**Addressing Dualisms in student perceptions of a historically white and black university in**

**South Africa**

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Abstract

Normative discourses about higher education institutions may perpetuate stereotypes about institutions. Few studies explore student perceptions of universities and how transformative pedagogical interventions in university classrooms may address institutional stereotypes. Using Plumwood's notion of dualism, this qualitative study analyses unchallenged stereotypes about students' own and another university during an inter-institutional collaborative research and teaching and learning project. The project was conducted over 3 years and 282 psychology, social work and occupational therapy students from a historically black and white institution in South Africa, participated in the study. Both black and white students from differently placed higher education institutions display prejudices and stereotypes of their own and other institutions, pointing to the internalization and pervasiveness of constructions and hegemonic discourses such as whiteness and classism. It is important to engage with subjugated student

1

knowledges in the context of transformative pedagogical practices, to disrupt dominant views

and cultivate processes of inclusion in higher education.

Keywords: dualisms, higher education, inclusion, transformative pedagogies, South Africa

**Introduction**

The question of how to implement anti-racist interventions in higher education remains a

pertinent global issue. In South Africa, national documents such as the Ministerial Committee on

Transformation and Social Cohesion (Department of Education 2008) and the Report on the

Summit on Higher Education (2010) foreground the importance of diversity and inclusion in the

higher education sector with reference to race, gender and class. Transformation charters of

universities such as Stellenbosch University (SU), and the University of the Western Cape

(UWC) are additional and specific institutional documents that refer to visions for diversity on

specific South African campuses. In spite of this component being enshrined in these national

(DHET, 2010) and institutional policy frameworks (SU and UWC), little literature exists about

engaging in dialogue about difference from a student perspective in higher education (HE)

institutions (Cross and Johnson 2007; Denson & Chang 2009; Jansen 2009; McKinney 2004,

2005, 2007), although some literature exists on this topic in school contexts (Hemson, 2006;

Stoughton and Siverton 2005; Soudien 2012). The literature that does exist on engagement with

difference in HE contexts, typically focuses on particular institutions (Cross & Johnson, 2008;

Robus and MacLeod, 2006; Steyn & Van Zyl, 1999) with few studies focusing on students

engaging in dialogue about difference *across* universities, especially in pedagogical contexts

2

(Leibowitz et al, 2012). This is significant as social constructions (Burr 1995; Gergen 2003) and hegemonic discourses of higher education institutions have implications for the perpetuation of stereotypes about institutions and consequently, the relative value that students place upon their own and other institutions. Existing literature furthermore draws on a range of theoretical perspectives; discursive and critical race theory (Robus & MacLeod, 2006; Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001), conceptual frames of campus membership that draw on Nancy Fraser's cultural recognition (1997), agency and Bourdieu's habitus (1986). Few theoretical orientations focus specifically on dualisms and dynamics inherent in dualisms that appear central to normative thinking about difference.

As a group of South African higher educators, we were concerned about the history of minimal inter--professional and inter---institutional engagement between students from psychology, social work and occupational therapy (human service professions), particularly across historically advantaged/white institutions such as Stellenbosch University (SU) and disadvantaged/black universities such as the University of theWestern Cape (UWC) . Students from these two universities rarely have opportunities to engage with each other. We designed a collaborative teaching and learning project to develop an inter-institutional engagement space. Before students commenced the course, only 25% of them had visited each others' universities in spite of the universities being geographically close. We perceived the lack of engagement across institutions as having negative consequences for teaching and learning, as students and educators have limited opportunities to experience and explore difference in relation to themselves, others, their curricula, disciplines and institutions. In the absence of such plurality of perspectives, inter-

3

--institutional and interdisciplinary dualisms remain unchallenged.

In this article we examine how the notion of dualism may be relevant for thinking about issues of difference in higher education, with specific reference to UWC and Stellenbosch student perceptions about the Universities of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch. We contend that the characteristics of dualism outlined by the feminist philosopher Val Plumwood (1993; 2002) may be helpful in attempting to challenge or address dualisms and issues of subjugated constructions of universities among students *in* pedagogical contexts.

Current literature in international and South African contexts that explore student perceptions of universities focus on experiences of teaching and learning (Bartram and Bailey 2009; Ruohoniemi and Lindblom-Ylänne 2008), especially during the first year (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews and Nordstrom 2009; James, Krause and Jennings 2010; Leibowitz et al. 2009 ). There is also a body of literature which may be considered to fall into the neoliberal discourse of 'climate surveys' (Brown & Mazzarol 2009) that assesses popularity of universities and the potential that universities have to attract students as paying clients and consumers (Ancis, Sedlacek and Mohr 2011; Brown and Mazzarol 2009). Very little literature engages with students' understanding and engagement in dialogue about difference, especially as it relates to students' perceptions of universities (Cross and Johnson 2008). Student perceptions are important to consider as they are likely to reflect normative assumptions about universities, which may affect student decisions about further study, their self-conceptions and their anticipated career trajectories. Both structural contexts and associated discourses about higher

4

education provide contexts for stereotyping and associated dualisms to arise and it is therefore important to consider how dualisms may frame student perceptions of their own and others' institutions.

**Contexts: differentiation in South African HE**

The higher education sector, like other levels of education has been, and continues to be, deeply affected by its apartheid past. Before the democratic dispensation in 1994, the South African higher education system was largely constructed as being divided into either historically advantaged or white institutions (HAIs/HWUs) or historically disadvantaged or black higher education institutions (HDIs/HBUs). Subsequent to this, during the period of 2000 - 2005, the 36 higher education institutions in South Africa were merged and developed into a stratified and differentiated higher education system of 23 higher education institutions in 2012 (Cooper 2015). The two institutions which are focused on in this paper are a historically white advantaged institution and a historically black and disadvantaged institution in the Western Cape region of South Africa that were excluded from these mergers. The higher education institutions in South Africa are now classified as 11 universities, 6 comprehensive universities offering a mixture of traditional and vocational programmes and, 6 universities of technology (Bozalek and Boughey 2012; Cooper 2015). More recent research has identified three differentiated groups of institutions characterised by patterns of inputs and outputs of research and postgraduate students. It is marked that the top five of these differentiated institutions are previously historically white or advantaged institutions and that the bottom eleven are either merged universities of technology or previous historically disadvantaged institutions, continuing the legacies of

research and postgraduate outputs that were initiated in the apartheid era  (Bozalek and Boughey 2012). Thus the effects of apartheid in terms of the governance and  resources available to differently categorised institutions continue into the current era. In addition, black students who can both afford to study at HAIs and who meet the more stringent academic standards tend to choose to study at HAIs while working class students who don't meet the academic requirements study at HDIs. This has resulted in many institutions remaining predominantly monocultural in terms of race and class categories with little communication between students and staff from these institutions.  The description of the higher education context shows how South African higher education institutions are still marked by dualistic thinking (and structures) along racialised and class faultlines.

Essentialist conceptualisations of difference regarding race, class and gender are based on dualisms. Plumwood (1993; 2002) argues that central to the construction of dualism is the idea of two polar opposites, which are hierarchised. One pole is always inferior to the other and the other represents the desirable norm with no possibility of continuity or mutuality between these two sides (Bacchi 2007; Plumwood 1993; 2002). Plumwood distinguishes five characteristics of dualisms; backgrounding, radical exclusion, incorporation, instrumentalism  and homogenisation which may be used in conjunction with each other as mechanisms to reinforce superiority or inferiority. Dualism is evident, for example in Ladson-Billings' (2009) notions of conceptual whiteness and blackness where structural privilege and disadvantage are embedded in everyday discourses of conceptual whiteness  Here objects, practices and institutions associated with whiteness are normatively considered excellent and desirable; in this case universities. The

6

converse is conceptual blackness where institutions and practices associated with blackness are normatively considered to be mediocre and less desirable. Plumwood suggests a number of mechanisms that enable dualism and the entrenchment of difference that benefits structural superiority. *Backgrounding* (also referred to as denial) entails making use of the other to service one's own needs but denying dependence on the other – what Joan Tronto (1993; 2013) refers to as 'privileged irresponsibility'. *Radical exclusion* (also referred to as hyperseparation) occurs where the  differences between the inferiorised and superior groups are maximised and essentialised, and where shared qualities are minimised. This is evident in constructions of white institutions as excellent and internationally competitive whereas black institutions are considered mediocre and not internationally competitive (Robus & MacLeod, 2006). These perceptions are promoted through physical and geographical separation of groups, as was achieved through the Group Areas Act during the apartheid era, which continues to impact on where people live  and what resources they have access to. This also applies to access to higher education institutions in South Africa (DHET 2013). *Incorporation* defines the inferior side of the duality as inessential and the superior side as the reference point, whose qualities are the primary. The resulting misrecognition erodes opportunities for mutuality or equal relationships. I*nstrumentalism* (objectification) is a form of objectification where  those on the inferior side are not recognised as having their own needs. Empathy for the other is non-existent and the other is only useful in terms of meeting the needs of the dominant group.  *Homogenisation* (stereotyping) occurs when differences within the inferiorised group are disregarded and they are all seen as the same. All students from a particular university or profession may be regarded as similarly inferior or superior, their differences are minimised and they are regarded as interchangeable with each

7

other.

  Therefore, in spite of formal desegregation, an informal spatial segregation  between and within

institutions, remains in South African higher education. Given the stark dualisms evident in these

normative constructions of institutions and the people that inhabit them, it is crucial to

deconstruct and add complexity to commonsense understandings of difference, when considering

anti-racist interventions.


Our project set out to challenge or address these dualisms by providing spaces and planning

activities where students across multiple differences could come together and share everyday

experiences and political histories. Even though numerous theories have been employed to

discuss student perceptions of universities, Plumwood's notion of dualism highlights core

essentialisms in dualistic thinking. We provided opportunities for face-to-face contact and

working together, we aimed to provide opportunities for students to engage in human exchanges

where the uniqueness and individuality of each person could be valued and where they would see

each other as having legitimate needs. We hoped that students would be able to acknowledge

their interdependence on each  other's institutions and professions by recognizing their value.

We furthermore anticipated that the recognition may assist students in reimagining aspects of

their identities in the light of their experiences of difference.


**Methods**

We embarked on a teaching and learning research project across two HEIs – the University of

the Western Cape (UWC), a historically disadvantaged or black institution serving a largely

8

working class student group (Breier 2010) and Stellenbosch University, (SU) an historically white or advantaged institution serving a largely middle class student group and across three human service disciplines in the Western Cape. The team consisted of educators in psychology, social work, occupational therapy and teaching and learning professionals. Plumwood (1993) notes that both continuity and difference have to be dealt with to overcome the dualistic dynamic. We thought about how best to provide opportunities for students to encounter each other intersubjectively by giving them opportunities to illuminate their histories, realities and their needs to attempt mutual recognition – experiencing each other as both similar and different. We used various mechanisms to do this – PLA techniques, online discussions, performances by artists and poets, critical literature, group presentations, and reflective essays. We ran this course over a period of six weeks, annually, for three years (2006, 2007 and 2008) and a total of 282 students were involved over the entire period. The assessment was continuous and multi-faceted. Student engagement in small online groups of about 6 members, group presentations as well as reflective essays were assessed by trained facilitators. Rubrics were used in defining assessments criteria clearly (Leibowitz et al. 2012).  Even though the project was not initially set up to specifically examine student perceptions of each others' and their own universities, strong views about the two universities emerged from student engagements and was deemed worthy of analysis, given the stark evidence of dualisms. In this article we focus only on UWC and US students' constructions of their own and the other institution in a worksheet assignment which was set for them in the Community Self and Identity course. We analysed 157 students' responses to a worksheet given to them in 2007 and 2008 where two of the questions that they were asked were the following: *What did you learn about your [own] institution in your*

9

*encounter at the workshop?* (our insertion) and *What did you learn about the other institution at the workshop (Stellenbosch or UWC)?*

See Table 1 below for a breakdown of the disciplines, and gender, 'race'[1] and home language of the students.

Table 1: Demographic information of all CSI students (N=282)

| | Year | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Discipline | Psychology | 41 | 14 | 13 | 68 | 24.1 |
| | Social Work | 50 | 44 | 54 | 148 | 52.5 |
| | Occupational Therapy | N/A | 44 | 22 | 66 | 23.4 |
| Gender | Female | 78 | 93 | 77 | 248 | 87.9 |
| | Male | 13 | 9 | 12 | 34 | 12.1 |
| Race | African | 19 | 30 | 36 | 85 | 30.1 |
| | Coloured | 43 | 58 | 35 | 136 | 48.2 |
| | White | 29 | 14 | 6 | 49 | 17.4 |
| | Indian | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0.7 |

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[1] The apartheid racial classifications of African, Coloured, White and Indian are still currently referred to in South Africa in official documentation, although it is generally recognised that these are contested and constructed categories.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not specified | 0 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 3.6 |
| Language | African | 17 | 30 | 30 | 77 | 27.3 |
| | Afrikaans | 46 | 22 | 16 | 84 | 29.8 |
| | English | 28 | 50 | 41 | 119 | 42.2 |
| | Other | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1.1 |
| Total | | 91 | 102 | 89 | 282 | 100 |

**Findings and discussion**

**Examples of dualistic perceptions of universities**

**Perceptions of Stellenbosch**

The most common perceptions of Stellenbosch University by UWC students are that it is a racist, Afrikaans, white, elite institution that maintains high quality and academic excellence, and where students worked very hard. The following four quotes are emblematic of many of the quotes reflecting perceptions of Stellenbosch University:

we have heard that they are racist, and that their standards are high. We assume that most of the students are 'white'. they have a lot of resources that we do not have. They are very expensive, but the quality is good (UWC black social work female student, 2008).

I know that Stellenbosch is regarded as an elite university; one of the best in this country. It also consists of mainly white Afrikaans students (UWC black social work female

11

student, 2008)

They are hardworking, racist and do more work than us, They have far more resources than we do (UWC black social work female student, 2008).

It seems that Stellenbosch University is attended by predominantly White people mostly Afrikaans-speaking. Although there are other races and cultures that attend, it seems that each culture tends to group together in friendship circles with few cross-culture "cliques"(UWC black occupational therapy female, 2007).

These quotes all use incorporation and radical exclusion in students' dualistic perceptions of the Stellenbosch university. While not always flattering of SU (for example the reference to racism), there is a deferential status ascribed to the university suggesting incorporation. SU is regarded as excellent and students are perceived to be hardworking. In contrast the perception is created that students at UWC are not hardworking which implicitly reinforces negative perceptions of UWC. Similarly, structural issues such as access to resources and historical material privilege is mentioned in relation to Stellenbosch University being well resourced when compared to UWC. The maintenance of historical material privilege in historically white universities, when compared to historically black universities in contemporary South Africa, is consistently debated with calls to national government for reforms in funding policies for higher education that recognise and address current inequity (Bozalek and Boughy 2012). Radical exclusion is also used as a mechanism to emphasise dualisms. Differences between the institutions are highlighted

12

with little emphasis on commonalities, whether perceived or real.

Similarly, perceptions of UWC were coloured by dualisms from both UWC and SU students. Common perceptions of UWC were both complementary and denigrating, these two perspectives often co-existing within the same quote. Perceptions about UWC as offering a poor quality education and events being disorganised, were common. Students also thought that UWC offered students an opportunity to be educated in a culturally diverse setting and that the fact that it is an English medium university made the institution more universally accessible.  The question of language is central to current debates on inclusion and enabling an anti-racist University in South Africa. At a university like Stellenbosch University, Afrikaans is the primary language of communication, alongside English. The language policy states that Stellenbosch aims to be a multi-lingual university. In practice Afrikaans is dominant and still ensures that the university remains predominantly white and retards racial integration as Afrikaans as a language of higher education is highly racialised. This is an ongoing and complex debate and it is beyond the scope of this article to engage fully with the issue of language in higher education. Suffice to say that it is not as much the language as it is white Afrikaans cultural domination that accompanies the language, that diverts even Black first language Afrikaans speakers, to an  English medium university, such as UWC.

Perceptions of UWC

The UWC students were conscious of their university not always being regarded as organised

13

and as an institution of quality and indicated their feelings of relief when the workshop was

perceived to be conducted in a professional way:

> I learned that I can feel proud to be studying at the University of the Western Cape. It is
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> often the perception from students from other Universities that the education that we
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> receive at UWC can't possibly be as good as other Universities. During the first
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> workshop at our University I felt that our students and lecturers were very professional
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> and well spoken. I particularly felt proud when (lecturer's name) gave her lecture. I
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> thought that it was very good, easy to understand and clear.

> The day was also well organized (something that can't always be said of UWC) and
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> everything was done to make the other students and the guest lecturers feel at home. The
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> fact that there was something to eat and drink was also very thoughtful. I feel proud to be
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> part of the multi-cultural environment that we have at UWC and feel that this is an
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> advantage that other students do not necessarily have. It is a great learning experience to
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> be exposed to so many different cultures and different ways of thinking. The fact that we
>
> are an English medium University also helps to make us more universal. (black, female,
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> 2007, UWC, SW).

UWC students also commonly and proudly described their university as multi-cultural and as an

English medium university, emphasising its universality. In this moment of pride, UWC students

use radical exclusion to highlight the differences between them and Stellenbosch University,

suggesting that Stellenbosch, as an institution, is monocultural, Afrikaans, and local with little

global appeal as a perceived Afrikaans language institution. Their quality judgements and pride

are complex as their radical exclusion of UWC draws on false but commonsense internalised

racialized discourses about white competence and Black incompetence to symbolise institutional

quality. Drawing on racialized discourses is common when making decisions or judgements in

everyday life in South Africa (Stevens, Duncan and Hook, 2013). At the same time, the

discourse of multi-culturalism is drawn on with pride and is viewed as beneficial by students.

The notion of multi-culturalism is controversial and cannot be discussed fully here. However, the

students use multi-culturalism as a positive institutional attribute. This is interesting because

UWC is not racially diverse as a predominantly Black institution, but is diverse in terms of

religious, ethnic and language diversity. Students draw on common racialised euphemisms of

culture as Blackness when they use multi-culturalism as a positive institutional attribute. They

believe that multi-culturalism will help them to work in integrated work settings, that is, work

settings where there are also Black people,  after qualification (Carolissen, 2012).


On the other hand, many Stellenbosch students indicated a more derisory attitude towards UWC

and also towards the higher education institution next door to UWC - the Cape Peninsula

University of Technology (CPUT), also indicating that they did not know much about the

institution:

      I know that it's in Bellville and that its acronym is also known as the University of Wild

Coloureds[2] and that Trevor Manuel[3] used to study there (Stellenbosch white psychology student; 2008)

Honestly I don't know much about UWC. But I would love to learn more. I think its situated somewhere in the Bellville area? (White psychology Stellenbosch student; 2008)

… a university where tuition was exorbitantly high, a well resourced university, and one where residential students enjoyed more space than our 3x3 dormitory rooms had to offer. Thus, persons who gained entry to an institution such as Stellenbosch not only had to meet strict academic standards, a coherent feature shared by our university, but also had to pay a huge sum of money in registration and tuition fees, a parameter I regard as flagrantly exclusionary (UWC black female social work student).

In these quotes, students use radical exclusion by claiming little knowledge about the other institution, minimising their apparent interest in the institution. The use of the terminology 'Wild Coloureds' in the first quote is also indicative of radical exclusion where the Other is inferiorised, and differences between the students at UWC are maximised and essentialised. There is also a level of homogenisation in this response as all 'coloured' people associated with UWC are regarded in the same light - from 'Wild Coloureds' to the then Minister of Finance. In the last quote by a UWC student, the relative wealth and resources such as space which SU has access to and the high fees which are charged, make the institution, as viewed by the student, deny access to those who do not have resources. The class based denial of access to higher education,

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[2] UWC, the University of the Western Cape is derogatorily referred to as the University of the Wild Coloureds.
[3] The ex-Minister of Finance from 1996-2009 during the presidencies of Mandela, Mbeki and Motlante.

because of material privilege, is one of the core issues highlighted in the #Feesmustfall student

protest movement that gained momentum in South Africa and internationally, during 2015.

> UWC is in Bellville, next to CAPUT (Pentech)[4]. It is a University that has much cheaper
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> fees than Stellenbosch. I would have considered going to UWC had their degrees been
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> recognised internationally. There are majority 'black' and 'coloured' students attending
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> UWC (White Stellenbosch Psychology student, 2008).

In the quote above the mechanisms of incorporation are evident - as UWC is placed together

with CPUT which is referred to in a derogatory manner (CAPUT). UWC is regarded with

scepticism, as not having the capacity to offer degrees which are internationally competitive, and

as accommodating mainly black students (radical exclusion) by implicitly highlighting the

differences between this institution and the one that the student is from (SU). It is crucial to

highlight that student mobility and employability in South Africa based on the institution where

the degree was obtained is a complex one. UWC is one of the top historically Black institutions

in South Africa in terms of teaching and learning and research productivity. Degrees from UWC

are internationally recognised but it is a common experience in South Africa, though not well

researched, that the everyday discourse of white competence and Black incompetence transfer to

institutions like universities and therefore impacts on choice of university, for those who can

choose which university to attend.  These discourses also impact on potential employers and

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[4] The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) is referred to as CAPUT (from the German word "kaputt"), in a derogatory manner, which means "useless, broken, dead, no longer functioning" in colloquial terms. It was known as the Peninsula Technikon, shortened to Pentech before 1994. Before 1994, technikons were perceived to offer technical, applied professional training and issued diplomas. After 1994, the role of technikons changed so that they became Universities of Technology that conferred degrees.

17

most Black students are keenly aware of the intersection of the racialized nature of employment opportunities and the university where the degree was obtained. The intersection of race, class, and institutional affiliation adds more complexity too as black graduates from historically white universities appear to be preferred to black graduates from historically black universities. However, white graduates, and especially white women, are given preferential treatment in appointments and promotions as they are the greatest beneficiaries of affirmative action policies (Department of Labour 2014).

The analysis of students' quotes using Plumwood's characteristics of dualism in this section of the paper shows how both UWC and Stellenbosch students hold dualistic and often derogatory views of their own (in the case of UWC) and the other institution but also how complex deeply racialized discourses and practices matter in terms of institutional choice for study and its intersections with race, class and gender.

A very small minority of students' views about the other institution were not changed. In the case of two students, their original beliefs were entrenched. They believed that Stellenbosch University was more organised than UWC, that mostly white, Afrikaans speaking students attended Stellenbosch university, irrespective of their experiences to the contrary. Three students raised new issues at the end of the module that were not initially highlighted. These ranged from learning about the political and activist history of UWC, of which they were not aware, learning that UWC is geographically more isolated from shops than Stellenbosch University, that the majority of UWC students use public transport to travel to university and that UWC students' boyfriends were typically not university students. This was apparently not the case for

18

Stellenbosch students.

The majority of students' dualistic perceptions of institutions were changed during pedagogical encounters. These are discussed below.

**Addressing dualisms**

Many students challenged their own dualistic perceptions through their participation in the course. They were asked how they viewed their own and the other institution at the end of the course and re-evaluated their dualistic perceptions based on experiences with students from the other university.  Some students' feedback suggested a complete reframing of their views while others indicated a more nuanced reframing of views. The following quotes show how students changed their views about Stellenbosch University being an exclusively Afrikaans university and that UWC was a "place of quality, a place to grow"

> I always thought it was an Afrikaans institution and that all of their lectures are given in Afrikaans but I came to know that there are also English lectures given since the girl in the group was an exchange student and she can only speak English (UWC, SW, 2007, black F)

The quote suggests that the student's assumption about language at Stellenbosch was reframed when she met a student who was studying at SU and could speak only English. Similarly, the quote below suggests a complete reframing in the students' interactions with students from Stellenbosch university

> I got a different view from the students at the Stellenbosch university as it was usually

19

described as a very racist university. I discovered that stereotypes can influence your

perceptions about something. By engaging with the students I realised that we are all

individuals and that we should make decisions on what we experience. It was wonderful

engaging with the students from the different departments and Stellenbosch University. It

also taught me about diversity and how important relationship building is between

students who have to one day go out into the field. (Social work, black female, 2007,

UWC)

Some students, such as the SU student in the quote below reframed his perceptions of UWC,

based on his lived experience during the course. It is interesting though how this student, as an

ex-UWC student appeared to begrudgingly accede to the possibility that UWC should be viewed

as an excellent institution as well. When complimenting UWC, he uses a very derogatory term

"bush" that was a very popular derogatory name for UWC among some sectors, especially prior

to the 1980s (Lalu & Murray, 2013)


Well I learnt that UWC is not as bad as I had thought it was, last year I was there and I had

no idea that their KEWL[5] programme was this advanced. for me that was a shock for in

my years having been at bush I had developed a negative attitude towards the institution,

needless to say these thoughts were completely removed upon this workshop, because for

the first time UWC showed me that indeed it's a quality place of education. for this it gets

two thumbs up (Stellenbosch, Psychology, black, M, 2007).

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[5] KEWL - is the e-learning platform that was being used by UWC at the time

The following quote also shows how a UWC student recognises how distancing and inferiorisation are central to his constructions of UWC and Stellenbosch but that his views are "unfounded". He does though, identify differences in interactional dynamics between students from SU and UWC, thus suggesting that there are instances of dualistic thinking that are unwarranted but others that are not

I'm sure that there's a tacit (though erroneous) belief (which I too am guilty of) amongst my classmates that institutions such as UCT and Stellenbosch are generally regarded as superior to UWC, which in hindsight is a totally unfounded notion. To be quite honest, the initial thought of being grouped with students from Stellenbosch was a bit frightening. However, the fear of being overwhelmed by Stellenbosch and thoughts of "Little old us (UWC Social Work students)" soon dissipated after initial greetings and getting to know one another a bit better…...... For example, after sharing our community maps with one another, it became clear that the White students in our group were significantly more privileged than the Black and 'Coloured' students. The White students also seemed to be more individualistic or independent than the rest of the students at our table, where fond references to family and community were more common amongst the Black and Coloured students as opposed to the White students, who both lived independently of their parents (Stellenbosch, Psychology, black,M, 2007).

This nuanced reframing highlighted in the quote above is further supported by another UWC

student

My perception however changed as the initial workshop progressed. Students from our

institution, particularly the social work students contributed quite meaningfully

throughout the workshop and also seemed more keen to participate during group

activities and when providing feedback. Moreover, a striking feature of the students of

my institution and that of Stellenbosch, was that we seemed to be a more culturally and

racially diverse group than they were. This feature I believe led to our feeling more

comfortable engaging members from both my own group as well as the larger group, as

the students from UWC were accustomed to working in groups where members varied

along lines of race, language, culture, and gender … (UWC black female social work

student).

The data suggest that students initially enacted dualisms through the mechanisms of radical

exclusion, incorporation and homogenisation that exist in a complex structural intersectional web

of race, language, class and institutional affiliation. There was little evidence of backgrounding

and instrumentalism in the data that we presented in this paper, though these mechanisms were

evident in other data collected during the broader study. Previous studies also primarily indicated

radical exclusion as commonplace among university students (Robus & MacCleod, 2006; Steyn

& Van Zyl, 2001).

Radical exclusion was addressed by bringing students together who had not interacted due to the

continuing legacy of apartheid and its geographical separation. This is still being played out in

higher education contexts and in everyday social encounters. By deliberately organising groups of differently positioned (HEI and social identities) students together, the course designers provided opportunities for students to encounter 'the other'. The use of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) techniques was necessary to facilitate dialogue and engagement about issues of difference among students. When doing drawings about their experiences and then discussing these experiences, students were able to participate in dialogue on an equal footing. The fact that students, due to the apartheid geographical divides, were physically separated from each other, initially supported well entrenched stereotypes about each others' institutions. Even though all students are still experiencing the legacy and the associated materiality of Apartheid, the visceral experience of visiting each others' institutions in this curriculum renewal project minimised the mechanism of radical exclusion.

The mechanism of incorporation was also addressed as all students were able to interrogate their own identities and assumptions through hearing about the experiences of marginalisation of the racialized, gendered, classed and institutionalised Other. This provided the opportunity to develop a consciousness of relationships of privilege and domination which still affect relationships between privileged and marginalized positionalities of students in the South African context. Student interrogation of their personal and institutional identities helped them to reframe some of their stereotypical assumptions in relation to their own and the other institution.

Through face-to-face encounters with each other and hearing about the effects of past and present inequalities and injustices on the lives of their peers, homogenisation as a mechanism,

23

was also challenged. All students were given the opportunity to witness the uniqueness and individuality of those who have been othered. They therefore had the opportunity to see "the other" as human, non-homogenous and as individuals with different life and political trajectories. In their responses to hearing the stories of their peers, it was apparent that those who were privileged realized, perhaps for the first time, the complexities of the South African situation with its apartheid legacy which still affects the lives of their fellow students. They became acutely aware of the needs of people they had hitherto been oblivious of. Marginalized students also realized that those in privileged positions did not exemplify good and perfect qualities only, but were individuals who also had vulnerabilities.

**Conclusion**

All previous studies concerned with student perceptions of South African HE institutions are located within specific cases of particular South African institutions. This study draws on inter-institutional student perceptions derived from dialogue and pedagogical engagement, located within ongoing complex dominant discourses about HE. We have argued the importance of Plumwood's notion of dualisms as an appropriate conceptual framework for this study and that both black and white students from these differently placed HEIs initially maintained their distance from each other institutionally. They did this largely through the mechanisms of radical exclusion, incorporation and homogenisation. They displayed racialised and classed constructions of their own and the other institution, pointing to the internalisation and pervasiveness of hegemonic discourses about higher education institutions. Stellenbosch, the historically white institution was consistently associated with excellence, quality and international stature, while this was not initially a perception of UWC. This finding echoes the

24

work of Robus & MacCleod (2006), Steyn & Van Zyl (2001) and Cross & Johnson (2008).

Following the collaborative educational experience, many, though not all students, were able to

reconstitute for themselves the way in which their institutions and own subjectivities were

constructed in relation to their own and the other institution. The fact that a small minority of

students were not able to gain insight into their positionalities in relation to others, is not a

shortcoming of the course. It is a deeply political and emotional question central to a pedagogy

of discomfort (Boler 1999; Boler and Zembylas 2003) that we have used as transformative

pedagogical strategy in this course. The core assumption of a pedagogy of discomfort is that

many of us (teachers and students) are emotionally invested in protecting ourselves from that

which we do not want to know and which makes us uncomfortable. Pedagogical interventions

using this strategy require difficult emotional labour from facilitators and students. Facilitators

need to develop a facilitation style that affirms curiosity about silenced and emotionally charged

conversations about privilege and oppression in the context of the curriculum (see Bozalek et al,

2010 for detailed description of the methodologies).  In order to disrupt dominant discourses, it is

important to engage with hegemonic views in the context of transformative pedagogical practices

as opposed to avoiding its importance in the classroom. Many students who had done this course,

acknowledged in an 18 months post completion evaluation, that the benefits of engagement

across multiple boundaries and insight into their own positionalities, were much clearer after

they had left the module, had opportunities for further reflection and had entered the workplace

(Carolissen, 2012). In order to disrupt dominant discourses, it is important to provide

collaborative spaces to engage with student stereotypes about institutions that, in divided and

unequal societies like South Africa, are inherently racialized, gendered and classed, and part of

25

institutional cultures.  These kinds of engagements are crucial for cultivating democratic

processes of citizenship and transformation of institutional cultures in HE, an issue of global

concern.

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27

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**Disclosure statement**

31