



Selves within Selves on a University Campus: An interdisciplinary perspective on flourishing and social responsibility in a transitional society

Introduction

Many aspects of the self are foregrounded during university. Campus culture engages diverse individuals in novel environments and with new ideas.

Student movements such as #FeesMustFall echo important societal discourses related to social justice, decolonisation, and inequality in a multicultural society.

Interdisciplinary Research Project Aim = to gain insight into how emerging adult students flourish in a fast-transforming and decolonising society while they negotiate various aspects of the self.

Using an interdisciplinary lens to:

- appreciate the complexity of human experience
- gain a true understanding of interrelated identity domains
- address contemporary social challenges in an interrelated world

The Research Team = An interdisciplinary, interfaculty, and intercampus team, representing various knowledge areas.



Prof. Luzelle Naudé
Psychology



Dr. Merlene Esau
Social Work



Prof. Diana Breshears
Communication Science



Rentia Engelbrecht
Communication Science



Israel Mawoyo
Teaching and Learning



Dr. Wilbert Joseph Gobbo
Philosophy and Theology



Francois Naudé
Psychology

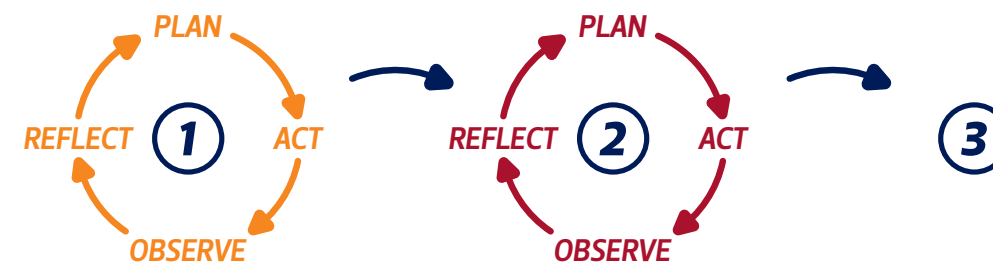


Dr. Catherine Mkaleso Shirima
Psychology

Methods

An Action Research Project

- Cycle 1 (2022–2023): An explorative, descriptive qualitative study embedded in a social constructionist paradigm
- Cycle 2 (2023–2024): An equal-weight, longitudinal mixed-methods study



The interdisciplinary team actively collaborated in all research phases



A Participatory Peer Design: Co-researchers = postgrad students.

- Participants felt more comfortable sharing in-depth experiences with peers
- Novice researchers received exposure and training in research



Paballo Seseli, Zandile Nxele, Kutloano Molumo, Elam Lami, Zandile Viti, Lerato Sokhaya, Kgabo Mphela, Boitumelo Sehlabaka, Keneilwe Chologi, Mpho Tsiloane, Mapaseka Tlaetsi, and Phelokazi Gili

Preliminary Findings from Specific Research Clusters

Students' voices were prioritised using:

- Reflections on identity artifacts
- More than 80 individual interviews, from five interview schedules
- Eight follow-up focus group discussions
- 14 Nominal group discussions
- Google Forms Surveys

First-generation student identity negotiations

A new identity for self and family: I am the one who will represent my family... this has even given us a title ... People who had given up on my family are now inspired ... I finally made it they are looking up to me, as a new breadwinner... you are going to change the situation and upgrade us

Practical Spirituality

Between Western and African cosmologies: I believe both in God and also in my ancestors... I believe in God because he was there before my ancestors. But at the same time, my ancestors are also looking after me and protecting in everything that's happening.

Financial Wellbeing

Money doesn't define me: It's not about money, but passion. Dreaming of a "Soft Life": If I study now the future looks more brighter ... I just have to get rid of the obstacles in the mid-way in order for me to get to that bright side... someday I also wanna drive a Benz...

Cultural Rites of Passage

During my initiation, I realised the strength that I have as a black woman ... It made me realise that as a black female, I have so much power, and I am big.

The way forward

- Research project can contribute to the production of knowledge that is engaged, interdisciplinary, and contextual.
- Ideas from various disciplinary fields will facilitate a deeper understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon of emerging adult identity in an understudied society.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration facilitated the establishment of partnerships across departments/centres/faculties/campuses, consolidating future endeavours and securing funding for establishing an interdisciplinary research hub.

For more information, contact: **Luzelle Naudé**, University of the Free State, South Africa, naudel@ufs.ac.za

www.ufs.ac.za

Inspiring excellence, transforming lives through quality, impact, and care.