12

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STUDENT WITH AN UNDERREPRESENTED ETHNIC AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF A MASTERS DEGREE IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

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DECLARATION

I, Elelwani Ramugondo, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise), and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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ABSRACT

What is it like, to be a student with a distinctly different ethnic and cultural background from that of the majority of the student population, in the department of Occupational Therapy (University of Cape Town)? This study was aimed at understanding how students with underrepresented backgrounds in the learning environment, constituted their subjectivities during a professional journey of becoming occupational therapist. A method of inquiry that embraced both phenomenology and a collective case study approach was used, and data were collected using in-depth interviews. Thematic coding of data from all participants culminated in the emergent themes: **the struggle of negotiating space**; **ongoing sense of difference and isolation**; **personal versus personal identities in conflict**; and **want to offer what I learnt back in my community**. Information shared by African participants converged into group-specific themes: **compromised sense of self**; **I am not making an impact**; and **there is tension in my becoming**. The findings of the study pointed to a problematic professional journey, for African students in particular.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS **Pages**

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

The evolution of this study emanated from literature on the South African context, history of occupational therapy (O.T.) in this country, theory on what informs learning, and the researcher's experiential journey as both a student and staff member in the O.T. department. This information collectively informed the rationale of the study.

1.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

South African history and its impact on the learning environment

It is imperative that all learners in a learning environment be able to share their experiences and perspectives. This is to ascertain that various frames of reference have more or less equal chances of influencing what is learnt by all. This for many training institutions remains a challenge. It also remains a question whether occupational therapy (O.T.) learning environments in South Africa, including the University of Cape Town (UCT), foster a culture of equality, mutual respect and tolerance. According to Rendall (1998), this should pave the way to participation by all students in training institutions.

According to Dowell (1996), the needs of the public should "dictate action" (p.296). This, for many health professions, including O.T., means that intervention should only follow proper diagnosis and insight into the lived experience of the people, the profession aims to serve. It also echoes a desire that may be held by most health professions: to deliver equitable, quality care to all patients or clients. It follows therefore that occupational therapy education, professional service goals and practice in South Africa, should be feasible for the economic, political and cultural context, within which our society finds itself.

Apartheid in South Africa bears a number of casualties. The literature is replete with documentation of the hindrances that black (Refer to Appendix A for definition) families have faced in developing and retaining a sense of cohesion, identity, and security in the

face of institutionally condoned racial discriminations. With the Group Areas Act, forced relocations and the institution of migrant labour, many black families and communities were separated. The substance of *'Ubuntu'*, traditional authority structures, and extended family networks, were undermined. In post-apartheid society, continuing personal and institutional racist practices that devalue personal worth and cultural pride further intensify the psychological scars that remain.

As part of institutions of learning, and members in a profession, it is essential to realise that we are products of a past. Our beings are grounded in a temporal matrix not simply of our own making, but which is uniquely and covertly related to our notion of the past, as it impresses upon us. Our collective perspectives, shared or divergent, are embedded in the past, and affect the selves of the component members and the perspectives of the current. Various groups have immensely long histories, and some hold strong particular interests in retaining or critically reviewing them.

Racism has affected self-identity for all in South Africa. As a nation we have grown up with racial myths about one another and ourselves. The myths were required, depended on, and vindicated because they maintained from generation to generation, economic gain and the preservation of white supremacy. Racial categorisations of "white'; 'coloured', 'Indian' and 'black' were needed to maintain control. The Apartheid State demanded that different racial groups were separated. This was accomplished by giving each group unequal status. The different status needed to be based on physical looks and immediately obvious; skin colour was thus used. Also, white supremacy was asserted regardless of different status and cultural backgrounds amongst different European groups.

The term *white* was aimed at ignoring European cultural and historic differences. It was meant to stand for racial unity and a superior social status based on physical appearance. It was also intended to mean and designate overall racial superiority and mutually exclusive long-term privileges. The exclusion of Indians, Africans, and Coloureds from early universities was an institutional reflection of this political intent. To effectively challenge the myths and their effect on education, we have to challenge both our past and current realities.

History of O.T. in South Africa

Occupational therapy, both in education and practice, has afforded little space for adapting to contexts, in a way that enables the meeting of needs of black South Africans. This is demonstrated by a lack in a body of knowledge that reflects a consciousness on how different groups of people were affected by the apartheid system that prevailed in this country before 1992. Even during the present difficult political transformation, there is non-existent discourse, and limited publication, on how O.T. could meet some of the needs of dispossessed, derogated, and suppressed communities and individuals.

In reviewing articles published between 1954 and 1991 in *The South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, a major South African publication for O.T., I only found four articles that addressed the impact policies of inequality put in place by the Apartheid government, had on Black South African people. This is bearing in mind that two publications per year, with a number of articles ranging from four to nine, were published. What is worth noting is that only two of the four articles I found on inequality were written by O.T.'s*.

* *The acquisition of empathy: issues for white South African occupational therapists* by Randall, 1991; and *Employment placement problems of Black disabled migrant workers* by Rendall, Miller, Sadie & Reitenberg, 1985.

One cannot help, but wonder around such reticence in investigating such issues as racism and oppression, or the consequences of being a black South African. Especially in the light of the fact that the populations O.T.'s worked with, and continue to do so, were disabled people who are mostly marginalised in terms of poverty and social isolation, exacerbated by repressive state policies. This is particularly of concern, given the claims that O.T.'s play a crucial role as a supportive interface 'between environmental barriers and individual barriers...having a critical part to play in both these levels, in terms of both individual adjustment and social change' (Cock, 1988: 7).

The exclusion of black subjectivities in O.T. discourse

Subjectivity in this text refers to individuality and self-awareness – the condition of being a subject – bearing in mind that in its usage, it underscores the subject as dynamic and having multiple aspects. It reflects a positioning that is always in relation to discourses and practices and in effect produces – the condition of 'being'. (Henriques, in Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994; and Mama, 1995).

It is important to note that learning and knowledge are influenced by subjectivities which embody assumptions, definitions, attitudes, and values that one uses as a frame of reference to inform concepts and one's actions toward self and others (Shibutani, in Broadhead, 1983). As Foote in Broadhead emphasised as well, an identity or subjectivities, provides an organising and "motivating" frame of reference for oneself and others that partially establishes the definitions of a social reality.

Perhaps some of the lack of engagement with issues of racism and inequality in occupational therapy discourse was due to poor representation of the oppressed in the profession. Those who were tasked with generating knowledge for the profession may have seen little value in entertaining such discourse. Change is of course, initiated by the

individual and depends on the individual's choice. What was included as important for those who were trained, depended on the standpoint of the knowledge generators. Bhavnani & Phoenix (1994) argue that what one is born into, or finds oneself in, produces a potential for standpoint or 'critical take'. Collective 'critical take' once established, becomes a compelling force with potential for fuelling a particular kind of knowledge in the world.

Occupational therapy complacency

Many who read this might be disturbed by this implied notion that O.T.'s were not bothered by racism. Yes, many may have been angered by the atrocities of apartheid, but often this anger was entirely focused on the system, or was viewed as a problem of white people in general, and not turned to the question of racism, that was thus resultant in the profession.

Occupational therapy purports to be a profession concerned with the wellbeing of humanity. However if it continues to disregard its racism within, it will eventually succumb to discriminating against black people directly or unintentionally. Borrowing from Jones in Howitt & Owusu-Bempah (1994) when addressing racism in psychology: just as a study of fish must ultimately say something about water, occupational therapy remains woefully inadequate provided it fails to recognise cultural racism. In saying this, it is important to highlight that racism in practice can also be taking no action to counter a system that discriminates against black people.

O.T. perpetuated racism in the past

Racism is maintained from generation to generation not simply because of economic interests and the preservation of white material gain, but also by the need to retain an ideology of white racial supremacy. The retention of racial superiority stems from a

social identity placed on our unique physical conception of race. The need to perpetuate racism also stems from the way in which this identity must be guarded in order to stay unaltered (Bowser et al., 1993). We as educators either inadvertently affirm and promote racism, or challenge and work toward countering it.

In the context of a learning environment where different backgrounds are brought, including those of people that are still bearing the brand of past inequalities, what then? Should there be discouragement of a sharing of ethnic-specific experiences and a blending of identities as a means of defusing racial tension? Doing so would unfortunately, ultimately deny the very people, whose needs we wish to meet, the clients or patients. "Race" is not only a biological topology. It emerges through racialisation which can transform ideas about doctors and patients, about hospital practice, and even influence diagnoses and treatment (Pfeffer, 1998). By not allowing issues of our past heritage to inform present learning, we could derail transformation of knowledge, and indeed foster the entrenchment of past inequalities.

The two articles I found while reviewing South African O.T. literature were very revealing of the assumptions drawn about differences between 'Races' found in South Africa. The first article aimed to highlight the essential differences between the 'African' system of thought to traditional philosophies of European origin. In this article Manganyi (1972) reiterates Tempels's theory of forces wherein the 'African' understands his or her world in terms of the interelatedness of the supreme force (God the Spirit/gods); founders of the different clans/first Fathers; the dead of the tribe/ancestors, and finally the living. These are said to operate in respective hierarchical order. Acknowledging this 'African' ontology was supposed to unravel the puzzle, posed by the tenacity with which 'Africans' seem to adhere to traditional beliefs in witchcraft and magic, for the medical and allied professions.

Indeed these assertions about the 'African' mentality were relied upon in explaining nuances in the 'Africans' reactions to therapy, and informed treatment approaches for some therapists. Kotkin (1978: 14) writes in her outline on how to approach a 'tribal African' with malignant disease that;

> "The tribal African, in most cases, accepts death with resignation, as it completes the cycle of birth and living, so treatment is not complicated by the psychological overlays often found in western counter parts... 'relationship" is at the core of African thinking regarding health and disease. An individual's relationship with his ancestors may be disturbed, resulting in sickness, disease or bad luck".

The African subject, was thus viewed as bearing an identity that essentially ahistorical, and fixed.

Kotkin also stated that the 'African' patient usually tries to please and co-operate with those who are treating him. And due to his cultural orientation towards crafts, is usually willing to participate in them, even when feeling ill'. Of importance to note here is that Kotkin uses the African's 'natural' inclination to craft activities to explain engagement in the crafts inspite of the ill health and possibly excruciating pain. An alternative explanation of the same observation could have been the social power -dynamics that may exist between a member of the dominant white racial group, and a South African black patient.

The second article I uncovered focussed on the ability of 'Africans'. This article by Biesheuvel (1972) sought to explore factors that explained poor performance by 'Africans' in scholastic activities. Although Biesheuvel listed a number of plausible explanations for intellectual deficits in the African population including nutritional factors and environmental influences, it is interesting that he nonetheless chose not to rule out basic genetic differences, which unfortunately at the time could not be

empirically substantiated. What is worth noting is the total exclusion of other factors that were directly linked to an oppressive State. One of these include forced removals of communities, resulting in displaced families living under sub-human living conditions which were undoubtedly non-conducive to adequate developmental stimulation for the children.

Consistent with the notion put forward by Pfeffer (1998) on the influence of 'Race' on medical practice, these colonial ideals about the 'African mind' greatly informed O.T. practice.

Although training for occupational therapists started in 1943 in South Africa, it was only in the late fifties that Black South Africans started to have some contact with the profession. This started in very unfavourable settings which at one instance was a 20 feet by 16 feet old laundry store with no windows (Keen, 1963), making it quite apparent that making the profession available for people who were not white was not a priority. What was a puzzle for the medical team was the confusion non-European patients had on why in the name of therapy, they were made to work without pay. The misunderstanding was seen as an indication of deficiencies in the intellect of the 'African'. This is indicated by Keen's assertion that; 'there is no doubt that the African does not or cannot understand the aims and objects of occupational therapy. That working, in a hospital environment may not have fitted well with the social realities the black South African lived with outside the hospital, or that the African may have been aware and disturbed by inconsistent treatments afforded different racial groups, were not considered at all.

Another important developmental milestone for the occupational therapy profession happened in 1958 when practitioners started to work in mental hospitals (Cooper, 1958). These meant that patients with mental illness could start to engage in purposeful

activities that O.T.'s believe to have the ability to prevent or mediate dysfunction of psychological origin. What is disturbing and indicative of the lack of willingness by the profession to challenge the status quo, were the types of activity patients of different racial groups were given opportunities to engage in, as reported by Cooper. The European patients were introduced to crafts including rug making, weaving, pewter-work, cord knotting, and toy making. Games included tennis, bowls, badminton, table tennis and netball. They also attended a dance once a week and a film once a month. They had social evenings, debates and quiz competitions. A librarian visited them once a week with books and magazines. In addition, a selected group of the patients were invited once a week, to attend a play - reading of "Hamlet". No manual labour was prescribed for European patients.

The 'non - European' male patients, while all this was going on, were sent out in 'gangs' to work in farms, did gardening and construction work in the grounds, and at one occasion, assisted in building the hospital swimming-bath. The female non- European patients were sent out to do domestic work and help in the gardens. Only sparse recreational activities were offered for African patients.

O.T. racist by virtue of borrowing from psychology

Occupational therapy can be viewed as racist both in its formation and composition, by virtue of it having borrowed from psychology. One example is the influence of psychology theorists in O.T.s' understanding and assessment of development and performance. A number of feminist theorists have asserted quite strongly how on close scrutiny of what appears to be neutral and objective, psychology can often reveal its racist ideological foundations (E.g. Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; and Mama, 1995).

An expression of occupational therapy's value-ridden nature can be discerned when for example, work assessment is scrutinised. This O.T. assessment that is administered to determine whether one is employable following recovery from an illness or injury, and of which efficiency and compliance are important variables, served apartheid goals rather than African interests. The ultimate contrast stressed here is how the apparent wish on the part of the O.T. to ensure the efficiency of the worker can disguise an unrelenting process of exploitation in South Africa. Another sharp contrast that can be drawn is against an assertion by occupational therapy that potential in engagement is attained when activities engaged in, hold meaning for the individual (Hagerdon, 1995). The fact is that African clients were not being facilitated into achieving their potential. If they were not physically strong and compliant as potential labourers, they were simply locked into unemployment. Occupational Therapy thus perpetuated the apartheid notion where whites were educated to control the political and economic arenas, whiles blacks were trained to serve and occupy menial positions.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY DEPARTMENT

Transformation initiatives in the O. T department

Since the late 1990's the Occupational Therapy department at UCT undertook a process towards understanding diversity, and issues that relate to discrimination. A number of imaginative strategies were devised to help staff and students to engage with different forms of inequality. These include discrimination against disabled people and blacks. This process is ongoing and continuously faces a variety of obstacles. One of the major challenges is ensuring adequate participation from students. A difficulty that I feel partly informs this challenge is marginal representation of populations that were historically discriminated against in society, in the department. Out of a total of 139 undergraduate students, there are only 17 black students in the department, 9 of which are African. This is in the background of statistics reflecting the following national racial distribution: 76,7

% African; 8,9 % coloured; 2,6 Indian/ Asian; 10,9 % White and 0.9 % unspecified (Statistics S.A.1998).

In addition, very few changes have occurred in the way in which the department approaches teaching and learning. Black students generally have had to adjust to the prevailing environment and culture of the department. It can be argued as well, that the curriculum is still heavily based on the Western intellectual tradition, and that expectations for students are based on years of experience with young white females from middle to upper middle class. Changes, such as a variety of support services for ethnic minorities have usually been introduced through a process of trial and error, and as alternative opportunities for students. The department has yet to find ways to integrate appreciation and respect for students' diversity into regular curriculum offerings, instructional strategies, and expectations, and to benefit from the insights, perspectives, and cultural knowledge that non-traditional student populations possess.

The department essentially finds itself maintaining an unexamined academic culture in the face of increased challenges from students of underrepresented racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. It can be argued that where effort is made to explore diversity in the curriculum, the focus remains on understanding the 'other' cultures, rather than critically revisiting the central core that has crafted the rules as to who is outside and what is 'mainstream'. Although the initiative taken by the O.T. department at UCT to understand diversity needs to be applauded, there needs to be more awareness and an appreciation, of more that still needs to be done.

The O.T. department has potential to be viewed as racist, though unintentional

The department will be affording itself disfavour if it does not readily embark on regularly reviewing how students from underrepresented population groups, experience

its culture. Comments like "What you see is not what you necessarily get." that are known to float among students should not be ignored. Perceptions do matter, and it is important to recognise that the victim, perpetrator, or observer can identify racism. It is crucial here to highlight some definitions of racism. Howitt & Owusu - Bempah (1994) see institutional racism as expressed in how many traditional systems, practices, procedures and structures of social organisations fail to address the needs of those that are underrepresented or effectively set barriers that deny access to, or disadvantage them. Whether institutional racism is unintentional may be a matter of contention.

Another form of racism described by Howitt & Owusu (1994), and important to watch out for is colour-blind racism. This is grounded on the ideology that acceptance of differences according to race is racially divisive. The result of this unfortunately is that the needs of different groups are dismissed in favour of treating everyone the same irrespectively. This is essentially unintentional racism in that the intent may be 'good' but the outcome as detrimental as any other form. This form of racism is highly problematic in South Africa, as history favours white people over others. Another point is that institutions can deny that there is a race problem, and tend to have a "people are people" view of the world, but however operate under an unconscious assumption of the 'white' experience as a point of reference for reality. What the occupational therapy department may need to watch out for is the power that inadvertently gives white people the right to have their group's definition of reality prevail over all other people's definition of reality.

1.3 THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CURRICULUM

The Eurocentricism of the O.T. curriculum

Occupational therapy has been described as a profession guided by a value towards clients achieving independence (Council of the World Federation of Occupational

Therapists in MacDonald and Rowe, 1995). Also as already illustrated above, as a profession geared to helping individuals become competent performers in whatever occupations or activities hold meaningful value or are of necessity to them, to whatever level the individual deems satisfactory (Hagedorn, 1992). In doing this, O.T.'s are also perceived as attempting to meet the needs of the individual in the community to which she or he belongs (Matlala, 1993). This already sounds like a mammoth task, without getting into how different practitioners would approach the same individual and how completely at the end of intervention the needs would be met. A further challenge is posed if it is believed that the needs of the individual, or more specifically, the value they place on independence, or the state at which they are satisfied with their occupational performance, is influenced by their culture, family values, moral codes etc. Sensitivity to these, and matching this to practice, is imperative.

In South Africa, occupational therapy education developed a hybrid form, borrowing mainly from American and British sources. Occupational therapy as a profession, taught and practised, assigns insufficient value to the experiences of black people. Eurocentrism informs the assumptions, outlook and instruments of the profession. The current O.T. curriculum leaves little room for understanding different points of view and different cultures. It keeps minorities marginal to its academic discourse and does not expose the 'hidden' paradigms that are essentially the internalised assumptions, the conglomerate of unspoken agreements, and the implicit contracts that participants in the process of training have covertly agreed to, in order to engage in the learning enterprise.

Occupational Therapy is also, and yet again, Eurocentric by virtue of it borrowing from psychology. Joseph et al, in Howitt & Owusu (1994), contend that Eurocentrism delineates the stance of much of the social sciences, especially psychology. That it is a matter of ethnocentrism, which involves seeing other cultures from the perspective of

one's own. Such perceptions are usually value-ridden and perpetuate an ideology that embraces the superiority of one's own culture as the only way things are done.

Asante, in Evans (1992) states that meaning in the African's current context must be derived from the most integral aspects of his or her being. When this is not the case, he argues that psychological dislocation creates robot-like beings out of Africans, as they are rendered incapable of fully capturing the historical moment due to that their existence is on someone else's terms. Africans should rather, exist on their own terms. Otherwise, Asante argues, the African will never find contentment, emotionally and culturally.

Kinebanian and Stomph, in MacDonald and Rowe (1995), argue that although occupational therapy has always been sensitive to cultural influences upon its philosophy, western middle-class values have continued to be inherent in its theory and practice. And that it has remained especially difficult to adapt treatment to cultural parameters.

To illustrate the pervasiveness of Eurocentricism in the standard curriculum, it is important to cite Howitt &Owusu-Bempah (1994) and Gudykunst (1991), for some differences a Eurocentric approach has with an Afrocentric one.

1. *Individualism:* Emphasis is placed on individuals' goals in European cultures, while group goals in purely Afrocentric cultures, have precedence over individual ones. In a collectivist Afrocentric system group activities are dominant, responsibility and accountability are shared. The emphasis is on collectivity and harmony. Co-operation among the group tends to he emphasised more than individual function and responsibility.

2. *Competition:* This is a highly valued element in a European culture.

4. *Time-emphasis:* In European cultures a strict, linear time- and appointment-keeping system is employed which emphasises the future since time 'mismanaged' is time lost.

5. *Non-verbal and verbal behaviour:* Looking a person in the eye may be a signal of disrespect in an African tradition, but to the European not to do so signals shiftiness or shyness.

6. *Nuclear family:* This is characteristic of Europeans where people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only. This may not match the experiences of Africans where the extended family is also important.

7. *Written tradition:* Having things in writing is highly important in European society, but African societies may have a much more oral tradition.

Another dimension in which the two approaches can differ is communication. Members of more European cultures tend to communicate in a direct fashion, while members of Afrocentric cultures tend to communicate in an indirect fashion. An example I can site here is of the Venda nation of which I am a descendant. The Venda's basic manner of communicating is indirect, often secretive. A Venda person's conversation abounds with general, evasive remarks, like *'Madi a u tamba khea* (Here is water to wash) when the speaker is offering an invitation to a guest, to join in a meal. The guest can reply with 'Hai, ndi hayani' (No, this is home), indicating that he or she does not wish to partake in the meal. This may be because he or she does not think there is enough food to go around. When the guest is quizzed about why they are turning the food down, he or she may still not reveal what is really the case; and if it is, the other person will likely as not understand that response as a disguise.

This ambiguous interchange is engaged in partly, to protect the integrity of a family. Stating the obvious with regards to the scarcity of food may imply that a family cannot provide adequately for its members. European cultures, in contrast, afford little room for

ambiguity. The European temperament necessitates clear and direct communication (Gudykunst, 1991). It expresses itself in such familiar commands as "Speak your mind", "Don't beat about the bush", and " What is the bottom-line? "

It is important to introduce caution here, and point out the danger in understanding cultures as fixed products rather than dynamic processes. Although striving for multicultural competence may meet a real need and help to allay concerns about professional ignorance and inappropriate behaviour, these attempts to help practitioners to be more sensitive to cultural and individual differences can encourage unwelcome stereotyping. A shared heritage is not a valid method of organising people into social groups and history should never be seen as an unchanging truth (Pfeffer, 1998). Culture, then, should be seen as the process of 'being and becoming a social being', not as a static entity, as interpretations of rules that inform actions in one's society, change over time with different circumstances (Swartz, 1998).

There is therefore a need for O.T.'s to be what was described by Pope-Davies et al (1993), as 'multiculturally competent'. Pope-Davies et al identifies and describes four aspects of this concept: Beliefs and Attitudes, or awareness; Knowledge; Skills; and Relationships. Beliefs and attitudes are said to be

made up from one's cultural heritage, values and biases, and how these may affect one's interaction with people from a different cultural background. Knowledge refers to appreciation and respect for differences found in other cultures, and an understanding of socio-political dynamics affecting these cultures. Culturally skilled people demonstrate effective means of communication with diverse cultures and use techniques in an individual's cultural context. They are also said to be sensitive to culturally inherent mannerisms, i.e. non-verbal and verbal behaviours unique to different cultures. The last component, Relationships, was described as an ability to integrate the other three aspects

to build an effective and positive therapeutic relationship with clients or patients from diverse cultural backgrounds.

1.3 THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The O.T. department as a socialising agent

By virtue of the fact that the Occupational Therapy school is the source of the abstract body of knowledge and the skills on which the discipline is based, it can be assumed that it represents the culture of the profession. If the multicultural competence of graduates is to be addressed, it makes sense to critically evaluate the process of O.T. teaching and the educational environment that is created for students. This essentially calls to attention the process of professional socialisation. Socialisation theory points to the process of role acquisition, establishing commitment to a profession, and the impact of formal and informal structures in institutions of learning that affect those being socialised (Broadhead, 1983).

The O.T. school can be seen as the socialising agent of the O.T. profession. Socialisation designates 'the processes by which people selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills, and knowledge, in short, the culture-current in the groups of which they are, or seek to become, a member' (Bloom, 1979, p. 33). Internalisation can actually be a more specific description of what occurs in socialisation. It pertains to the adoption of social roles. In its application to the O.T. student, socialisation refers to the processes through which he or she develops his or her professional self. The new self with its accompanying values, attitudes, knowledge and skills, merging these into a more or less consistent set of dispositions which govern behaviour in a wide variety of professional settings.

Role learning, as it presents itself, is an interface, dynamic process between the self and the immediate cultural environment. A process whereby the values of the culture inform expectations of behaviour and spell out the various privileges and obligations of the future role. This is reinforced by interpersonal interactions with peers. The learning, therefore, is most essentially through models (lecturers, clinicians, and successful peers) and situations that directly represent the operational situation of occupational therapy (fieldwork placements), or simulations of it.

Underrepresentation of black students

White organisations can present both overt and 'hidden' barriers to black people (Smith, in Marchesani & Adams, 1992). Here are some barriers to students from the black population that may relate to the occupational therapy situation in South Africa:

1) Lack of multilingual and culturally trained O.T.'s may result in inappropriate services and act as a deterrent to other members of the black community.
2) Also, occupational therapy was not amenable to investigating issues such as racism and oppression, the reality of black people, or the consequences of being a black South African, leading to a lack of visibility and credibility in the black community.
3) O.T. is also seen to be a profession for upper middle class white females.
4) The financial rewards of being an occupational therapist are also not seen as viable for anyone who depends solely on a salary, or has responsibilities for an extended family.

O.T. cannot afford to be apolitical

The social and cultural diversity of South Africa's population is an established demographic fact. Cultural diversity within institutions of higher learning calls for significant changes in essentially conservative and predominantly monocultural curricula, teaching practices, and institutional characteristics. Some of the pragmatic

reasons for an urgent need for demographic changes in institutions of higher learning are the following:

1) There is a need to redress underrepresentation of social groups who have been unjustifiably denied access to higher education in this country.
2) As the traditional pool of white applicants for higher education decreases and the pool of black students increases, it is in the long-term, pragmatic self-interest of institutions of higher education to adjust the balance within their student populations.
3) The dialogue of multiple viewpoints enhances intellectual enterprise.

All subjectivities should influence curriculum

It is imperative to develop an educational discourse that values the expression of cultural differences and embraces a non-racist, anti-oppressive worldview. This is if learning environments are to benefit from the perspectives which black students bring, and if successful learning experiences for these students, are to be provided for.

Green (1989), to this end purports that learning is enhanced when it is more like a team approach than a solo race. A good learning process, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often, fosters involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens comprehension. This happens when people are afforded the opportunity to have a deep political, emotional and intellectual impact on each other, and provoke each other into rethinking their social realities (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994). And, as students are participants in other important relationships, competing identities feed into and partially redefine the nature of the training situation. Articulation of multiple and competing identities within specific situations leads to situations defining identities, and vice versa.

Removing barriers to participation

It is crucial that as educators we learn how to maximise educational opportunities and minimise or remove educational barriers for large numbers of students coming from our diverse society.

A model presented by Jackson, in Marchesani & Adams (1992), puts forward as one of the dimensions of teaching and learning that have particular relevance to issues of social and cultural diversity; knowing one's students and understanding the ways that students from various social and cultural backgrounds experience the university lecture rooms. This thinking informs the purpose of this study. My investigation of the students' experience however, will go beyond the classroom, to include the department, and fieldwork.

Students in the occupational therapy department at UCT, in most cases come from school environments where they had no contact or interaction with population groups different from their own. Although there are adjustment dilemmas common to both groups of students, white as well as black, the emphasis in this study is on the latter. This is because for these students, as argued in earlier paragraphs, the lecture room may be a place of cultural isolation and of norms, values, and customs that contradict their home socialisations. In addition, the curriculum too often represents a perspective on the accomplishments of Western civilisation.

1.5 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Professional socialisation's impact on personal identity

If indeed there are a few students of different ethnic and cultural frames of reference as that shared by the majority of white students, in traditionally white Occupational Therapy departments, what is their experience like? How do they embark on a process of sense

making, in the context of confining ethnic and cultural boundaries? It is important to take cognisance of the continuing developmental task of identity formation for the age group that would typically be in this setting. This is an age group that has barely left adolescence and is heading towards young adulthood. The significance of attaining a professional identity cannot be underestimated either.

The issue that is tackled here is the impact of professional socialisation on the 'being' of an individual, and vice versa. The first argument to be made is that it is dimensional (Broadhed, 1983). Professional socialisation affects students' conception of self and the multiple identities which, in phenomenological combination, they associate with themselves as unique persons.

Borrowing from the terminology used by Mama (1995) I will call the process of identification or professional socialisation, the constitution of professional subjectivity. This is done to highlight, as done by Mama, the notions that identity is dynamic, encompasses not only race, but also gender; class; ethnicity collective; national identity; as well as professional identity. As mentioned earlier, my study aims to unravel the experience of students from underrepresented ethnic and cultural backgrounds, in the department of Occupational Therapy, at UCT. It is envisaged that substantial time will be spent reflecting on, or tracing the dynamics occurring in the constitution of their professional subjectivities.

A number of studies, though not in South Africa, have been done to look at the achievement of a professional identity for medical students (Bloom, 1979). Such studies are non-existent in occupational therapy.

In looking at the process of constituting professional subjectivity in students from diverse groups, it is crucial to consider the point that not all subjectivities shift. As suggested by Bhavnani & Phoenix (1994), we should also be asking questions like; what does it cost to stabilise which subjectivities? It should also be recognised that not all aspects of subjectivity shift at the same rate and that the specificities of what shifts and at what costs count.

2.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

This study is concerned with studying subjective meanings and individual ascription of sense in the journey of developing a professional identity, by students who consider themselves as having cultural and ethnic backgrounds that are underrepresented in the Occupational Therapy department, at the university of Cape Town.

2.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The main question asked in this study is: What is it like to be a student with a distinctly different ethnic and cultural background, in the department of Occupational Therapy (University of Cape Town)? The research is exploratory and supposes the value of context and setting. As a researcher, I am interested in a deep understanding of the participants' lived experiences of being students from underrepresented ethnic and cultural backgrounds, engaged in the process of acquiring a professional identity.

2.4 OBJECTIVES

A. Compile a profile of participants with relevance to the research question (e.g. age, number of years spent as a student in the department, self-defined ethnic and cultural identities).

B. Explore with individual participants, what is encompassed in their personal subjectivities.

C. Explore with each participant, their journey in constituting their subjectivities in relation to an evolving professional identity.

D. Establish whether there are critical factors or processes within the department, which may encourage or inhibit participation or sharing of their perspectives and experiences.

2.5 STUDY DESIGN

This study is mainly concerned with lived experience and the comprehensive description given to it by the individual. This necessitated phenomenology to be the overall approach of choice. As stated by Moustakas (1994) the aim of such an approach is "to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (p.13). This description fits in with the aim of the proposed study, and allows me to ask 'process' questions that explore the essence of the experience.

A 'case study' approach as a method of inquiry, is also embraced in this study. This approach is understood here to not only focus on studying the unique situation of an individual as purported by Stake (1998). It is viewed as also including intensive inquiry into a selected example in order to demonstrate the phenomenon of multiple locations and subjectivities (Essed, 1994). The study of a selected example was found useful as a methodology by Essed, for the analysis of dimensions of oppression and resistance. She argues that through concentrated inquiry into a single case, different phenomenological processes of domination all come together in a personal biography and can allow for fundamental understanding. This study will look at a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon of constituting, and reconfiguring subjectivities in students whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds are not well represented in the O. T department.

2.6 DESCRIBING MY 'STANCE' AS A RESEARCHER

As outlined in the introduction, I am both an employee and postgraduate student in the department. I also graduated from the same department at the end of my undergraduate studies eight years ago.

Although I am not oblivious of the dynamic tensions (present and anticipated) created by my threefold (researcher, student and staff) involvement in the department; there has been implied support for my study. I was allowed access to students and left to use my discretion in conducting the study.

During the early developmental phase of the protocol, while presenting at a research support group in the department, I was confronted with what seems an inevitable question for people engaged in studies that look at culture, or ethnicity;

> "How would you know that white students' experience is any different, without a control?"

I was not equipped well enough at the time to deal with this question, but I said that I was interested in the experience, not that of students in the majority. I agree with Azibo, in Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, (1994), and Mama (1995), that underlying such questions is the expectation and the assumption that white is the standard reference point, which in my opinion has no sensible rationale. In this study the minority students will also be studied in their own right.

This study relied on my establishing trusting relations with the participants in the study. Students generally relate easily with me, approaching me for assistance whenever necessary. My involvement with them as a class co-ordinator (for first years); lecturer; and fieldwork or project supervisor, facilitated these relationships.

With black students, I share the experience of being a student with a different background from the rest of the class, although for me this happened during a different time period. This could have been a factor that enabled the basis for equality during interviews to impress itself quite quickly.

2.6 SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

Like Hollway (1989), given the sort of questions I had in mind, I had a 'gut feeling' about which people I needed to interview. My study required people capable of exploring themselves in ways that would demonstrate their development of subjectivities. The focus being on evolving specific ways of acting and perceiving within a profession as a result of acquiring a particular knowledge base. Especially in a profession that offers very little role modelling by people who share one's ethnic and cultural background as a black student. I however, shared the same sentiments as Mama (1995) and did not want to assume 'certain homogeneity across' the expected group of participants (p. 75). Also for me, the process of self-identifying as a participant singled out for me those with the best potential to be good informants, in relation to my research question. One of the crucial criteria for a 'good informant' is that he or she should have the necessary knowledge and experience of the issue (Morse, in Flick, 1998).

The risk I took was the possibility of getting students who did not really comply with my 'gut feeling'. It would have been quite tricky to select from people who have used the liberty offered them to self-identify, whilst avoiding stereotyping. Neither random sampling nor stratification was an option for the research. This was due to the fact that representativeness of the findings was never a purpose. The extension of the basic population of students who would self-identify as participants could not be known in advance.

2.7 THEORETICAL SAMPLING

An invitation (See Appendix B) was posted on the students' notice board. One female African student had already approached me, sharing her interest in the tension between occupational therapy and an Afrocentric perspective. She expressed her interest in being a participant in my study. She later advised me to place personal invitations for every

SECTION TWO: METHOD OF INQUIRY

2.8 DATA COLLECTION

I decided quite early in the research process that I would leave the choice of the setting for data collection to the participants, so that they would be at a venue where they felt comfortable. Data collection generally followed an in-depth interviewing format, with features of the episodic interview. In-depth interviewing allowed for sessions to be much more like conversations than a structured event with predetermined responses. I initiated each interview by thanking the student for sharing their time with me. Due to the expectations that they have to see patients in their training, amidst attending lectures and taking tests, students in the department often have limited time to dispense. Concerted effort was made to meet participants in the times that suited them.

The underlying assumption in the episodic interview (Flick, 1998) is that participants' experiences of a specific domain are stored and recollected in forms of narrative. The episodic interview allows context - related presentations to emerge. The focus is in letting the interviewee cite episodes in which he or she could have had experiences that seem to be relevant to the phenomenon in question. The interviewee may select the nature of the narrative description of the situation, and the selection of other situations. The episodic interview facilitates the presentation of experiences in a general, comparative form as well as ensuring that individual situations and episodes are described in their uniqueness.

The sessions were mostly held at the students' homes or residences. After expressing my gratitude I would then reiterate my interests in understanding their experience as minority students in their journey to becoming occupational therapists. The following were the questions I made sure that I covered by the end of a session, in varying forms:

1) Tell me about yourself / who are you?
2) Tell me about your first arrival at UCT.

3) What was your initial impression of the O.T. department?

4) How would you describe your identity (in terms of ethnicity and culture)?

5) What informs this?

6) How does this relate to the rest of the class?

7) Tell me about your journey, being whom you are, in becoming an occupational therapy professional.

These questions helped uncover the meanings participants derived from their experiences, while I probed for elaboration where necessary. Care was taken to respect how the participant framed and structured his or her responses. This degree of systematisation was necessary in order to avoid long narratives, which happened with my first interview. As a blessing in disguise, although I was devastated at the time, it turned out that I had pressed the play button instead of record, and had therefore not recorded the session. Luckily I could still go back a second time. What was important for me during the interview was that my attitude conveyed acceptance. This was not difficult for me at all, for I found that the participants readily shared valuable information with me, which I highly appreciated.

What became quite apparent to me early on in the study, although I did not know how I would justify the rationale thereof, was that I could not adopt a neutral role in my contacts with participants. Although I knew that this went against everything I had read about achieving credibility in empirical studies, I felt uncomfortable with the notion of assuming only the interviewer's role and limiting my participation, in the fear of 'contaminating' data. Reading from feminist literature, steered in this direction by my supervisor, helped in allaying my fears. My fear was not only that I would not be able to legitimise my methods, but also that I knew that whatever interview I did, without

actively engaging in it, would be impoverished. There is nothing natural about one-sided descriptions of meaning.

In addition, one cannot hope to find out much about people through interviewing within a hierarchical relationship, where the researcher assumes the role of 'the knowledgeable' one (Oakley, 1981). When as an interviewer I became prepared to invest my own personal identity in a collaborative enterprise of discourse, I knew more would be achieved in unravelling the nature of 'being', and 'becoming', not only for the students, but myself. The manner in which feminist theorists (e.g. Essed, 1994; Hollway, 1989; Mama, 1995; & Oakley, 1981) engaged in research was very encouraging in this regard.

A video camera, with the cap left on, was used to record the sessions. This followed permission from participants. The advantage of using a video camera is that it runs longer than a tape recorder. There was no need to attend to the recording once it was set-up. Because the cap was left on participants did not need to worry about visual data being captured. After a while participants appeared to take no notice of the equipment. I recorded observational notes on a legal-sized, hard-backed notebook that I could place on my lap. There was very minimal writing I could gather on the notebook because I became very involved in dialogue. I had committed the questions that I set for guiding the process to memory, to allow for a free-flowing conversation.

Participation was on a once-off basis. Twice during the interviews I had the opportunity to reciprocate. One was when the interview happened during the time when workers for a catering service to the students' residences were on strike. I knew that students found the money the university gave the to buy food, insufficient. I have a nephew also staying at one of the residences. He spent the two weeks arriving at my place 'accidentally' around suppertime, almost everyday. On my way to see the student I picked up some juice for

her. I learnt later on that she had passed up going out for breakfast with her friends for the interview. The second occasion was an interview that happened during study week. The student I was seeing had missed a series of lectures I had given because they clashed with Pesach/ Passover. She had approached me about this before hand and made sure she got notes afterwards. When I saw her it was quite evident that she was nervous about her readiness for exams, although she was keen that we go ahead with the interview. When she asked me to clarify some concepts for her afterwards, I was very happy to oblige.

2.9 ENSURING RIGOR

A basic tenet of qualitative research is that it is oriented towards exploring concrete cases in their temporal and local specificity (Flick, 1998). It is further argued that social scientists cannot directly capture the lived experience. It is now purported, that such an experience exists only as a social text, written by the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, in Flick, 1998). A standpoint thus adopted here is that reality is a relational construct of contexts and the meanings ascribed to them by participants.

This ultimately suggests that biographical narratives presented by participants cannot be expected to be a full representation of factual processes. It is a mimetic presentation of experiences, which are constructed in the form of a narrative for this purpose – in the interview' (Flick, 1998, p. 36). Consequently, reliability in the orthodox sense of replicability is absurd. The value of a case can rely only on its uniqueness (Janesick, 1998).

Morse (1998) suggests two criteria and two strategies that can ensure rigour in qualitative research. The criteria are adequacy and appropriateness of data. Adequacy pertains to the amount of data captured. Sufficient data needs to be collected, to allow for variation to be both accounted for and understood. Appropriateness refers to sampling that is done in

accordance to the conceptual framework underlying the study. The audit trail and the verification of the study with secondary informants are the two strategies that Morse suggests. In order to satisfy the first strategy, all documentation that was developed in the study was kept. This constitutes an audit trail and can be made available to the supervisor and examiners. During the preliminary stages of the coding process, raw data was shared with a peer review in the form of a research support group. This was done for the researcher to ensure that data 'spoke for itself'. During member checking, all students agreed that the themes represented what they shared in the interviews, and reflected their experiences in the occupational therapy department. The information the key informant had shared also corroborated my findings. One participant pointed out that a particular theme pertaining to all students did not specifically relate to her personal experience. The researcher was aware of this and had planned to use what she shared to inform contrasting of experiences between participants. This will be expanded on in the presentation of findings.

2.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the implementation of the study to be allowed, it had to go through the health science ethical committee. All participation by students was on a voluntary basis. The purpose of the study was fully explained to participants. An option to discontinue during the interview was offered. Confidentiality was discussed with participants and they all wished to remain anonymous. In order to maintain this, the use of pseudonyms to refer to participants was therefore adopted. Descriptive information that can link data to participants was avoided as much as possible.

SECTION THREE: DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic coding was employed to make sense of the transcribed interviews with all participants. Firstly, paragraphs were numbered and units of meaning separated and then coded. The codes were developed through openness to subtlety in the elements of subjectivities or relational 'being' and 'becoming'. Salient, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together were noted. Subcategories emerged by grouping the codes around phenomena that address the research question. The subcategories were then checked across individual cases to allow for reflection of divergence, and convergence. When these were grouped, categories emerged, with indication of representation across the cases. The categories were then cross-checked with the codes, to ensure that they represent them.

Categories were then thematised by identifying those that were salient, and grounded to the meaning held by participants. The categories that were most relevant to the question were selected and elaborated into themes, by grouping around them those that are defined by them. As patterns started emerging, continued matching of these with negative instances of the phenomenon in the raw data was maintained to ensure plausibility.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS OF THE INQUIRY

4.1 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Five participants were interviewed in the study. The participants were all in their early twenties. There were three third year students, and one student from both the second and fourth year classes. Following is a brief description of the participants as they were at the time of the study, as well as a summary of how they described their individual subjectivities.

Agang is in her fourth year as a student in the occupational therapy department. She originates from outside of Cape Town. She had to stay home after matric because her parents could not afford to send her to university. She is presently receives, but shared that she has to live on a strict budget. She also related that she knew very little about occupational therapy until she actually became a student in the department. She describes herself as the only one she knows from her province doing the course. When asked about how she would describe herself, *Agang* said she saw herself as one of two black students in her class, and a representative of where she comes from. She also said that she regarded herself as having different experiences from the rest of the class.

Bulelani, also in his fourth year as an occupational therapy student, comes from what he describes a rural area, also outside of the Cape. He is the last of six siblings and shared that he receives part of his financial support from his two elder brothers. He is also a bursary holder. He stayed at home for a year after matric because he needed to take a break. Going to school in the rural areas, he had no guidance regarding what career he could pursue. He learnt about occupational therapy as an alternative when he could not be accepted into physiotherapy. *Bulelani* sees himself as a black student from a disadvantaged ethnic group. He included being the only male black Zulu-speaking student in his class, in his description of himself.

Lumka is in her third year as a student in the department. She comes from a small town in the Cape. She sees herself as black, having both rural and urban origins. She describes her home as generally more affluent than others in her neighbourhood. She however states that she did not go to a good school as her family had financial difficulties.

Dinah is from Cape Town. She was born in South Africa, but her family later moved to Israel. They lived there for six years, before coming back. She went to a private Jewish school and describes her background as privileged. She learnt about occupational therapy while shadowing a physiotherapist, and decided that that is what she wanted. She arranged for another job shadow so she could have a good feel of what the occupational therapy profession had to offer. She describes herself as an 'observant Jewish', white, English speaking and married. She noted that she was in some sense both a majority and a minority student.

Elaine was born in George. Her family moved to Cape Town when she was about 3 years old. She completed her primary school in the Cape flats. After that she attended one of the early model C schools. She is from a middle income family background. She describes her identity as embracing a number of backgrounds. She identifies strongly with her grandmother, who is Dutch. She also describes some Moslem and German influences in her background. She also cited contact with people from the Congo who lived in her neighbourhood, during her teenage years. She mentioned that she did not identify with the "coloured" community.

4.2 EMERGING THEMES

Themes that emerged from the data are represented schematically in 4.2.1.9 and 4.2.2.7. Whereas students shared some common experiences as individuals whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds are underrepresented in the O.T. department, African students also seemed to have specific experiences that were unique to them as a particular group. This necessitated a division into how the themes were grouped; those derived from common experiences, and the ones derived from group-specific experiences. There were also experiences that were particular to *Dinah* as an individual. These were used to contrast and highlight the significance of group-specific experiences. Below is a discussion of each theme according to its categories, followed by a reflection.

4.2.1 THEMES DERIVED FROM COMMON EXPERIENCES

4.2.1.1 Theme one: The struggle of negotiating space

The categories in this theme describe the features of the temporal element of entering a learning space, namely the O.T. department. They highlight how for these students the early phase of negotiating space in this environment, is marked by traumatic experiences.

Fitting in is a struggle.

Space for these students as they enter the learning environment, is not a given. There is effort involved. There is also an awareness of being the one who does not belong to a particular 'clique' in the class, robbing these students of an initial sense of belonging within the class. *Dinah* explained,

> *"Oh okay. Last year I struggled quiet a bit and this year things have just completely turned around for me. I must say... Umm our class is very clique, I found last year. Not so much this year and I struggled within that. I really did, because I would flitter around but I would never be able to fit in anywhere, into*

whenever there were group projects and stuff, if one like pairs off or whatever. And like I struggle to find my place within the class "

What *Lumka* said supported this,

"... they never actually took me as part of the class. Yes I felt unwanted and not understood, you see. It made me not want to be there. And in a way yea, in a way it kind of affected the way I relate to them, you see"

Wanting to belong

This category describes a yearning in students from underrepresented groups, to belong. These although expressed by all participants, was related with emotion by *Lumka*, who has been the least number of years in the department, and therefore might be currently faced with the initial struggles of fitting in. Her expression mirrored the overwhelming nature of this experience,

"We want to belong. We do want to belong. I don't want to be in that class and know that I am not part of this class. It's just so much for me. I want to belong. I want to be part of them. And I want them to know that I'm part of them"

Anxiety of working in groups

The lack of a sense of belonging is played out and confirmed when these students are confronted with the process of forming groups in the learning environment. This process appears to be filled with feelings of anxiety.

Agang: "Wow, oh my God, working in groups...Actually it's another thing with sort of have like you could have something to say about. I actually think I was saying that I really don't like working in groups...that is why like actually I don't enjoy working in a group at all"

This level of anxiety seems to be based on past experiences as indicated by *Bulelani*'s account of an experience in first year,

> *"The way like our classmates treated us, like I even thought of changing the varsity and going somewhere else. Because I do remember one of the incidents that happened in our class. We were lectured by... (Name), then we were supposed to be in groups of five ...and we were like sitting alone there. It was me and... (Another African student). They were sitting like together. And then... (Name) repeated that I said you have to sit in groups of five. Then no one came to sit with us...It was like a long story...I was not happy at all. That was a bad, bad experience that I had like in OT. And even now you know I do think about it sometimes, if I see those students. It's difficult "*

4.2.1.2 Reflections on theme one: The struggle of negotiating space

Feeling isolated

The initial years seem to be the most traumatic for the participants. This is not surprising since for any student, this is the time in which space is negotiated within the learning environment and the general campus. What is of concern is the level at which for these students, this time is filled with a complete sense of isolation. Students, with underrepresented backgrounds such as is the case here, often find themselves for the first time in an environment that is mostly, even overwhelmingly, different. The forming of groups for class tasks seems to be highly problematic and filled with anxiety, as these students probably anticipate not being selected by their classmates, which may point to lack of acceptance.

Disparity between what was expected, and the actual lived experience

The traumatic nature of these kind of experiences is enhanced by what could be deemed a disparity between what was expected, and the actual lived experience of student life at

UCT. This is with particular reference to UCT's marketing strategies, and those of the department of occupational therapy. The mismatch between values and information in mission statements, brochures sent to prospective students, and speeches at orientation, and what students actually experience, can be wrenching and disorienting to students (Hunt et al, 1992). An example of this is indeed what is reflected in *Bulelani*'s comment:

> *" So the first time I came to UCT, it was a big surprise. You know, I expected to like find more guys, and it was my first time to come in contact with the white students, like to be in the same class. So it was another thing which, like you know, make me feel a bit tense "*

This expectation can be linked to the fact that we in the department do have on one of our brochures, a picture depicting a black male student in fieldwork placement.

4.2.1.3 Theme two: Ongoing sense of difference and isolation

This assertion by participants signifies a continuing sense of limited common space between participants, and their classmates.

Them, and then me

A clear demarcation exists between individual participants and others in the class. This is reflected in what *Lumka* said,

> *"It is more like okay me going to their class, but not being part of their class "*

There also seems to be a sense that the rest of the class members share a past that participants are excluded from. This is reflected in what *Agang* shared,

> *"In 1998 actually I wanted to be a class rep, but then the thing... there was sort of like they know each other, and I don't know from where they know each other anyway"*

Attempts at negotiating space in the class, is felt by participants in a way that highlights the 'them versus me' demarcation,

> *"Yea, yea. Well, they are trying their best to involve me in whatever they do, but you can sense that there is still that little misunderstanding to what I am to them and who they are to me"*

Having a different background from the rest of the class

What seems integral in informing this feeling of separatedness from the rest of the class, for participants, is having a frame of reference that is distinctly different from the others, as captured by what *Agang* said,

> *"I think the thing is that we like sort of have different experiences of doing things. Probably the things that we talk about more, they are actually totally different things. They will maybe have their own topics of the things that they talk about, that you cannot just like go and sit there and share what you want to share with them "*

Relating only academically

This category draws attention to a forging of a certain level of relating, albeit limited. *Agang* points out that the only way she relates with the class is through shared academic experience.

> *"Identifying with my classmates, it's more like of a, academically I do identify with them, because like okay, the class constitution part of it, I'm actually part of it, and I agree with the things that we're asked to do in class. But like socially I want to say that I don't ..."*

This is reiterated on by *Dinah*, who said,

> *"This is something that is really hard in terms of my class as well. That often they will go out to restaurants and stuff and I just won't be able to go and that's just*

also just another fact and its, and its sometimes very hard for me because its another thing that distances me from everyone and I get quiet frustrated about it"

4.2.1.4 Reflections on theme two: Ongoing sense of difference and isolation

Limits of communication

Strauss (1997), in quoting Mead, argues that people who share concepts, and therefore are able to transcend the limits of communication, have a potential of sharing space **"some time, some where".** Dewey, in Strauss stresses this point and purports that it is only in and through communication, that societies can come into existence.

Actual learning is impacted on by social relations

All the students felt there was no common space between their social spaces, and that of their classmates. Some people may argue that since the setting at stake here is that for learning, it may not be crucial to be able to relate socially. Unfortunately, academic enterprise is not divorced from other forms of relating. As pointed out earlier in the introduction section of this work, the ability to relate socially in fact enhances the actual learning. Debate comes naturally, when one feels comfortable, does not feel misunderstood, or judged.

Where there is a history of unequal placing of ethnic and racial groups in society, as is the case in South Africa, this becomes even more of an issue. Mistrust and undermining of opinions are just some of feelings fuelled by prejudices, that accompany intellectual discourses in our society. Furthermore, as stated by Strauss (1997), it is through social participation, that perspectives shared in a group become internalised.

As already established in the introduction, for learning environments to be enriched by diverse perspectives, it is crucial that educational discourse which values the expression

of cultural differences is developed. As purported by Bhavnani & Phoenix (1994) this happens when people are given the opportunity to have more than just an intellectual impact on each other. Intellectual discourse needs to provoke individuals politically and emotionally, into rethinking their social realities.

4.2.1.5 Theme three: personal and professional identities in conflict

Shaped by my origins

Participants saw their personal subjectivities as strongly informed by their upbringing. *Claire* saw her growing up as highly influenced by a conglomeration of strong Dutch grounding, an Afrikaans background, and the Moslem culture.

> *"I had a lot of influence from my grandmother, and she was Dutch. So it is very much an Afrikaans farming kind of background that I came from. And I always identify with that 'cause when my Mum was at work, it was my Gran looking after me... Usually the rest of the family don't bother with Afrikaans music, but I will...Yes. I think I really value the values that my Gran instilled in me. I also identify strongly with her"*

Bulelani also reiterated on the issue of origins creating strong grounding for current personal subjectivities.

> *"...In my description I can include that I'm a Zulu and I think the way I grew up, it was like it shaped my personality, if I can put it that way. The way we use to do things from my community or from my culture is totally different to what I'm seeing here in Cape Town"*

O.T. Eurocentric and English in approach

All students expressed that they experienced the department as bearing a strong English and Eurocentric influence. *Claire*, *Agang*, and *Dinah's* comments reflect this.

Claire: "You know, it's very much English rule. British influence is strong. That's exactly what I see"

Agang:"...I think it's more in most of the African communities where I feel most of the things that we're doing, or most of the things that we sort of have to practice, are more Western things, they won't accommodate African things as such"

Dinah: "I mean definitely majority is white...Which in a class makes a difference... I think it does...English speaking...big"

Expected behaviour sometimes not appropriate for where I come from

This category stemmed out from experiences shared by all participants except *Dinah.* The other four participants felt that there was a mismatch between what they know to inform behaviour from their background, and what seemed to be expected of them in becoming O.T. professionals.

Bulelani describes how the way he relates to elderly people is different from how he generally does to other people, and how this is not accommodated in the learning environment.

"So I think that is one of the things that made me believe the way I am today. You have to be like, if the older person comes to you and say do this, you have to just do whatever they tell you. You don't have to query, like why do I have to do this...,which I find, you know, I have to do it a lot in the department ...Sometimes I find it difficult, especially in fieldwork ... and at present, I'm working in an Old Age home... sometimes it's not easy for me just to tell them, you know, some limits, like you have to do this up to here. I'm really struggling with that"

This sentiment is shared by *Lumka,* who related how she struggles with having to call older people, by their first names.

> *"...my brother, my younger brother, he's one and a half years behind me, so he calls me by name. And um the way we do things, we are so, ok, according to our culture I can't just call you Elie. When I got here you know I couldn't get it in my head to say I call her Elie. I say Miss whoever, see. And then it was so, it was so difficult because I just can't relate, even to the people who clean, they are all being called by name"*

Although *Dinah* did not directly identify with what is reflected in this category, she agreed with the notion that what was the norm, in terms of how people of different age groups interacted in Western society, was at conflict with what black students knew about their backgrounds. She cited an instance in class where a fellow student who is black, was able to indicate this. She also expressed how this enhanced her learning.

> *"...I mean I know. When we did some sort of role-play in terms of umm...I don't remember exactly what it was but in the end the child spoke up to the parent. You know saying, I don't agree with you, and like in African cultures that's completely unacceptable. Whereas with us it's like a given and I learnt from that experience, I learnt so much. Like...(Name) suddenly goes no, not like yes. Oh and it is ..."*

The difference in expected behaviour is also felt around basic communication skills. This is reflected in *Agang*'s comment:

> *"Ja, I think so, because in certain cultures you can't just like do such things. Like we were taught that when you're talking to someone, you have to have eye contact, and for us having eye contact with an elder person sometimes it is okay, but for some people they take that as something rude. We are like we just have to*

sit and listen to what the person is telling you, and probably go and do what you were asked to do. But how we should do things in OT - you are like, maybe you are going to interview an elderly person or someone around forty or thirty, something of ages, then you will have to I think. It was really quite hard for me to go through such a process, especially the first year, it was difficult..."

The tension between expected behaviour in the learning environment and what participants find appropriate, plays itself in how specific professional skills are employed in O.T. practice. This seems to lead to a feeling of being limited in what they can offer.

Agang: "...quite different, and you will find that the white students will maybe identify more with that area, and enjoy there, even if it's not the matter of I am not enjoying the time. It's just that I actually can't offer more, because it's sort of how actually I maybe treat or assess and stuff like that - sort of a bit different - and how you could get information from the people you are working with, it's quite different as well. Because for me actually with OT, it's sort of quite tricky. Like for us, if you have to get information from an elderly or older person, like we sort of watch out, or listen to the things that we're trying to find out from the patient."

Elaine: "Ja, I feel that somehow that there are times you are sort of expected to break past that barrier. Or I don't mean it's a barrier - it's a proper boundary that should be there anyway, cause you can't chop and change every single person you see..."

4.2.1.6 Reflections on theme three: personal and professional identities in conflict In a bicultural-dilemma

The students in the study confirmed what was purported in the introduction section, indicating that the Occupational Therapy department was Eurocentric in approach. There was also a view that it projected a very British grounding in its value system and what is

instilled in them to inform practice. These students seem to find themselves in a bicultural-dilemma as they have been socialised to affirm modesty, and non-assertiveness in their family and community but are expected to be assertive in the classroom and fieldwork.

Rendered ineffective

The processes, through which black students develop into professionals, are therefore accompanied by a change in values and attitudes that are inconsistent with where they come from. Miller, in Bloom (1979) explains how students can be 'out of phase' with the values embraced in the cultural environment of a given school. He proposes that a student may fail to do well because his or her value structure is at sharp contrast with the value system of the school, not because of lack in intellectual ability. Students are in this way, also rendered ineffective in practice. This may be going on while the institution in its formal mission and goals express commitment to the growth and development of its students.

Developing interpersonal relations that facilitate empowerment in terms of occupational engagement, with clients, is integral in occupational therapy practice. If a student is robbed of personal resources that they can tap into in order to easily forge such relationships with clients, the department needs to ask itself what it means by 'stimulating growth' in the development of its students. This also points to a need to re-examine a curriculum that is riddled with perceptual bias that disregards the value of non-western concepts or approaches to life.

4.2.1.7 Theme four: Want to offer what I learnt, back in my community

Responsible for where I come from

This category reflects a sense of responsibility amongst participants, to meet the needs of communities from which they originate. This was implied in what *Agang* and *Elaine* shared. For *Agang* this sense of obligation stems from the fact that she is not aware of anyone from her area, who is an O.T. or studying to be one.

> *"...I'm the only representative... there is actually a lot, I actually think that there is a lot that I have to offer to the people of North West..."*

Elaine's statement also expresses her wish to go back to where she was born, and practise O.T.

> *"I was thinking about that because for me what I would like to do is going to work in...George or Ceres. I see myself working there "*

O.T. is valued for what it can offer for clients and self

Occupational therapy as a profession was seen generally to have the potential to empower individuals. *Lumka* expressed how her awareness on meeting needs of individuals was raised through what she learnt in O.T.

> *"Well, firstly OT has kind of opened my mind in the way usually it is to people. It's not just talking, talking, talking. It's getting knowledge from that person and giving them back something... because you're going to go out there and you're gonna work with people and you're gonna need the knowledge that you've acquired here at varsity to be able to treat those people there"*

Dinah also related how when she was in the process of deciding on a profession, she found O.T. appealing due to what it can offer.

> *"I actually shadowed a physio but the physio was working with an O.T. and my eyes like veered that way ...I found O/T, you know completely amazing...treating people holistically, you know with the psychological as well as the physical, it definitely appealed to me"*

The participants also shared how they are able to draw some beneficial skills from the course, for themselves as individuals.

> *Lumka: "...I kind of take what I think is going to be right for me and integrate with what I already have..."*
>
> *Agang:"...and there were things like when I did not know how to maybe handle stressful situation...I've been taught how to do this and that, and it's probably the things that I can probably teach another person. So I sort of take the things that I know, or I could maybe... I try and apply them to my life as well..."*

4.2.1.8. Reflections on theme four: Want to offer what I learnt, back in my community

Seeing value in the profession

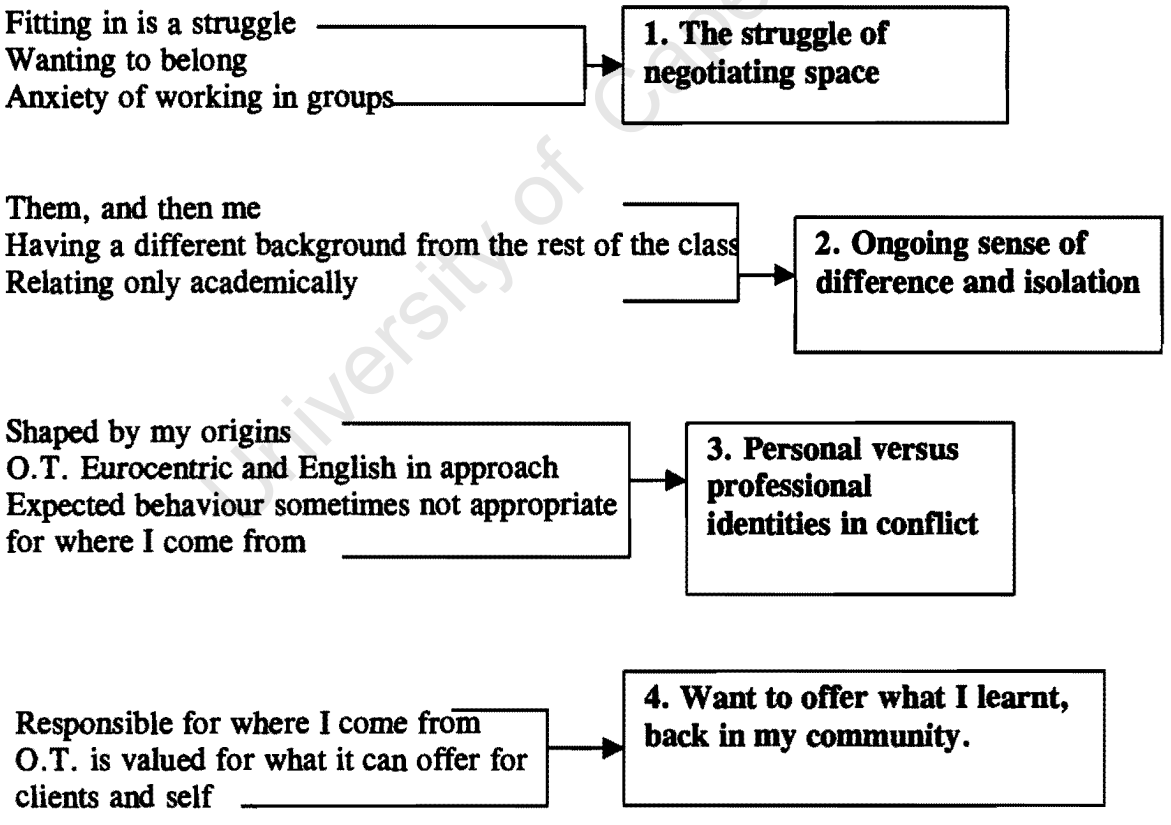
What is interesting to note is that even though participants spoke of a disparity between what was expected in the learning environment and what is appropriate in their backgrounds, as reflected in theme three, they still saw value in what the profession can offer a client and the self. There are aspects of what is taught in the profession, that students find empowering for individuals. This indicates how O.T. as a profession can be viewed as having a valuable role in the South African society.

Awareness of community needs: a resource

One can assume that this awareness of community needs is fostered by the familiarity these students have with their own backgrounds. This resource is what occupational therapy, as a profession needs to tap into, to inform curriculum needs, if its intention is to let the lived experiences of South African communities 'dictate its action' (Dowell, 1996). It is therefore imperative that these students can share their insights, in a learning environment.

4.2.1.9 Schematic representation of themes derived from common experiences

[These were developed from categories emerging from data across the five participants]



4.2.2 THEMES DERIVED FROM GROUP- SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES

Despite the fact that participants who self-identified as African came from essentially different language groups, namely Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu, what they expressed shared a distinct commonality, which allowed for a derivation of three group-specific themes. These are presented below.

4.2.2.1 Theme one: Compromised sense of self

Race, ethnicity and culture being central to subjectivity

The description by African students, of their personal subjectivities in a learning environment, seemed to be centred around race, ethnicity and culture. This is expressed in *Bulelani's* statements, one of which was also quoted earlier,

> *"I am one of the Zulu students studying at UCT doing OT... In my description I can include that I'm a Zulu and I think the way I grew up, it was like it shaped my personality, if I can put it that way. The way we use to do things from my community or from my culture is totally different to what I'm seeing here in Cape Town"*

And,

> *"Okay, I see myself as a black student from a very, very disadvantaged ethnic group. And it's obvious I'm a South African"*

Lumka indicated how her sense of what is central in her identity, is stable across different contexts.

> *"Because I know that I'm Xhosa if I'm here in Cape Town or in a Black and rural or urban area. But still, I still retain that thing that I'm Xhosa speaking and I know that"*

Lumka went further and indicated how her racial identity bears relevance to her being different to her classmates, and how she relates to them. Her statement also indicates that she feels that her behaviour in the learning environment is often explained in terms of her being black.

> *"I think, well the way I look at is, just because I'm Black I don't have to justify whatever I do in class, or whenever I don't come to class, I don't have to justify the reason why I didn't. Because for them being Black and missing a class, okay it goes hand in hand, you see...First of all, okay me being Black and them being White just makes us different, especially in South Africa"*

Silence around relating

This category was informed by a sense amongst participants that discussion amongst students over difficulties in relations across different racial groups was not forthcoming.

> *" ...So its more of an unsaid thing that, and so its difficult to just talk to them about it because they themselves don't talk about it. So, I don't know how to approach it. And I don't know how to approach them"*

Relating to the traumatic incident that happened in first year that was recounted earlier, *Bulelani* shared the same view.

> *"She (Lecturer) raised the issue, and some of the students said they were not aware that, you know, that only two students (Black) were sitting alone... ja, although they (Students) did ask us. But it wasn't like, it was just asking. It was like saying hi to someone else. They were not like taking it seriously, if I can put it that way"*

Hoping for more black students

Participants shared a wish that there could be more black students in the learning environment, accompanied by some hope that things would be better, as indicated in this statement,

> *"Maybe if there were more black students, not specifically Zulu-speaking people...maybe it was going to be better, but I don't know"*

The wish for more black students seems to be linked to possibilities for better relations. Poor relations appear to be associated with being different.

> *"I consider myself to be very dissimilar in terms of beliefs, behaviour, it's such a lot. Sometimes if you are sitting in a class, and you just look around, sometimes it doesn't make you to feel like you are at home like more relaxed. It's not like I'm not happy, but, you know, sometimes you need, you know, that kind of thing to have like people that you can relate to. For me it's like really like lacking something"*

No space to be completely myself in the department

African students expressed a limitation in the space provided in the department, for the expression of their personal subjectivities. The following comments shared by all African participants represent this point,

> *Lumka: "But it's when I go to class, I'm somebody else and when I'm here I'm somebody else "*
>
> *Bulelani"...If I am in the department, there is that change; if I'm from outside, you know, whether I'm in a class, I will feel there's part of me that is not there. The way I behave during classes is not the way I behave when I'm outside. I don't know if I'm clear..."*

Agang: "...it was more on what I do outside, and what I don't do here. At the department I think it's like, I go to school, it's only that, academic, the OT thing only, like the other things, like sport, church and relationships, they are actually not part of my life, when I get to the department. It's just like things that I hold for myself, and I talk about them when I am outside the OT department probably..."

These students seem to experience complete separatedness between who they are outside the department, and inside. This also plays itself out in how much they get involved in the different settings.

"...outside the department I do lots of things... I do lots of things. I laugh a lot, and I have netball; I've got choir, and I do offer a little bit for the residence as well, because at the moment I am involved with sport SAFCO with netball, I am a treasurer for netball. At church I'm sort of responsible for the choir and..."

Bulelani's statement reiterates this point,

"I don't know. You know, if my classmates at the department can see what really am I, but there's a lot of things that I can do and suggest to be changed, if I can get a space to be myself in the department. There are lot of things that I can suggest and maybe, yes, I can do a lot of things"

Need to be given a chance

There was an expressed need by participants, to be given a chance to get involved in the department. This appears to be linked to a sense that they are not perceived as able to handle duties they may be tasked with.

"...And in my residence I used to get involved. In '97 I was the treasurer of the sub-committee for the food in (Name). This year I'm also in the house committee in (Name). I can get involved, but if I get a chance to get involved. But here in the department I would like to be, like, you know, if the class feels like I can be one of

those people, but they don't think that I can be one of those people...They don't think. They know maybe the way that I behave in my class that Bulelani can't do that thing. But I know that I can do it. But if I can get a chance, if no one is willing to do the thing, I can do it. "

Volunteer for things I do in the department

It appears that for most activities that African students involve themselves in, apart from academic tasks in the learning environment, is volunteered for. This is reflected in what *Agang* shared.

"... but at the department not at all. But every time, like maybe we are asked to have a class rep, to like the time I attended the workshop, I volunteered to go and attend the workshop. And there was a time last year when the HSSC wanted a representative and I also volunteered to be there"

4.2.2.2 Reflections on theme one: Compromised sense of self

Salience in ethnic, racial, and cultural subjectivities

In following up on the centrality of ethnicity, race and culture in subjectivities, with African participants during the interviews, it was apparent that these three components came to the fore, only when they came to UCT. It has been established indeed in sociological literature, that different situations can enforce individual as well as collective identities and thus promote certain subjectivities more than others ((Bhavnani & Harraway, 1994). For these students, the shock of being thrown into an unfamiliar social setting, filled with inequalities; academic and educational, that mirror the scourge left by apartheid in our society, could have brought on the pronouncement of race, culture, and ethnicity. These identities perhaps play a role in providing a sense of core stability, in the face of threatened subjectivities (Yuval-Davis (1994).

Self-Renaming: Response to threatened subjectivities?

What is also of interest to note, is that two of the participants in the study came to the department with English names, but decided to change these to African ones in the middle of their second year. This is something I can personally relate to, as it happened to me as well. On arrival to the department and noting that I was the only African student, it became important to me to assert the difference saliently by reverting to using my Venda name, which I never used in high school. This could be due that carrying an English name for me at the time, implied successful racial colonisation.

Strauss (1997) seems to agree with this and states that various emotional reactions can be linked and evoked by a person's imaginings of what he or she must appear to certain audiences bearing the name he or she does. He further purports the changing of names as marking a rite of passage, representing a wish that the person holds of bearing a name that portrays, what I feel, are new subjectivities. The fact that the new names tend to be African underscores a need for ethnic and racial, if not cultural salience. Assigning a name to self is therefore an authentic act of placement or identification.

Lack of communion between subjectivities

It is apparent in the category; **No space to be completely myself in the department**, that African students experience an acute sense of alienation in a space, which is supposed to be a major socialising agent of the O.T. profession, that is the O.T. department. This is of concern, assuming that the department is where the bulk of the learning, is centred. This ultimately suggests that African students have a limited opportunity to interact in scholarship with reference to their individual student perspectives, derived from the assortment of subjectivities which is embraced by their larger sense of personhood (Broadhead, 1983). The "lack of space to be self " could be partly due to the difficulty in sharing a social space informed by shared realities.

The apparent separation of subjectivities held by African students between the occupational therapy department, and other settings, may also point to a lack of a 'goodness of fit' between subjectivities that are primary to them as individuals, and those which appear to be valued in the department. It seems that inasmuch as individuals simultaneously embody multiple subjectivities, they also embrace multiple perspectives on ways these relate to themselves and others, as each of these subjectivities carries a different social value depending on the setting (Bloom, 1979). It is apparent that there are personal subjectivities that may be discouraged from expressing themselves, in the O.T department. Saying this reminds me of my own student life when a colleague, and friend of mine, who was also one of few black students, was arrested for taking part in a protest against the apartheid system. I remember it being very hard for us to share this information with the rest of the class.

Also, in my first year I was once beaten up by the police for being on a 'white only' beach as part of a defiance campaign that was meant to put the government under pressure to release Nelson Mandela. I went through my four years of study without ever mentioning this to my classmates, other than my friend. Somehow there was an unsaid notion in the department, of it being only communists and 'troublesome' people who would engage in political activity, at the time. The culture of the department seems to still somehow, fail to embrace the subjectivities and experiences of African students. Where subjectivities do not seem to articulate with one another, by way of allowing expression through each other, it is difficult for one to fully impact on any situation.

Misjudged potential

What African students shared around having to volunteer for leadership positions in the learning environment, points to the presence of prejudice. Whether this is only perceived or real, needs further exploration. What needs to be realised though is that prejudice does

not just happen, but is learned not simply at isolated situations and by random individuals, but by groups (Bowser et al. 1993). Group assumptions about race and self are then either reinforced or counteracted by institutional affiliations. A learning environment like the O.T department therefore, cannot assume a neutral stance. It must also be recognised that the various manifestations of social oppression, such as racism, have a significant impact on the worldview, self-concept, self-esteem, and behaviour of both those who benefit from a system, and those whom the system disadvantages.

4.2.2.3 Theme two: I am not making an impact

Applicability not enough

This category was derived from three subcategories, which are presented below.

1.Unfamiliarity

Participants shared how the environments in which they do fieldwork practice are mostly unfamiliar to them, sometimes rendering them unable to make use of activities they know from their backgrounds. This seems to be compounded by the theory they receive in preparation, and activities they have in their disposal to use with patients, as they are both influenced by a Western perspective.

> *Agang: "...the theory is more in sort of a Westernised way...Like at home, I've never heard of dominoes or stuff like that, so to think about them immediately to do with the client is something that comes very last for me...the activities that I will think of, are more of the activities that I sort of come across, or maybe the games that I used to play. Because I don't know more of the games that the white students used to play, or maybe, I mean from my culture, older people don't play games at all - some of them they don't go for exercises like running... So here, if I had to work in an old age home, the last thing I would think about, is taking these people for a walk or for a run, because at home I've never thought about such a thing"*

Bulelani: "Because the most thing that we are doing here in terms of culture, in terms of behaviour, in terms of activities that we are told to do there, you know, for me, I always think whenever I'm doing something, I'll think this won't be appropriate in my community or in my culture...I always say, No, think back, will this be appropriate in my culture where I come from? And most of the things, they are not. Like sometimes it will seem as if we as black students, we are not creative and something like that, and that is not the case..."

Agang recounted instances where she felt she could tap into what she knew from her background, to apply in fieldwork practice. She felt she learnt more in these instances, and could apply her knowledge back in her own community.

"...if you are going more to the hospitals where there is maybe a lot of white people in there, it's like the hospital will be sort of more of a Western way of doing things, than if we're going to places like Khayelitsha, or where we go for the Montague thing, because I was in the Xhosa community. So it was a bit different. I think I was actually feeling here I am learning more, and it's something that I can take and apply at home, than if I have to work in Groote Schuur, or work in an old age home like Noah, or something like that"

2. Difference not accommodated in evaluation

All African participants felt that evaluation in the learning environment did not sufficiently accommodate difference in approach, which is based on diverse frames of reference.

Bulelani: "No, it is not happening like you are saying that the way I relate to people to the department value in terms of marks. No, I don't think they are doing that. There is very few that they are doing like in terms of relating to client, is not

that much that we know that they are taking into consideration... I don't think that they are doing enough"

Agang: "If I am talking to someone who is much older than me... It's like, sometimes especially, maybe you are supervised... You might like be seen as if you are not getting the information that you are supposed to get; not necessarily that you are not aware...You feel that it's actually not your space to come and get such information from a person"

3. Fieldwork and human development allows some space

The participants felt that fieldwork practice, and lectures in human development, afforded them some space to either express their subjectivities, or indicate where taught concepts differed with how they understood reality.

With regard to fieldwork participants had the following to say,

Bulelani: "You know, when I'm in fieldwork placement, I feel like this is Bulelani. I can do things, I can be myself"

Agang: "I think there is a chance that I get to express such things. It's more when we come to the fieldwork lectures"

Agang went further and recounted how in a fieldwork preparation lecture, she was able to share what she knew about the family structures and roles of family members in African cultures.

"...I shared a lot of my knowledge or my experience or how I, like maybe okay, that's how most of blacks, the African people are seen to do things, not necessarily that we're still doing them. Because with me there is actually a mixture of both Western and African way of doing things, it's not purely African. So that's where I get to share some things ...the difference between families and

what we call a nuclear family in a Western way, and what we call a nuclear family in an African way. And you get that extended family in an African way, like finding another family, about 13 or 14 people, staying in just one yard or one house, being the mother, the father, the children and the grandchildren, or maybe your own grandparents staying in there as well. So you find out there's actually a lot of overlapping roles"

With regard to human development lectures, this is what she said,

"The lecturer left the space where the student could ... actually the information that is put in there is more coming from the students, like adolescence where there is circumcision and stuff like that, ja, the traditional schools and things like that. Those are the things that we could like share, like, okay, in such and such a culture; even the Moslem people they could share what they think, okay in our culture at this age, people do this and this"

Opinion not valued

This category is informed by what African participants shared around how they felt their classmates regarded their contributions in the learning environment. There seems to be a sense that their opinions are not valued, as indicated in the following comments,

"That's something about them. They think that you can never come up with a good solution to a problem. And it's like, I don't know it's so very undermining. Because I don't know why they think that way. Just because you're Black you can't come up with something good. So that's why every time we had a group discussion I would just keep quiet"

And,

"Most of the time people consider what they call majority thing, even I can try whatever I can, but it won't make such a difference. Because they will consider,

like the class is doing this, why this one. They will consider maybe my own point of view as being, you know. Although they won't say it's wrong, but they won't take it serious, as if maybe it was a vice versa the majority of black students"

Fragile confidence

There was an expressed sense of inferiority amongst African participants, which seems to stem from various factors. *Lumka* linked this phenomenon to being in an unfamiliar environment, where she did not expect to be one of very few black students, and the fact that she comes from a disadvantaged background.

"And coming to UCT and doing O.T. and only to find out that there were only a few blacks who were doing O.T. and I was never really in that situation ever at high school ... I don't know how to relate to them at all because I'm just not like them. They come from various places where they had everything and anything. And me, I don't know, it was just an inferiority complex, kind of thing. I just couldn't help it. So I just switched off. Okay, always quiet"

Agang identified with this sentiment, and expressed a sense of vulnerability and a need to guard against getting her confidence destroyed.

"...at school I was a quiet person as well, but it wasn't like there were things that I couldn't do. Because at school I had responsibility and I got to do this and this. But then when I got here it was like ... ...maybe if I got embarrassed, that will impact on what I've been trying to build for such a long time, and it (Confidence) might go down to the point where I can't take it. So it's like I always try to either maintain where it is, or try to go for the things that I know, it's less likely for me to fail or to get embarrassed or things like that"

Playing it safe

This category is partly derived from a statement uttered by *Agang* in the category just above. *Agang* went further and explained how her confidence was fragile during her first and second year in the department. She describes needing to play it safe by avoiding taking unnecessary risks.

> *"The discomfort as well. I think the other thing, 1st year and 2nd year, it was like I was still like getting to explore the place, and like getting my feet together. And I think the other thing, it was more I was still like feeling sort of vulnerable, so I was trying to protect myself, like being in a sort of like a contained area..."*

Choosing silence

As a strategy against feelings of not being taken seriously by classmates in the learning environment, African participants described opting for silence.

> *"It all stems from the fact that I felt that whatever I would say they wouldn't take it seriously. So why the heck should I say anything if they were not going to take me seriously...The group things that we were doing, the group work that we were doing,...these guys never really take black guys seriously..."*

The choosing of silence appears to also impact on learning content where the students feel they could make a contribution, but feel limited by the responses they anticipate.

> *"But then I think the way O.T. approaches it is so very western influenced. So, all they will say, okay even witchcraft. I don't know what they call it or how they make sense of it, but they way they do is very westernised and its very difficult to convince them because they think that they know but they've never been there and they have actually not experienced it. So I just kept quiet because there's no need for me to explain to them. I just take it the way they think. Because even though I say that they'll say that I'm telling stories"*

And,

"Yes, that's right. I don't know. For me, I just don't want to talk about it. When they view it from the Western, okay Western part of it, so I'm like okay fine, its fine. If they think the person is delusional then they have delusions"

4.2.2.4 Reflections on theme two: I am not making an impact

Socialised to have a Eurocentric approach in practice

- Kinebanian and Stomph suggest that domination of a profession by a particular set of cultural belief systems, become limiting, where the majority of practitioners have been of the dominant culture, like in O.T., in South Africa. This is, as Tanner (1996) puts it, because the cultural bias implicit in the practice of the profession may not be readily questioned and challenged, especially in training. This is supported by Miller, (In Oakley, 1981: 39), who purports that 'A dominant group, inevitably, has the greatest influence in determining a culture's overall outlook – its philosophy, morality, social theory and even its science.

- Also, a learning environment with learners sharing a fairly homogenous frame of reference in terms of ethnic and cultural background, tends to create a space mostly for confirmation of prior held knowledge (Williams, 1994). This has very serious implications for curriculum development in a profession with a culturally diverse population to serve, like occupational therapy in South Africa.

Not informing learning content

- Confronted with a struggle of fitting in with a perspective that they do not necessarily relate to, or having to be at the mercy of the white majority for the validation of their views, African students in this study, appear to choose silence. This is consistent with Smith's description of the experience of minority students in learning situations at

institutions of higher learning, where he cites instances where they withdraw from participation (Marchesani & Adams, 1992). He explains that this is often due to the effects of a visibility/invisibility paradox created by being made the centre of attention when topics of race, culture, or religion, are discussed but generally ignored otherwise. During classroom discussions, such students are often nominated as spokespersons for their group on particular issues. The apparent assumption is that everyone from a particular racial or ethnic group thinks alike and furthermore that their expertise in class is limited to their group's perspective. This can lead black students to withdraw, thereby limiting their participation and jeopardising their academic success.

This unfortunately, limits African students in opportunities to be part of informing agents of the academic enterprise. If the higher ideals of learning include people reconstituting their social realities (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994), informed by a sharing of different perspectives, then it is indeed of concern that African students are not making an impact in the learning environment. This relates to the concern raised by Bhavnani & Phoenix on the cost of stabilising certain subjectivities, and shifting others. It can be inferred that the occupational therapy department fosters the shifting of African subjectivities, more than those of the white students. To fully appreciate the problematic nature of this situation, an approach that takes into consideration South Africa's historical context is needed. Caution within intellectual discourse needs to be taken where amongst other things, persons can assume particular stances toward memorialising, rejecting, recreating, 'cashing on', or escaping from past inequalities that inform present realities (Strauss, 1997).

Is professional competence therefore compromised?

A disturbing fact is whether African O.T.'s trained in white institutions, need to heed a warning by Baldwin, in Howitt & Owusu-Bempah (1994) directed at black

psychologists. Baldwin felt that their Eurocentric-orientated training had essentially rendered them incompetent in providing culturally relevant services to black people. That they often tend to attend to black people as if they were white people disguised in black skins. Failure to provide culturally sensitive occupational therapy may be as disastrous for clients as ethical failings. In this very real sense, therefore, O.T. has not simply conspired with the system in the denial of the needs of culturally and racially diverse groups; it continues to train therapists inadequate for work in a multicultural society.

4.2.2.5 Theme three: There is tension in my becoming an occupational therapist

Presence of tension

African participants expressed a presence of tension in their journey to becoming professionals. For *Bulelani* the tension seems to express itself through what has changed in how he does things and his feelings about this, ultimately bringing a sense of discomfort.

> *"...Sometimes I can feel it, you know, it's not the way I used to do things. You know, there is that tension. It's not that I'm afraid or whatever. I'm not comfortable. I'm comfortable, but there's a thing that is missing..."*

For *Agang*, the tension appears to be linked with use of English all the time. Although she sees an advantage in the language professionally, she seems concerned about the impact an extensive usage of English might have on how she relates to her family.

> *"...I actually get the influence having to speak English for the majority of the time. It really had an impact. I always feel that it's really okay academically and like professionally wise, it's an advantage, but then when I get home, it's really a problem to get to speak to my family and the kids, and all those people in the (Sotho) language"*

Becoming someone different

As African students are in the process of becoming professionals, they seem to have a sense of a change in their subjectivities, that renders them essentially different to whom they were before. *Lumka* appears to experience this change as profound.

> *"I've changed. I would say that. I've changed...Well there's been okay a very drastic change... "*

Bulelani identifies with this; he seems to be acutely aware of this experience at present.

> *"In five years time, I see myself as a male OT from UCT, although at the moment I don't feel like as myself, if I can put it in that way"*

Threat of losing touch

Losing touch with one's origins seems to be a threat, requiring participants to use their mother tongues where possible to help prevent this.

> *"But when I'm with my friends you know that I speak Xhosa with them because I don't want to lose touch".*

Need to regain my sense of identity

This category was partly informed by the one just above and an expressed need by participants, to reconnect with their central subjectivities. This is reflected in a statement by *Bulelani*, in which he indicates that re-establishing his identity can be possible only if he goes back to work in his place of origin.

> *"...I don't know. But I can feel, even though I'll qualify as an OT, I'll prefer like maybe go and break and work in Natal or somewhere around those areas, just to regain my sense of identity, if I can put it that way. Because now I can feel I'm not really myself..."*

4.2.2.6 Reflections on theme three: There is tension in my becoming an occupational therapist

Conversion constitutes the professional journey for African students

It was suggested earlier, that it may be that the department demands more shift in subjectivities of African students, than in those of white students. This is implied in the expression by African students, of the drastic nature of the change, in their journey to becoming professionals. Where subjectivities take drastic shifts, in order for one to fit in a particular profession, it may be accurate to view the process as conversion. Conversions involve an individual's appropriation of 'being', which necessitates or leads to a reformation and reorganisation of prior subjectivities (Travisano, in Broadhead, 1983). Such changes require a change in the 'informing aspect' of one's life and biography. Moreover, there may be a negation of some former subjectivities.

Another process outlined by Travisano, is alternation. Alternation is a process of integration experienced as unproblematic, since it does not result in a qualitative reorganisation of the relationships among already existing subjectivities.

Travisano's analysis emphasises that the difference between a conversion and an alternation is determined by the extent to which newly acquired subjectivities are integrated and aligned with an individual's prior subjectivities and lifestory. Conversion involves the resolution of major mal-integration of newly emerging subjectivities with existing ones, requiring a qualitative reorganisation of the relationships among them. The process may go so far as to require an entirely new constituency of these.

This outline seems to capture the essence of the journey by African students, in forging a professional identity, within the department of occupational therapy. It seems the constitution of subjectivities, in these students' professional journey involves

considerable trauma, mal-alignment, and possible abandonment of other important subjectivities. An argument that may be directed against this assertion pertains to its peculiarity to African students, compared to any other group of students. Although this was not a comparative study, it might be worthwhile to contrast the professional journey assumed by African students with insights shared by *Dinah*, on her individual professional journey. It is not assumed that all students other than black will identify with this. The difference between a student whose sense of subjectivities is marked by less of a variance, with what is embraced by the learning environment, in acquiring a professional identity, and African students, is however striking.

As opposed to the experiences of African students, *Dinah* felt valued and given space as an individual with a different frame of reference, in the department. She had also asserted that she came from a privileged background and that she chose O.T., knowing what it entails. Her voice informed the collective themes for all students except the one on expected; **Personal versus professional identities in conflict**. She also pointed this out during member-checking. Describing her sense of the journey she was on, in constituting subjectivities in relation to an evolving professional identity, she had the following to say in our conversion:

> *Elelwani: "And then the last question. What would you say about what you... what would you say about your becoming, in your journey to becoming an O.T.?"*
> *Dinah: "I'm going to go a bit off here. But like, it's not just me becoming...it's not just me becoming an O.T. but It's O.T. fitting in with me... And something I've learned in my life as well, that, that I've never seen myself fitting into an O.T. philosophy, but it's with an O.T. philosophy fitting into me. You know and, and then it's you know the core is there and it's just now about learning and expanding on that.... I don't feel I have to fit in with anything it has to fit in with me"*

Elelwani: "Hmmm...It must fit in! Is it fitting?"

Dinah: "Yeah, yeah but then that's also why I chose it because I knew it would fit in with me and it is"

Essentially what is portrayed here is the process of alternation in acquiring a professional identity, where consistent parallels can be drawn between the value system and attitudes embraced within the evolving professional identity, and the individual's prior subjectivities and biography. Indeed Dinah spoke of how she and her husband had recently been drawing parallels between O.T. and Judaism,

Dinah: "This is the kind of person I want to be and someone who can, can practice their belief system and I think and... Judaism is a lot about, a lot of that. Umm, but I was.... having this conversation with (Name) and we where like drawing parallels between O/T and.. Judaism and really it's about you, you know what you do is what you become its really like that cause it, it's a very doing type of religion it's like there is so many laws and practices, and... your whole day is structured around doing and that's why like it is an O.T. thing and we where like laughing about it the other day but it is really, it's part of my life philosophy. That you know, that whole cycle which is amazing"

What was also fascinating was what Dinah shared when I asked her about her feelings and views around what is understood to be occupations, and what constitutes interpersonal relationships, in the department. After thinking for a while she explained how being a minority in society, as a Jewish person, she constantly finds herself having to modify information to suit her, and how she came into the department already having low expectations of getting her individual needs met. This may partly explain the level of tension experienced by African students in their process of acquiring a professional identity. African students understand life as experienced by the majority in South Africa.

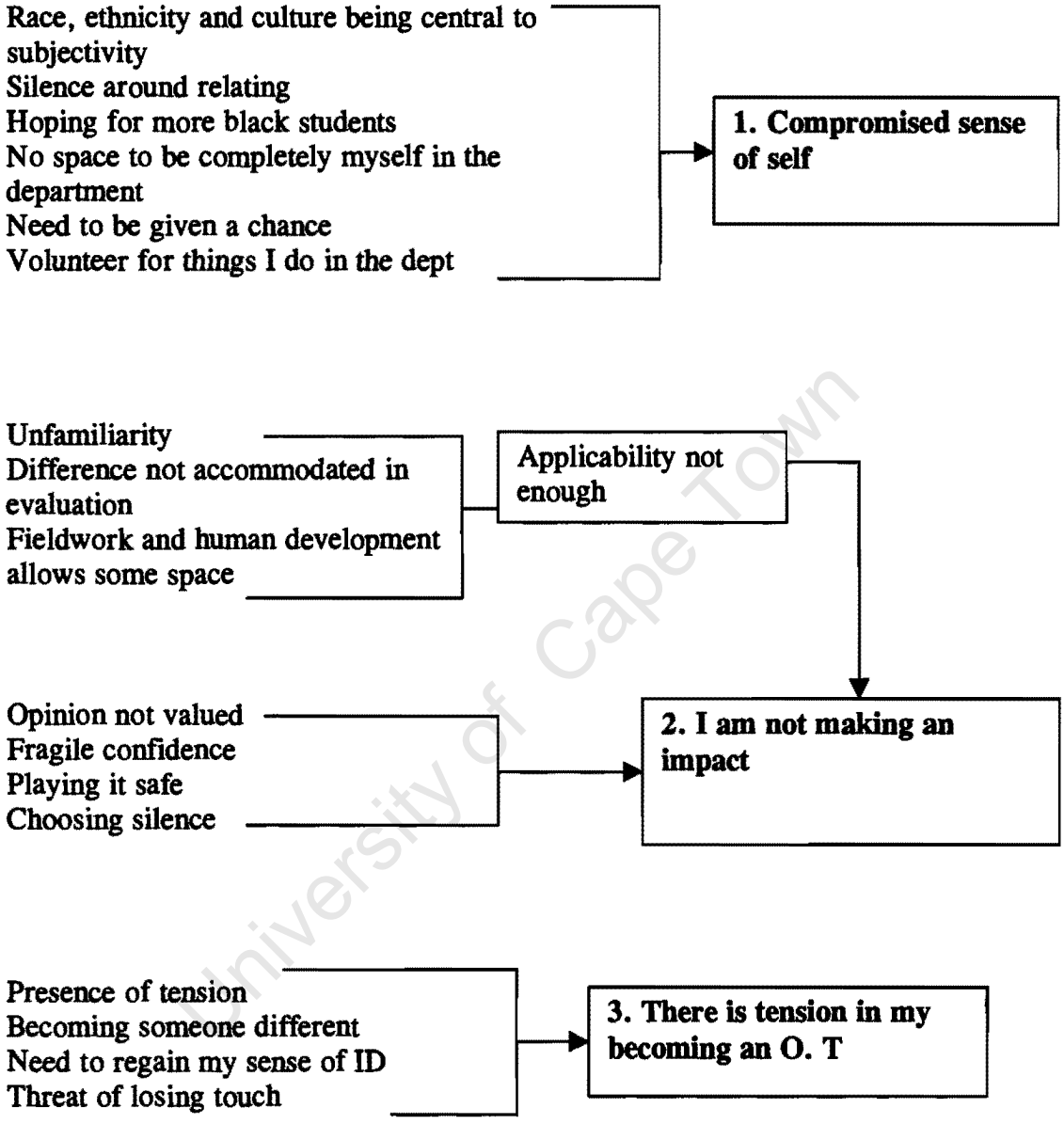
It is not surprising that confronted with perspectives that represent reality for a few of what constitute South African society, in professional socialisation, the negotiating for space is difficult, traumatic, and totally reorganising.

Students come to the O.T. department with multiple subjectivities. It is ideal that they view professional socialisation as supportive or fulfilling and allowing expression of these other subjectivities. This ultimately suggests that African students should also have an opportunity to interact in scholarship with reference to their frames of reference. Under these conditions, Broadhead urges that people share their perspectives on issues and their provisional answers to questions about the meaning of events and how one should respond to them. He argues that such perspectives stimulate a concern among students to structure their work and training more directly in line with the higher ideals of community service, conscience, and commitment.

Broadhead argues that individual student perspective derive from the assortment of primary subjectivities which constitute their larger sense of personhood, which extend from their shared humanity as collective members of larger social groups, heritages, and cultures. These perspectives accompany students' collective experiences as members of families, members of ethnic groups, residents of communities and localities, etc. The socialising influence of these perspectives in informing the constitution of professional subjectivity therefore needs fuller recognition, promotion, and strengthening.

4.2.2.7 Schematic representation of themes derived from group-specific experiences

[These were informed by categories emanating exclusively, from *Agang*, *Bulelani*, and *Lumka*]



SECTION FIVE: CRITICAL REFLECTION

5.1 CONCLUSION

5.1.1. A PROBLEMATIC PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

Participants in this study shared experiences that highlighted critical factors and processes within the O.T department at UCT, which encourage or inhibit participation, or a sharing of perspectives. The inability to relate socially and how this manifests itself in the learning environment was a definite problem. An example that was cited and seems to evoke a lot of anxiety is group formation during projects or class discussion. For African students there is also an awareness of not being taken seriously by classmates, a result of this being poor self-confidence and a lack of interest in participating.

Where the actual curriculum is experienced as limiting, it is where it remains mainly informed by a Western perspective, rendering what students know of their own cultures, in terms of behaviour, relating and activities, somewhat obsolete. Students however shared that human development lectures, culture-sensitive lectures in fieldwork, and some fieldwork placements afforded them some space to share knowledge from their frames of reference. What should also not be ignored, is the potential for empowering individuals that participants recognise and value, in the O.T. profession.

Exploring the journey in which subjectivities are constituted in relation to an evolving professional identity, with each participant, it was revealed that for the African student, this is essentially a process of conversion. It is a journey marked by negotiating space in an environment that does not fully embrace what they are all about. The journey is experienced with misgivings about the level at which they are able to inform what is learnt by all. Ultimately it is a process filled with an awareness of leaving behind what constitutes the essence of their being African. Where there was less tension in the process of becoming an O.T. professional for a minority student, it was where the student felt

valued and given space "to be" in the department. This was also a student who experienced expected behaviour in practice as not foreign to her frame of reference.

5.1.2 WHAT A TRANSFORMED CURRICULUM SHOULD OFFER

Transformation at UCT means fostering equity. This describes a process of broadening access to those who were previously excluded, and cultivating a sense of belonging and full participation by all members of the campus community. It is apparently understood in the institution that simply recruiting more students and appointing token faculty or administrators from targeted social groups, without accompanying changes on the part of dominant group members and the institution as a whole, is a recipe for disaster. Studies that pay attention to ways that interactions among students and staff from diverse social groups are manifested everywhere on campus are needed and unfortunately limited. Of particular concern are the effects of these interactions on both the social and academic life of the campus community. It is apparent in this study that these interactions are not what they could or should be in the department of occupational therapy at UCT. A significant shift in the evolution of approaches to social diversity on campus needs to be a concern, not only about who is in the learning environment, but also the influence of worldviews on social interaction and academic discourse. This shift should also be about understanding how individuals on campus, view society in relation to their conception of social injustice (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992).

This kind of transformation is unattainable unless the curriculum aims to broaden students' horizons and enable them to appreciate different cultures, different modes of thinking and inquiry, and different values. This study uncovered that for the most part, the O.T. curriculum at UCT remains Eurocentric in approach. A transformed O.T. curriculum should lead students to analyse the unstated assumptions and perspectives

that underlie scholarship. The shift towards a culturally sensitive perspective amounts to a "paradigm shift" or change in worldviews.

A transformed curriculum according to Marchesani & Adams, (1995), goes beyond including exceptional individuals in the margins of an otherwise unaltered curriculum. It is characterised instead by efforts to analyse and understand the reasons for and conditions of exclusion for non-mainstream groups. Differences in culture, gender, ability etc. are no longer viewed in relation to the dominant ideas and contributions of those that have traditionally set standards and defined norms of participation. Critical examination of norms and standards does not only focus on how to equalise the playing field but rather on fundamentally changing the rules of the game. The authentic voices and experiences of the former "outsiders" are considered directly and in their own terms rather than interpreted through the lenses of the dominant culture. This way, varied voices help make clear the multiple nature of reality as it is perceived from the inside out, and these diverse voices are valued for what they can tell us about various perspectives on reality.

5.1.3 TRANSFORMATION IS AN EMOTIONAL ISSUE

The recent debate on transformation in Higher Education has received high visibility. Many campuses across the country are struggling with this issue. The national dialogue about the transformation of the curriculum is still in its early stages. It is marked by profound philosophical and value differences. The emotionally charged part of the debate centres on the issue of standards. Facts that need to be realised and seriously reflected on however, include the following:

- Knowledge is context-based.
- Equity and multicultural issues permeate everything in higher education.

- ❖ Standards, quality, and excellence are individually, institutionally, and culturally based.
- ❖ Equality means critically reviewing and redefining the criteria for excellence.
- ❖ Race and gender issues are central to knowledge and all institutional decisions. Bowser et al. (1993)

Another issue that needs to be recognised and confronted is that higher education is a scarce resource in our society. Conflict over issues of access and affirmative action are therefore inevitable. The introduction of transformation, especially if it addresses issues of oppression and inequity, often generates powerful emotional responses. These range from guilt and shame to anger and despair. If not addressed, these emotional responses can result in resistance to equity-related issues.

5.1.4 OPENNESS IS REQUIRED

It is not easy to analyse processes that may hint on the presence of racism within any institution, especially when this is an introspective look by an institution, into its own structures. One reason for this is because to analyse with reasonable accuracy, means the institution should evaluate its structures and values, and relational patterns between people, with a high level of honesty.

This study was focussed on students who saw themselves as having ethnic and cultural backgrounds that are underrepresented in a learning environment. What these students shared in the study suggest a number of serious concerns, needing immediate consideration and recourse.

The researcher by no means wants to assert that in this study all issues were exhaustively and clearly identified. Difficulties that underrepresented groups, especially black students

often face are amorphous and tangled. For all involved, mostly the occupational therapy department staff, this may prove quite overwhelming. Campuses and professional schools faced with this challenge have often been found to skirt, transfer blame, or avoid the conflicts and issues that arise (Bowser et al, 1992).

The difficulty faced by institutions of higher learning should not be undermined. Increased diversity of students on campus or departments that have historically been mainly been European poses real challenges. It cannot be expected to be easy teaching students who come to a department from different worlds from those of most of the teaching staff body. This is even more compounded where the disciplines taught, like in occupational therapy were mastered in Eurocentric institutions or from perspectives that are far from where the students come. It is an undeclared fact that for the most part, very little is known about underrepresented student bodies in terms of their cultures, and their experiences, in the O.T. department.

It therefore becomes almost inevitable that staff members may see students who question the practical uses of knowledge, or who appear withdrawn as evidence of their lack of understanding or preparation for being in the university. When this is done, it unfortunately fuels the notion that students need to assimilate into the culture, perspectives, and ways of doing that are known and understood by the department. In the end students are inadvertently blamed for problems they experience. Left unattended, this may lead to a development of a false sense of superiority among students whom traditional perspectives in the department favour, and a false sense of inferiority in non-European students.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study sought to unravel what underlies the academic journey as experienced by students who see their ethnic and cultural background as underrepresented in the occupational therapy department. Some issues where raised that underscored the fact that for the most part, for these students, this journey is problematic. A few insights were developed and lead to recommendations that are presented below.

5.2.1 ALLOWING SPACE FOR THE ASSERTION OF DIFFERENCE

Marchesani & Adams (1992) suggest as one of the crucial ways to foster a learning environment that takes into consideration, the frames of reference of all in the learning environment, a concerted effort by an institution to understand its students. This study can be viewed as one of the efforts the O.T. department has embarked on to do just that. Another point of departure may be a realisation that finding common ground between students, needs to be accompanied by asserting difference where it exists. Space for sharing places of origin and difference in perspectives needs to be created on arrival and throughout training.

5.2.2 DEVELOPING CROSS-CULTURAL FLUENCY

Also, as it is important to research material that is taught in a classroom, it should equally be seen as crucial for staff members to inform themselves about cultures they are unfamiliar with, that may exist in the student body. This would make it easier and more natural to invite insights from students that may have perspectives informed by those cultures. In doing this as educators in South Africa, we will also be acknowledging the impoverished and one-sided information most of us received in the former educational system, designed to instil and foster inequalities between different races. Care should be taken though, not to target individuals, making them spokespersons of views, and perspectives, they themselves may not hold. Van Note Chism et al (1989) assert that

desire to be quiet for students should be respected. They propose that educators should be careful to let students choose to participate voluntarily and should encourage involvement by making non-intrusive means like making eye contact, asking open questions, and demonstrating interest when participation does occur. Implicit in this suggestion is the need for training for staff members to develop cross-cultural fluency in their teaching and class- room interactions. Opportunities must therefore be created for such training by the department.

3. DISRUPTING THE SILENCE AROUND RELATING

It was asserted in the findings section that relating enhances learning, and that this was found to be a source of dissatisfaction for underrepresented students in the occupational therapy department. It needs no mention that one cannot and should not force social relations between any group of people, even if the absence thereof, may severely impact on learning. A serious difficulty that the problem of relating introduces in the department, as mentioned before, is when groups need to be formed for projects etc, in the learning environment.

What African students also mentioned is that there appears to be a silence around problems regarding relating in the department. White students in particular, are seen to not want to engage with the problem of relating among groups of different races or backgrounds. Some may argue that talking about problems of this nature unnecessary augments their effects. The difficulty with silence though is that it does not will problems away, especially for those that are affected. Everytime groups need to be formed, it is these individuals who seat with the anxiety of whether they will be picked, or not. This ultimately adversely affects self-esteems, and inevitably tempers with learning.

Bowser et al purports that the communication process is covert, systematic, and multidimensional and that it takes place on the levels of content and relations. Often when people feel locked-in, in a racially charged interchange, and maybe accused of being culturally insensitive, or racist, they feel extremely vulnerable to others' perceptions and interpretations. They then may need to get away from the uncertain, complex, uncomfortable space of race relations. One way of getting away, as suggested by Bowser et al, is to undermine one's racial-group membership so as to allow the individual to disregard the relevance of their race on personal achievements and experiences.

It may be that what the department needs to do is to create fora to bring the reality of the sense of separatedness experienced by minority students, to the open. Such fora may be offered by tools already in place in the department, like the median groups, or class-constitutions. These tools however, may be useless if they mirror what happens in the general learning environment, and classes are allowed to avoid issues that touch only a few students. To create real space for African students, staff members need to be aware of the issues, and be skilled to bring these to the fore, in a manner that does not stigmatise individuals, but allow for voices to be heard. This may prove to validate these negative experiences for minority students, which is better than complete disregard which exacerbates feelings of being taken for granted, and not valued. As asserted in the introduction section, racism may be unintentional, and this can very well be what the occupational therapy department may be accused of.

5.2.4 ONGOING RESEARCH IS REQUIRED

A new attitude is what is ultimately essential, coupled with reliable tools to furnish the department with qualitatively useful information about the reality of student experiences, and processes for responding efficiently and proactively. What may be also useful is a

device for swift access to an appropriate body for individuals experiencing different forms of injustices in the department. The response to what is learnt from such access is crucial. There must be appropriate actions of recourse and individuals involved must be made aware of its nature.

5.2.5 ACCOMMODATING DIFFERENCE SHOULD BE EXPLICIT

It was also established in the introduction section that it is an assumption of the superiority of one's race, culture, and ethnicity that informs a tendency to regard only one's way of doing things as normal. If the occupational therapy department wants to portray a non-racial stance in its beliefs, approach to learning, and teaching, it needs to clearly and demonstratively embrace a broader definition of what is normal and appropriate in terms of behaviour, ways of relating, and information. Demonstratively is the operative word here.

It is insufficient to assert verbally only that different perspectives are welcome, without them informing structural elements that imply what is valued. An example of such an element is how marks are allocated towards behaviour that as a department, we wish to encourage during professional practice. In saying this it is acknowledged that much needs to be done to redefine what is 'appropriate' in O. T. practice, taking into consideration the community the profession wishes to serve adequately. Equally so, priority in terms of what is assessed, in terms of relationships and occupations, and how these assessments are done, needs to be revisited.

5.2.6. SUPPORTING AN AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY NEEDS

What could also encourage African students to further impact on what is learnt by all is tapping on what these students seem to bring with them to the learning environment; a need to go back to where they come from, to practice. It was asserted earlier that this

might very well be a resource in enhancing the profession's actual feasibility for the community whose needs it hopes to meet. These students can be encouraged to be reflexive to where they come from, by creating space early in their studies for them to share their insights as informed by what they think they are learning in O.T., in the background of where they feel they want to work. Linked to this could be giving students support in selecting and having their electives in a way that they feel will best prepare them for where they will most likely work.

5.2.7. PROVIDING MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP

African students also expressed that they do not feel that they are able to be who they are inside the department, as they are outside. Examples cited pertained to opportunities to take up leadership positions. Something needs to be done regarding participation by these students in the department. Democratic means of selecting student leadership is obviously not working. Perhaps what needs to be done is that more effort should be focussed on allowing students to volunteer, rather than be voted into positions. Terms of running offices can also be shortened to allow for more opportunities.

5.2.8 REVISITING UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS OF THE O.T CURRICULUM

With regard to the tension in becoming professionals for African students, the recommendations already mentioned will partly address this. However a crucial element necessary to deal with this difficulty is seriously revisiting the underlying assumptions that inform the occupational therapy profession, by the department. Care needs to be taken in viewing what is portrayed in continuing to perpetuate the status quo, given its mismatch with what bears reality for the South African majority. What has been expressed by African students is that it may be helpful for there to be more black students in the department. My view is that though this is true, it is not enough. As mentioned

before in the literature section, simply adding numbers of black students, with little change in the learning environment, is recipe for disaster.

Implicit in the current vision* of the O.T. department, is the goal towards achieving a departmental environment that recognises the context in which the profession finds itself. It is clear that the transition toward a transformed curriculum is a high priority and a long-range goal within the basic mission of the department. The head of department initiated this effort, and support and commitment were successfully generated among staff members. What still needs to be done though is introducing means in which underrepresented, and marginalised student experiences become an integral part of the department's central educational mission. A requirement towards this may be a broadly representative fact-finding, policy generating and implementing body. Representativeness in this body should take ethnicity, gender and status in the department, into consideration.

Hunt et al (1992) found that this kind of a committee could serve as a sounding board for black student issues and may help make the appreciation of cultural values and diversity in an organisation a felt priority. This can be done through identifying and generating proposals to deal with recruitment and retention of socially diverse students and establishing a more inclusive curriculum. The main principle guiding this body should be a consensus about what a transformed curriculum should equip a student with. Students should be on the committee, and additional student input could come from interviews with students where they can discuss their experiences in courses and possibly make recommendations for change.

* "A transformed Occupational Therapy service, education and research resource, to match our African context, focused on the achievement of health through occupation".

5.3 LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

The strengths and limitations of the study will be simultaneously tackled, owing to the fact that at times one of them enhanced the other. There are however certain limitations that could not be avoided that may have influenced the outcome, and therefore compromised the study. It is inevitable that my position in the department will have influenced how I interpreted the findings. There could also be certain contextual factors in the department that could help in explaining the findings, which I am blinded to due to a certain level of loyalty to the O.T. department.

During the interviews, students could have felt either limited or obliged into sharing certain information by virtue of my position as a lecturer. The issue of certain participants fearing that there could be repercussions following their participation was mentioned in the method of inquiry section. Although this fear appeared to have been allayed from the level of relaxation noted during interviews, it is not known how much students still held back certain information that could have been useful.

During planning of the data collection, I had decided to leave the choice of language used open for individual participants. The language invariably chosen by each participant was English; inspite instances were I felt the participant could express himself or herself better in their mother tongue. These individuals seemed to want to make it easier for me to conduct the interview. In this way, what was shared could have been constrained.

Having been a minority student in the department at one time, and also the fact that my racial identity is similar to the African participants, it was inevitable that I would influence what was shared, as well as interpret the findings from a particular stance. Although some may argue that this is a limitation, I feel that in a way it made it easier for the issues that arose from the study, to do so, beginning with the actual conception of the

study. My role in the study although mainly being that of a researcher, sometimes veered into that of a participant, where I found myself identifying with experiences or issues that were discussed. This I found to help lower the power discrepancy between the participants, and myself.

In addition, as part of ensuring that the students felt safe in sharing sensitive information, they were assured that care would be taken to let their identities remain unknown. This ultimately meant that a thick description of participants could not be made available. This severely limits possibilities for comparison between findings from this study, and other related studies. This however is not a major limitation, since qualitative research by its nature, is less concerned with generalisation of findings beyond the study sample. Its main requirement is the level of truthfulness in representing information as was shared by the participants. In this study truthfulness was demonstrated by the high degree at which participants agreed with the themes arrived at, during member-checking.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE INQUIRIES

- From what *Bulelani* shared, it was clear that being male brought a certain essence in his experience to becoming an occupational therapist. Given the report constraints of this study, this element was not sufficiently pursued. This is an area worth researching as it is crucial that the O.T profession uncovers barriers that gender difference brings in the pursuit of the profession, which is presently female dominated.
- This research looked at the overall essence of the journey in constituting subjectivities during a professional journey, it is felt by the researcher that sufficient focus on certain elements was lost e.g. the process of sense-making, given a problematic professional journey. This could be pursued in a future study.

- A follow-up study that unravels the sense-making of students with underrepresented ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the department, who have just graduated and are entering the field of occupational therapy as professionals, would uncover the level at which they feel prepared to work with black clients.

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7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

7.1 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Black: In this study, black refers to people of African, Indian and 'mixed' (Referred to as 'Coloured' in South Africa) heritage.

Diversity: Refers to a representation, in a learning environment, of "People with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance" (Cox, 1993, p.6).

Culture: Culture refers to the 'system of knowledge' that is shared by a large group of people. It can be defined as "The system of values, beliefs, shared meanings, norms and traditions that distinguish one group of people from another", and for a particular group, "... is manifested in what members of that group think, believe, understand and do" (Cox, 1993, p. 161).

Ethnicity: Yuval-Davis (1994) describes ethnicity as relating to the politics of collective boundaries, dividing the world into 'us' and 'them' around, often, assumptions of common origin and/or destiny. These are aimed, from specific positionings within the collectivities, at promoting the collectivity or perpetuating its advantages, via access to state and civil society powers. Gender, class, political and other differences may play central roles in the construction of specific ethnic subjectivities.

Eurocentric Approach: This is an approach that "tacitly assumes and focuses on white European perspective and lifestyles (Rowe and MacDonald, 1995, p. 256).

Underrepresented groups: Refers to groups of students whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds are not well represented in the learning environment. The representation of this group in the broader community may be in an inverse proportion.

APPENDIX B

7.2 INVITATIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

7.2.1 First invitation

THIS IS AN INVITATION !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The department of Occupational Therapy at UCT is committed to understanding diversity as well as issues that relate to discrimination. This is partly aimed at developing professionals that are reflective about how their practice is influenced by an awareness of difference in the South African society. As a point of departure for raising awareness about the need to transform as a department, towards an institution that fosters acceptance and a sharing of diverse frames of reference, particularly with regard to ethnic and cultural backgrounds, it is important that we know how we are doing currently. It is with this in mind that a study that looks at the experience of students from under – represented ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the department, was conceived of. **If you perceive yourself as being a student that could enrich what we wish to learn about students whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds are under –represented in the department, please call either of the following numbers:**

4046049 (W)
0826606543 (After hours)

7.2.2 Second invitation

AN INVITATION!!!!!!

This is a follow-up on the invitation on your notice board, to help us as a department, to know a bit more about ourselves. If you believe that you have something to share of your experience as a minority student in the department, come let us have a conversation. Confidentiality on your participation will be maintained at all times.

Elelwani
Tel: (W) 4046049
(Cell) 0826606543