Reflections on life stories by post-graduate students: Intersectionality and Agency

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the reflections of post graduate students who completed a semester course called the Personal is the Professional, aimed at facilitating a reflexive and critical thinking. By working with their lived experiences students explored the intricacies of the society they live in and how this influences how they view the world and their professional lives. These include the intersection of gender, race, class and culture as dominant social discourses. In the telling and witnessing of life stories, the study traced how the students' engagement with personal discourses created shifts in understanding how context shapes how they experience themselves and others. Through narratives, the study showed how students engage in and at times unintentionally contribute to dominant social discourses in their everyday lives. The results suggest that with increased reflexivity, there was a greater sense of personal and collective agency. This was evidenced by students' ability to recognise and deconstruct their sense of self by looking deeply into the discourses as well as how they have impacted other students in the cohort.

This study used qualitative methodology and was theoretically based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological perspective model and Bandura's social cognitive theory (1989), which allowed the participants to locate themselves in different levels and structures that have impacted their lives. Data was collected through participant observation during class presentations and interactions; written tasks completed by the students throughout the module; and unstructured interviews to explore how students' understanding of self and others had shifted over a five-month period. The sharing of personal stories in a safe space created the possibility to discover similarities and differences across different cultures, race groups and gender and resulted in a spirit of unity and collective agency. It also created a platform for deeper reflexivity. The written assignments provided a language and framework to create awareness and voice to articulate their experience resulting in a sense of freedom and confidence leading to a perception of greater agency in their personal and professional lives. The findings were discussed in relation to the existing literature, which was aligned to both local and international contexts. Implications of the study are discussed together with recommendations for further study in support of developing critical reflexivity and agency.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The context in which people are born and live influences how they perceive the world and make sense of it. As such, life stories are part of who we are as people and it is important to revisit some of those experiences to be better able to realise the power held within the stories (Sliep & Kotzé, 2007). By definition, life stories can be defined as a chronological description of events and meaning of a person's life. The narratives are composed of discourses such as gender, race, socio-economic status, religion, culture, disability and many others. As people, we are often not aware of how we respond and effected by dominant social discourses. The interconnection of these discourses was termed "Intersectionality" by Crenshaw (1991). Azmitta & Thomas, (2015) argues that the intersection between the discourses can lead either to privilege or disadvantage. Intersectionality concentrates on the difference between how the social categories can generate inequality of power and resources in historical and cultural contexts. The power of discourses impacts people in numerous ways, for instance, how we make sense of the things around us based on what we have been exposed to, thus interpretations will vary according to that discrepancy. The power it interplays in our lives affects our approach to life and the manner in which we represent ourselves. Thus, power is considered in terms of how it is negotiated between people; how it propagates and produces individuals who both experience and exercise power (Sliep, 2010).

Sharing of life stories enables people to establish an environment that allows them to understand and relate to one another (Sliep & Kotzé, 2007). One of the key purposes of telling stories is to acknowledge the diversity of people, the kind of background they come from and to enhance both personal and professional growth (Sliep & Kotzé, 2007). Who we are personally has a way of infiltrating our professional lives, so it is important to be aware of the manner in which we locate ourselves and our actions. Reflecting on the dominant social discourses can assist in developing a practice in which people are able to deal with various contexts and diversities (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). Reflection in life stories is important as it enables one to position oneself intentionally, aiding the recognition of the construction of discourses and the dominance they have in shaping one's story and identity.

The terms reflection and reflexivity have continuously been used interchangeably, raising some confusion. Briefly, reflection concerns looking back into our experiences and is frequently utilised by professionals to improve their practice (Schon, 1987). Reflexivity goes further and can be considered as an interactive process that places emphasis on the relationship between the self, other and context (Bolton, 2010). The process of sharing life stories and being reflexive, especially regarding the recognition of dominant social discourses, can result in agency. Bandura (1989) describes agency as the ability to change your actions which has an effect on how you express yourself. Varying experiences elicit different reactions to events in people and this sometimes provides scope to determine the uniqueness of people at an individual level (Bandura, 2006). Reflectiveness involves "self-examining one's own functionality" and reflecting "on personal efficacy, soundness of own thought and actions, and meaning of their pursuit" (Bandura, 2006, p.165). As growing professionals, it is important that we understand ourselves and look deeply into the things that limit or enable us to move forward. As a result, this will allow us to serve members of society with better understanding.

Furthermore, a complete understanding of intersectionality is needed. This term is largely used within the academic field; however, recognition of its effects remains important. The fundamental concern of intersectionality relates to issues of difference that arise when different discourses intersect with each other, for example, race, gender and class. Davis (2008) highlights that intersectionality is about understanding the effect of race, gender, sexuality, class and religious orientation on identities, experiences and struggles for empowerment. Intersectionality ideally looks at how mutually constitutive the discourses are to each other, for example, how race is 'gendered' and gender is 'racialised' (Davis, 2008), and what the effect of this is on people. This is relevant in the South African context, given the history of South Africa, where racial disparity and patriarchy are still prevalent. It is therefore important to understand how the life story of an individual has moulded who we are and to shift away from dissociating ourselves from members of the group by using terms such as 'they, us, others' (Sliep, 2010). Intersectionality is a significant aspect as it reviews how you position yourself within and between discourses and the impact this has on the self and relationships with others.

Agency can either be facilitated or hindered depending on how we position ourselves in relation to these dominant social discourses. This has an effect on one's life and becomes a component of self-reflectiveness. The ability to reflect on your own story and developing an understanding of others in the educational setting contributes to critical thinking. It allows you to move from focussing on your own identity, but identify with other people in a group setting to achieve collective goals (Cole, 2009; Sliep, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to explore what happened when processes were put in place during a semester course, the Personal is the Professional, to facilitate reflexive and critical thinking about the influence of discourses and their intersectionality in students' personal and professional lives. The focus was on masters' students who attended the module and were involved in exploring their life stories and witnessing those of others in the master's class. The process included sharing one's life story with fellow participants and revisiting the stories to deconstruct how the discourses affect their lives. The study explored the effect of such a process on critical thinking and reflexivity and whether there was an increase in agency in the students and their development as professionals.

1.2 Background of the research problem

The rudimentary tenet of intersectionality is the notion that social categories such as race, socio-economic status (SES), gender and sexual orientation are not self-governing and simple but rather manifold, co-dependent, and mutually constitutive (Bowleg, 2012). It is therefore important to consider how these facets are fundamental to the construction of one's social identity and to understand that social discourses are outward forces that permeate the way a person defines themselves. The manner in which people reflect on their lives is important so that there can be an increased awareness of the effect of these discourses on their stories. Understanding how we are influenced by society, permits us to more deeply understand the way in which we describe ourselves and how we want to position ourselves.

Magnusson (2011) asserts that categorisations are imbued with symbolic, practical and political meaning and that the extent of this is often immense enough to influence our whole life trajectory. The gender of a person, for example, decides much of a person's life course and individual outcomes. For example, being a female, it is expected that one be subservient to the authority of

men, and in the modern world having to compromise one's career in the interest of starting and grooming a family. It is not, however, the only influence as multiple categories influence each individual's life. Whether recognised or unrecognised, they shape our life trajectories. The importance of self-reflectiveness in this process is to create awareness of the salient discourses that shape and influence our own lives. These discourses are not who we are, but are facets from the past and present and have the possibility to also permeate into the future. This is an important consideration as these discourses have a way to form a similar pattern across generations in families (Collins, 1998).

Several studies have been conducted that explored the interconnectedness and effect of the dominant social discourses (Anthias, 2013; Azmitta & Thomas, 2015; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Cole, 2009; Garry, 2011; King, 1988; Steyn, 2004; Warner & Shields, 2013). However, there has been limited acknowledgement of how they form part of identity formation. Admittedly, on a global level a number of studies have been conducted, but not within South Africa. As a matter of fact, there is a great need to address the aspect of how race, gender and SES inform one's identity and the impact it has, especially in a South African context. Thus, in terms of impact there is limited research on the overall effect of intersectionality in relation to one's self-efficacy and intentionality with regard to agency.

Contextual savvy is described as "the ability to read and understand the political, cultural and social cues that surround you and the ability to respond in such a manner that you can successfully obtain your objectives and adapt your approach according to changing circumstances and people" (Sliep, 2010, p.124). This means one has to study the environment and make sense of it and in that way, one will be able to acquire skills to deal with current issues. What is crucial to consider is that previous studies have focused on the injustices of the apartheid regime whereas the focus in this study is on how being from a different racial group can come with challenges in a post-apartheid society, where racist encounters still pervade. This means that research into the intersectionality of dominant discourses remains relevant and requires continual focus to understand the impact on people in different contexts and at different historical moments.

Engaging in a process like this increases our ability to reflect. As growing professionals, it is important that we understand ourselves and look deeply into the elements that either limit us or enable us to move forward, thereby allowing us to serve members of society with better understanding. This is important in an educational setting and relevant in a South African context on the grounds of the diversity of its population. Students should not merely tolerate each other, but have insight into the nuances that have an effect on their lives as well as understand their colleagues (Sliep, 2010). Moreover, reflexivity is a process that emerges through social experiences (Callero, 2003). This implies that to be reflexive one has to look back or reflect upon one's experiences in terms of one's relationship with others. In doing so, one should consider the wider society to evaluate how to emancipate themselves from the power of the dominant social discourses, which are limiting their potential for growth and agency.

1.3 Rationale and significance of the study

The purpose of the research study was to explore reflexivity in an educational setting. Through life story sharing, we examined the dominant social discourses of the masters' cohort. By doing so, we further investigated the impact that these dominant social discourses have had in the lives of the students. Furthermore, some investigations were also carried out in how they overcame some of their challenges. In addition, the study explored the development of agency and reflexivity in the masters' cohort, and how the process of life story sharing enabled students to better understand the power of dominant discourses in their lives.

The study was important as the influence of dominant social discourses had been found to influence how we see ourselves both personally and professionally. Furthermore, to fully understand these influences. Current literature revealed that it necessary not just to understand the discourses in isolation, but to understand how they intersect and impact on each other. Thus, this study explored how students reflect and engage critically with the influence of dominant social discourses and their intersection on their lives during a semester course (the Personal is the Professional). The study aimed to track reflexive development as well as any sense of agency that was acquired over students' lives during this period. This was done by virtue of developing a better understanding of themselves and others in this context.

1.4 Research Objectives and questions

The objectives of this study were:

1. To explore the experience of students engaged in critical reflection on the influence of dominant social discourses and their intersectionality through life story work

2. To investigate the effect of engaging in critical reflection on students' sense of agency in their personal and professional lives

The critical questions to be answered by undertaking this research were:

1. How are the experiences of students engaged in critical reflection on the influence of dominant social discourses and their intersectionality through life story work?

2. What are the effects of engaging in critical reflection on students' sense of agency in their personal and professional lives?

1.5 Ethical clearance for the study

Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Ethics Committee. Further details regarding ethical procedures are set out in Chapter 3, Section 3.3 and attached Appendix A.

1.6 Outline of the study

Chapter 1 is an introduction of the study. It provides a background to the study and a brief overview of research in the area of intersectionality of dominant social discourses and life stories. The rationale for the study, the research objectives and questions, and ethical clearance details are provided.

Chapter 2 is the review of the literature. It sets out the theoretical framework of the study and considers the importance of reflexivity on life stories and how it shapes the identity of an individual. It is mainly focused on an educational setting in a South African context. The Ecological Systems and Social Cognitive theory are discussed and their relevance to intersectionality and reflexivity is detailed.

Chapter 3 sets out the research design and methodology. Ethical procedures, sample, research instruments and both data collection and analysis methods are detailed. The credibility and dependability of the study are discussed.

Chapter 4 contains the findings and discussion of the results of this study. This includes the emerging themes from the data sets and how they varied across the different methods of data collection. The findings are presented using a timeline of activities students had to complete during the semester course and quotations from the participants are included. The discussion relates to the themes/constructs that emerged and portrayed significance in shaping stories, reflexivity development over time in conjunction with understanding intersectionality from their own stories, and agency.

Chapter 5 concludes with the implications of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the background and the many studies that have been conducted to understand intersectionality and the power of discourses. It is important to consider what has been contributed to the body of knowledge and to highlight where the gaps exist, and to position the research accordingly. The concept of intersectionality comes from the feminist approach and it is closely linked with movements that challenge the patriarchal system or fight for equity amongst the genders (Davis, 2008; Hancock, 2007). Many studies have been done to explore the interaction and interconnectedness of discourses. The context has been mainly international and for this research the aim is to explore the nuances and apply it to a South African context. Furthermore, the research will unpack how dominant social discourses are relevant and affect people in making sense of their everyday life and informing their social identities (Moolman, 2013). Additionally, the research will consider how engaging in life story work and critical reflexivity can be a tool for increasing one's agency as awareness of the effect of the dominant social discourses increases.

The importance of intersectionality and the power of discourses lie in understanding one's agency in terms of these dominant social discourses. Bandura (2006) elaborates on the constructs that constitute agency in a person, and is of the view that it is imperative to consider the environment and the structural organisation surrounding each person. Understanding the significance of our context generates a way of understanding our own lives and how we view reality from our own perspective. Life story work is believed to be a useful way to further such understandings and is central to this study. Educational biographies are tools or techniques that allow students to learn from their own experience. They guide their future learning through reflecting on the past events that have shaped their social identity to make sense of who they are in both personal and professional contexts (Dominice, 2000; Sliep, 2010). Reflexivity is another significant aspect to consider in building or enhancing a critical reflexive professional. In essence, the ability to know oneself better becomes beneficial to others as well, in terms of how one relates to others and comes to better understand the varying backgrounds that people come from.

Theories used in this study are the Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1989); Social Constructionism by Burr (1995) and the Ecological System Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1977). These theories in conjunction enhance our understanding of the power of discourses and their impact on agency. They are discussed in further detail below.

2.2 Study Application

This study focuses on reflexivity from a constructionist perspective. Central to this study is the aspect of reflectiveness for the participants. Bolton defines reflection as,

> A state of mind, an on-going constituent of practice, it is not a technique. It challenges assumptions, ideological illusions, damaging social and cultural biases, inequalities, and questions personal behaviours which perhaps silence the voices of others or otherwise marginalize them (2010, p.3).

This asserts that as professionals it is important that we examine our behaviour and reflect on what we can do better. Reflection also involves reliving and reiterating on the events that have taken place (Bolton, 2010). In this study, all participants had to reflect on their life stories from childhood to the present date and on the many hurdles that can, with hindsight, be viewed as a source of strength. This research does not only focus on reflection but on reflexivity as well. According to Bolton (2010) reflexivity can be understood as "finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others" (p.4). Moreover, it's considered as a standpoint where as an individual you can locate yourself and appreciate your own influences. This definition is aligned with the aims of the study of becoming critically reflexive professionals by starting within the self before going out to assist other people.

The epistemological position of the study followed that of constructionism, which is located within the qualitative research paradigm. Constructionism considers the creation of constructs and how people interact and give shared meaning into their daily lives (Burr, 1995). Essentially, this approach examines the knowledge that we have about our society. The epistemological position of reflexivity was mainly on the researcher having the ability of self-awareness in the construction

of reflexive knowledge (Neuman, 2006). Coupled to this, the researcher consciously reflected on the context and processes of knowledge creation.

2.3 Literature Review

This section reviewed the pertinent and relevant literature to this study. The perspective on intersectionality, applicability of intersectionality and its relevance in different context was reviewed. Additionally, the distinction between reflexivity and reflectivity was also reviewed among other issues and experiences.

2.3.1 Perspectives on Intersectionality

The term "Intersectionality" was coined by Crenshaw (1989). It is rooted in Black feminist scholarship and based on the need to critically examine the frameworks that exist in our society which limit our consciousness to the injustices and discrimination that occur (Crenshaw, 2016). The multiple impacts we receive from these discourses bring awareness to the trickledown to social injustice and its continuity, by the use of frameworks which conjure a holistic view, also how we react and give importance to different discourses individually instead of where they converge (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993; Bowleg, 2012; Cook & Fonow, 1986; Sinacore, Blaisure, Justin, Healy & Brawer, 1999). Intersectionality has grown in the field of feminist scholarship and further developed interest in the inquiry of self-awareness. However, there still appears to be a lack of agreement over the definition of the concept of intersectionality; though it seems that people acknowledge its presence (Azmitta & Thomas, 2015). Intersectionality fundamentally looks at social discourses and how these discourses collectively impact the life of each person either positively or negatively (Warner & Shields, 2013).

Over time there have been arguments as to whether the discourses can and should be separated or considered in terms of their overall impact on oppression (Azmitta & Thomas, 2015). Some have speculated that if there, "is a possibility to recognize how each domain of difference operates within hierarchies of power given that if one disaggregates them, one is violating the key assumption of intersectionality, that these domains of identity are inextricably intertwined" (McCall as cited in Azmitta & Thomas, 2015, p. 4). There is a need to further investigate the importance of understanding the impact of the interconnection of the dominant social discourses.

Most people fail to combine the aspects and treat them as separate entities that have no association to one another. However, many researchers are of the view that they are interwoven (Davis, 2008; Hancock, 2007), and it is in this sense that we have to explore how they model our lives and beliefs.

2.3.2 Intersectionality and impact on identity

The premise of intersectionality is that social categories overlap and inform each other in order to constitute identity formation (Baerveldt, 2013; Cole, 2009; Magnusson, 2011). In the process of creating identity, we are a by-product of our experiences and of the adopted social norms from our communities. Identity is rooted in life-long learning (Hart & Fegley, 1997; Nelson, 1997; Sliep, 2010; Taylor, 1989), and is therefore seen as fluid as we learn and are shaped by our daily experiences. Circumstances can change our behaviour and how we reflect on ourselves and on the events, that happened to us. In essence intersectionality is about the interconnectedness of constructs and the becoming of a unified whole (Davis, 2008).

It is therefore important to consider how these facets are fundamental to the construction of identity. As suggested by Hall, "there can be no true self hiding *inside* or behind the artificial or superficial because self and identity are constructed *within, not outside discourse*" (as cited in Callero, 2003, p.118). There are two pivotal examples we can deliberate on. The first being that gender alone informs the social script we must align ourselves with (Wiederman, 2005). This is because of the dichotomous nature of gender as stipulated in our society. However, a fixation on labels is limiting and does not permit flexibility. For instance, as a female, one is expected to behave in a certain way and if one deviates from the norm, is then confronted with stereotypes. Such a restriction does not embrace uniqueness, and it is limiting in a society where things are always categorised or labelled in dichotomy. The second example is the current discourse of the intersection of race and socio-economic status. It was inherited through historical discriminatory practices in terms of which race informs socio-economic status (Babbitt, 2011; Hancock, 2007). South Africa, with its history of apartheid, is a good example of this.

There is significance in understanding how our identity is constructed. Parker and Shotter defined deconstruction as "not just to unravel hidden assumptions and to uncover repressed meaning, but to bring to the fore concerns altogether different from those implicated in the discourse concerned"

(as cited in Sliep & Kotzé, 2007, p.142). By repressed meaning, one can assume that there are more factors at play that inform how we identify ourselves, and without properly being able to acknowledge these components, they are unconsciously overlooked (Warner & Shields, 2013). This means that when we are unaware of the factors that influence our identity development, we allow discourses to inform who we are at that time. Alternatively, we can use will power to deconstruct the connotations of the discourses and thereby play a more active role in the creation of our identity.

2.3.3 Application of Intersectionality

Intersectionality is further illuminated by Azmitta and Thomas (2015) who focus not just on individual difference but also on structural differences in societies. They highlight that,

> intersectionality is crucial in contributing to social change, and suggests the term *transnational intersectionality*, which shifts the focus from individual differences onto the structural roots of inequality, namely, the social, economic, and political forces that perpetuate interlocking systems of discrimination (p.4).

This means that the issues pertaining to inequality and helplessness in people brought in by facets of their identity has either limited them or privileged them. Mahalingam (2007, p.45) characterised intersectionality in terms of the "interplay between person and social location, with particular emphasis on power relations among various social locations". In many contexts being a male, for example, is highly associated with power, privilege, wealth and opportunity (Else-Quest & Grabe, 2012). Some scholars have argued that the personal is the political yet others maintain that inequities are not simply political issues, but are also always psychological, which is pivotal in attaining wellness (Else-Quest & Grabe, 2012; Griscom, 1992; Jenkins, 2000; Prilleltensky, 2008).

Others hold the opinion that intersectionality has only been accepted and embraced specifically in academia (McCall, 2005). This means that the whole concept of interwoven categories is not well recognised in other contexts, but is limited to those who are contributing to the body of knowledge. Furthermore, intersectionality has largely focused on injustices that affect women (Cole, 2009). This is linked to the proposed conceptual model by Levine-Rasky that is, "to explain how the context influences the situational salience of particular identity domains but still leaves active other

intersecting identity domains, even if individuals are not immediately aware of them" (as cited in Azmitta & Thomas, 2015, p.4). This means that there is more work to be done by professionals as well as learning about agency in an attempt to escape some of the challenging circumstances.

In a South African context, due to the apartheid regime, the inequality of distribution of resources created a gap that is still evident today (Romany, 1995). In other words, those who are rich are more able to access resources, yet those who are poor rely heavily on the government for support, hence the introduction of social grants. The focus in some studies has been on empowering women (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Gunkel, 2012; Wing & De Cavarlho, 1995). Women have often been disenfranchised in society and many studies have looked at how intersections of gender can have an effect in one's vocation (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Moolman, 2013). Davis (2008) stated how gender is 'racialized' and this is very evident in the South African context. The ideology of apartheid might be long gone; however, the effects are still present in many ways such as in the work environment (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). One's gender is also used as a tool to define criteria for working in certain occupations at certain levels. There are still stereotypes that categorise women as incapable of being part of executive committees which are sometimes justified by saying women have different roles to play. This creates a gender bias and is an injustice (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Moolman, 2013; Wing & De Cavarlho, 1995).

South African studies (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Romany, 1995; Steyn, 2004) emphasise the interconnectedness of race and gender, and how historical oppression and limited resources make these quite noticeable (Bowman, Duncan, & Sonn, 2010). Romany (1995) further interrogates how being white is associated with power and authority. This dates back to the colonial period, where one was the oppressor and another became the oppressed (Romany, 1995). An example of the many ways in which race still has an effect on people's lives can be found in a study done at a University setting where students alienated themselves racially and would use words of dissociation by labelling parts of the campus as a 'white or black' residence or cafeteria (Tatum, 2000). The study was exploring the development of racial identity and ways in which we can thrive to affirm that identity. Furthermore, it looks at how constructive racial identity can benefit the people in recognising and being aware of the privileges they have, and actively seek ways in which to fight against injustices (Tatum, 2002). The study provides insight of a journey in understanding

the racial dynamics we experience on a daily basis. This distinction shows that although people have the illusion of being emancipated, some of their behaviours are still indoctrinated by the apartheid system. There have been numerous attempts to alleviate the ill effects of the past and bring about a sense of equality among the people (Brewer, Conrad, & King, 2009; Romany, 1995; Wing & De Cavarlho, 1995).

There are a number of studies that have explored or investigated the intersectionality of the three dominant social discourses of race, gender and SES, but have not focused on how a person can acquire critically reflexive skills that can be both helpful at a personal and professional level. There are a number of issues or troubles that South Africans deal with, which is why the areas of focus vary in order to address or explore those issues further. Despite having a very strong Bill of Rights and Human Rights, South Africa still faces many challenges in particular at grassroots level. The constitution and ideologies that are set in parliament are not reflected in the communities where people interact with one another. Although the aim of the constitution is to protect everyone irrespective of their race, gender, disability or sexuality, this does not always follow through in practice (Bowman et al., 2010; Brewer et al., 2002). For example, in relation to issues of homosexuality and gender inequality, discrimination continues to prevail in our communities (Ratele, 2009; Swarr, 2004). People with disabilities are frequently not given the same autonomy as others. However, since the incident of Oscar Pistorius, there have been varying opinions about people living with disabilities (Swartz, 2013). The tragic case of Pistorius/ Steenkamp shed some light on how the society mainstreamed race and gender on the incident and unwittingly failed to look at the disability. Oscar's impairments became irrelevant at this point, and more emphasis was brought on the family upbringing and the 'culture of violence in South Africa' in which he is inserted. Oscar's agency as an individual responsible for murder was taken away from him, when factors of race, gender, and upbringing were put to the forefront (Swartz, 2013).

South Africa is a diverse country with a rich culture because of its people. Drawing from ideologies and practices such as apartheid and patriarchy, it is not too distinct from other countries. Despite the measurements taken the constitutional laws are mainly Western influenced, the experiences of people in their communities are not reflective of the rights and laws that govern the society (Bowman et al., 2010). Women are still exploited in many ways and gender equality is necessary (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Wing & De Cavarlho, 1995). As the country is deeply enriched with

cultural practices and customs, it is challenging to alter or stop the practice of customs that portray women as subjected to men in most structures of society (Gunkel, 2012). Culture is engrained in all groups of this society and it frequently directs the way in which people should behave in accordance with social scripts that contextualise the difference between a man and woman (Gunkel, 2012; Moolman, 2013; Wiederman, 2005). It is therefore imperative to consider the role played by culture in our lives and the influence it has on other social institutionalised classifications that form part of a person's social identity. This emphasises that intersectionality does occur and is in existence, although we might fail to recognise it.

2.3.4 Intersectionality and agency

Humans are not passive entities, but interact with their environment and in this sense, have the capacity for agency. Bandura (2006) discusses the different properties of agency: *intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness.* These properties highlight that a person has multifaceted experiences that inform who they are or become. Agency is recognised as a "meta-cognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thought and actions" (Bandura, 2006, p.165). Bandura distinguishes three forms of agency, namely: individual, proxy and collective agency. With individual agency, the focus is on how the person is responsible for the influences in their surroundings and experiences and tries to control such actions (Bandura, 2006). Mediated or proxy agency is characterised by working through others and influencing people to come together because of their shared interest or concern which enables them to collaborate as a group to ensure that the desired outcome is met. Collective agency is about a group of people coming together without anyone influencing the collaboration, but working towards shaping their future for the better (Bandura, 2006). This means that every individual has some form of agency, but it is dependent on whether the person is able to use their own intuition, or to access agency through or with others in a collective forum. In linking agency to intersectionality one may say that intersectionality is about the influence and effect of dominant social discourses, whereas agency focuses on the ability to respond to these discourses. Through varying experiences people react differently to an event and that sometimes provides the scope to determine the uniqueness of people as individuals (Bandura, 2006).

In light of the effect of intersectionality on one's agency, it is imperative to look more closely at the meaning of discourse. As defined by Burr (1995), a discourse can be defined as "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on, that in some way together produces a particular version of events" (p.48). However, there are limitations in this area of focus if one takes into account how many studies have been done to elaborate on the influences informed by these discourses. In reviewing the literature there is concern about how, in colloquial terms, these discourses have become mundane and used as mantras (Cole, 2009). Thus, it is believed that the area needs to be revisited so as to acquire new insights to add to the existing literature. It is also of concern how frequently the "triad" (race, gender and class) of discourses are mentioned without meaningfully addressing the concerns for which the phrase serves as shorthand (Knapp, 2005). This means that researchers have used these constructs without having any new insights and therefore further research is required to look more deeply into the impact of the interconnection of the discourses. Our identity is influenced by these factors and it is fundamental to understand how that happens as people come from different environments with various cultural beliefs. Whether by choice or enforced, our thinking is aligned and informed by our beliefs and this consequently shapes our way of thinking. As Gergen (1999) points out, we are part of a social world that is constructed and maintained and we both contribute to these practices and act within them. This therefore means that we are not only recipients of the system but are also active participants in the construction of society.

2.3.5 The importance of reflexivity

Reflectiveness involves "self- examining one's own functionality and reflecting on personal efficacy, soundness of own thought and actions, and meaning of their pursuit" (Bandura, 2006, p.165). The importance of self-reflectiveness in this process is to create awareness of the salient discourses that shape and influence our lives (Bandura, 2006). These discourses are not who we are, but facets from the past and present and have the possibility to permeate our future plans. If people are not aware of the sources that influence the way they think and make decisions, they will be unable to effect change. The manner in which people reflect on their lives is important. If they become aware of the influence by society, they will be better able to understand the way in which they describe themselves, which is part of being critically reflexive (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009; Sliep, 2010).

Gergen (1999) defines reflexivity as "the attempt to place one's premises into question, to suspend the 'obvious', to listen to alternative framings of reality, and to grapple with the comparative outcomes of multiple standpoints" (p. 50). This may be understood as a way in which one thinks more critically about the self. We go through circumstances which propel us into taking action; and action is temporal and spatially explained. Thus, for a person to be reflexive we have to be aware of where, with whom, and in what place in the history of events action takes place (Gilbert & Sliep, 2007). Reflexivity has in the past mainly been used by feminist scholars (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993; Sinacore et al., 1999). It has now become more widely used and is often included in the educational setting (Gilbert & Sliep, 2007). It has been noted that reflexivity in an educational setting promotes self-awareness and helps recognise human truths (Sinacore et al., 1999). In this sense reflexivity becomes a necessary tool or practice for students so that they can relate their personal experiences to their professional context. Reflexivity further promotes understanding of self and others within a collaborative context (Sinacore et al., 1999).

Transformational learning is promoted by the use of life story work in an educational setting (Sliep, 2010). Life history as a methodology is still often criticised by the more traditional approaches to education, as it is centred on the subjectivity of the person (Dhunpath, 2000). Dhunpath has referred to this approach as "*Narradigm*", which is a narrative centred approach. By focussing on identifying dominant social discourses, the intersectionality and effect of these were used to bring in more objective understanding. Various scholars and studies have used techniques, such as narrative analysis, as a tool to analyse qualitative data that is focused on people's stories (Crossley, 2000; Neumann, 2006). A life story is about who we are deep down, where we come from and how we have developed our identity (Gottschall, 2012). It becomes essential for students to access their life stories to acknowledge how their personal experiences and societal discourses that influence them also permeate their professional lives (Sliep, 2010). The practice of engaging life histories can be perceived as a strategy for self-advocacy as one takes cognisance of the facets that constitute their social identity (Meininger, 2006; Gibson, 2011). Reflexivity is elicited through understanding one's positioning in terms of dominant social discourses which leads to one actively refuting or accepting their positioning in various contexts (Sliep, 2010).

Magnusson (2011) asserts that categorisations are imbued with symbolic, practical and political meaning to the extent that these meanings are often of such immensity that the sex category of a

person decides much of her or his life trajectory and individual fate. Giddens (1991) states that, "The reflexivity of modernity extends into the core of the self. Put in another way, in the context of a post-traditional order, the self becomes a reflexive project…" (as cited in Stelter, 2009, p.211) Gender is greatly imbedded in cultural foundations and at times influenced by religion which further stipulates the manner in which a person should behave. It is also influenced by the educational setting where suppositions are purported as truth or reality (Magnusson, 2011). Our background in terms of economic striving further enables or disables us to acquire education at tertiary level because many people are not able to afford such an opportunity (Sliep, 2010). Social class refers to hierarchies between groups in societies that are based on economic resources, positions of status or power, as well as political and economic interests (Magnusson, 2011).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

In this study, critical reflexivity was considered from a constructionist approach in terms of which our reality is constructed in interaction with others in our environment. An exploration of context was therefore considered integral to this study. For this reason, an ecological perspective was used on the basis of the research. Considering the effects of storytelling and a reflexive deconstruction of our stories shared with others in terms of increased self-awareness led to agency. Accordingly, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory provided a relevant framework to the aforementioned effect. Social constructionism involves "taking a critical stance towards taken for granted ways of understanding and make sense of our world and ourselves" (Burr, 1995, p.3). This approach questioned the way in which we have come to distinguish constructs or discourses such as race, gender, class, and culture. It highlighted that through interaction as people we make meaning and sustain the knowledge by social processes. Burr (1995) argued that knowledge is fabricated by how we perceive our surroundings and is often influenced by the social and economic arrangements prevailing at that particular time. Henceforth, this approach was integral to the pursuit of this study in exploring the effect of the dominant social discourses. This enhances how we understand ourselves as individuals as well as in a collective group.

2.4.1 Ecological perspective

Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective theory (1977) has five systems namely the microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; macro system and chronosystem. The theory helps in understanding how individuals behave in their environment and how an individual can influence or be affected by the society at large (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Using all the components of this theoretical framework, it is important to note that an individual has the capability to influence and be influenced by society at a broader level - macro system (McLeroy, Bibeau, Stelker, & Glanz, 1988). Bronfenbrenner (1995) posits that in the process of growing up a person acquires a set of values which they follow blindly and are labelled deviant when they do not conform. The environment in which we grow shapes us and the factors that drive our thoughts and behaviour are based on the norms of society. We also become accustomed to what we believe to be acceptable behaviour. Fundamentally it is important to understand that we come from different contexts as people. Colombo and Senatore (2005) suggest that the ways of understanding the world come not only from objective reality but from other people, both past and present.

2.4.2 Social cognitive theory- an agentic perspective

The Social cognitive theory (SCT) by Bandura (1989) was another theory used in this research. The basic essence of this theory is that as people we are self-organising, proactive, self-regulating and reflective. This implies that, as people we are not mere objects of the experiences that happen to us, but also contributors to our circumstances (Bandura, 2006). In using SCT toward an agentic perspective, the fundamental property of human agency is human development, adaptation and change (Bandura, 2006). Human agency can be understood by its components which include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2006). Precisely, these components are explained as follows: intentionality which involves other participating agents, as there is no absolute agency, is about an individual who has accustomed their self-interest to achieve unity of effort within diversity. In this case, forethought provides future-directed plans whereby an individual sets goals they aim to reach. Self-reactiveness goes beyond the planning. and forethought. Subsequently, it delves into the ability to construct appropriate courses of action

and regulating the execution of the plans. Lastly, self-reflectiveness focuses on the self-examination of an individual rather than as the agent of action (Bandura, 2006).

Reflexivity and agency form the basis of the study. It was thus significant to understand how the agency of an individual informs the kind of behaviour they want to exhibit, and how collective agency has influence on the individual's reasoning and decision making. The purpose of this study was to assess whether students had gained an ability to be reflexive by telling and deconstructing their life stories and by better understanding the impact of the dominant social discourses on their lives. Further, the research explored whether such reflexivity enabled students to develop their agency.

2.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, the literature suggests that many studies have been done in an international context but that there is a gap in the local context and the complexities of intersectionality still require further research. Furthermore, recognition of the discourses and their power is not well established. Human agency is also a significant component that can better help a person in outwitting the influence of these nuances. The theories used in the research highlight the way in which we make sense of ourselves, the community around us and how we contemplate things around us.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section looks at the research design and methodological tools used. It elaborates on who the participants were, outlines the aims of the study and the research questions. It gives a detailed account of the entire process of data collection and analysis, as well as the paradigm that was chosen for this particular study.

3.2 Study Paradigm and Design

This study used a qualitative research paradigm. It focused on the narratives of people and how telling their stories shape who they are. Qualitative research places an emphasis on depth more than breadth (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2004). The aim of the research was to explore intersectionality in relation to dominant social discourses and the effect of critical reflexivity through life stories. According to Struwig, Struwig and Stead (2001), qualitative research acknowledges the individual's environment and how the individual and the environment interact which is relevant in this study which focuses on the value and experience of sharing life stories. The research also involved exploring how people are influenced by their surroundings and the effects of the dominant social discourses.

A qualitative approach can pose meaningful questions to participants that solicit "responses in participants' own words and native cognitive constructs" (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p.13). The orientation of this study followed a reflective-dialectic approach to provide new insights (Hughes, 2003). The reflective-dialectic approach involves 'outsider' researcher working collaboratively with 'insider' community researchers to get better insight of the community (Hughes, 2003). In this study importance was given to the effect of reflexivity during the students' experiences of sharing stories. The researcher explored whether this led to an increased sense of agency in the students' personal and/or professional lives. In relation to this study, the researcher played both role of insider- outsider, in order to retain a level of objectivity whilst undergoing the same process as the participants in the research study. This was particularly important because the

study intended to be reflective and to increase our understanding of how discourses are interconnected and impact our lives.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were taken in account for the research. A gatekeeper letter permitting the researcher to conduct the study using fellow students as participants was acquired from the University Registrar (see Appendix B). The participants were debriefed about the research, its aims and how the results will be disseminated to those participants who want to know the results of the study. The researcher explained how confidentiality was to be maintained by using pseudonyms and that participation was voluntary. An information sheet and consent letter were provided for the participants to sign and they consented to voluntarily participate in the study, as well as consenting to being audio-recorded for the interviews (see Appendix C). The consent was given at the onset of the semester course. The data collected was safely stored. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee (see Appendix A).

3.4 Participants and study location

All students who started their Masters in Health Promotion in 2015 were included in the study. Nine participants were purposively selected. The study was located at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College Campus) in Durban. The study took place during a semester module (the Personal is the Professional) which is part of the Health Promotions Master's which focused on actively incorporating students' personal life experiences into the course. The module is based on the notion that each person is able to explore their own reality and has the ability to understand and take part in knowledge creation. These understandings are related to personal experiences, and then translated into professional practice. The duration of the module was from February to May, 2015.

3.5 Study Approach

A qualitative research approach was taken using participant observation, analyses of completed written assignments, and semi-structured interviews. Participant observation can be understood as "a qualitative research procedure that studies the natural and everyday set-up in a particular community or situation" (DeVos, 2002, p.280). In the observation of participants the importance

was consequently both on one's own and on the participation of others (DeVos, 2002). This approach required the researcher not only to be an observer, but to also take part in the research as a participant, which was in congruence with the objectives of this study. The researcher, at the time of the research, was also a student registered for the module and doing her own life story and activities central to the course. In addition, it was essential when using the participant observation approach to consider that it involves being a complete participant and being a complete observer (DeVos, 2002).

For this study, participant observation was well suited as it allowed the researcher to understand the experience of the other students who were part of the investigation and to engage with the participants on an ongoing basis during the course of the module regarding their experiences. This particular method was chosen because it enabled the researcher to not be an outsider, but to be part of the collective which permits a comprehensive perspective on the problem under investigation (DeVos, 2002). The flexibility of the procedure is also important in a reflexive study since the problem can be redefined timeously without necessarily detracting from the scientific qualities of the study (DeVos, 2002). Some of the advantages of using participant observation included that the researcher, as a student herself, formed relationships with the other students and this allowed the research process to be relatively easier as the rapport between them was already in place. This is evident from the way that the interviews could be conducted which will be further elaborated on in the data collection method section. There are however possible limitations to this method, such as being too close to the participants and this might have an influence on the researcher's own positioning about the research as part of the group. Bearing both insider and/ or outsider roles, the researcher might experience difficulty in retaining objectivity.

3.6 Data collection instruments

 Four sets of data were collected, three sets of data were done through archive research. Data was collected during the module included (i) a written assignment of the Life stories of students when they first entered the course, (ii) reviewing their life stories through an ecological perspective assignment (iii) narrating their life stories in the third person, and (iv) interviews after they had completed the semester course. Access to the archives, was granted by the course coordinator, with the consent of the participants. Participant observation was used to view how the students

interacted with one another during the semester course (class discussions, group work, active learning exercises). During these interaction activities, a journal was kept to record. The observation provided insight to the manner in which the students related to one another.

3.7 Data Collection methods

The first data set focused on the life stories written and presented by each participant. The second set was an assignment that was given to the students which required them to use an ecological system perspective to explore how various discourses have affected their lives. Thirdly, the students were asked to re-write their life stories in a third person format. The final data set consisted of interviews that were conducted at the end of the module to find out more about students' experiences of intersectionality and reflexivity, and whether there had been an increase in agency in how students perceived the power of the dominant social discourses. The interviews allowed the researcher to consciously initiate dialogue with the participants which enabled ideas to flow freely and gentle probing became possible (Casey & Kumar, 1988). An unstructured interview guide was used (see Appendix D).

The interviews were unstructured due to the informal nature of the environment in which they were conducted and the familiarity between the researcher and participants which had been built up over the course of the module. The main purpose of the exploration was to explore the students' experience of being critically reflexive. In addition, it was fundamental to take note of the overall presentation that was done by students at the end of the module. This was to understand how they were then positioned, and how their agency had been developed over the five-month period they had been enrolled in the masters programme. This was used as a guide for the researcher when developing the interview questions. Interviews were conducted at the end of the module to probe any area of focus that had not been highlighted extensively in the sets of data aforementioned. An interview schedule was used (see Appendix D). A one-to-one informal conversational interview was used in this study, as the rapport between the researcher and participants was well established.

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher conducted interviews with individual respondents from the Masters class, as well as reviewing their life stories from the onset of the course and after five months. The written assignments submitted during five months were included as additional sets of data to track and review the student's ability to reflect on intersectionality and

agency. In order to probe more deeply and to further show any changes in positioning and agency that occurred within the students over time, three students were selected as case studies.

3.8 Data analysis

To analyse the data, thematic analysis was used to find themes/constructs, and to track patterns showing how students' ideas changed overtime as they completed their assignments. Thematic analysis involves a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly, Kelleher, & Gliksman as cited in Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). According to Braun and Clark (2006) thematic analysis can be understood as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (*themes*) within data, it minimally organises and describes your data set in (*rich*) detail" (p.6). Part of the process of thematic analysis requires the careful identification of themes, by "reading and re-reading of the data" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p.3). Thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. Before the themes were extracted from the data, the data was transcribed inform of the verbatim. Kvale (1996) states that verbatim transcription is considered as loyal, objective and the starting point of developing the major recurring themes of the study.

According to Braun and Clark (2006), there are a number of steps in thematic analysis which were followed by the researcher. The initial step of the data analysis process is familiarising and immersing oneself in the data to be analysed. This is followed by identifying the themes that emerge from the data. The third step is coding where data is marked according to themes using the research questions as a guide (Terre Blanche, Durheim, & Painter, 2006). This is followed by grouping different concepts that would have been expressed by various participants in several ways under a single theme. Finally, each theme is elucidated in detail.

Thematic analysis in this study involved the researcher reading and immersing herself in the data and formulating codes that appeared across all the data sets. The codes were reviewed and their interrelation generated the themes or constructs that are included in the next chapter. For each data set, the researcher made a comparison of the themes across the other data sets, and tracked emerging patterns in the changes that occurred to show if there was any development of reflexivity

or agency that resulted from taking part in the semester module. The social constructs: race; gender; class (SES); education; and culture are enumerated on in the analysis section in relation to intersectionality and agency.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) perceive the fundamental feature of using case study as to provide multiplicity of perspectives that are embedded with a specific context. In this regard, the strategy to use case profiles to give insight on the changes that took place over the five-months period, using different evidences from the selected students. The three students were chosen based on gender, race/nationality and SES; this way variety in the stories and challenges are given prominence, and to depict how the intersection of the dominant social discourses has impacted them diversely. With the sample being predominantly female, it was necessary to segment the case studies to show the racial experience and cultural variance that existed in the cohort. It is essential to note that the case profiles are not to be taken as representative of the entire sample, but as an approach into which we can learn from each profile.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

Creswell (1998) suggests that the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be established by using four strategies: dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility. These qualitative strategies are comparable to the quantitative criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality. Each of these four strategies in turn uses criteria like reflexivity, triangulation and dense descriptions (Thomas, 2010). Triangulation is defined as studying something from multiple perspectives to improve accuracy (Neuman, 2006).

3.9.1 Dependability

Dependability refers to "the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). The research design needs to be carefully specified as is done in the present case; however, it is unlikely for this study to be repeated in exact the same way. However, the relationship between the researcher and participants was at ease because of the 'insider' role. Another researcher might struggle at first in building rapport, but can be able to achieve the same results arrived at in this study. The researcher attempted to ensure consistency by providing a comprehensive description

of the steps that were taken and giving justification for decisions taken during the collection of data.

3.9.2 Confirmability

Seale (1999, p.465) argues that "auditing could also be used to establish confirmability in which the researcher makes the provision of a methodological self-critical account of how the research was done". This research study can be corroborated by others using the same guide or steps that have been used by the researcher to get the same results. The data set and findings of the study can be also analysed by an outsider to see if the results are similar and increase the dependability of the study. The researcher was sensitive to individual subjectivity and bias that could have impacted the outcome of the study. The methodology used by the researcher of being both a participant and an observer, had an advantage for the purpose of this study. Possible limitations regarding over-identifying with the group are considered and reflected on.

3.9.3 Transferability

According to Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, transferability may be "described as a matter of judgement of the context and phenomena found which allows others to assess the transfer of the findings to another setting" (2003, p. 268). There is a similarly fair chance that the findings of this study can be replicated in another context using different participants. Though narratives may differ, however most people are impacted by the dominant social discourses across different communities and societies. Therefore, it is possible to transfer this research study into another social context and attain relative findings.

3.9.4 Credibility

Credibility is the "extent to which data and the data analysis are believable and trustworthy" (Thomas, 2010, p. 319). Life stories are subjected to scrutiny as to whether the story holds truth to the narrator or not. However, in line with this research inquiry the data collected and analysis provide sensitivity to the various experiences of the participants. Credibility and triangulation feed into one another. Triangulation is used to compare data to decide if it corroborates and to confirm the research findings (Creswell, 2003). Brannen (2004) argues that triangulation of data helps to

axially authenticate the findings through the corroboration processes of different perspectives. Multiple data sources were used to gather multiple perspectives on the same issue central to this research study on the effect of dominant social discourses in ones' life. Additionally, case profiles were used to portray the diverse perspectives from the stories to address the research objectives of the study.

3.10 Chapter Summary

In summary, this section explained the methodological aspects that were undertaken to conduct this study and the various steps that ensured that the ethical standards critical to research were not compromised. This study was qualitative in nature and explored the reflection and engagement of students to the influence of dominant social discourses. Furthermore, it gave account as to how the study might be replicated in the same way, and produce the same impact that can be applicable in another context.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how students reflected on the effect of dominant social discourses on their lives over a five-month period and whether engaging in critical reflection had an effect on their sense of agency. Initially students shared their life stories with the group. They were later given assignments over a five-month period to stimulate their critical thinking on how the environment has shaped their way of living and in this way, were taught critical reflexive skills. The findings are presented below using graphical representation of the themes that emerged from each activity.

To track the students' critical thinking and reflexivity, the outcome from each data set was compared across the other data sets. The constructs that are elaborated on in this study are race, gender and SES. These discourses were selected because they were highlighted as important in the literature and also came out strongly in the data collected. Below is a table summarising the themes that emerged across all the data sets. The data set comprised of three written tasks (i) Life stories; (ii) Ecological perspective assignment; (iii) Third person narration; and (iv) Interviews.

These sets of data were used on each participant, to track if there were any changes that occurred. Additionally, the data set was used to compare amongst the respondents which constructs or themes were dominant in their narratives, and how as a group collective agency might have been achieved. The data was grouped according to each task and the overall out-take are reported. To further substantiate the findings from the data, case study approach was undertaken to elucidate on the narratives of three students, and tracking the agency at various levels.

4.2 Findings

In this section, the findings were presented following the timeline activities of the students as illustrated in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Timeline activities for students

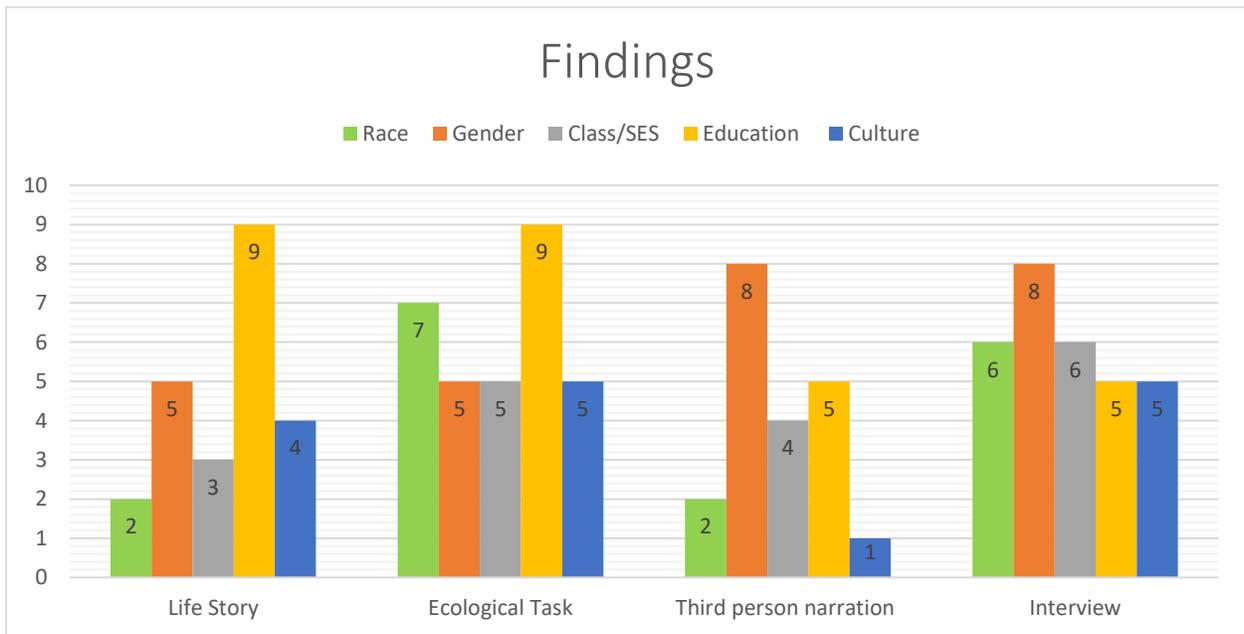## Table 4.2: Themes Emerging from the Combined Data Sets

Table 4.2 Themes emerging from the combination of data sets

- Race as a social construct
- Power of gender norms
- Perceptions of SES as inherited/ acquired
- Education as a tool for progress
- Strong influence of culture

The categories that were explored in this study were race, gender and SES. Furthermore, education and culture were found to be strong discourses that have great impact in the lives of the students. The dominant social discourses were explored in relation to how they came up at the onset of the programme and across the five-month period. The way in which these discourses were mentioned suggests a lot about how race is perceived to be socially constructed; and how the power of gender norms interplay in their lives. Race and gender appeared to be interlocked within culture, which has strong impact in the way one comes to understand themselves and their background. There were varying recognitions that SES can be either inherited or acquired, more so education came up as a strategic tool for some to emancipate themselves from the detriments of SES.

Above (Table 4.2) is an overall graphical representation of the discourses with inference to each data set. The discourses were noted based on how the participant spoke about it in their narratives. The illustration beneath depicts a divergence as to how students at the onset of the programme did not perceive the role and importance that race plays in their lives. However, as the time progressed, one can note the gaining of awareness from the students about the impact that the discourses can have on their lives. The comparison of the constructs or themes across the data sets does not merely quantify the appearance, but also highlights the change and shift that took place. The shift occurred through hearing the stories of others in the cohort study. Furthermore, the shift happened as the students interacted more with one another in class and outside.

4.3 Tracking themes: effects of dominant social discourses

The thrust of this theme unpacks the effect of dominant social discourses as per emerging theme from the informants and data collection tools. Below is the detailed information of the themes

4.3.1 Race as a social construct

As a social construct and discourse, race was not initially given particular significance by the participants, particularly at the onset of the program. One participant stated:

> *I do not think race influences who I am, it's just the colour of my skin. It does not make*
> *me less of a person…I feel like you cannot be classified for what your skin colour is (JM)*

The above quote shows why race might initially have been overlooked as an important component and one which has an impact on ones' life. According to this participant race still insinuates a divide amongst people. The participant's response can be linked to sense of self, whereby it can be enabling or disabling depending on the context (Bandura, 2006). In this regard, the student does not perceive the role played by race in her life, and the categorisation has no influence in how she views herself. People can choose to be 'colour-blind' to specific things, essentially those that can bring discomfort.

Race can be perceived to have no effect on the surface, but covertly it does have great impact and sensitivity. The sensitivity impact of race manifest itself inform of racial disparities and non-cooperativeness of people from different races. This is irrespective of whether one acknowledges or refutes the power of this discourse (King, 1988). Across the entire group, race was not highlighted as important as there were only two out of the nine students who discussed this discourse during the first life story task. However, during the second assignment, race was reflected on by most students and increased from two to seven. This portrays a lack of awareness that the students had pertaining to the impact of race. But gradually, one can notice a shift in how the students later engaged with this discourse, and realised how it has shaped their lives.

As part of the tasks, students completed their life story work using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. By applying this theory into their life stories, students were asked to consider more closely how the influences from their surroundings have impacted on their social identity. In the second task, students began to have a deeper level of engagement with race as a discourse. However, it was noticeable that in the other sets of data race shifted in its importance, as more emphasis was made on the power of gender. Classifying things whether people or animals is a norm in our society. However, when one does not befit the criteria of the category, it creates a state of confusion (not being sure where one belongs) or resistance (choosing to be different from others). This can be exemplified by these students stating:

> I've accepted that I'm different. But how do you classify a person that doesn't know what they are? You know you're not Indian; you're not fully Indian or fully Coloured either. Where do you go? To which spectrum do you go? (JM)

> *It's a struggle, you never know especially if you living in South Africa if you will be accepted… It's not like anyone is racist or prejudiced it's just that people always want to box you into a race group (NK)*

Looking at these extracts, participant JM shows resilience by accepting her uniqueness instead of attempting to be categorised. Relating to Bandura's self-reflectiveness aspect, JM shows how she has come to define herself, outside the confines of the normative rules of society that distinguishes people from one another. Whilst, NK seems to be conflicted about being possibly rejected for not matching a criterion that will classify her into a specific racial group. Pertinent to the constructionist framework, these students present two points, the first point being that we adhere to using the standard criteria to define where one can be categorised. Secondly, we need to shift away from the existing definitions; criteria, and move towards embracing who we are as individuals.

Race and SES are closely interwoven, and the dual role of these discourses can either bring about privilege or oppression to an individual. The participant describes:

> *The fact that I was black made my journey more difficult because most black people because of the apartheid legacy still lacked motivation to invest their wealth to education… the job was for sustaining the household's livelihood only (SL)*

As the student highlighted the issues that she experienced, it is crucial to cautiously review how race seems to have detrimental effect on black people on a wider scale. This is annotated by Beale (1970) that, "As blacks they suffer all the burdens of prejudice and mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin. As women, they bear the additional burden of having to cope with white and black men". This emphasises that what happens to black people is not exclusive to a South African context, but a perpetual phenomenon across the world.

Davis (2008) explains how race is gendered and vice versa. It is important to highlight that in most cases it becomes difficult to speak about race without gender, as suggested by King's (1988) *multiple jeopardy.* This emphasises that not everyone is impacted negatively, for instance the born-free generation might be privileged more than previous generations because of the

democratic rule and policies fostered within this diverse country. However, though apartheid may have been formally abolished, its legacy is still ongoing (Romany, 1995). One student shared:

> *The historical background of our country has also represented us as South Africans with unique issues, amongst them; lack of good healthcare, high poverty and unemployment... However, the nuances attached to racial segregation and discrimination are still prevalent (JM).*

It is evident that attempts to redress the past are enduring. The continued effects of race in people's lives do not make it any easier. Furthermore, in a bid to make everyone equal and trying to rectify the past, there are ways in which the government is contributing to a divide amongst the people. This includes the use of Affirmative Action. However, though the intentions are good, they can contribute towards marginalisation of other racial groups.

Drawing from these participants' responses, from the onset of the program to the interview stage, there is evidence that the participants did not initially acknowledge the influence of race. However, the more closely it was reflected on, it became apparent that it was impacting their lives. This symbolised a shift in thinking that race has no influence and realising that it interplays in one's life in some way. Through engaging with the life story work in the dominant social discourses, the participants were enabled to be reflective and highlighted the struggle of being classified. This can also be understood as critical reflection, as the participant infers back to incidences that have taken place, but might not have been recognised as significant at the time. Overall, an understanding of the significant effect of race, seems to have increased for the majority of the participants as time progressed. There clearly seems to be a change in the way students engaged with this discourse, and a shift from how they perceived it before.

4.3.2 Power of gender norms

Gender refers to being either male or female, this discourse appeared strongly across the combination of data sets. The importance of gender as a discourse was demonstrated as most students showed the need to share and position themselves within this category. It was also noticed that participants found it easier to speak about their gender than their race at the first meeting.

However, there was also a marked increase in both the third and fourth tasks with eight out of nine students speaking about their gender. Referring back to the graphical presentations, the increase depicts students' ability to reflect and increasingly acknowledge the influence that is played by their categorisation of being female or male in society. Social scripting is an important factor that has to be evaluated as to how it enables men to have more privilege than women. Many of the studies (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993; Bowleg, 2012; Cook & Fonow, 1986; Sinacore et al., 1999) have focused on how women have and continue to be oppressed in many aspects.

From the beginning to the end of the module, it was understood that students had taken cognisance of the role that was played by being of a certain gender category, and the impact this has had on their lives. Participants in this research study were mainly females with one male. Looking at the composition of the sample, one can state that the predominance of women in health promotion further perpetuates the ideology that women are better caregivers than men. Within a South African context, women have been oppressed and have resisted the archetypal way in which the system is favourable to patriarchal organisation (Romany, 1995). Women have often been associated with being unskilled and not partaking in the work environment, with the exception of domestic employment which can be observed from a racial aspect (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Romany, 1995). Gender socialisation can be linked to Bandura's Social Learning theory (1986) that posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment and behaviour.

As individuals, we are born and socialised to particular ideologies and this can be related to the interdependent relationship between people and the multiple levels of the environmental system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The ecological perspective model takes into account the multiple levels of influence that can impact on one's life. Doing this task provided an opportunity for the participants to review their understanding of their lives systematically. Thus, through social scripting we find ourselves assigning different tasks and responsibilities to people based on their gender (Wiederman, 2005). Although, the participants did not speak about gender specifically as a discourse, some of the participants revealed their experiences in terms of gender, as shown below:

I was brewing, cooking food, cleaning the house and washing our clothes… I was a girl to my mother, although rebuked and called "girlish" by my peers… Later in life I came up with double quality, for me there is nothing to be done only by girls and or boys (AT-male)

In interpretation, for AT it was apparent that his circumstances enforced stepping into a role and doing things that are usually assigned to women. That, on its own captures the importance of breaking away from the social script and to not perceive such changes to mean being totally emasculated, in the sense of powerlessness as a man. The following comments are made by female participants:

Responsibility roles while assisting my mother in taking care of my siblings…Things have changed over time because of civilization. Despite the fact that we are all six girls, my father ensured that we all received education. (BSF-female)

After completion of my junior degree I got an offer to study a four-year diploma in nursing. I accepted as I needed the money for my son. In 2008 my training commenced, my boyfriend came from his training and we got engaged. I was the happiest woman in the world (NN-female)

The two participants showed the differing roles of being a woman and also reaffirmed the association of women as being caregivers. Women have been closely linked to nurturing and this continues to pervade society around the world and it is more applicable in South African communities. This can be seen through family structure and role played by women in taking care of their families and the HIV/AIDS pandemic has seen more women being overburdened by nurturing for the sick, aside from their normal routine. Additionally, particular cultures enforce a woman's role more with less freedom to negotiate or challenge the norm.

Furthermore, women are still subjected to stereotypes and being underrepresented (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). The predominant system favours males to get educated and not females (Romany, 1995). Romany discusses the social and economic exclusion of women in the South African society. This is evident from BSF, who mentioned that her father felt the need to get his daughters educated. The father exemplifies agency, as he does not want his children to be disadvantaged by the system. This ties in well with education and enabling a female person to be

given an equal chance to that of a male. Participant NN portrayed the typical way women have to juggle between motherhood, work and being a student. The participant reflected on the numerous roles as being both positive and negative, finding a balance between work and personal life being challenging, however a way of life that cannot be changed but managed.

This manifests in most parts of the world and women are faced with a burden to fulfil multiple roles (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Romany, 1995). The recognition of gender as an important discourse seemed to increase from the third activity and depicted an increase in the levels of students' critical reflection of their experiences and how this discourse influenced their lives. This is evident from SP who reflected on the things that her parents have done for her, and observed the privilege of being able to attend school and given all the basic necessities she wanted.

4.3.3 Perceptions of SES as inherited or acquired

This discourse in particular did not appear to be highly significant in the students' stories at the onset of the programme, only a few students elucidated on their class. One student explained her circumstances:

> *The jobs of our elders were not paying high wages in such a way that one can store some cash for their kids…I wanted to further my studies but there was no one who can finance me (SL)*

One can understand that this student had financial constraints that limited her opportunities of getting into university. Additionally, from the extract one can get the sense that financial saving or investment has been something rarely done among black people in South Africa, which deeply impacts many children in our society. The *#FeesMustFall* campaign, it can be argued, is a strategy to afford everyone that opportunity to go to university irrespective of one's background. During the course of the programme the discourse was not unfolded immensely. However, at the end of the module there was evident increase of awareness. Students had reflected on their experiences and this enabled them to consider their socio-economic status and the role it has played in their lives. There was varying understanding and positioning amongst the participants and how they located themselves relative to this discourse. Some of the students highlighted that their background has impacted them in diverse ways.

Social class is understood as hierarchies between groups in societies that are based on economic resources and positions of status or power (Anthias, 2013; Magnusson, 2011). Some of the participants expressed that their perception was that class is part of inheritance or acquired. This suggests that by default a person is classified under a particular cluster. For example, if a person is born into a disadvantaged family, they can be associated with a low working class. Two participants explained their positioning as:

> *I am in this class and the privileges I have is because I was born into this family, so it is not who I am (CL)*

> *…I do not really look at myself as belonging to a class and I do not look at people as classes; class is inherited and I do not see the why I should value class (NN)*

Another alternating view about class was that it can be acquired depending on how an individual works towards empowering themselves. It is not merely about classifying oneself using the family or parents' social stratum.

During the latter part of the module, one of the participants who was unaware of the privilege she had at the beginning, later recognised and acknowledged being privileged. This participant stated:

> *I was fortunate to have been able to grow up in gated estates* (a secured area and accessible to people who are financially well off). *I was unaware of the suffering of others until I saw it first hand at university (MR)*

This highlights the reflexive aspect in which the student has now been able to assess the kind of lifestyle and opportunities she has been afforded, in comparison to other students who felt they were being limited by their background which taught them to persevere. She states that though she has things at her disposal, the change in environment and coming to a tertiary institution provided her the opportunity to learn that not everyone had such a privilege. This was a significant shift and demonstrates reflexive ability for her to reach such an insight, and becoming more aware of herself and other people's struggles. Hodgetts and Griffin (2015) suggest that class remains a construct with multiple meanings and mainly looks at how the personal is interwoven with the social. This means that there is no specific way of defining class, and as people, our experiences in social

contexts and associations have an influence on our categorisation. This is congruent to the social constructionist framework that we create and give meaning to our daily experiences (Burr, 1995). In relation to the participant, living in a gated community already portrayed her socio-economic standing as it was judged based on the area she resided in. The concept gives deeper understanding to intergroup relations and social inequalities. However, most approaches focus on the inequalities that are inclusive of economic, cultural and ideological processes (Anthias, 2013). The combination of these dimensions is important as it emphasises that class relations are experienced, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed on a daily basis.

4.3.4 Education as a tool for progress

From the onset, education emerged very strongly in the life stories of all the study participants. This may be because their education forms part of who they are and emphasised the journey to get to a master's level of study. A credible explanation for this can be found by looking at it from an ecological perspective. In most communities and contexts education is emphasised (Hancock, 2007; Hodgetts, 2015; Romany, 1995). From another viewpoint, education can be viewed as a tool that can enhance agency. This was evident when one of the participants stated that getting educated was a way of exiting a vicious cycle of poverty and oppression:

> *Education is my only means to what I dream to contribute in humanity. I expect my endeavour in education will enable me to possess the actual tool to materialize my dream to stand for the well-being of humans and to stand for those who are in a need* (AT)

Yet for another participant, education brought about a sense of achievement and fulfilment with one's capabilities, as the student explained:

> *At boarding school, I held numerous leadership positions and I did well academically, I received many awards and participated in different activities in school (SP)*

It is quite clear that education played a crucial role in the perceptions of students on how they can liberate themselves from oppression and the injustices in society by equipping themselves and studying on their own (Azmitta & Thomas, 2015). Thus, education can be regarded as a privilege as it has allowed people from various backgrounds to partake in building their career and enrolling in the Masters' programme showed the potential that existed within these individuals. Relative to

the extracts above, one can observe education as a tool for progress as well as a platform where one can learn and acquire new skills. This is in line with Bandura's (1989) work on human agency, where he argues that a person can exercise agency through self-belief. Education has an impact on the livelihood of the students. There has been limited research done in a South African context, with regards to the influence of education being a tool of agency and empowerment in most people's lives. It is clear that people use education to afford them the opportunity to improve their lives and those of others (Else-Quest & Grabe, 2012). Furthermore, education can be closely linked to ones' gender and class. This means that the intersection of these discourses can have an impact on one's ability to acquire education, and in some instances, it can be limited by these discourses.

Education came out as a strong discourse and it can be linked to race and privilege as a result of the apartheid regime. Reflecting on how the apartheid system allocated resources to people, many black people did not get the opportunity to become educated after the period following 1953 with the introduction of Bantu Education (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Romany, 1995). This resulted in black people, females in particular, being the most unskilled with only domestic work as a means to sustain themselves and their families (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). Young girls have been limited in terms of accessing education as compared to their male counterparts (Romany, 1995). One student alluded to the following:

> *I am very honoured and proud of myself. I have learnt that in life if one has a vision/dream about him/her life nothing is impossible. Some challenges are not meant to destroy the dreams but they are the stepping stones to our destiny (SL)*

This student presented Anthias' (2013) concept of how one can experience intersectionality by having dominance in one aspect but on another not be privileged. From the student's assertions, it is clear that there are some who choose not to be victims of circumstances and pursue education at all costs as a stepping stone to their destiny. Instead their circumstances become the driving force that spurs them on to want to achieve more.

4.3.5 Strong influence of culture

Culture can be defined as beliefs or customs of a particular group. As a theme, culture was not particularly strong but appeared very influential. According to Burr's (1995) prototype of social

constructionism, our understanding of the world is dependent on where and when in the world one lives in. This is to say that with time meanings change, and this can be related to chronosystem of the Ecological perspective model (1977), that time changes the way of life and new meanings are developed. Initially students did not refer to race specifically, but as the course unfolded more specific reference was made. This can be exemplified by a statement from one of the participants: "*I am a proud Zulu girl*" (SP)

Emerging from this statement are the concepts of culture and race, which portray the intersection of these discourses. Furthermore, it is crucial to highlight the entwined nature of race and gender. Bowleg (2012) further explains that neither one of the categories of race and gender can be clarified alone without acknowledging the results brought forth by the intersection of these discourses. The student might have entwined the themes but she was not aware of this and it corresponded to the literature on the understanding of intersectionality (Azmitta & Thomas, 2015). This can be aligned to the argument by Vygotsky (1978) that culture is the foundation of all aspects and has impact on other categories. The participant was able to centralise culture as being predominant in how she perceives herself without elaborating in detail about her race.

Culture as a belief system can also be viewed from a social context perspective, with reference to the interdependency that exists between the individual and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In most instances when making inference to culture it becomes imperative to involve gender (Davis, 2008). The main reason for that is there are social scripts that as people we ascribe to and they often evolve around the gender of the person before it informs other aspects of their life (Burr, 1995; Wiederman, 2005). This can be displayed from one participant's account:

> *Adding on that my father was a very cultural person, he believed that we as young women have to go and get married to other wealthy families for us to have a brighter future. Even now… they do not support my education because they do not understand. They think I must go and work with the degree that I have and get married now than doing Masters (SL).*

This confirms that being a woman puts one in a position of being subjected to many expectations by society and family (Wiederman, 2005) and it is further exacerbated if a person does not get any form of assistance or support from the family. In the above extract, the student makes a link

between gender and culture and how these two discourses have influence on a person's social identity. From an agentic perspective, this participant seems to have endured many hardships but would not give up until her goals are achieved.

There was inconsistency in the way that this theme appeared across the data sets. However, it has a significant effect in shaping our lives. Just as this participant acknowledged:

> *As a culturally grounded family, I was always taught the importance of respecting the elders and behaving in an acceptable manner, as a young African woman…people have high expectations of us… we should be an example to other young people in the community (SP)*

This illustrates how this participant positioned herself in relation to the social discourse and the sort of influence it had in shaping the person that she is today. It demonstrates the importance of culture in shaping and influencing one's identity creation. Vygotsky (1978) is of the view that culture is the most important aspect in understanding ourselves, as it cements all development and influences how we make sense of our environment. Louis (2009) emphasises that we should be aware of the impact brought forth by this discourse in our lives, and how we relate to others.

4.4 Case Profiles: Tracking changes in position and agency

This section focuses on three participants to show if there was any change in perspective and demonstrating deeper critical thinking in relation to the dominant social discourses and their intersectionality. The sharing of stories and experiences is used to enhance students' critical thinking, to increase awareness of the power of these dominant social discourses (Sliep & Kotzé, 2007). The three participants include a black female, one male, and one Indian female.

Participant SL is a twenty-four-year-old woman of African descent. These are some highlights from the life story that was shared by SL:

> *I come from an African family that practices Zulu culture. While I was, young I had this huge dream of becoming a doctor so that I could help people... Even though there were many challenges at home, they were my driving force to carry on. I have learnt that in life*

if one has a vision/dream nothing is impossible. I also learnt that challenges are not meant to destroy the dreams, but they are the stepping stones to our destiny.

Drawing from SL's narrative, there is a lot one learns from the experiences that she went through. There is also a change in how she perceived the struggles from her life story. She believed that these experiences have made her a stronger person. If it were not for these circumstances she would have been different in many ways. Hence, she embraced the challenges as a form of encouragement to make her life better. Additionally, it is important to consider her position on culture, that despite being limited to some extent she still feels proud of where she comes from as part of her social identity. Most essential was the resilience she showed in that she had not stopped dreaming despite what was happening around her, as she shared:

The death of my family members discouraged me a lot because I thought my dreams were not going to come true. However, I did not stop dreaming. I told myself that I will not allow anything to stand in my way.

This student portrayed a strong sense of agency in saying that no situation would hinder what she has planned for her future. One can also infer that this student did not let financial constraints limit her from getting into university and that these unfortunate events were only the stepping stones to her destiny. This participant showed critical reflection in her experiences and what they have taught her as the person she is today and how to continue to persevere until she reached her full potential. This is symbolic of being reflexive. This is in congruence with Bolton's (2010) definition of reflexivity as being part of how one locates himself or herself in the picture and acknowledging one's own influences. With reference to the ecological perspective, this was highlighted by SL:

The fact that I am black made my journey more difficult due to the apartheid legacy, most black people lacked motivation to invest their wealth into education. I had to start from the scratch in building my education. I saw that I had to make a change for my family, my generations to come and my society at large, by gaining a higher education. They (family) think I must secure work and also get married now. That influences me a lot because sometimes I do need their support even if it is not financial support but the emotional support... I will prove to them that education is vital especially for women.

From what was said by the participant, one can perceive how all the dominant social discourses of race, gender and socio-economic status have manifested in her life in a limiting manner. The way in which the student referred to race and SES corresponds with what is in the literature about the gap of economic freedom and equality between racial groups (Romany, 1995). Furthermore, she revealed the struggle of getting educated as a female and the implication that education had in her community and within the family. This is in line with the literature that gender inequality still prevails and is mostly fostered by culture, which is the backbone of any society (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Wing & De Cavarlho, 1995). The participant used the term '*motivation*' which in this context meant not being driven or seeing the importance of saving money for educational purposes. This has been a major setback for many black communities, given that during the apartheid era black people were trained to do mainly manual jobs and thus never required formal education for such skills (Romany, 1995). Challenging the norms in society by getting educated is not well accepted and this was reinforced by the lack of support from the family, as she stated:

> *I do not get enough support from my community and family as I would have wanted; like if I was a male I think that things would have been different but because I am a female and living in this cultural context it is difficult.*

This student clearly indicated that her potential will not be derailed by staying obedient to rules that oppress women and favour men as being more important and superior (Romany, 1995; Steyn, 2004). She continues and is determined to progress in life, despite the obstacles that stand in her way. Her persistence can be observed throughout the course. In a third person narration, this was shared by SL:

> *Her focus and achievements was a result of the support from her mother and the desire to study further to conquer the apartheid legacy of poverty in her family. The life of this young lady showed the struggles of black people in South Africa, also that of a person who is focused and ambitious, and can conquer the legacy of inequalities.*

In this exercise, the student recaptured what she had said in the first life story but reflecting on it in the third person. She stated:

Doing life story in third person helped me realise the progress that I have made and the fact that I have come so far, and I was not aware of…

This participant shared that through engaging in this work, she realised the achievements and privilege of receiving an education at a Masters level. This has made her courageous and gave her a sense of agency in that she felt able to continue empowering herself.

An observation that was made is that the participant became reflective on the inequalities that persist even in present society. This can be seen where she stated:

"*The fact that I am black made my journey more difficult due to the apartheid legacy…*"

 The participant was hoping that through education she would be able to escape from the impact of these dominant social discourses. Lastly, participant SL shared her insight about the intersectionality of the dominant social discourses in her life and learning about her colleagues' life stories:

Starting with gender as it links more with my culture since I am from a Zulu background. I feel that gender has largely influenced me in a negative way, because it encourages males to be dominant over females. Females are supposed to be submissive. Therefore, it influenced me a lot when it comes to school and studying and gaining power through education. I felt inferior being a young black woman.

What can be gathered from this participant is that she gained awareness of the power of the dominant social discourses in her life and how it has impacted her self-efficacy; this can be evidenced further when she said:

There is that sort of power that goes with those discourses so I feel like I must work hard to empower myself so that I can reach that stage. It was amazing like one of my colleagues mentioned that the dominant discourses that have oppressed me like race and gender, she said she did not feel any oppression of those dominant discourses it was rather very interesting.

Additionally, listening to her colleagues' life story work gave her hope because others could be privileged by the same discourses that have manifested negatively in her own life. Thus, one might

say that life story work is important in an educational setting to bring about different kinds of knowledge to be constructed anew and learnt from (Gibson, 2011; Meininger, 2006; Sliep, 2010). Although this participant already showed a very strong sense of agency in her initial life story it is clear that with increased critical reflection she displayed a more nuanced understanding of the effect of discourses on her life. During the final interview, she stated:

> *It (self-awareness and reflexivity) is important because you become aware of what you were not aware of previously, and I think awareness brings insight and we become informed and able to take action to minimise those weaknesses and work on your strengths to become a better person.*

Highlighting from this student's extract, one can observe that reflection played a crucial role and it was necessary in enabling one to have a different perspective. The participant acknowledged that before partaking in this module, she was more individualistic. However, through the course she has learnt that everyone has a role to play. Therefore, being part of a team is more important than working in isolation. Additionally, she felt that by selecting the module it helped her particularly with sharing of the narratives. It made her aware of the experiences and discourses that shaped her life. This has allowed her to stop feeling ashamed about where she came from. Through sharing her life story, it has provided her the opportunity to be supported and cared for by her colleagues, and this boosted self-confidence, as alluded to:

> *I feel like when we share our life story, we are afraid because we want to repress those painful things that will hurt our feelings, but the more you tell your story it is when you become aware of your background and gain the confidence to be proud of what you have achieved.*

In essence, reflection is a practice of challenging the events that have occurred and questioning one's behaviour towards experiences that have disempowered or emancipated a person (Bolton, 2010). Increased self-efficacy can be tied to Bandura's (1989) SCT that states that the core of agency is when a person believes in their capability to take control over the experiences that impact their life.

Participant AT is a twenty-eight-year-old man of African descent, born outside South Africa. The Masters' program is diverse and enrols students from different parts of the continent of Africa. It is therefore crucial to depict this diversity; this is what can be highlighted from AT's life story work:

> *Eritrean societies are very close to each other but interdependent in their lives. Our neighbourhood is occupied mostly by the middle and lower classes of society. The bad experiences were militarization of our young minds and it has long lasting effect. I came to South Africa in May 2013. Education is my only means to what I dream of contributing to humanity. I expect that my endeavours in education will enable me to possess the actual tool to ensure that my dreams materialise.*

From reading AT's life story, one can see numerous challenges that he has dealt with and may still experience if he goes back home. One can also learn the pivotal role that has been played by education in this student's life which has led him to run away from the military regime in Eritrea. His story of escape and exile showed bravery and a strong sense of agency that has driven him to withstand many difficult circumstances. It is reflecting on these experiences that gives people courage to learn more about their capabilities and to not give up their pursuits (Sliep & Kotzé, 2007). Education is not only a tool of agency but the means to a liberated life. AT's life story can be reviewed using the ecological perspective model. He highlighted that:

> *My neighbourhood is poor community, but rich in social interrelationship and communal assistantship. I was given asylum in South Africa in May 2013, since then I am active member of Eritrean civic community in Durban. Eritrean struggle for justice is yet in its maturation and I know it is also my fight. However, my belief in education for change keeps me away for a while from fully involving.*

Looking at the experiences of this participant, it is evident that he grew up in a close-knit community, which is central to the ecological perspective model about interdependence. Coming from a country where there is so much social injustice drove this student to make hard choices. Determined to attain his aspirations, he chose to move away from home. This made him reflect more and think about possible contributions he could make to his country. He reflected on this and said:

> *I can't wait for the right time to stand for justice; I always try to practice it even with my very little capacity.*

It is still evident that despite being in a different environment, AT has not stopped thinking about his people and the things that happen back home. He still aspires to be the agent of change in his home country, although currently pursuing his own goals. This symbolises the true meaning of reflexivity as Bolton (2010) explained that it is about reflecting and doing something to change the situation. This participant also emphasised how valuable the process of reflexivity was to him, as it brought about peace of mind. He narrated his story in the third person:

> *In a nation having scarce resources, he was feeling responsibility and was ready to contribute his part. However, as an active observer he was away from everyone to notice the changes that were happening. But nearly 10 years of freedom, the same liberation fighters started to oppress the citizens and showed unwillingness to transfer the leadership democratically to the people.*

Reflecting on his life before coming to South Africa, it was apparent that he missed his home country and family. However, the injustice and oppression that exists is something that he cannot take and having left makes him guilty. He thinks about the contribution he might have made to bring about change instead of fleeing the country. The government's failure to have established a democratic leadership is among the reasons that he is not able to go back home. Essentially, one can gather that it is within these circumstances that we are able to grow and appreciate the ordeals for making us stronger (Sliep & Kotzé, 2007). During the interview, he said:

> *I am a product of these discourses, how they manifest and how they influence me. I am in the process of emancipation now I understand myself. Listening to the life story of an individual's it lets you go beyond the face...*

At the end of the module, for AT, it was meaningful to learn about the power of the dominant social discourses and partaking in the process of listening to his colleagues' stories and this enabled him to learn beyond face value about the people in his surroundings. This has helped him to care more and be courteous to others as everyone has different experiences and it is not about how a person presents themselves.

On the impact of intersectionality, the participant indicated that reflexivity has become a part of the way he thinks, a part of his process of emancipation:

> *I am in the process of emancipation now I understand myself, it's like letting yourself from the boundaries of the society or any boundaries which prevent you from thinking back that like you feel scared in some way. So, I am in the way of emancipating myself and it could be part of reflexivity, the more I reflect is the more I would go in-depth.*

Doing life story work has afforded him the opportunity to reflect more and to continue to seek finding himself and freedom (Dominice, 2000; Sliep, 2010). There was a change in this participant in relation to recognising the power and intersection of the dominant social discourses in his life. His interaction with his colleagues shifted because of the different perspectives he witnessed and considering the varying backgrounds of people. The process of sharing the life stories enabled him to view others differently while learning more about himself, which is symbolic of critical reflection that the study aimed to increase within this cohort group. He gained increased skills to be reflexive on the experiences he has gone through and how he can shape his life after learning about the discourses that immensely impacted on him. His life experience at the beginning made him become supportive of women empowerment, as he stated:

> *I think God created women to be strong; and also, my mother for the role she plays, so I support the independence because I have seen it…*

The participant was raised differently and has gained more respect for women because of the way he grew up which taught him not to differentiate between gender roles. What is also significant to note is the political atmosphere that the participant was exposed to. Growing up in a communist country where the roles he could play were prescribed to him by the system, he realised that he would not be able to pursue his own dreams. This has driven him to seek to find justice for his fellow countrymen.

Participant MR is a twenty-three-year-old woman of Indian descent. The diverse nature of the class made it necessary to look at varying experiences of the students. This can be highlighted from the life story work of MR:

It was strict schooling that equipped me for life as a strong and independent woman. A big part of my identity is my culture, although my family are originally from North India, I am proudly South African. I have always wanted to make a difference to the world and now I can fulfil my wish by assisting those who need my help.

From this narrative, one can understand that this student is more grounded on her culture as she strongly feels attached to it and perceives it as her identity. In this activity, the participant did not appear to be disadvantaged by the dominant social discourses i.e. race; gender and SES, but the events that happened in her family have taught her to appreciate life more. This student was aware of her character and the importance of managing her responses to people as an aspiring professional. With inference to the ecological model, the following is emphasised from the student's work:

No one can live in isolation. In as much as we are all individuals; we are all somehow influenced by our external worlds. My family has been supportive of my decisions throughout life. They guide me in the right direction and have instilled morals in me. I am fortunate to have had a father who supports me both socially and financially. My family motivates me to fulfil my career choice and they have taught me to always strive for the best in whatever I do.

Looking at this student's family structure, she has been fortunate to have had support. If one compares MR with participant SL experiences, SL has been struggling financially and has not received much support from her family in the same way as MR. This shows the differing experiences that come with race and socio-economic status for these two participants. She acknowledged the influence that the family and friends have had and particularly felt reflective about using the ecological model in relation to her life and emphasised:

Being reflective is something I do every day, but it's actually difficult being critically reflective upon yourself, that is what I have learnt.

The close resonance to Bronfenbrenner's model, depicts the level of dependence the student has on her support structure. One can argue that the student is more influenced by the people around her, and have great leverage in the way she makes her decision. Another argument might be that

there is no individual agency, but mediated agency that is not explicit. The student felt the process of being critically reflective was challenging on the basis that she only viewed her environment with one perspective, and unable to triangulate and see from various positioning, of which this programme allowed her to do by engaging with other students and their narratives.

In third person narration, the student did not present a life story in a third voice, but provides some aspect on her family history in relation to culture and religion. MR emphasised her position on culture and religion. These two discourses featured more often in her story. In the final interview, this participant showed that reflexivity is part of how she thinks now, after accepting that the dominant social discourses had been to her advantage which had put her in a privileged position. She emphasised that:

> *With class, gender and race there have never been negative discourses in my life before, I have never even thought about it, altogether I have never been discriminated by either one of the discourses. I learnt to appreciate my life because I have two parents, who take care of me, and some people do not have that and it's actually a big privilege to have both abled parents taking care of me and it's something that I never saw as a privilege before. I saw it as a necessity but now I know it is not.*

This participant learnt about the privilege she had from these dominant social discourses and also acknowledged that in a different context her life might have not been the same. This was exemplified when she said:

> *I realised that I have my discourses and I always have a choice of what I want to do, and the agency to do it… I just feel like if I were in a different context maybe my three discourses together I would have experienced life differently.*

This changed the way in which she related to her colleagues and began to realise that she has had some form of privilege, but had been unaware of this before engaging in life story work. Through engaging in life story work and being more reflexive, she has now come to an understanding of the intersectionality and impact of these discourses. The participant stated:

Four months ago, I was a bit of a totally different person and was unaware of the challenges that other people faced, which I haven't faced before, and it made me realise that sometimes I need to focus on the bad times and reflect on them to understand how the positive had emerged.

From the extract, it is clear that the participant has reflected and perceived how fortunate she has been, that the very same discourses that have privileged her have limited other people in her masters' cohort. It is important too that she also seen that being in an enabling environment has allowed her to exercise agency in doing what she has interest in.

In addition, the participant looked back at her life story and her colleagues' life story work that was shared in class and came to a realisation that the role played by her parents was significant and if it were not for them perhaps, she would have not been part of the Masters' program. She also shared how she got to understand the concept of privilege, as she stated:

I thought privilege was about the rich and famous, but it's not. A privilege is about being in a huge university and in a class of ten people that is what I have learnt…. At least now when I go to the communities, I will understand the different perspectives and backgrounds that people come from.

Furthermore, the participant changed one of her passions for children and wanted to be involved in women empowerment projects, after engaging with numerous texts on feminism. Through looking at how culture and context can affect women in various ways and learning from the stories of her peers, she wanted to be part of impacting other women positively. This showed an element of collective agency (Bandura, 2006) as she wants to be a change agent in the community. Through partaking in this program, the participant shared that she has taken some of the things for granted when she realised that some people were lacking things like basic health care. She emphasised that at the beginning she felt uncomfortable with the process of sharing her life story, but has learnt that sometimes it is important to let people know if you are struggling. This process has enabled her to learn more about herself. The realisation that she was privileged has allowed the participant to be sensitive.

4.5 Intersection of discourses

The intersection of the dominant social discourses has been referred to under some themes and markedly had an impact on participants' lives. It is crucial to highlight that at the onset of the module, the majority of the students had difficulty in understanding the concept of intersection, just as (Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005) argued that intersection is a complex term. The students were unable to make a distinguished connection as to how the dominant social discourses has shaped their life stories. The interconnection of the discourses was, however, evident in the responses of students. Some examples from the participants are as follows:

> *I can say I am a product of these discourses, how they manifest and how they influence me (AT).*

> *I think we learn through labels that shape how we think about other people and how we think about ourselves. So, it is quite a challenge when you are aware of these discourses and when you are aware how your identity is almost made up of these discourses (CL)*

> *The connection of different discourses that are dominant in your life and how they link like race; gender; background; economic status and class, basically everything that dominates in your life as all the dominant discourses in one's life (SP).*

The above extracts show that the understanding of the concept and application came later in the module. In accordance to Azmitta and Thomas' (2015) argument on transnational intersectionality, it is evident that the process of sharing the life stories enabled the students to move beyond looking at their own background, but to better understand the dynamic interlock of the dominant social discourses. This enabled the students' awareness to increase significantly and recognising through one another the effect that the dominant social discourses had in their lives, although some did not overtly call it intersectionality.

From a South African context, both gender and race have an effect on the socio-economic status of a person. Many studies have been conducted that explored the interrelatedness of these discourses (Anthias, 2013; Else-Quest & Grabe, 2012; Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015; Warner & Shields, 2013). It is important to consider the context in which South Africa was positioned before the democratic era began. Azmitta and Thomas (2015) give emphasis on the interrelation between

race, gender and class as inseparable dimensions of oppression. Romany (1995) gives an account of the nature in which gender and race intersect in a post-apartheid era. Black women have been excluded from participating in the labour market through cultural practices that endorse the patriarchal system which marginalises women (Romany, 1995). The effects of apartheid still pervade, although constitutionally the government has incorporated plans and legislations that empower women to fully participate in everything and not to be discriminated against because of their gender (Romany, 1995). This is similar to events that took place in the USA, where for many years' black women were invisible in society and had to fight for their rights against racism and sexism (King, 1988). It is clear that women have been oppressed immensely and irrespective of the attempts at redressing that problem there is little progress. In the work setting women are still underpaid compared to men (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010).

Anthias (2013) focused on how an individual may be in a better position in one aspect, but be concurrently subservient. Garry (2011) emphasis that inclusion of privilege and oppression in intersectionality shows that it is applicable to everyone and not just to members of marginalised groups. It is important to consider the effect of race from another perspective. White women may have received some benefits during the time of apartheid because of their race and are well represented in the work environment in comparison to other racial groups (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). There continues an ideology of associating whiteness with power and privilege. Steyn (2004) defines the construction of whiteness to be central but not exclusive to the process of power and oppression. However, he believes it still shapes the postcolonial world that people live in. With such a deep embedded history of colonialism and apartheid system, the post-apartheid South African government has had to deal with a backlog that seems impossible to breach (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Romany, 1995). It is worth taking into account the challenges that prevail at this time, which threaten a better livelihood for all people. Therefore, one can ascertain that some of the students at the end of the module had increased critical reflection that enabled their agency to increase.

4.6 Reflexivity

4.6.1 Student reflexivity

The students' increased ability to reflect critically was central to this study. By having done the module, most participants showed evidence of having gained critical reflexive skills. For example:

> *It is important because if you are not aware of your strengths and weaknesses, then how are you going to communicate and relate to other people? Sometimes through the self-reflection we are doing you will find that things are not often negative, it's not always negative (NN).*

According to this participant, there was a valuable lesson in becoming reflective and engaging with the different dominant social discourses and their impact. Culture became integral in how this student made sense of her environment and related to other people. This is in line with Sinacore and colleagues (1999) who emphasis on the importance of promoting reflexivity in the classroom, as it enhances self-awareness and recognising range of human truths. Allen and Farnsworth (1993) highlighted that learners engaged with reflexivity will be better able to perceive, and locate themselves as apprehenders within a particular cultural and socio-historical context.

From a Vygotskian perspective, to enhance cognitive development the environment should be enabling for some form of social interaction (Louis, 2009). Reflexivity fundamentally puts the person at the forefront of social interactions. It allows the individual to be an object of study to themselves, by having dual roles of being the subject and object of study through the social experiences that occur to them (Callero, 2003). An example from one participant:

> *It is valuable to me because I have never actually taken time to think about how these dominant discourses intersect in my life, so for the very first time I got to know and do reflection on that (SP).*

Thus, one can deduce that taking part in this programme has helped students to reflect more and know how to find balance between both their personal and professional lives.

4.6.2 Research reflexivity

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) argue for the need for a researcher to be socially and emotionally responsive to the participants and forms part of qualitative analysis. As the researcher, I found myself in juxtaposed roles as I had both the role of being a student and researcher. From this

research study and looking at the dominant social discourses, I believe that this study was relevant. I learnt the power held by the discourses and how they have and continue to impact both my personal and professional life. My own biases almost influenced me to disregard the impact of these nuances. However, I was able to reach the point of fully grasping and applying it to my life on a continual basis, and have found it to be beneficial. I believe that this study was not only relevant but applicable to our lives. The way these nuances reconfigure our experience on a daily basis. Whether positively or negatively, we should be able to respond in a manner that does not compromise our values and ethics. I also think that being in a dual-role enabled me to engage better with the participants, as I was part of everything they did.

The informal discussions and interactions that took place during the five-month period, allowed me to understand the participants better, as compared to only listening to life stories. I can say the emphasis of social interaction by Vygotsky was crucial. Henceforth, it created an environment where the group was able to share things in a collective as we were experiencing those issues. Communication was important and it formed relations between 'I' as the researcher and the participants. It created an opportunity to view situations in different perspectives, think about others around us. Thus, it did not only promoted self-awareness but fostered selflessness in people.

4.7 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the findings of the research study corresponded with current literature. The themes that emerged were related to what the study investigated. The discourses do have an impact in influencing the lives of the students at both personal and professional levels. Across all the data sets, it is clear that the students' critical reflection and agency increased over the span of the module. The intersectionality of dominant social discourses was not seen as particularly from a Western perspective, but was applicable to the South African context. The theories that were chosen for this study were incorporated and enhanced the manner in which I made sense of the results.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

This section presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study following the order of the research questions and objectives of the study. The effect of dominant social discourses, reflexivity and limitations were used as subheadings to summarise the conclusions of the study.

5.1.1 Effect of dominant social discourses

The majority of the participants in this study clearly showed that there was an impact from the dominant social discourses on their lives. Although the main focus was on race; gender; and class; the significance and role played by education as well as culture were influential markers. This is in agreement with the concept of transnational intersectionality in reviewing how discourses perpetuate discrimination. These are constructs that have not been well explored in the literature. Through partaking in the sharing of narratives, the process can be deemed essential as it created a space of openness amongst the cohort group and better understanding of each other in formation of collective agency. The results suggest that with increased reflexivity, there is a greater sense of personal and collective agency. The intersectionality is evident in their narration, even though not stated as intersectionality its application was apparent.

The theoretical frameworks used in this study explored most avenues that help make up an individual and how they navigate and interact with their environment. It is quintessential for one to fathom their own positioning for better ability to acquire the skill of being reflective. The procedure of revisiting past experience was beneficial in gaining the capability and skill to be more critical of the taken for granted aspects of our lives. The impact of the dominant social discourses varied across the cohort. This helped the students to better understand themselves in their personal and professional lives. Culture was central to the majority of the stories. Thus, further exploration on the level of influence it has remained an issue for further studies. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) argued that culture is the underpinning layer for all other aspects.

In this context, the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) put individuals at the centre of different systems, that exert some impact on the decision making and sense of self of the person. By applying this model in this study, it did not take away the uniqueness of the South African context, by that meaning the model is flexible and practical in any context. Furthermore, it served the integral purpose of discovering the level in which the individual was able to exercise their own intuition, which feeds to the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989). Thus, these two frameworks complimented one another, and brought out the desired outcome of the study aim.

5.1.2 Enhanced reflexivity and agency

The socio-cognitive theory by Bandura (1989) highlights the agency of a person and how it develops over time. This theory served well to explain the development that was shown to have occurred with the students during and at the end of the programme. This was exemplified by how students shared their life stories and views on the intersectionality of the dominant social discourses in their own life stories. The increasing awareness and agency is reflected in the students' ecological task, how particular experiences invoked the power of race and/or gender. Education as a discourse was strong and can be regarded as a tool for agency. This follows the evidence from the majority of the participants, who felt strongly that education has played a role in defining themselves. Further to this, education could be used as a pragmatic strategy to escape the oppression of dominant social discourses. This signifies the role that education has in our society as a gateway ticket to improving one's knowledge and lifestyle. From a largely female dominated group, the consensus among the participants was that education will enable them to be independent and break away from the norm of patriarchy that positions a man in power and authority.

The importance of reflexivity as a process was found as useful by the students and enabled them to recognise the privilege and limitations they have in their own lives. In the literature, the intersectionality of the dominant social discourses (race, gender and class) has been explored greatly. The study findings highlighted that the students' ability to reflect increased over the course of the module. This is evidenced by tracking from the case studies how each participant engaged with their narratives and insight brought forth by doing this module.

Studies have been done in both local and international contexts. However, the majority have focused on the impact of discourses rather than on how one can shift the power of these nuances. There are limited studies that have explored the importance of reflexivity in developing critically reflexive professionals. Reflexivity is primarily concerned with raising critical questions about oneself, while agency focuses on the ways one responds to events or situations. The students showed the ability to be reflexive and that they were able to be critical in their thinking and take into cognisance the factors that interplay in shaping their life.

5.2 Limitations

Tracking the agency of the students was a challenge for the researcher. This led her to use case studies in order to establish whether there was any change that occurred, from the beginning to the end of the module. There are possible hindrances in replicating the study outside the educational setting. Having a dual role to play was favourable, but it also proved a challenge to report the findings without dissociating from being a member of the group. The sample was limited in gender representation, with only one male in the cohort. In the study intersectionality was explored around gender inequalities and the results presented the oppression that was experienced by women more than men. This limited the confirmability of the study, in particular with respect to the gender aspect.

5.3 Recommendations

Comparatively a lot of research has been conducted focussing on the oppression of women. However, men have been neglected which needs further exploration. Gender balance in the sample size will show equivalent domains of power and struggles between men and women. Therefore, it is important to have a fair spread of gender representation in the cohort. The sensitivity of race becomes necessary to be explored. It is noteworthy that in the South African context, being male, white or black, has its own privileges and limitations. More in-depth case studies would be helpful in yielding better results and ensuring that each participant's agency and reflexivity is tracked well. Furthermore, a longitudinal study would be recommendable to visit the participant and ask questions pertinent to agency after a set period of time.

Education as a tool for agency needs better exploration. An alternative context, needs to be considered as people are misled to believe that living in the Western countries means being well-off financially. However, some indicated that their experiences would have been totally different of which they are grateful for, as this context has enabled them to not be self-contained. Further research is needed that will focus on how generations born after apartheid are impacted by the dominant social discourses without particularly making reference to this oppressive system. By doing this, it might enable one to highlight if there have been any changes in the way people live as well as developing reflexivity in relation to the dominant social discourses. This suggests that there is much work still to be done in this area.

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UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

4 August 2015
Ms Nombuso Mbatha 211523469
School of Applied Human Sciences
Howard College Campus
Dear Ms Mbatha
Protocol reference number: HSS/0905/015M (Linked to HSS/1243/014)
Project title: Developing critical reflexive professionals who can provide appropriate service to individuals, communities and society

Full Approval — Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 21 July 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/lnterview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

....

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Cc Supervisor: Prof Yvonne Sliep
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Dr Jean Steyn
Cc School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001 , Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facslmile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: imbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za
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UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

11 May 2015

Ms Nombuso Mbatha
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Howard College Campus
UKZN
Email: 211523469@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Ms Mbatha

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:
"A constructed identity: intersectionality and dominant discourses (gender, race and socioeconomic status) of post-graduate students doing a Masters in Health Promotion'.
It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by performing interviews with students who are willing to participate in the interview on the Howard College Campus.
Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:
● Ethical clearance number;
● Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
● Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire; ● gatekeepers' approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book.
Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

MR B POO
REGISTRAR (ACTING)

Office of the Registrar
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: reqistrar@ukzn.acza Website:
www.ukzn -ac.za

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INFORMATION SHEET

Project title: Developing critical reflexive professionals who can provide appropriate service to individuals, communities and societies (Protocol reference number: HSS/1243/014)

Dear Student

We are doing a study to find out how you experienced the Personal is the Professional Life Story module which you completed during your Health Promotion master's course. The information collected will be used to inform future learning with this methodology.

Here is the information you need to decide whether you will take part in the study:
- If you agree to take part in the study you will be asked to attend a data gathering workshop with other students who have completed the Personal is the Professional module in the Masters in Health Promotion and will be asked in individual interviews how you experienced the module and what affect it had on your personal and professional life.
- The workshop will be held on Wednesday, 27 May 2015, from 9:00am to 3:00am at the NSA Gallery in Durban.
- If you cannot attend the workshop you could still be interviewed individually in person or via skype.
- Your life story that you shared could be used to inform the study although your name would not be mentioned and your permission on anything that is used for the study would be obtained first.
- You will not be asked to give any information that you would rather keep private and all responses will be kept confidential.
- The results of the study will remain anonymous. However, on request participants can be given feedback on the findings of the study.
- You will be free to stop taking part at any time.
- The project leader will be available during the workshop if you feel you would like to talk to anyone privately during that time and contact details will be provided for someone you can contact after you have attended the workshop.
- You can also contact the researchers if you have any questions about the study.
    - Project leader: Yvonne Sliep - 082-4989343
    - Lynn Norton – 0837871477
    - Nombuso Mbatha - 0725599481
    - University Research Office: Phumla Ximba (031-2603587)

If you would like to take part in the study, please sign the consent form attached.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I have been informed about the details of the study:

Developing critical reflexive professionals who can provide appropriate service to individuals, communities and societies (Protocol reference number: HSS/1243/014)

I have read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and freely agree to take part in the study.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

CONSENT TO RECORD

I consent to the recording of all interviews and focus groups that I participate in during the study.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

Interview Guide

This interview guide is not rigid but rather fluid as new aspects worth pursuing may emerge during the interview session with some participants. However, the following questions serve as a general guide of the area around which the discussion revolves. The questions are not necessarily going to follow the sequence below and not all of them may be asked, or neither all of them will be pursed with each participant.

1. What does intersectionality mean to you?
2. Do you think that this understanding is valuable to you? Explain in what way (Personal/Professional)
3. What impact do the discourses have on your life, in terms of the choices you make?
4. What have you learnt from the stories shared by your colleagues and reflecting onto your own story?
5. Do you think/ believe that self-awareness is vital for you as a future practitioner?