SOCIAL IDENTITIES OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN FIRST-YEAR FEMALE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Social identity refers to that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from the individual’s knowledge that she belongs to certain social groups, together with the emotional and value significance attached to each membership. Changes in post-apartheid South Africa bring to question the influence thereof on the social identities of Black South African first-year female students. The impact of the changing social context on the process of identity construction is therefore considered. The aim of this qualitative research is to explore and describe the emerging social identities of Black South African first-year female students. Information rich participants were purposively selected. The question, “How do you see yourself in your social relationships?” was posed during focus group interviews. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed and analysed using Tesch’s descriptive analysis technique. Centering on group memberships, which constitute the social identities of these participants, the following themes emerged from the data analysis: membership of a family, membership of a peer group, membership of first year female university students, membership of a particular cultural group and membership of society at large. The recommendations in line with these themes could facilitate identity construction and interaction within a multi-cultural society.

Keywords: Social identities, first-year female, Black South African, qualitative research

Résumé

L’identité sociale fait allusion à la partie de l’image de soi-même que l’individu développe en fonction de sa conscience du fait qu’elle appartient à certains groupes sociaux, ainsi que de l’importance émotionnelle et morale qu’elle attache à cette appartenance. Les changements survenants dans la nou-

Mots clés: identités sociales, étudiante de première année, Sud-Africaine noire, recherche qualitative

Introduction and Rationale for the Research

World wide, the role of women in society is changing. The transformation of women’s consciousness and of societal values in most societies, according to Castells (1997:136), has been phenomenal in the last three decades and it has fundamental consequences for the entire human experience, from political power to the structure of personality. Contributing to this transformation is the transformation of the economy and of the labour market, in close association with the opening of educational opportunities for women; technological transformation in biology, pharmacology and medicine that has allowed a growing control over child-bearing; patriarchism has been affected by the development of the feminist movement and the rapid diffusion of ideas in a globalized culture, and in an interrelated world. Since 1994, in South Africa, major political, social and economic changes have been and still are occurring (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997:250), affecting changes in the social lives of all its inhabitants. Such changes in society have major implications for women, impacting too on emerging identities, seeing that in all societies the process of identity construction is tied to the historical moment (Freeman, 1993:161).

This necessitates a re-evaluation of the conceptualisation of identities of women, which is in line with Magubane’s view (in Agenda, 1997:17) that the issue of identity has moved from the periphery of academic discourse and concern to the centre and has begun to (and should) be seriously debated. Kutin (in Agenda, 1997:22) believes that it is necessary to deal with women as
existing in multiple spaces and who have to forge complex positions and identities as a consequence. Mama (1995) is in agreement when she states that inherent ambiguities and contradictions exist when people inhabit a space of multiplicity, and that in a society like South Africa, comfort with ambiguity, dissonance, hybridity and difference is important.

The above rationale provides the background for the theoretical framework in which this research will be placed. A postmodernist view of identity suggests multiple selves (Steyn & Hay, 1999:121) or a plurality of identities (Calhoun, 1994). Gergen (1991:7, 83) believes that a person exists in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction, and that each self contains a multiplicity of others. He (Gergen 1995:366) suggests that the selves are constructed relationally, as temporary, partial and flexible emergents created within diverse social interactions. Accordingly, Erikson (1968) believes that the social environment and the interaction with significant others such as parents, family groups and membership groups, affect the construction of identity. Silverman (1996:261) sees these socially constructed selves as context-dependent. Identities, including social identities, from a postmodernist perspective, are viewed as realities constructed in the interactive moment, according to Mc Namee (in Grodin & Lindlof, 1996:149).

Of particular importance to this research is the Social Identity Theory (SIT) of Tajfel (1981). The SIT is based on particular meta-theoretical assumptions about the nature of people, the society and the relationships between them. It purports that society consists of categories, which are in specific power relationships and status relationships. These categories are based on characteristics such as gender, nationality, class, profession, and so on. Yet, a category does not exist in isolation, but in relationship to other categories, and each individual is simultaneously member of different categories or groups (Korf, 1998:10). Social identity thus refers to that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from the individual’s knowledge that she belongs to certain social groups, together with the emotional and value significance attached to that membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986:16). A social group is where two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves perceive themselves to be members of the same social category (Turner 1982:15).

Group identity is therefore synonymous with social identity (Hogg, 1992). One’s group identity provides a definition of the self and mediates the effect of the cultural context on individual social behaviour, according to Hogg, Terry and White (in Heaven et al., 2000:68). Because such identities transcend racial, religious, and other boundaries, individuals have greater flexibility in actively seeking out those groups that are likely to maximise their feelings of self worth, according to Brown (in Heaven, et al, 2000:68). Social identities arise from in-group-out-group categorizations and similar identities are likely to have similar social representations or ‘shared cognitive constructs’ (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). The self is then conceptualised as a loose as-
sociation of group memberships, with different groups becoming salient in different situations (Campbell, 1995a: 151).

Self-concept is central to SIT. Within the SIT, the self-concept consists of the totality of self-descriptions and self-evaluations. These descriptions form groupings, which are called self-identifications. Self-identifications resort in one of two distinguishable subsystems of the self-concept, namely social or personal identity (Tajfel, 1981; Korf, 1998:104), or according to Castells (1997:7) a primary identity (an identity that frames the others). Membership of social groups are therefore integrated in the social component of the self-concept. Bornman (1999:63) reminds that the nature of an individual's identification with a particular group and her response to societal change will depend on personal and developmental factors, as well as the wider social, economic and political context.

When a group membership gets a negative valence, it has implications for the self-concept of the individual. The opposite also applies. When a comprehensive socio-structural change occurs in a society, as it perhaps is beginning to happen in South Africa, and the position of a group changes, it has implications for the social identities of the individuals in the group (Korf, 1998:3).

Campbell (1995a: 150) expands the SIT and suggests a trialogue model of identity, which conceptualises identity as an adaptive resource drawn on by individuals in tackling the social and material conditions of daily life. The group memberships provide the raw material for identity construction. This model tries to link group memberships and behavioural choices to specific life situations faced by individuals. According to this model, social identity is specific to a situation and social identity construction is then regarded as the process whereby the individual responds to the day-to-day problems of her life circumstances.

Castells (1997:7) concurs that the construction of identities uses building material from history, geography, biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies. However, individuals, social groups and societies process all these materials and rearrange their meaning, according to social determinations and cultural projects that are rooted in their social structure and in their space/time framework. For Castells (1997:6-7) identity building originates in project identity, whereby individuals, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and in that way seek the transformation of the overall social structure. This might be the case where patriarchalism, thus the patriarchal family, the entire structure of production, reproduction, sexuality and personality on which societies have been historically based, is challenged.

It is accepted that one of the most important tasks of adolescence is the acquisition of an own identity/identities. However, each individual is born into a specific cultural group and the identity construction takes place in this social
context as well as in a wider social context in interaction with others. According to Erikson (1968), this process therefore involves a relative unique integration of both intra-psychic and socio-historical aspects into the person's developing personality.

Group identification and identity development during periods of social and political change in real life should be researched in order to understand the influence of these processes on the relationship between the individual in this case, a woman and her membership groups and the way in which individuals and groups adapt to changing societal circumstances (Campbell, 1992; Bekker 1999). Moosa, Moonsamy and Fridjon (1997:258) lament the scarcity of empirical investigation into the psychological impact on Black people / their responses to the historical and socio-cultural context of South Africa. Stevens and Lockhat (1997:254) also plead for ongoing research and development of more appropriate theoretical models through which to understand the adolescent response to the long-term impact of transitions and consequently, the broader needs of these adolescents. Braungart and Braungart (1995:77), too, are of the opinion that little research has focused on youth caught in the throes of massive societal transformations, while Letlaka-Rennert, Luswazi, Helms and Zea (1997:236) believe that no empirical information is available concerning South African women’s identity development. According to Sennett and Foster (1996:204), few South African studies have directly addressed the issue of group identity at all. This research will therefore explore and describe the social identities of Black South African first-year female students, in a historically disadvantaged higher education institution in the Eastern Cape, against the background of women’s changed role and position in a post-apartheid society, and from an educational psychological and psycho-sociological background. This research in no ways intends to address the whole complex nature of identity construction, but merely wishes to contribute to an understanding of the social identities of these particular first-year female students.

**Problem Statement and Research Objective**

This research, being part of an inter-institutional research project of emerging identities of first-year female students at Eastern Cape higher education institutions, focuses on the social identities of Black South African first-year female students. The primary research question can be stated as, "What is the content of the social identities of Black South African first-year female students, at a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape, in post-apartheid South Africa?" The secondary question, which arises, is "Which guidelines can be generated to facilitate social identity construction in these first-year students?"

The primary objective of this research is to explore and describe the content of the social identities emerging in Black South African first-year fe-
male students, at a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape, in post-apartheid South Africa. The secondary objective is to generate guidelines to facilitate social identity construction in these first-year students.

**Research Design And Research Method**

A qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual research design was used (Mouton & Marais, 1990:45-46) to research the emerging social identities of Black South African first-year female students in a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape.

**The sample**

The participants were purposively selected and were Black South African first-year female students between the ages of 18 and 22 years, with an average age of 19.35 years. Letlaka-Rennert et al. (1997:236) are of the opinion that gender may affect the socialization experiences of Black South African women, and in turn their self-conceptualisation, therefore it makes sense to keep the genders separate. All forty participants were from the Eastern Cape and were studying at a historically black university. They were selected because they identified themselves as Xhosa, and not as Coloured, White or Asian. Sennett and Foster (1996:204) refer to Tajfel who maintains that the combination of impermeable boundaries and social stratification in SA indicate that any study of social behaviour ought to be explained at the level of groups. Seeing that this research focuses on social identities, it is deemed necessary to work at group level. The participants all came from largely mono-cultural contexts into a more multi-cultural environment, which could impact on the way they perceive themselves in terms of their social identities. This age group, according to Erikson (1968), should be able to state/position/align themselves with views of themselves. Informed consent was acquired from the participants and confidentiality was consistently ensured.

**Data collection and analysis**

The data were gathered by using focus group interviews. Each group consisted of 6 - 8 participants. The participants' first language was Xhosa. The intention was to conduct the focus group interviews in the mother tongue of the participants, but logistic problems caused the interviews to be held in English. The question was however translated into Xhosa to facilitate understanding of what was required. The focus group interviews were continued until the data became saturated. Two researchers (White female academics) participated in each group: one acted as facilitator, whilst the other took field notes (Vockell & Asher, 1995:201-205) regarding non-verbal interactions between the participants, as well as between researcher and participants.
The focus group interviews were held at Vista University. The researchers briefly explained to the participants that the study was aimed at exploring their social identities. The same question was posed to all participants, namely, in English, “How do you see yourself in your social relationships?” and in Xhosa, “Uzibona ungumuntu onjani xa uphakathi kwabanye abantu?”

The focus group interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and were analysed by using descriptive analysis (Tesch in Creswell, 1994: 154-155). Guba’s (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) model to ensure trustworthiness was applied. Units of meaning were identified and categorised, after which the central themes were identified. An independent coder re-coded the transcriptions according to the given protocol and a consensus discussion was held to determine agreement of the identified central themes and categories. A literature control was done to recontextualise the findings (Poggenpoel, 1998:342).

Moosa et al. (1997:256) cite Bulhan who warns that it would be inaccurate and misleading to consider the experiences and responses of Africans as homogenous. They also cite Dawes, who warns psychologists not to be naive by oversimplifying the Black situation and not paying sufficient attention to levels and varieties of Black experience and cultural transitions. This was taken into account.

This research, being qualitative in nature, did not aim to generalize its findings, and the findings are merely a snapshot of the social identities of a small group of Black South African first-year female students at a historically black university.

The participants willingly and spontaneously participated in the interviews, often expressing ideas about racial issues, not easily discussed with a person of another race. Spontaneous feedback from the participants indicated that they had personally gained from the interview experience, as is revealed in the statement, “... I've learned something from coming here...”. Some indicated a desire to have such an opportunity again. The participants of this research project displayed a hopeful spirit regarding themselves in terms of their future in South Africa.

Results

Five central themes emerged from the data. Drawing on Tajfel's definition of social identity in terms of group memberships, information about the dominant groupings constituting the social identities of these participants became apparent.

Table 1: Social identities of Black South African first-year female students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Membership of a family</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* valued for acquiring a university education</td>
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<tr>
<td>* awareness of change and growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>* family dynamics</td>
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<tr>
<td>* nature of communication</td>
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<tr>
<th>Theme 2: Membership of a peer group</th>
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<tr>
<td>* need to belong to a group</td>
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<tr>
<td>* role model</td>
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<tr>
<td>* dynamics of friendship</td>
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<tr>
<td>* opposite gender</td>
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<th>Theme 3: Membership of a first-year female student group</th>
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<tr>
<td>* opportunity to become part of a selected educated group</td>
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<tr>
<td>* impact of university access on self</td>
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<tr>
<td>* aspirations of being a successful Black African woman</td>
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<th>Theme 4: Membership of a cultural group (Xhosa)</th>
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<tr>
<td>* importance of knowing own roots</td>
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<td>* dichotomy between needs of self and cultural expectations</td>
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<tr>
<th>Theme 5: Membership of society at large</th>
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<tr>
<td>* acceptance of diversity</td>
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<td>* social responsibility</td>
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The results will be discussed, using Table 1 as reference.

**Discussion**

Campbell (1995b: 166) in her research, found evidence that women were engaging in the process of constructing more empowering social identities. Changing family structures and changing educational and economic opportunities offered them more opportunities for independence and growth. In line with the view that particular group memberships become salient as one moves from one social situation to the next (Campbell, 1995b: 162), the dominant memberships, which constitute these first-years' social identities, are:

**Theme 1: Membership of a family**

Considering that 1994's democratic change is still fairly recent, the Xhosa's family set-up has not changed significantly. The family still appears to maintain its traditional status with a low level of education of the parents possibly giving rise to poor communication. It is, however, also clear that the family is committed to assist and encourage the student in order for her to attain a better education and a concomitant better social standing in life.
• **valued for acquiring a university education**

In a society where levels of education are low and employment opportunities minimal (Freeman, 1993:158), the value the family attaches to a university education is clear and is expressed as follows “... they are glad that I’m here, because I’m the first one in my family to come to university...” and “...they feel it’s like an important thing for me to go to university...” One participant said, “... my father is proud for me to come here and he is old but he also loves education because he is also doing standard ten at night.” The family also values the student as a “... a high class person...” and “...they believe in me...” and “...they feel proud”.

According to Hoog and Abrams, cited by Sennett and Foster (1996:204), individuals strive to maintain and enhance positive self-esteem, which they achieve through comparing themselves with other individuals or groups. It is clear that in the eyes of this social group, the first-year females’ self-esteem is boosted, as being at university distinguishes her from the ordinariness of others in her family. Although Castells (1997:156) is of the opinion that the family has been transformed by the massive incorporation of women into paid labour, African women acquiring tertiary education and filling white-collar jobs on a large scale, is new and this chance is valued by the family.

• **awareness of change and growth in person**

It is the participants’ perceptions that their families see them as “...someone who has changed...” and “... they think I am growing and I know I am growing...” and “they see a change in me ... and I understand, because now I am at varsity...”, which makes them feel as if they are outgrowing their families.

This perceived change is also associated with a change in needs as “...now they associate me with ... if I phone them I’m going to ask for money...”. Campbell (1995a: 156) agrees that the issue of mobilizing material support is a key challenge facing youth at university. Options are to seek material assistance from the family, or to make one’s own money through a range of strategies, such as “...doing a part-time job during the holidays...” Castells (1997:173) mentions that the incorporation of women into the labour market and into paid work has important consequences for the family, as the woman’s financial contribution becomes decisive for the household budget and the female bargaining power in the household increases significantly. Campbell (1995a: 156) concurs that education is regarded as the route to economic and social improvement for oneself and one’s family, and therefore there is tremendous pressure from the family on the participants to pass their exams, as one participant says, “... I get all the pressures.... they don’t want to lose their money.”

• **family dynamics**
Bearing in mind that each student comes from a different family with different
dynamics, it is mentioned that "...I must be thankful for what I have ... my
family...", with a reason provided that "...my parents are very supportive...". 
Another participant however, mentioned that the size of her family limits her
opportunities, "...I don't like a big family, because sometimes you want some­
thing and you can't get it because we are many...", whilst another is more con­
tent in that "...it is nice to be a big family...".

The belief that women are not expected to go to university and achieve,
is still alive and well amongst the African group, as reflected by "... in our cul­
ture ... to take a woman to university ... is wasting money ... you're going to
marry and leave them alone...".  This is juxtaposed by the expression of the
expectation of payback time, as "... I will have to give them food and
clothes... it includes everything they want... at the end when I finish my ex­
ams..." A willingness to submit to this practice of giving back is revealed in
"... I will stay with my parents and do things for them as they did to me..." and
"... I can learn so that I can bring my sisters here..." These participants were
not going to discard their families who were supportive of them, and Camp­
bell (1995a: 156) concurs that strong ties of loyalty and responsibility to their
parents and siblings still remain.

This finding concurs with Mwamwenda's (1995:429) statement that one
is expected to lend a helping hand, which is seen in the funding of the educa­
tional experiences of most Africans. A person, who had been helped in this
way, is likely to reciprocate when the need arises. Mutwa (1986:54) shares
this view that the members of the family share food drink and sometimes even
clothing and money and generally assist in making life easier for each other.
Mwamwenda (1995:424) refers to Durojaiye who points out that an individual
in the traditional African society considers himself fulfilled only if she is in a
symbiotic relationship with her extended family. Regarding the position of
women, Campbell (1995b: 165) found that they were accepting of their subor­
dinate social status both as Black people in the wider South African context,
as women, and as members of a younger generation.

- nature of communication

Typical of many participants, time with the family is limited, as revealed in
"... I spend too little time with them..." and that communication is not always
easy, as "...my parents don't talk too much about everything..." Besides not
communicating, an indication that the student feels superior over her mother
and does not want to ask her advice, is reflected in "...I don't respect her
(mother) opinion..." According to Mutwa (1986:54) under African tradition
you remain a child under the full control of your parents for as long as they are
alive.

Mwamwenda (1995:428) also notes that Black children now are too as­
sertive in the presence of their elders, asked questions when they should have
submitted and spoke freely on subjects which elders/parents considered taboo.
Freeman (1993:159) states that this rejection of the status quo may in fact be part of the way in which young people develop a more meaningful personal and social identity. However, Mutwa (1986:55) is concerned over the loss of the authority the African parents have over their children and feels that this needs to be restored.

*Theme 2: Membership of a peer group*

Peers could facilitate the ability to define current and future realities and roles in ways, which the family cannot, as adolescence implies increased differentiation from the family (Freeman, 1993:160). Peers could also play the role of sounding board to the maturing adolescent. In all societies the peer group has a specific function, so too for these African participants, yet it is interesting to note that Myburgh and Anders (1989:129) came to the conclusion that African adolescents attach a lower value to the peer group than do white youths. According to them, the importance of the peer group seems to decrease, as they get older. This might perhaps be an indication of being granted maturity at an earlier stage in their lives than other adolescents.

- **a specific need to belong to a group**

The general viewpoint is that “...it is important to belong to some kind of a group...” as it provides comfort, in that “...being with someone you know and you know them, I feel as if I am free...” The membership provides help in that “...if I have a problem I go to them and they help me...” This finding is in line with Brewer, as cited by Bornman (1999:43) who relates group identification to the need for identity, but also to another basic human need, namely the need for affiliation, assimilation and security.

Some participants felt that they had outgrown their friends who were not attending university, seeing that “I don’t spend a lot of time with them talking about things here ... that they don’t understand...” The opportunity to attend a university puts some distance between university students and non-university students, as “...they think of you as different...” Yet maturity regarding knowing who you are is reflected in “...I know there is a difference, but it doesn’t change who we are, because we grew up together, so even if I’m at varsity.... I think we should maintain that friendship”.

*role model to others*

One participant felt very sure of herself, because “...they see me as a great model...”. The strength of the self is also seen in that “...I’m not doing what my friends want me to do, I do what I think is best for me...”. Being a good role model contributes to the development of others. This ties in with Freeman’s (1993:163) views that youth have to find identity through social reconstruction, rather than through social struggle, in socio-historical circumstances, which might mitigate against positive social and personal identity formation.
dynamics of friendships

The participants exercised a choice in making friends, in that 'good' friends are chosen in as much "... I like to belong to a group of good people...", even though "...some of us don't like each other...". Membership in a group of friends affords the opportunity to air your views, as "...I am not afraid to express my view...". Campbell's (1995a: 155) findings concur with the importance of choosing good friends, in the context of companionship and leisure, and with the role that friends play as a good or bad influence in the struggle for self-improvement. It should also be kept in mind that individuals may simultaneously belong to groups that are associated with quite contradictory behavioural options (Campbell, 1995a: 152).

interaction with the opposite gender

Although it is usual for Black South African females to be subordinate to males (Campbell, 1995b: 165), a participant mentioned that her male friend "... is proud ... because I did come to university and he is also at the university..." However, where women are relegated to a lower status, but manage to beat the odds in attending university, the opposite is usually true. Males are afraid of females who are at university, as "... men here and outside are afraid to come to me..." because "...they see me like kind of having power..." In spite of these perceptions, some females still feel concerned about making fools of themselves, as a participant worries about "What would he think of you if you perhaps say the wrong things?" Although Campbell (1995b: 166) states that belonging to an educated group present the women with the strongest possibility of independence from men, a definite need to relate to males, to have their understanding, respect and support, to feel validated, is still required.

Theme 3: Membership of a first-year female student group

According to Vorster and Sutcliffe (2000:11) the difference between adolescent self-identity and ideal identity (that which the adolescent envisages) makes identity formation possible. The first-year female envisages her membership of this group as contributing to her ideal identity. Tajfel (1981) explains in-group bias by linking the individual's need for a positive self-image to the status position of the in-group. Being at university definitely provides status.

opportunity to become part of a selected educated group

As for most first-year students, the first year is experienced as "... very difficult..." and there is very little "...time to socialize with other social groups..." However, a sense of gratefulness is expressed in "... the university used to accommodate White people, not Blacks, but now there is a lot of Blacks at university ... like Vista..." This historically Black university provides many opportunities as becomes clear from the following, "I like Vista so much, be-
cause if it wasn’t here, I wouldn’t have the opportunity to be educated, be­
cause I can afford it...” and “...even bursaries...I can have them now...” and “
...it’s easy to get a bursary now than before 1994...” and “...it’s a great oppor­
tunity for me to be at varsity this year and as a Black student...”

Campbell (1995b: 166) found that belonging to an educated group pre­
sented women with the strongest possibility of taking power within both the
public sphere and the sphere of interpersonal relationships. Braungart and
Braungart (1995:80) concur as they found that Black students valued complet­
ing their university degrees, as this would be the key to personal improvement
and security, as well as providing the necessary credentials to be influential
and helpful in society.

• impact of university access on self
University access has provided an opportunity to grow and has contributed to
identity formation, as one participant says “... I am comfortable with myself ...
in any situation...” and it has created the space “... to be herself... “. In the
eyes of the others, this development is also visible, because “...once you are
at varsity, the people think of you as different ... you are a higher level than
them...”

The comment that, “Ja (Yes), I think we’ve all changed...a little wiser
than I was...” underlines the perception of growth. Although growth and
development are experienced, and “...it does a lot for your self-image...” in es­
sence “... it doesn’t change who we are...”

According to Crocker and Luhtanen (1990:60-61) this is in line with the
SIT in that individuals strive to belong to groups which contribute positively
towards their self-esteem and which therefore are evaluated positively for
these participants, being first-year female students contributes positively to
their self-esteem. Moosa et al. (1997:256) cite Bulhan who describes a group
of Africans he calls the intelligentsia, as those who have attained a distinctive
status and privilege through their acquisition of western education. South Af­
rican education is still in essence western education, although curriculum
transformation is occurring, albeit very slow.

• aspirations of being a successful Black African woman
According to Freeman (1993:163) a sense of economic and social productivity
needs to become part of everyday life in the same way as political struggle did
in the previous decades. This is apparent in the aspirations of the first-years,
who have a strong will to become someone of importance, as is suggested by
“...we are the leaders of the future...” In order to get there, a participant has
set her goals, in that “I also want to do honours and masters... ”, “...a good
person ... a schooled person...” because “education is the key...” “...the key
for the future”. It is clear that a strong need exists “...to move up and become
someone...” Campbell (1995a: 156) concurs that education is regarded as the
key to the bright future, leading to improvement in the quality of life and op-
opportunities for enhanced self-esteem and that the hope for educational success was closely linked to the possibility of following a 'professional career'.

These participants believe that they can achieve the qualification they have enrolled for, in that "...I am confident about my studies..." Mokgathle and Schoeman (1998:33) agree that there is a belief in the ability of in-group members to pursue their goals and realize their potential. Campbell (1995b:166) too, in her findings, agree that women are enthusiastic about their hopes that they would succeed in their quest for higher education, which would give them access to the possibility of personal, family and community advancement. It appears that the participants' self-efficacy, i.e. whether or not a person believes that she is able to achieve a desired objective, is healthy. In the context of the lecture halls at university, the need to have some status is revealed when a participant says, "When I am in class ... I want to contribute, so that people will say that there is something in me..." and "...I would like to be recognized ... [as someone] who has a powerful influence others..."

Although Braungart and Braungart (1995:81) found that the desire for financial wealth and success did not rank among the top five hopes expressed by Black students in their study, these participants aspired to future financial security, as "I see myself as a successful person with my own money..." and "...I am confident about my studies and I just hope that one day I'll be the breadwinner in my family". Braungart and Braungart (1995:80) found that especially women were concerned that without education they would be dependent on others. Although women in formal employment have always earned considerably less than similarly employed males, this was not an issue for these participants.

Theme 4: Membership of a cultural group
Culture, too, is a source of identity. According to Chaskalson et al., as cited by Bekker (1999:4), culture is a means of drawing distinctions between groups of people on grounds of one or more of a number of characteristics such as their beliefs, knowledge, language, rules of kinship, methods of education or forms of social relations. In this regard Campbell (1995b) explains that in SIT, group memberships are associated with a range of behavioural options which consist of possibilities and constraints on behaviour and cognitive schemata which serve as frameworks for interpreting the world. It is membership of a cultural group that can provide opportunities and constraints for the female. Erikson's (1986:89) opinion that a firm sense of identity depends on the support, which the individual receives from the collective sense of identity characterizing the social group significant to her, must also be borne in mind. From the perspective of the SIT, acceptance of one's cultural group as a positive reference group would enhance positive self-esteem (Turner, 1982).

* importance of knowing your roots
A participant mentioned that "Each person must have confidence and you must know what you like and what you must not like.... you must not reject your people..." or "forget those who helped you to get where you are." Campbell's (1995a: 154) findings concur that membership in the group, 'Black people', has a definite influence in identity construction. This is in line with Mokgathle and Schoeman (1998:32) who found that a preference for an integrated society did not mean sacrificing own identity. Bornman (1999: 66) also concurs in that in her study the Black respondents' stronger ethnic identification correlated with less uncertainty in the face of rapid political and social change.

Moosa et al. (1997:257) cite Bulhan, who describes the intense search for cultural roots and issues of identity, when Africans who have internalised Western culture, experience rejection and racism in the same culture. He describes three stages of "reactive identification", a process to solve this crisis, i.e. capitulation, revitalization and radicalisation. The last stage refers to when a new identity is forged based on integration of the old and new socio-cultural influences, where individuals exposed to western education are able to feel comfortable with their original culture, both in terms of their strengths and weaknesses.

In spite of being a new generation, the need to fulfil their cultural role of caring and respecting elders is still found among these participants. As one participant put it, "You have to care about older people and respect them as you respect your parents...". However, Mwamwenda (1995:431) warns that due to contact with other cultures the African interdependent self has not remained undiluted.

- **dichotomy between culture and the needs of the self**
  It became apparent that the African student sometimes feels uncomfortable in that "You'll find White people, Coloured people, every colour is there and there's no problem with that, but it's just us Black people, we don't' like going to those clubs in town...". Nel (1989:44) supports the idea that intercultural contact causes uncertainty and that in an effort to cope with this uncertainty, certain defence mechanisms that are linked to the cultural background and which are forms of protection, such as stereotyping and ethnic prejudice, are used in contact with other cultures.

Mwamwenda (1995:431) states that an individual should not become self-centred to the extent that he or she no longer is concerned with communal well-being. The African self is therefore predominantly interdependent as well as collective as opposed to being individualistic and independent. Freeman (1993:163) predicts that Black youth are likely to become more concerned with their personal futures than with the collective future of Black African people and that individuals will take additional responsibility for their personal lives. It does not imply that they will abandon community spirit and co-operation.
Campbell (1995b: 165) found that the process of social identity formation tends to be structured in such a way that social identity contributes to the reproduction of existing patriarchal gender relations, where men tend to dominate women in interpersonal relationships and where men have privileged access to political power and economic wealth. Within African society, women continue to be treated and valued as possessions and are objectified by members of their own group (Letlaka-Rennert et al., 1997:237), even though Mutwa (1986:50) argues that women hold a very high position in African society and that women are spiritually superior to men who are merely the protectors and guardians.

A student says that "I do like socializing with people, but I don't want to be the initializer of something ... I like to keep quiet..." Turner, in Sennett and Foster (1996:104) too, argues that individuals internalise social categories as part of their self-concept, and may, at such times when social identity becomes salient, behave solely in terms of their group memberships. Alternatively when personal identity is salient, behaviour of a more personal, individualistic nature may be expected from the individual. In this regard Stevens and Lockhat (1997:254) are of the opinion that the current socio-historical context tends to encourage a rejection of collectivism, and rather invites black adolescents to embrace individualism. In the African culture the woman does not play a dominant role, as her traditional gender-role restricts her behavioural options and limits her freedom of choice and independence, according to Pleck (in Mokgatlhe and Schoeman, 1998:30).

Amongst the participants variations were found; in that one would say "... I like socializing with people..." whilst the other will say "I find it very hard to meet people, to introduce myself...". The benefit of socializing is also contemplated as "...I like to mix with people, you learn something and you become more advanced...". Although one participant indicated that she doesn't "...usually mix with people of different cultures...", another would say that being with someone of another culture benefits her, "I have a friend who is not Black ... it's nice to be with him... to be confident of my culture and my self..."

The main reason for not interacting with other cultures is a matter of a practical nature, "...that's because they used to speak Afrikaans and then I don't understand..." and a matter of perception that people of different colour don't want to mix..." they also think we don't really want to mix with them..." Campbell (1995a: 155) concurs that there is a need/willingness amongst Africans to extend their horizons by meeting new people outside the township.

However, the need to make a difference is apparent, "I want things to change. That's why I don't want to communicate with Xhosa people only". Maharaj (1995) found that the highly educated respondents in his research showed a greater willingness to mix with people of different races. The higher the level of education the greater the readiness to approach people of another
The lower the education, the lower the degree of readiness to approach other groups.

**Theme 5: Membership of a society**

With changes in post-apartheid society towards democracy, what Erikson (1986) suggests, is an ideological structure which captures the imagination and expectation of youth; a structure which they feel they can dedicate their lives to in the present, and which they believe will serve them well in the future.

- **acceptance of diversity**

It became apparent that these participants look beyond the colour and status of the other, in that "... they are just humans..." and "... they also feel the same way as we feel..." The need to reach out to the other is clear, "We must go to them ... (other cultures)" in order "... to get to know each other, to respect one another, to respect the other culture..." Bornman (1999:63) hypothesizes that highly personalized intergroup interaction could loosen the emotional strings between an individual and her ethnic group and that, according to Korf and Schoeman (1996), co-operation between the in-group and out-group is regarded as beneficial.

Some participants had already managed to step over the divide and stated that they "... can interact with the White people, Coloureds, Indians..." and that "... I’ve got good friends, ja, Coloured friends around the campus..." That change has occurred for some is clear, "It’s (interaction) easy and it was difficult..." but "... apartheid has not yet passed".

The realization that "... people are different..." indicates some degree of acceptance. Robins and Forster (1994:115) refer to Ng’s (1985) study, which found that in-group favouritism only occurred when personal status was low. When personal status was high and group status low, out-group favouritism ensued. In terms of both in-group identification and favouritism, these studies suggest that social identity served as an alternative identity resource, which is employed when satisfactory personal identity enhancement is not available. These participants felt good about themselves and were therefore able to reach out to other groups.

It is interesting to note that Heaven, et al. (2000:71) conclude that Blacks prefer to emphasise cultural diversity and inclusivity. The participants expressed the view that "... our country now is free and you can talk with anyone you want to talk to..." Yet not knowing each other is a factor which affects interaction, "... when I am between ... the... like races... different people... I don’t feel welcome, like I don’t understand what they used to do..." and "... we don’t do the same things, so I cannot speak to them..." Not knowing traditions and cultural habits, according to the participants, inhibits interaction.
Anxiety of meeting new people is also expressed as “We are all afraid when we meet new people and you don’t want the create the wrong impression about the kind of person you are...” as opposed to “I do like all people... no matter what colour you are, what language you speak...” Black South Africans entertain links beyond their immediate language or ethnic group (Heaven, et al 2000:71). So crossing the racial divide still poses a problem for some, as “Some people ... they think you are Black ... and ... other you know, are White, so I can’t ... I can’t communicate with you...” but not for all the participants.

- **social responsibility**
A mature viewpoint is expressed by participants as “...what can I do to make the world better...” Braungart and Braungart (1995:80) concur, as they found that Black students valued completing their university degree, as this would be the key to providing the necessary credentials to be influential and helpful to society. Campbell (1995a: 156) too, mentions that community upliftment through practical and political strategies are considered.

Mwamwenda (1995:429) says that on the completion of children’s education, their links with parents are maintained through regular financial and material support on the part of these children. Braungart and Braungart (1995:80) agree that Black students desire to help make South Africa a better place for future generations. Heaven et al (2000:71) found that Black Africans view national strength and order as implying a more encompassing South Africanism and an acknowledgement that national identity subsumes differences in language, race and class.

**Recommendations**

Based on the above findings the following guidelines are suggested:

- **Empowerment of families**, through community outreach programmes, to sustain a cohesive effective family unit in which adolescents can freely construct their own social identities without being forced by an older generation to maintain a particular culture with its beliefs and traditions.

- **Creation of a ‘space’ for opportunities for positive inter-cultural peer interaction** where they feel they can express their viewpoints, feel secure and where their ‘voices’ can be ‘heard’ in a spirit of trust and mutual respect.

- **Revisiting orientation programmes** for first-year university students in order to facilitate acquisition of life skills such as goal setting, self-awareness, decision-making, conflict-resolution and ways to achieve success. Incentives to attend are required as it allows for a choice to be empowered.
• ‘Awareness of culture’ campaigns to facilitate understanding among cultural groups, tolerance and social development. It is interesting to note that research has found that in post-apartheid South Africa Black South Africans are undergoing a brisker psychological change and adaptation than other groups (Heaven et al., 2000:72).

• Revitalising tertiary education to facilitate social transformation, citizenship and nation building. Lecturers should reconsider their outcomes, curricula, teaching styles and the support they provide to students. Programmes that could encourage independent development, thought and judgement, meaning-making and that also provide all adolescents with greater skills and options to deal with their South African realities should be developed.

Conclusion

The findings of this study cannot be generalized; it rather represents a snapshot of the content of Black South African first-year female university students’ social identities. The golden thread running through Campbell’s (1995a: 154) findings, as well as these central themes, is a commitment to the image of an educated person who has access to the economic advantages, social status and general opportunities for self-advancement that tertiary education is believed to offer.

Campbell (1995b: 165) agrees that under changing social conditions, the possibility of constructing new and more empowering identities does sometimes exist for women, and possibly this snapshot provides a small peep into it. It is fascinating to note that according to Castells (1997:359), new power lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions, and people build their lives and decide their behaviour, and that the sites of this power are peoples’ minds. It is the memberships of the social groups that contribute to identity formation, but it is in the individual’s mind that it is internalised into own identities. Identities will become identities only when and if social actors internalise them, and construct their meaning around this internalisation (Castells, 1997:7). It must be recognized that the impact of social influences on identity formation are more complex and nuanced than had been conceptualised (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997:154).

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