

**Race, class and the equity dilemma: Examining the  
usefulness of a biographical questionnaire in  
identifying Resilient-Agency (R-A) to supplement  
admission criteria into the University of Pretoria**

by

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## ABSTRACT

The dilemma of accounting for race, class and equity in admission to university education is not a new one and yet, it remains a heated debate and an unsolved problem to this day. The grey surrounding this dilemma far outweighs the proverbial black and white areas. This study argues that the equity dilemma may have a great deal to do with the way access is granted into university. It aims to offer actionable alternatives to the debate surrounding this dilemma, i.e. should access be granted – in an attempt to redress past inequalities – on the basis of race or class? By focussing solely on race and/or class, the underlying signals of agency and resilience in students who work against disadvantage may be misread and even, at times, thrive in the face thereof. Since the potential exists, these signals of agency and resilience may also transcend all these imposed restrictions and obstacles.

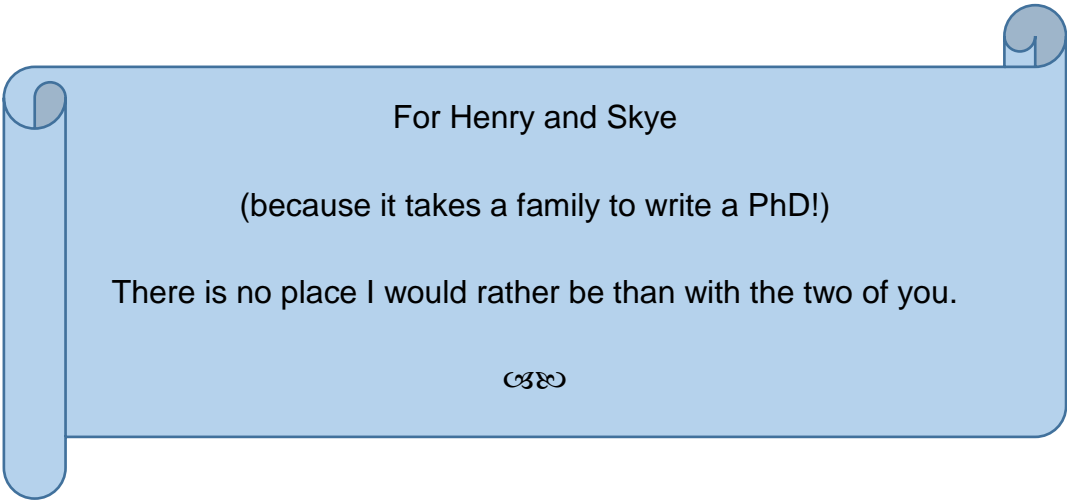
In the field of education, the figure Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, irrefutably arises. For this reason, amongst others, the study mainly draws on Bourdieu's ideas to expand the manner in which it understood this interplay between educational disadvantage, as structure, and the ability of some students to succeed, as agency. Yet, sociological notions of agency were not found completely satisfactory in the attempts to understand why some students excel despite challenges. Hence, an attempt was made to enrich the sociological notion of agency with a complimentary focus on the psychological concept of resilience.

Consequently, the argument was that, if resilience and agency is demonstrated by a student and can be perceived, it must be possible to assess it and to determine, before admitting a student to university, whether he/she is in possession of such traits. This was done by examining the usefulness of a biographical questionnaire (BQ) in the identification of resilient-agency (R-A) and, if positive, to implement such a BQ to augment placement at the University of Pretoria.

The BQ was administered to two cohorts of students in 2012 (n=118) and 2013 (n=229). The data from the BQ was used to identify participants and interviews were consequently conducted with seven of them. A narrative analysis was done on the qualitative and quantitative data, whereby the data was re-storied into narratives. With

the permission of the Registrar of the University of Pretoria, students' first-year marks were organised into the narratives. A thematic analysis of the narrative was done and elucidated through the inclusion of the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

Various questions arose in grappling with the positioning of the concepts resilience and agency in this study, especially with regard to the narratives. During this process, a shift in personal theoretical understanding of these two concepts led to the investigation of a possible amalgamation of the two concepts. As a result, new conceptual terms were introduced that build on resilience and agency. The contribution of this study is presented in the identification and discussion of the potential indicators for R-A, as detected from the presented narratives. These indicators were then positioned in a way that may inform the possible future development of the BQ into an instrument that has the potential to identify R-A. It can then supplement the process of university admission and effectively address the equity dilemma.



For Henry and Skye

(because it takes a family to write a PhD!)

There is no place I would rather be than with the two of you.



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## Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
APS	Admission Point Score
ASP	Academic Support Programme
AZASM	Azanian Students' Movement
B-BBEE	Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BED	Bantu Education Department
BQ	Biographical questionnaire
CAS	Central Application Service
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CUT	Central University of Technology
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT	Durban University of Technology
eNCA	eNews Channel Africa
ERS	Education Renewal Strategy
GPA	Grade point average
HMC	Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IPET	Implementation plan for Education and Training
Medunsa	Medical University of Southern Africa
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
NBT	National Benchmark Test
NECC	National Education Crisis Committee
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
NP	National Party
NP-PSET	National Plan for Post-School Education and Training

## PREFACE

This study deals with the process of selecting students for academic placement in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (UP). The need to redress past injustices due to the structural disadvantage imposed on black<sup>1</sup> South Africans by apartheid<sup>2</sup> education, as well as continued class inequality post-apartheid (which often still follows “race”), forms the backdrop to this challenge. My role as educational psychologist involved in academic support led me to embark on this study, in which I explored what I call “the equity dilemma”. An attempt to understand, and possibly predict, why certain students succeed at university in spite of their structural disadvantage, guided me to read beyond the psychological field and took me to a sociological understanding of notions of structure and agency. Structure refers to social institutions that both enable and constrain human freedom, while agency refers to the ability of humans to change social structures through collective or individual effort.

In the field of education, the figure Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, irrefutably arises. For this reason, amongst others, I mainly drew on Bourdieu’s ideas to expand the manner in which I understood this interplay between educational disadvantage, as structure, and the ability of some students to succeed, as agency. Yet, I did not find sociological notions of agency completely satisfactory in my attempts to understand why some students excel despite challenges. At that stage, I returned to my psychological training in order to enrich the sociological notion of agency with a

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, unless otherwise stated, reference to “black” as a race will incorporate black, coloured, Indian and Asian races.

<sup>2</sup> Apartheid literally means separateness and refers to the time of South Africa’s history when people were separated on the basis of colour (notably white people and black people, the latter of which included all people of colour).

complimentary focus on resilience. In short, the latter refers to an individual's ability, in conjunction with their ecology, to "bounce back" from adverse challenges.

Due to my interest in the realisation of each individual's potential, resilient-agency (R-A) became of particular relevance to me. It became even more relevant during the process of reflecting on and writing up this study, I was steered into reflecting on my own life and my own positioning and R-A within a setting of cultural capital in a dominated vs dominant world, where one of the greatest dilemmas is that of race and class. What transpired was a monologue of autobiographical nature that led to many insights into my own life, which placed elements of this study in perspective. According to the Employment Equity Act<sup>3</sup> and the past apartheid classification, I am a white woman in my mid-30s, born and raised – for the most part – in the apartheid regime as part of the dominant white people, speaking the "oppressor's language", Afrikaans. While growing up I was rarely, if ever, exposed to English. My entire world was Afrikaans, i.e. my family, my neighbours, my friends, my school, my church, the shops I visited and their product branding, and even my television. All programmes were translated into Afrikaans on the then television channel called "SAUK 2". I was a teenager when South Africa started changing. At that time, the greatest influence in my life was the loss of the Afrikaans voices that I came to love in my favourite "Afrikaans" series. I never knew they were translated. I felt bereft and betrayed. I was a teenager, so it was standard practice to believe the world owed me something. I was unaware of the uprisings and consequent massacres, the fight for free and fair education, the oppression and Nelson Mandela's long walk to freedom that were taking place around me. All I wanted was the main character of one of my favourite series, Alf's, Afrikaans voice back.

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<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the Employment Equity Act, is to achieve equity in the workplace by promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through elimination of unfair discrimination and implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce.

Then I went to University as a first generation, Afrikaans student and the world was my oyster, until they started with English textbooks. Once again, language became a very prominent factor in my life. My friends and I sat for hours on end, translating entire textbooks in order to study in Afrikaans. English was just too foreign and too unknown. Until, off course, the work became too much, and we were forced to study in English. And here I am, a white Afrikaans girl from the Lowveld of South Africa, writing my PhD in English.

Why am I writing this, you may wonder? As I indicated earlier, I needed to understand my own “struggle” and see it in perspective, in the light of the greater struggle that was going on around me and is, for that matter, at least to a certain extent, still persisting. When I think of apartheid, I am ashamed. I will never understand it. In reading for this study, I often became very angry with myself because I had never really examined it. I did not like some of the things I saw as a child, but I also never really questioned them, since it was just the way life was at the time. Now, albeit retrospectively, I have that lost opportunity back.

I do, however, need to express my cognisance of the fact that, even though I was not raised in a “rich” home, and I use this term very loosely, I was privileged in that I never wanted for anything that I needed – wanted yes, but not needed. I never went to bed hungry and I never went to school without shoes and warm clothes in the winter. Therefore, I do not presume to understand true disadvantage and more specifically, the experience thereof.

What I indeed understand is that, even though one may not be rich in monetary terms, one can be very rich in social and cultural capital. And that I was. As a child, I read a lot as the library was just a short walk from my home. I had access to various artistic materials and tools and I often attempted painting or crafts of some sorts. I was allowed to explore my creativity and express it through various mediums. I learned to think outside of the box. And this probably helped me later on when I had to make plans to study in English.

The question that I contended with as I reflected on my own positioning in contemporary South Africa was, was I an agent, or was I resilient? Was English a structure that I transcended, or was it a difficult situation that I bounced back from?



Other issues I grappled with during this study served as instruments and indicators used towards determining whether students should be placed at institutions of higher learning. This is a controversial topic, since the effectiveness of using school marks to predict success is often questioned. Over time, universities developed a number of additional instruments to supplement matric<sup>4</sup> marks. In my opinion, these instruments tend to be quite blunt when it comes to understanding the potential unlocked by individual agency and resilience, which I term resilient-agency, or R-A for short. Initially, I attempted to quantify student narratives gained through biographical questionnaires (BQs) distributed to first year students in 2012 and 2013. I tracked their performance over three years and realised that my own index added little predictive capacity to the picture. I then turned to a qualitative approach and conducted seven semi-structured interviews in an attempt to understand why some students show evidence of R-A. What made the process both interesting and challenging, was the fact that my research was conducted during student protests over the commodification of higher education, as well as the fact that the curriculum is seen as a colonial construct, calling into question the very nature of higher education.

Hence, as a result of the collective agentic movement against inequality in terms of access to higher education, in combination with my own (very superficial) experience with R-A and my observation thereof in other students who are disadvantaged in the true all-encompassing sense of the word, I attempted to find a way of addressing true disadvantage, perhaps even as a way of making sense of my own past and finding my own retribution by making a difference in the future. In the end, I concluded that qualitative approaches in deciding on access to higher education should supplement existing indexes, rather than quantified notions of R-A.

But without further ado, *a re yeng* (Sesotho for let's go) ...

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<sup>4</sup> Matric refers to the final year of high school in South Africa

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Race, class and the equity dilemma

The dilemma of accounting for race, class and equity in admission to university education is not a new one and yet, it remains a heated debate and an unsolved problem to this day. The grey surrounding this dilemma far outweighs the proverbial black and white areas. Van der Berg (2014:205) referred to statistics compiled by Leibbrandt et al. (2010) which indicated that individual incomes of persons aged 18 and older saw an average decline of 40% from 1995 to 2000. This decline can be, at least partly, attributed to decreasing earnings to education ratios (how well education is endowed by the labour market) for black people, in contrast with increasing yields to education for whites (Van der Berg, 2014:205). Even though this study does not aim to answer questions around inequality in income, it remains a product of education and perhaps forms part of the grey areas surrounding the debate around equitable access to education. The question that can be asked right at the outset is, are universities allowing the correct students entry into its programmes? This study argues that the equity dilemma may have much to do with the way that access into university is granted. It aims to offer actionable alternatives to the debate surrounding the equity dilemma, should access be granted – in an attempt to redress past inequalities – on the basis of race or class, or should these criteria be supplemented with additional measures?

This study introduces this debate by referring to one of its greatest contributors, Pierre Bourdieu. He believed that *“... even if there were equality of opportunity, even if the children of the wage labourer had the same chance of entering university as the children of the senior executive, still the university would reproduce the domination of the latter over the former. Teaching in the university presupposes and reinforces the privileged upbringing of the middle and upper classes”* (Burawoy & Von Holdt, 2012:105). In this statement, Bourdieu focusses on class as the dominant predictor for university success. In South Africa’s higher education sector, talk about redress

mostly centres around race and, often only by implication, class, while additional measures such as resilience or agency are rarely mentioned, if at all.

This view was illustrated by the more recent South African debate between Max Price (2010:1) and Neville Alexander (2010:1) over criteria used for equitable access to university programmes, in this case at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The debate between Price and Alexander explicitly surfaced the tension between race and class as indicators of disadvantage. The context was UCT's policy of using race quotas for access to the programmes of the University's medical school. Max Price, Vice-Chancellor of UCT, argued as follows: "*Statistically, 'race' is a good proxy for disadvantage, reflected by the close correlation between 'race' and class – i.e. given South Africa's history most black people are still relatively poor, and vice versa*" (Price, 2010:2). He stressed the fact that using race as proxy was, at least for the moment, the only way of working towards equality in our society. In his opinion, the current discrepancy between the performance of white students and that of black students is so vast that the exclusion of race in the admission process would simply lead to stereotyping of our society and the reproduction of views of racism. According to Max Price, white students would continuously be seen on campus doing well and passing within the required time, while black students would be struggling, receiving additional remediation, but still taking longer than the required time to pass.

The fact, however, remains that race does not necessarily encapsulate true disadvantage and that there is a growing black middle-class who are no longer disadvantaged (Soudien, 2016:2015). Neville Alexander, also from UCT, reacted to Price's statements by stating that universities should not allow others (in this case the ruling government) to tell them who they should teach. "*And this is only the tip of the iceberg. At a much more profound level, i.e., without any reference to admissions criteria, this discussion is about the nature of a non-racial society and about the role of the intelligentsia in helping to shape such a society*" (Alexander, 2010:1). Alexander argued that class was a more appropriate measure for disadvantage and that, if taken into account as a criterion for admission, would address racial inequality as well, but with the added advantage of not entrenching race as an identity category. Alexander's argument would hold that a second-generation middle-class black student who attends a private school such as Bishops or Herschel (in the case of Cape Town) should not

be seen as disadvantaged and selected over a white student from a working-class area.

This debate reverts this study to Bourdieu and his argument that class is the leading predictor of success and that universities reproduce the dominant class. Yet, Bourdieu himself was the child of a “wage labourer”, a member of the subordinate lower class, much like Prof. M.E. Moshia, an NRF-rated researcher who, today, is an Environmental Soil Scientist, Computer Programmer, Software Developer and Precision Agriculture Specialist. Prof. Moshia obtained a doctoral degree from Colorado State University through a Fulbright Scholarship and he is currently a Fulbright Research Scholar in Precision Agriculture and Machine Learning at the University of Florida, USA (<http://whoswho.co.za/matshwene-edwin-moshia-950083>). In his autobiography, he wrote:

*“Poverty couldn’t be the wall to boundary my potentiality, but I have built the foundation of my victory on history. Along the thorny road to reaching my dreams, lots of salty tears escaped my eyes and I have tasted about few millimeters of them. Indeed, my history has determined my destiny. Today I am a Fullbright Fellow.*

*I have grown up walking barefooted in the village streets and the wild jungle of the village looking after my grandmothers’ goats, for that was the only wealth the family possessed. Enjoy reading my road; it was not an easy one. Today my road is black, divided by white line in the middle, with speed limits and other caution signs. I shall fall and suffer no more. For I’m the grandson of Ngwana-Setwaba Maphuti Kgabo Setati, raised by the experienced”. (Moshia, 2006:vii;viii)*

How then did Bourdieu and Edwin Moshia and many others like them manage to transcend the boundaries of class? How did they survive and succeed in a lower class setting without the necessary tools that are made available by default to children raised in a middle-class family and attending a middle-class school? This study argues that this is the fundamental link that is overlooked even to this day. What makes a student cross over the boundaries of disadvantage (be it race or class or something else)? Even more importantly, can that link, that essential “virtue” be captured, measured and used to give more disadvantaged students a chance at success? There may be evidence of the absence of enough room for agency in Bourdieu’s theory and, furthermore, it would appear as though there may also be a link between agency and resilience.

While Price argued that race remains an important category as proxy for bringing about equity in the context of legacies of disadvantage, Alexander argued that class is a more appropriate category that holds the added advantage of transcending the potential stigmatisation of beneficiaries of such redress. In terms of these arguments, this study argues that, by focussing on race and/or class alone, the underlining signals of agency and resilience may be misread in students who work against disadvantage, even sometimes thrive in the face thereof, and transcend (or has the potential to transcend) all of these imposed restrictions and obstacles. In addition, focussing primarily on race and/or class offers only a partial view that leads to an essential incompleteness in policy choices to address inequality (Soudien, 2016:199).

The university has a responsibility towards the country at large to produce graduates who will add to the skills, social and economic capital of South Africa. Additionally, the university has a role to play in the redress of the country's disadvantage. This is in accordance with the South African Constitution, but this same constitution also states that we should build a collective identity. Such an identity should be built by promoting a multi-racial as well as multicultural society (Abib, 2016:37).

Alexander's argument holds that the skewed method of redress based on race is far from the original point of departure of "free education for all" and of eliminating past inequalities by providing opportunities to the less fortunate or disadvantaged. Allowing university admission to an underprepared student from the lower-class, who does not possess the said skills to overcome disadvantage, does not add to the overall increase in skills in South Africa. Entrenching race as a continued category of disadvantage may not contribute to the empowerment of disadvantaged (black) people. Instead, by allowing underprepared students purely on the basis of their skin colour may perversely contribute to the creation of a despondent and learned-helpless next generation. In effect, if one follows Alexander's argument, inequality may well be reproduced on a different level and education may again become a playing field for political agenda, as was the case during apartheid (Levinson, Cookson & Sadovnik, 2002:589).

And this is the dilemma. Should redress truly be a mere advancement or increase of black numbers? Max Price illustrated the point well by comparing a disadvantaged

black student who received 60% in the final matric examination, but overcoming many obstacles to do so, with a student who attended a well-equipped school and extra classes and obtained 70% (Price, 2010:2). Despite structural disadvantage, the black student in this example displays a combination of resilience<sup>5</sup> and agency<sup>6</sup>, two traits which may equip this student to succeed at tertiary education regardless of the apparent lower mark.

Working in academic support programmes at UP, the impact of these two traits (or their absence) was visible, allowing some insight into the lives of the many individually consulted students. Some were able to overcome obstacles by sheer determination and motivation. Others lacked a sense of resilience and/or agency and soon floundered. This does not imply that any individual can necessarily overcome all disadvantages, nor that others can overcome none, but that a certain level of individual, or collective effort, may impact on social or individual structures. Indeed, the aim of equitable access to higher education has social change as its ultimate goal.

Consequently, the supposition was that, if resilience and agency are demonstrated by a student and can be perceived, it must be possible to assess these characteristics and to determine, before admitting a student into university, whether he/she is in possession of such traits. Thus, the aim of this study was to explore ways of supplementing admission criteria at UP beyond (not instead of) race (or class). It was therefore not the aim of this study to replace race or class as predictors for success or as guiding principles in admitting students to university, but to offer supplementary measures that will ensure that the selected students have a reasonable chance at success in a university environment.

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<sup>5</sup> Resilience will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2 under 2.8.2. However, to provide some context at the outset, the term can be defined as a psychological term, since a quality or trait is hard to pinpoint, but it allows a person to achieve despite being disadvantaged by poverty or a lack of good primary and secondary education (Herrman et al., 2011:259-260).

<sup>6</sup> Agency (similar to resilience, will be discussed under 2.8.1) can be introduced as a sociological term that refers to the ability of individuals to overcome culturally defined structural boundaries through individual choice and a “stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions” (Giddens, 1979:55; Dahl, 2009:397).

This study strongly senses the misguidance in our current policies and procedures. The wrong students may well be admitted and, essentially, also turned away. The responsibility to produce a student body that will enrich and improve our country and lead it forward, while leaving the damage of the past behind, is not being complied with. In the next section, literature on the current admission criteria used internationally is briefly reviewed.

## **1.2. Current admission criteria and approaches used to foster more equitable provision of underrepresented sociodemographic groups worldwide**

The race, class and equity dilemma is not unique to South Africa and is reported worldwide in countries ranging from the highest to the lowest income (McCowan, 2016:645; Kim, 2016:347-351; Minefee, Rabelo & Young, 2018:79, Marginson, 2011:23-36; Day & Nolde, 2009:135,137; Li, Mahuteau, Dockery & Junakar, 2017:625, Astin & Astin, 2015:66; Odhiambo, 2016:196, Smith, 2016:973). In addition, students enrolling for higher education worldwide are not prepared for what awaits them once they enter the institution to commence their studies (Marnewick, 2012:123; Rassen, Chaplot, Jenkins & Johnstone., 2013:6; Nel & Kirstner, 2009:953-954; Day & Nolde, 2009:135,150).

Currently, international higher education admission practices often rely heavily on exit school marks or year 12 school marks. There is widespread concern around the effectiveness and “fairness” of the use of the so-called grade 12 marks (in the case of South Africa’s National Senior Certificate (NSC) results) as a selection and placement tool when considering equitable access to higher education (Marnewick, 2012:134; Pitman, 2016:1205,1213; Palmer, Bexley & James, 2011:iii,1,11-12; Conley, 2011:4-5; Nel & Kirstner, 2009:958; Fleisch, Schoer & Cliff, 2015:5; Odhiambo, 2016:203). In South Africa, the National Benchmark Test (NBT) is sometimes used to supplement the NSC results, but even this practice raises questions around fairness and accuracy of selection and access to higher education (Fleisch et al., 2015:13). In other countries competitive entrance examinations or admission tests are used to supplement final matric marks, but these often make equitable access more difficult (McCowan, 2016:658; Conley, 2011:5). In addition, many such tests do not fare well in predicting

potential failure among students (Potgieter, Ackerman & Fletcher, 2010:17). Consequently, we are faced with a weakness in problem identification (how to arrive at equitable access) leading to a weakness in problem-solving (poor methods of redress) (Soudien, 2016:199), as is discussed next.

Globally, higher education institutions are concerned with “fair” admission, especially in cases where students had been disadvantaged, but also in light of the fact that every student comes with a unique set of skills and preparation for higher education. This may advantage a certain group while disadvantaging underrepresented or (previously) disadvantaged groups (Abib, 2016:43,46; Marnewick, 2012:134-135; Pitman, 2016:1204-1203; McCowan, 2016:646; Marginson, 2011:25).

Alternative entry programmes (interchangeably called special, foundational, extended, pathway, bridging or augmented programmes) represent one way in which institutions are trying to ensure equitable access. In many such cases, school exit marks are still used as selection criteria for these programmes, although a lower mark is accepted than that required for mainstream access. In some cases, students from disadvantaged schools are given “bonus” points that are taken into account too (Govender, 2014:14; Palmer et al., 2011:v,15-16; Conley, 2011:6; Day & Nolde, 2009:140; Astin & Astin, 2015:67). In the next section, the admission criteria relevant to this study is discussed.

### **1.3. Current admission criteria in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria**

For the purposes of this study, first year students in the Faculty of Humanities at UP were studied. To register for a programme in the Faculty of Humanities, culminating in a first degree, a learner must hold a valid NSC with admission for degree purposes and a minimum Admission Point Score (APS) of 30. The calculation of an APS is based on a learner’s achievement in any six recognised NSC 20-credit subjects. If a learner has an APS of between 26 and 29, placement may be granted in the BA (Extended programme).

Learners who have already been admitted as per their grade 11 results, with an APS of between 26 and 29, but who no longer comply with the minimum requirements as



set out above in their final grade 12 examination, may write the Institutional Proficiency Test (or NBT) in January of the year of commencement of study. The Faculty's Admissions Committee then reconsiders these applications for placement in the BA (Extended programme) as soon as the results of the NBT are available. Some preference is given to students of colour due to the equity targets of the Faculty (see appendix B). It is nevertheless becoming increasingly evident that exit exam marks cannot be used as the sole admission criteria since it privileges only a certain type of cognitive learner, while the results seem to be unreliable (see 1.2. above). *"We allow children to pass with ridiculous results and lie to them when we say to them that these sub-standard marks can get them into a job or into post-school training"* (Jansen, 2012:1). In this same article, Jansen went on to say that universities should devise their own admission policies in an attempt to ensure that students who show the ability to succeed at university level are selected.

#### **1.4. The universal need for equitable admission policies**

Part of the discussion about equitable access and admission policies and criteria, centres around the global expansion in higher education systems. This expansion converted a once elitist enterprise, reserved only for a select group of students, into one where universities have become institutions providing education to masses (Marnewick, 2012:123; Smith, 2016:971-972). The conundrum, however, is that expansion does not necessarily equate redress of past disadvantage and equitable access to marginalised groups (McCowan, 2016:645; Badat, 2011:5; Marginson, 2011:26-27; Odhiambo, 2016:197), or even meaningful access to the curriculum (McCowan, 2016:650). This translates firstly into the responsibility of a country to provide various higher education options for students to suit their needs, but secondly, it highlights the responsibility of universities to select students who are adequately prepared or has the potential to succeed (McCowan, 2016:652).

Looking at global statistics (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2018) presented in Table 1.1, questions arise around the success of universities in admitting students who are adequately prepared. Average graduation rates in China, Australia, the United States of America, Finland, France,

the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and South Africa are, for the most part, less than 50%.

Table 1.1. Gross graduation ratio by level of education between 2011 and 2016

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>China</b>			18.22	23.75	27.36	30.49
<b>Australia</b>	65.28		72.74	73.11	58.89	
<b>United States of America</b>	38.92	40.01				
<b>Finland</b>	50.11	50.57	50.06	49.86	53.3	52.88
<b>France</b>		41.04	43.44	44.41	46.16	
<b>United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland</b>	43.39	46.19	48.12	53.55		
<b>South Africa</b>		7.01	7.866	8.236	8.94	

*UNIT OF MEASURE (Percentage), LEVEL OF EDUCATION (Bachelor's to Master's or equivalent level), GENDER (Total: Male and Female)*

To bring about the change needed to create inclusive and “fair” education (both multicultural and multiracial), the proposed change should happen on various levels. Starting at the individual (staff member and student) to the classroom and all the way through the institution and beyond, even reaching the community (Guo & Jamal, 2007:45; Rassen et al., 2013:26; Kim, 2016:351; Marginson, 2011:27,29; Astin & Astin, 2015:73). Such a change also need to take aspects, such as psychological (specifically metacognition), sociological, demographic and institutional factors, into account (Potgieter et al., 2010:18; Minefee et al., 2018:90; Marginson, 2011:28; Li et al., 2017:638).

If universities are to access the benefits of human capability and facilitate true equitable and fair access, it cannot continue using merely race as a dominant view, as this does not allow for agency (Soudien, 2016:204). What is required, in essence, is a measure of prior agency (Marginson, 2011:34) and this study suggests the addition of resilience, and not merely prior academic performance (Smith, 2016:987). With this in mind, the need for equitable access in South Africa is discussed next.

### **1.5. The need for equitable access to higher education in South Africa**

It is the vision of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) of South Africa to develop a single, coordinated education system that will provide post-school

education in the form of more types of courses and qualifications across a wide spectrum, increased financial support for students, and an improved quality education and training (DHET, 2013:7; DHET, 2017:12). The single coordinated post-school system will include institutions ranging from universities and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, to public community colleges (to be established) and other private colleges and training facilities (DHET, 2013:5).

Provision of higher education through the single coordinated post-school system, as laid out in the 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training will be made by means of differentiation (DHET, 2013:29). Through differentiation, access for all South Africans will be improved by offering various forms of educational opportunities at the various institutions. Talk centres around improved participation and success rates provide *“a variety of modes of learning, learning programmes, and methods of teaching and assessment for diverse student bodies”* (DHET, 2013:29) and also address equity and social justice issues (DHET, 2013:30).

The White Paper recognises that such a growth in the higher education sector will require proper facilitation to the correct programmes and institutions and they propose to channel such facilitation via the Central Application Service (CAS). The CAS will provide advice and support regarding post-school opportunities for students and facilitate students' application to more than one institution at a mere once-off application fee. It is, however, stated categorically that institutions still have authority over their own admission decisions (DHET, 2013:31).

Consequently, and in line with the discussion in paragraph 1.4, the need is recognised for institutions to improve their systems for apposite, equitable and inclusive placement of students by recognising potential and the likelihood of success (DHET, 2017:86). However, neither the 2013 White Paper nor the 2017 Draft National Plan for Post-School Education and Training (NP-PSET) propose what such an improved system should entail or encompass. Considering the gap identified in the national plan, this study hopes to offer another option to include in the improvement of the admission system. Consequently, the background and origins of this study is discussed next.

## **1.6. Background to and origins of the study**

In an attempt to improve the admission system, by selecting students who should indeed be given a chance at university (i.e. not setting a student up for failure – one who should perhaps never have been selected to begin with, or who at least require additional academic support to make the transition from secondary to higher education), the University of Pretoria's (UP's) Faculty of Humanities embarked on a quest to introduce an Augmented Programme instead of the existing Extended Programme. The Augmented Programme's aim was to offer an additional foundational year that provided full augmentation of the subjects that a student would enrol for in the consecutive years of study. One of the experts consulted was Dr Laura Dison from the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) who was involved in the development of the Academic Support Programme (ASP) at WITS. The ASP provided a curriculum of foundation courses similar to what the Faculty of Humanities at UP had envisioned. At the time of the consultations, WITS had made use of alternative testing, through the implementation of a BQ and language proficiency test to select students, who demonstrated academic potential, from disadvantaged communities (Dison, 2009:5).

However, the dilemma at the time was that, whereas WITS had an admissions committee with experience in interpreting such BQs, UP had none. A pilot study was to be conducted in 2012 by administering the BQs used by WITS to new first-year students during the orientation week to determine whether the use of such a tool would be viable in UP's Faculty of Humanities. Unfortunately, after presenting and deliberating the envisioned Foundational Programme, an executive decision was made that such a programme would not be financially viable. In addition, the Dean responsible for driving the initiative, resigned shortly thereafter.

Due to personal involvement in writing the proposal for the Foundation Programme and work in student support at the time, an obligation developed to continue with the work already done in this regard. As a result, embarking on a doctorate study followed – one that would explore the conversion of the BQ used by WITS into a more quantitative tool that would be less labour-intensive to score and interpret. Once such a tool existed, it was envisaged that the Foundational Programme might be rekindled and explored again, or the questionnaire at least be implemented to improve equitable

and fair access to the current Extended Programme. In the next section, the methodology of this study is outlined.

### **1.7. Methodology and research design**

On a paradigmatic level, this study is based on a pragmatic foundation, influenced by three aspects. These aspects are firstly, the actions of young people who transcended the limiting boundaries that threatened to keep them from excelling in a higher education environment; secondly, the situations where “failure” should have been the order of the day for students, yet, the stories told were those of successes and unexpected mastery; and, thirdly, the choices that students made to challenge structure, which could have had positive or negative consequences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:10).

The worldview of this study is that people are more than products of structure or capital. Human beings have the power of choice that can shape realities, should they decide to make use of it. As a result, this study subscribes to the constructivist ontology of multiple mentally created social and observed realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:110-111). Hence, agency (see 2.5 and 2.6) is not viewed as dependant on predetermined capital but rather on an interplay of choices through R-A. This study is thus concerned with the multiple realities that lead to structure and structural disadvantage that inconsistently confine students; school marks that do not consistently predict performance of the different students; and race that does not consistently encapsulate class but instead perpetuate race categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:10).

To understand these realities within the dynamic and fluid South African higher education sector, its ensuing debates on fee free education as well as decolonisation and “Africanisation”, the study draws on one of the foundational authors on educational disadvantage, Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, structure is transcended through agency (see Chapter 2, 2.5.1), but only insofar as the individual possesses the necessary capital to do so. The study agrees with Bourdieu that structure and capital are important, but it disagrees with the amount of emphasis he places on the reality of structure and the types of capital that are important. As a result, the study attempted to supplement and enrich the sociological notion of agency (the ability of some

students to succeed despite their disadvantaged backgrounds) with a complimentary focus on the psychological concept, resilience. Resilience is no longer viewed as merely an individual trait (as discussed in Chapter 2, 2.5.2), in fact, it compliments agency in that resilience studies increasingly recognise the community and the relationships of a person as equally important to the trait. Resilience is therefore important as an intrapersonal trait that a student can rely on when faced with challenges. Resilience is, however, also important as an interpersonal trait, enabling a student to draw on their relationships and community resources (such as the university) to compliment this trait.

Based on the ontological stance and the complimentary theoretical focus needed to address the multiple realities in this study, particularly realities of structure and agency (see the first paragraph of this section), the axiological point of departure is rooted in Sociology (not in Psychology, the author's field of training). The reason for this lies therein that this study views this problem as being situated primarily in a social sphere and *"not based in a duality between reality independent of the mind or within the mind"* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:11). That being said, the individual remains vitally important in the social sphere and, as a result, the study cuts across psychology by focussing on resilience. The social sphere referred to is the university environment and, hence, this study also has a focus on higher education.

The author positioned herself in constructivist epistemology in order to answer the questions related to the multiple realities at play. Here, Bourdieu's social constructivist view of the socially created value of capital and the social inculcation involved in the formation of habitus is especially valuable. The study agrees with Bourdieu that all realities are socially constructed, but it disagrees that this social construction is predetermined by the dominant class and consequently, dependent on class. Subsequently, an interactive link developed between the author and the interviewed students during examining these individuals' ability to construct their own realities and transcend structures despite a lack of capital or the influence of the dominant class. As such, the findings of this study were formed as the study progressed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:111).

Based on this interactive link and the constructivist belief that individual constructions of R-A would only be elicitable through interactions “between and among” the author and the respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:111), the author chose methods that would allow such interactions. Yet, some degree of quantitative data was also needed to acquire knowledge about the influence of resilience and agency in equitable access to university; in successful navigation of university studies; and in supplementing admission criteria. Consequently, this study makes use of a mixed methods approach, more specifically, of explanatory sequential mixed methods. This method follows a two-phased approach. Firstly, a BQ was used to collect quantitative data, whereafter the results were analysed. In phase two, these results were built on by conducting semi-structured interviews with a sample of students who completed the BQs. This was a necessary part of the research as the experiences and reactions of such students made up the repository of what the author wanted to know, and it explained resilience and agency in more detail (Creswell, et.al. 2018:15).

Finally, this study further aims to contribute to equitable student access by supplementing currently used admission measures (grade 12 exit marks and race). To examine the possibility of developing such a supplemental measure, the results from the BQ, together with the information collected from the interviews, the interactive link with respondents, and the students’ marks are analysed for themes and corresponding details by means of a narrative analysis. Narrative analysis offers the opportunity to pull all the data together and to study the qualitative indicators of resilience and agency, gleaned from the narratives, as possible predictors of effective navigation of university studies. The narrative analysis also offers the opportunity to propose possibilities for the development of a future measure of R-A which may supplement admission criteria and redress disadvantage through equitable access (Howe, 2012:90; De Vos, 2001:359, Creswell, 2012:259). This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

### **1.7.1. Research questions**

The overarching research question that this study aims to address is:

How, if at all, can a BQ (see *Appendix A*) be used to identify indicators of resilience and agency in a university seeking a way to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Sub-questions:

1. How, if at all, can the indicators of resilience and agency predict academic performance in the Faculty of Humanities at UP?
2. How can this biographical instrument be further developed to specifically identify resilience and agency in order to supplement the indicators of the disadvantaged, such as race and class, so equitable access to higher education programmes can be determined?
3. How, if at all, can such a biographical instrument be designed in an easily analysable and interpretable manner?

### **1.7.2. The structure of the study**

This study is presented over eight chapters, each with its own unique part to play in creating the whole, starting with the introduction presented in this, the first chapter. The introduction aims to set the stage for this study by looking at an overview of the equity dilemma in South Africa and internationally. This is done by referring to a relevant debate on this topic between Max Price and Neville Alexander. Against the backdrop of this debate, the reader is introduced to the theoretical framework following the work of Bourdieu. In addition, the concepts resilience and agency, as proposed to potentially contribute to the quality and efficacy of the placement process at UP, is introduced in the framework of this study. Global equity issues in higher education is discussed by reviewing a variety of international literature on the topic. Finally, the research design, methodology and the research questions that guides this study are outlined.



In Chapter 2, a literature study guides the reader through the work of Bourdieu. His concepts of cultural capital, social capital, habitus, field and domination are explored in the culturally diverse landscape of South Africa and applied to the context of access to higher education. This chapter also examines the concepts agency and resilience in order to form a clear picture as to why these concepts may add value to a process of placement in a university setup. Various questions arose in grappling with the positioning of the concepts resilience and agency in this study. During this process, a shift in the author's own theoretical understanding of these two concepts led to the investigation of a possible amalgamation of the two terms. As a result, a new conceptual language is introduced that builds on resilience and agency and is discussed in addressing the relevant questions that guided this process.

The third chapter deals with the emergence and origin of the equity dilemma in South Africa. The structure and structural disadvantage, as encapsulated in the history of education in South Africa, is discussed in this chapter, by revisiting the various stages that marked the country's existence and development. This discussion is enriched by illuminating historical events through interwoven discussions of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, as well as the reference to resilience and agency.

Chapter 4 deals with the methodology and discusses the explanatory sequential mixed methods design of the research process. First, the quantitative phase is examined by referring to the process of sampling and the collection of data from the BQ. Subsequently, the qualitative phase is discussed with reference to the relevant sampling, data collection through interviews and the measurement instruments used. Finally, the summative narrative analysis of the aforementioned phases is discussed through the re-storying of the interviewed candidates' field texts.

From here, Chapter 5 reports on the quantitative data obtained from the BQ, the students' APSs, first-year Grade Point Averages (GPAs) and the resilience score assigned to each BQ.

In Chapter 6, the seven participants' narratives are discussed by means of a summative table, devised from the elements uncovered during the initial narrative analysis. Hereafter, themes revealed during the subsequent narrative analysis is discussed. Re-storying each narrative required the inclusion of the participant's

interview, combined with the initial BQ and additional information such as their marks and APSs. All this information is then elucidated in the narrative with theory by exploring, among other things, the cultural and social capital, habitus, agency and resilience (or lack thereof), as well as R-A.

Based on the seven narratives, Chapter 6 further alludes to how the BQ used in this study can be reworked. This can happen by presenting and discussing suggested questions that arose from the narratives and may be included in a future BQ aimed at identifying R-A. Finally, suggested answers to the aforementioned questions, as found in the students' narratives, are provided.

Chapter 7 contains proposed changes to the BQ, discussed by unpacking the responses received (based on the narratives) in each of the BQ's sections. It further proposes questions by which R-A can be identified for consideration for a future BQ.

The final chapter provides an overall discussion on the global question of how to improve access to higher education for disadvantaged or marginalised groups, in such a way that it becomes true and equitable. The chapter briefly describes the goals of the study, revisits the research questions that guided it and explains the context of the study and its relevance. The theoretical construct, R-A, is briefly discussed, with reference to implications for theory, policy and practice in the context of higher education. In the latter part of the chapter, the research questions that guided this study is addressed. It is followed by a discussion of the shortcomings, limitations and trustworthiness of the study, as well as the potential transferability of the research in another context outside South Africa. Finally, before concluding the chapter, directions for future research are provided.

## **1.8. Conclusion**

The equity dilemma in South Africa sees a debate between what should be classified as the most important proxy for the redress of past disadvantage, and in many institutions, race is the proxy of choice. However, literature shows that, due to the emergence of a new black middle class, the race category alone may no longer be sufficient. In addition, international literature suggests that using matric marks as sole admission criterion may hinder the equity pursuits in higher education even further.

This study examines the possibility of using a BQ to augment the process of selection and/or placement at university so as to address issues of disadvantage, while responsibly placing students who have the potential to navigate their university studies effectively. In the next chapter, this dilemma is immersed in the theoretical framework of this study and discussed in consideration of Bourdieu's views. The concepts of agency and resilience, as potential factors that may be derived from the BQ, are also discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

# THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING: BOURDIEU MEETS RESILIENCE AND AGENCY

What or rather where do we find the origin of diversity and, therefore, inequality? According to Bourdieu, we find it in capital: the foundation of social life and dictating of one's position in the social order; the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life. Yet, as mentioned before, Bourdieu changed his position and social order. Additionally, capital was more than merely an economic commodity to Bourdieu; he viewed capital more as a symbol originating in culture (Bourdieu, 1986:241-242). In this chapter, the aim is to review the definitions of the various forms of capital and how it plays out with regards to agency and/or resilience in a person's habitus; in what way people can use it to fight the symbolic battle for cultural domination that Bourdieu so often refers to, and that he himself fought successfully. Being born the son of a small-town postal worker in 1930, he too used every opportunity (and presumably his resilience and agency) to widen the gap between his original social status and that which he aspired to. *"By the time he died in 2002, he had become perhaps the world's most influential sociologist within the academy"* (Brooks, 2017).

Apart from economic capital (money/currency), Bourdieu also distinguishes broadly between cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986:243). This distinction is now discussed in more detail.

### 2.1. Capital

*"Roulette, which holds the possibility of winning a lot of money in a short space of time and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously, and in which the winning of the previous spin of the wheel can be staked and lost at every new spin gives a fairly accurate image of this imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without hereditary or acquired properties, in which each moment is perfectly independent of*

*the previous one ... so that each moment anyone can become anything*" (Bourdieu, 1986:46).

Unfortunately, the reality is far removed from the *imaginary universe* that Bourdieu refers to. In reality, capital, be it economic, educational, cultural or even social, often does go a long way to determine an individual's position. The amount of capital that an individual possesses at a particular moment in time may dictate that person's role in a relationship, the person's power to change structures and even the weight of influence the person has on such things as tastes or politics and the like (Bourdieu, 1984:108-109). As will become clear later on, the influence of cultural capital in the form of fame (associated with economic and social capital) on the opinions and reactions of people are astonishing, and proves just how important (and violent) this symbolic commodity can be. On a macro level, the amount of "... *actually usable resources and powers ...*", or rather (economic, cultural and social) capital is what causes the differentiation between social classes as they present themselves within a given society (Bourdieu, 1984:114).

In this instance, the author takes an academic leap of faith and uses an example of popular culture, found in the 2004 American pop-culture movie *Mean Girls*. It can only be imagined what Bourdieu's reaction would have been had he known that his name would be mentioned in the same sentence as a movie; one that he probably would have detested. Readers of this thesis may also cringe at the thought of this. However, this is an opportunity to use this rather unorthodox but specifically selected metaphor to illustrate the real life in high culture, so far removed from the ideal universe that Bourdieu imagined. In the movie, Regina George is the most popular girl in the school, while Gretchen Weiners is one of her very loyal (lap dog) followers. Throughout the movie Gretchen tries to popularise or "trend" a new word:

*Regina George: Your bracelet is really pretty where did you get it? I love it!*  
*Cady Heron: Oh my mom made it.*  
*Gretchen Weiners: So Fetch!*  
*Regina George: What is fetch?*  
*Gretchen Weiners: Oh, it's like slang, from ... England."*

However, Regina tells Gretchen later on to "*stop trying to make fetch happen. It's not going to happen!*" (Cady Heron, 2013). As a result, "fetch" never "happens" for

Gretchen in the movie. In fact, “fetch” also never rooted in “slang” language outside the movie. What happened instead is that, thirteen years later, Regina’s “*stop trying to make fetch happen*” has become a popular phrase used to sarcastically scorn a person viewed as out-of-touch.<sup>7</sup> This is once again a clear example of the strong – albeit symbolic and at times almost invisible – influence of cultural, social and economic capital. The fact that Regina’s character was endowed with coveted capital in all three forms, regardless of the fact that it was fictitious and only part of a pop-culture movie, ensured her greater success even outside the realm of the movie.

Nevertheless, what is of particular relevance to this study is not so much the likes of characters like Regina, but rather individual cases where the *imaginary universe* does present itself, and characters from the shadows of dominant social class do manage to leave a mark on society and transcend the barriers of structure (again referring to the life of Bourdieu as an agent). This study makes use of a conceptualisation that Bourdieu used in his book *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. He makes a distinction between an event ranked high on the social calendar of the elite, such as an exhibition or opera, and a museum. The difference is that the former enables “... a select audience to demonstrate and experience its membership of high society ...” and is only available to those possessing certain types of cultural capital. Thus, an exhibition or opera are exclusive events, excluding individuals who are not in possession of the said cultural capital. For example, a particular dress code is required that not everyone has the means to ensue. While a museum requires equal amounts of cultural capital (at least as far as the will to visit it and the ability to appreciate its contents), the contrast manifests in it not excluding anyone on the basis of dress (Bourdieu, 1984:272). The indicators for resilience and agency identified by this study resembles the museum: students who do not have the cultural, social and/or economic capital to qualify them for entry or invitation into high society, but who, given the chance, would indeed be an asset to that high society. The critical element

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon\\_valley/2014/05/01/mean\\_girls\\_slang\\_fetch\\_10\\_years\\_later\\_why\\_it\\_didn\\_t\\_catch\\_on\\_according\\_to.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2014/05/01/mean_girls_slang_fetch_10_years_later_why_it_didn_t_catch_on_according_to.html)

however, lies in their *willingness* to “visit the museum”, regardless of their social class and the structures that govern them, resulting in their changing those very structures. Following this crucial distinction, capital is now discussed in more detail as economic, cultural and social capital.

### **2.1.1. Economic capital**

Economic capital can be described as anything that can be converted directly into money – among others, property rights, goods or possessions – or money itself (Bourdieu, 1986:47). In the game of symbolic warfare, the symbolic violence is often flamed by some force. In the case of the state, it may be physical in the form of the military and the police. In the case of higher education, it may be language or some other commodity. Regardless of the type of force and how it is implemented, economic capital is usually required to fund it (Bourdieu, 2005:12).

Bourdieu recognised that economic capital often underlies other capitals, yet, it may not be enough. If one, for example, needs a specific type of machine to conduct one’s business, the purchase of that machine will simply require economic capital. Yet, economic capital will not ensure the knowledge of how to operate that machine, in which case cultural capital in its embodied form will be required. Similarly, to obtain an education one often needs economic capital but, without cultural capital to support learning, education may never be acquired. In addition, once education is acquired, it cannot be converted back into economic capital in a linear way (Bourdieu, 1986:50-51).

Therefore, whereas economic capital is a tangible commodity, it is not the only commodity of importance; and even though it may play a substantial role in a person’s social standing, it is definitely not the only role player. Thus, the other types of capital and their part in individuals’ lives and in society is now examined.

### **2.1.2. Cultural capital**

In Bourdieu’s view, cultural capital encompasses the attaining of a collection of symbolic elements consequentially being part of a particular social class such as accent/dialect, posture, behaviours, clothing, abilities, tastes, material belongings and

credentials. A sense of collective identity and a group feeling (“this is my/our people”) is created when similar types of cultural capital are shared with others – the same taste in movies, for example, or being from a deep rural school (Bourdieu, 1986:48-51). Unfortunately, social mobility may be as promoted or hampered by cultural capital as by income or wealth and, as particular types of cultural capital are more valued than others, it also leads to major social inequality (Bourdieu, 1986:46-48). With reference to the author’s own linguistic pathway, cultural capital in the form of language was served differently during different times in her life. The Afrikaans language offered a certain degree of supremacy, safety and a sense of belonging during the apartheid times. That very same language, however, created a barrier in the form of a lack of proficiency in English during early years at university; a barrier that bound students with a “shared lack of proficiency in English” and a “shared comfort in Afrikaans” together as a group.

The language itself was not the barrier, for it *“no more contains within itself the power to ensure its own perpetuation in time than it has the power to define its extension in space. Only the process of continuous creation, which occurs through the unceasing struggles between the different authorities who compete within the field of specialized production for the monopolistic power to impose the legitimate mode of expression, can ensure the permanence of the legitimate language and of its value, that is, of the recognition accorded to it”* (Bourdieu, 1991:58). To drill down to this point, the forms of cultural capital, the individuals competing in different authorities, and the interrelationships between them needs to be considered.

Bourdieu identified three forms of cultural capital: (1) embodied, (2) objectified and (3) institutionalised. **Embodied** cultural capital is accumulated over a long period of time, partly unconscious through observation and partly through self-investment where, for example, a person strives to improve the self through sacrificing time. It represents the conversion of “external wealth” into an integral part of the person’s habitus (see 2.5. for a discussion on habitus) and being. Embodied cultural capital cannot be exchanged for currency, purchased, sold or left to future generations. Since it forms part of a person, it also passes away with that person. Additionally, it also classifies the person based on their heritage (or residence or place of decent) and presumed social



standing. Examples include one's accent or dialect (associated with a particular class or space), dispositions, opinions and the like (Bourdieu, 1986:50).

It may be of importance to point out the difference in contexts between the French with its established language (spoken as well as academic/pedagogic) in which Bourdieu writes and the multilingual context of South Africa. The fact, however, remains that even in the multilingual South Africa, only two languages, namely English and Afrikaans, are recognised as academic languages in higher education. This creates a field that is played according to certain rules that may presumably be acquired through inculcation linked to the acquisition of a particular cultural capital (it may imply social and economic capital too). South Africa, being a country with 11 official languages, apart from being home to many African refugees and immigrants speaking yet other languages, is particularly dense in dialects. This classifies people in terms of geographical and class decent, thereby having caused implications for this study, as students presenting themselves through dialects associated with cultural capital linked to lower social class at the outset, was faced with barriers erected by the dominant cultural capital and class (Robbens, 1993:153). It is the positive adaptation and mobility against such structures – and the indicators of resilience and agency involved therein – that is of particular interest in this study.

Cultural capital in its **objectified** state represents a dual capital. Owning a luxury car or prized wine collection are examples of cultural capital in its objectified state and can be converted into currency. However, the ease of conversion, the currency value and the number of people interested in buying depends on cultural capital in its embodied state. Thus, the value that certain people attach to certain items/events (e.g. tickets to see a world-famous violinist, or “trending” a new word) depends on the opinions and views they have of it as a result of *their personal* embodied capital (Bourdieu, 1986:50). This is well illustrated by the social experiments of Joshua Bell (acclaimed American musician) and Cristiano Ronaldo (famous Spanish Soccer player). Joshua Bell played his \$3.5 million violin for 45 minutes in a Washington subway station during rush hour, his placing the open violin case at his feet indicative of his hope to receive donations for his music. More than 1 000 people passed him during that time. Only 7 people stopped to listen to him playing and only one person recognised him (he was not disguised). At the time of the experiment in 2007, tickets for decent seats at his

concert sold for \$100 each (Weingarten, 2007). People were willing to pay \$100 to see a man play when he played in a space where the cultural capital in its embodied form (of the elite and even the bourgeois) rendered worthy and prized. Conversely, when that space changed to a space associated with the embodied capital of the working class, the same “commodity” became almost worthless.

Christiano Ronaldo did a similar experiment where he disguised himself and took to the streets to showcase his fancy soccer footwork. No one noticed or was even interested – some were even agitated – until he removed his disguise. Within minutes he was swamped by fans, proving again the intricate and reciprocal relationship between objectified and embodied capital (Professionals in disguise, 2015).

In a university set-up, students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and entering the university with a low APS (such as the students who participated in this study) can almost be likened to a “Ronaldo-in-disguise”. Most people see the exterior presentation and is uninterested or aloof, agitated even, while there may be an academic “superstar” underneath that exterior. Through grappling with the theory and the concepts of resilience and agency, this study attempted to find a way to see beyond the disguise.

Credentials and qualifications such as tertiary degrees, or titles that symbolise competence in a particular culture and/or provides authority or standing are examples of cultural capital in its **institutionalised** form. These credentials and qualifications have the same (relatively) stable or permanent worth as money and is guaranteed by law. Once they are obtained, they do not have to be “proved” again and they do not, for the most part, or at least for extended periods, fluctuate as is the case with academically uncertified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990:132). This then translates into the differentiation between self-taught people with no formal qualifications, which may be called into question at any time, and people with qualifications that have been accredited independently of those who acquire them. These accredited academic qualifications imply (and legally guarantee) a certain degree of cultural competence and cultural capital (it needs to be added, without reference to social class as is the case with the high society’s social calendar) (Bourdieu, 1986:50). Institutionalised

cultural capital can, however, scarcely be separated from social capital as will become evident in the next section.

### **2.1.3. Social capital**

**Social capital** can be described as membership of, networks with, or connections to certain groups, be that family, friends, or wider social or professional networks. It also refers to the support that each member of such a group receives by having access to the collective capital (resources) available in the group (Bourdieu, 1986:51; Bourdieu, 1990:35). Apart from social capital referring to social connections and the consequent sharing of resources, it also has to do with *“honourability and respectability that is often essential in winning and keeping the confidence of high society, and with it a clientele, and may be drawn on, for example, in making a political career”* (Bourdieu, 1984:122). In such instances, a lack of social capital may form a barrier in reaching one’s full potential. A person may not acquire as good a job, even with qualifications, if he/she does not have adequate social capital (Bourdieu, 1984:147).

Social capital, in the author’s case, similarly flowed from the “lack of proficiency in English” and a “comfort in Afrikaans”, shared with fellow Afrikaans students, as referenced earlier. Because this bound the group together it, in turn, yielded social capital as a support structure of note. In the discussion of the narratives in Chapter 6, similar support structures are often found in a family environment or a teacher-learner relationship. It was thus interesting to note that also social capital often played a role as an indicator of resilience and agency in the habitus of the participants, and it therefore became an important component of this study. Of equal importance, however, is that capital, in whichever form according to Bourdieu, resides in the habitus and therefore it became the next point to discuss.

## **2.2. Habitus**

*“Habitus is one of Bourdieu’s most influential yet ambiguous concepts. It refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital”* (White Fuse Media, 2016). Habitus is said to lie deep in the unconscious where it had been imparted (inculcated and appropriated) from childhood onwards – as an immanent law. It refers to those habits, skills and dispositions (particularly note agentic or non-agentic reactions and resilient or non-

resilient responses) that are deeply ingrained and in our possession due to life experiences and our preference for cultural articles such as fashion and/or dress, that is considered art and food preferences (Burawoy & Von Holdt, 2012:15; Bourdieu, 1977:72). Bourdieu (1977:72) defines it as “*systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations*”. The goal of these structures (such as language or economy) as produced by collective history is to successfully reproduce themselves as completely as possible in the form of “durable dispositions”. This is done through inculcation and appropriation of these dispositions in the individual who is persistently conditioned in a similar manner that result in that individual continually “*being placed in the same material conditions of existence*” (Bourdieu, 1977:84; Bourdieu, 1980:53).

What is of particular importance in this study is Bourdieu’s distinction between *social* class and *class* habitus. Bourdieu is of the opinion that members of the same social class can never be assumed to have lived through the same life experiences, neither could any events that occurred in their lives be expected to have followed the same sequence. Instead, Bourdieu again focusses on the system of disposition that individuals, who share a similar habitus, may possess. It may be of value to refer back to the earlier example of Regina George and Gretchen Weiners. They are both members of the high social class, even members of the same clique, but they do not enjoy the same recognition. Could this be a result of varying systems of disposition, simply stated, the leader vs the follower? This even cautions against the use of class (as opposed to race) as a measure of redress and leads one to examine possibilities in a shared habitus. It links to the debate discussed in Chapter 1, and cautions against Neville Alexander’s argument that class is the more accurate measure to address past disadvantages. In this study, it thus became important to search for the shared cultural capital (and not necessarily, for example, the same race or class) that since childhood have been inculcated in the habitus of the different individuals who participated in this research. It became vital to search for similar class habitus as perhaps potential indicators for resilience and/or agency (Bourdieu, 1977:85).

Bourdieu often used sport metaphors when discussing the habitus by referring to it as a “sense for the game” or a “feel for the game”. This signifies an understanding of how

a game works and the knowledge of what the next step in the game (and in a given situation in life) should be. This “sense” or “feel” enables a person to anticipate the direction that a game is about to take and to act accordingly (Bourdieu, 1998b:25). When explained in such terms (sense, referring to “philosophical”, “literary”, “artistic”) it can be deduced that habitus is rarely explicitly laid out or enforced, due to its gradual, progressive and imperceptible occurrence (Bourdieu, 1997:179-180). In South Africa, for the most part, habitus may be in a transition phase for many people. In a sense, white South Africans have lost a large part of their cultural identity in the recent past. This became apparent in the author’s life when her child had to dress in traditional cultural clothing for Heritage Day and she had no idea what it entailed for white South Africans. The only cultural identity associated with white South Africans is that of the “boer” (farmer), the English soldiers or the settlers, and for most of them growing up in present day urban cities, all of these are so far removed from their habitus that they cannot imagine themselves identifying with *voortrekkerkappies*<sup>8</sup> or other dress styles associated with those times. The reason is probably because habitus can be seen as *“the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them”* (Wacquant, 2005:316). Dress for most contemporary white South Africans, is purely that of popular European or American fashion. The author does, however, believe that, while white South Africans may feel a loss in identity, in terms of dress at least, many black South Africans may face a contention or even conflict between cultural identity and popular contemporary identity (or might they feel freed from the shackles of this assumed identity?). What should be done when cultural habitus collides with popular culture? Or are these separate habitus? Swartz (2002:645) states that there are *“different kinds of habitus for different social classes and status groups, such as gender, racial, ethnic, and generational cohorts. Habitus, then, adjusts aspirations and expectations according to the objective probabilities for success or failure common to the members of the same class for a*

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<sup>8</sup> A voortrekkerkappie was a type of cloth hat worn by “boer women” during the Great Trek period.

*particular behaviour*". In this case, people may adjust their expectations and aspirations according to the habitus that is at play at a given time. However, it does not seem this simple.

Bourdieu explains this to an extent by referring to the "law of the social body" (of the dominant habitus) that cannot merely be "*converted into the law of the body ... by a simple effort of will*" (Bourdieu, 1997:179-180). A person who challenges, in a way, his own personality (being timid), because it does not fit the description of the "law of the social body" (e.g. to be taken seriously one has to come across as assertive and extraverted), will feel deceived or let down by their body, potentially hindering upward mobility and resilience, even to the extent of paralysing the person. On the other hand, a person inculcated in a different set of "laws" may see this as a challenge and even motivation to excel (Bourdieu, 1997:179-180). This view became evident in this study and is illustrated in more detail in the discussion of the narratives in Chapter 6.

Bourdieu cautions that habitus often leads to justifying social inequality (Bourdieu, 1984:5-6), possibly exacerbating the previous statement because, in certain cultures, for example, Da Vinci's Mona Lisa is widely accepted as fine art by the middle and upper classes and all who have been exposed to and instructed in this view will share this sentiment. The Mona Lisa may, however, play a very small part in the culturally acceptable art landscape of some of the African cultural groups in South Africa. As a result, the aforementioned middle and upper classes are considered socially "rich" and possessing vast amounts of social capital by persons with an understanding of and appreciation for this same culture. A person who has not been exposed to this view, but has been brought up to view different forms of artwork as "fine art" will be judged as socially poor. It is then (erroneously) believed that some people are naturally inclined to the finer things in life while others are not, whereas the distinction should not be between the people but rather between the arts. This distinction in the classification of art was clearly illustrated when UCT removed 75 of their artworks in an attempt to guard them after many of its artworks were burned during student protests the previous year. As part of its transformation process, UCT then embarked on a review of all artworks on campus. "[T]hey set up a committee which went around looking at all the artworks at UCT and decided which ones were offensive and one does not know which ones were not" (Poonah, 2017). The critical factor here is the

reason behind the difficulty in determining the offensiveness of the artworks: the varying cultural capital linked to offensiveness. This is similar to varying cultural capital being linked to the appreciation of “fine art”.

This insight is accompanied by Bourdieu’s likening of habitus to a “feel for the game.” Similar to a skilled batsman that “just knows” when to swing at a 160km/h ball without consciously thinking about it, each of us has this type of “just know” for the social situations we regularly encounter. In South Africa, however, depending on the situation, one’s habitus (which can be rooted in any number of different cultures represented by the rainbow nation) will either enable a person to successfully steer that particular situation, or cause that person to misread it altogether. This is worsened by the fact that the habitus and cultural capital of the different role players in that society may differ completely. Growing up in a crowded, crime-ridden informal settlement will teach a person skills to survive dangerous situations; to manage with very little; to cope in situations where one is always surrounded by people and has very little personal space. Upon entering university, such a person may be able to work smartly with very little resources and survive having to live in a dangerous and suspect part of the city. However, the same person may find that their skills are not useful – and may even be detrimental – to navigate their interaction with fellow students and lecturers who do not share the same habitus as this person, but instead value things such as personal space.

The important thing to consider when judging the required actions in each of the above situations is the field in which it takes place. Perhaps then one can conclude that there are not, as Swartz suggested, different habitus but rather different fields, each with its own set of rules for the game. And perhaps it is resilience and agency that allows a person to manage these differences successfully because, in the sport arena at least, many a fine golfer adjust seamlessly to the occasional game of hockey, and an esteemed rugby player could easily fit into the rules of a game of American football if he understands the rules of that game. This concept turns the attention to the all-important Bourdieuan concept, field.

### 2.3. Field

Field can be seen as a multi-dimensional space that is taken up by specific positions (for example, in netball the player that plays the “centre” position occupies the centre of the field). These positions are then taken up by the various actors (or the various players in the game) who express the different positions (Bourdieu & Johnson. 1993:30; Bourdieu, 1985:724). With reference to this study, field can be seen as the physical properties (land and buildings) on which the (game of) university<sup>9</sup> is situated (played) as well as the various positions (actors/players) that it constitutes, notably the students, and the staff directly involved in their admission to and placement in the university. It becomes evident in the consequent chapter that the field of higher education in South Africa has changed rather dramatically over the last few decades. Universities under the apartheid regime were hierarchically classified into a dominant (white English), an intermediate (white Afrikaans) and a subordinate tier (black) (see Chapter 3 for specific discussions). Each of these tiers represented unique fields with different rules. On the one continuum, dominant universities were subject to virtually no state control and could, to a large extent, *“reject external political determinants and obey the specific logic of the university field”* (Naidoo, 2004:461). On the other end of the continuum, the opposite was true with subordinate universities being *“subject for much of their history to direct and violent state control and repression”* (Naidoo, 2004:461).

Field can be seen as the interrelatedness of constituent parts, which establishes that each position – from the students to the lecturers to the executive and every other position involved – is subjectively defined by and placed relative to other positions. This results in the actual existence of each position – even the dominant one – being dependant on the other positions constituting the field. The structure of the field (in this case the university) can then be seen as the structure of distributing the capital

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<sup>9</sup> The discussion and explanation of field was found best in Bourdieu’s discussion of the literary field in his work, the field of cultural production. The author believes that this discussion can be applied to the explanation of any field. Thus, in this section the literary field is replaced by the university field.



necessary for success in the field (such as students graduating or lecturers publishing) (Bourdieu et.al., 1993:30). Agents are spread across the multi-dimensional field in the first dimension (i.e. application for admission to university and consequent registration), in line with the overall volume of the capital they possess (such as APS – the marks they obtained in their final matric examination, combinations of high school subjects and in some instances, even exposure in the form of, for example, portfolios or community engagement). In the second dimension, the composition of their capital (or the relative weight of the combination of their school subjects required for registration in a specific degree – discussed in more detail in Chapter 1) is taken into consideration (Bourdieu, 1985:724).

The university is a field of forces in which cultural capital, according to Bourdieu “*is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible*”. This implies that only students possessing certain cultural capital will be “successful” at university. The aim of this study is to identify which aspects of cultural capital (perchance in the form of resilience and agency) the above statement relates to (Bourdieu, 1998a:264-265; Bourdieu et.al., 1993:30; Bourdieu, 1986:46). In addition, the university is also a field of struggles (and this had been evident throughout centuries in the form of, for instance, uprisings, strikes and demonstrations) with the explicit aim of transforming the field, while other struggles aim to conserve this field of forces. Relating to struggles in the university field, different agents have different agendas to defend or improve their positions. The strategies that the various agents in various positions decide upon are directed, to a large extent, by the relationship (or structure of network) between various positions (Bourdieu, 1998a:265; Bourdieu et.al., 1993:30). This became evident in the #feesmustfall protests in 2015/2016 when students felt that they were not heard by management, chose their strategies (violent at times) as a result and challenging, in effect, what Bourdieu refers to as domination.

## **2.4. Domination**

Moving from the field on which agents play to what happens to agents themselves on the field due to the distribution of cultural capital, one has to consider that the cultural, social and economic capital that weigh supreme, dictate the dominant group and, by default, render the others dominated. Or at least, in oversimplified terms perhaps, this

is how Bourdieu viewed the world: a constellation of the dominant and the dominated. During the apartheid era in South Africa, this is an accurate description of what happened in the country with the white (especially Afrikaans) people being the dominant and black people being the dominated. A symbolic domination accepted as natural during the apartheid era existed between them, especially by the dominant (white) class, and it was misinterpreted as something else, something good and necessary for the survival of the white nation. Presumably, it was unobserved altogether by many white South Africans, hence the dominated had no choice but to accept the domination. In South Africa, the dominant asserted their version and understanding of society as the “objective truth” and this “objectivity” was used, through education, politics and the like, to affirm and preserve its dominion (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000:6-7,13; Burawoy & Von Holdt, 2012:11).

In post-apartheid South Africa, domination is not as easily explained, as it is divided. The majority of the previously dominated people who voted for the current ruling party, live in severe poverty and are highly disadvantaged, while the same is not necessarily true of the presently dominated. Thus, *economic* domination is fragmented and divided, one might even add, undecided. However, the political domination appears to lie in the hands of the ruling party. Taking note of anecdotes, however, one has to wonder even about this. During the protests, the youth appeared to be especially divided in where their political dominion was seated, but this is a topic for another discussion (Jansen, 2017:116-118). What is important is that the youth is part of the educational sphere – a space where pedagogic action occurs. According to Bourdieu, domination is perpetuated through pedagogic action – the enforcing and instruction (or is it indoctrination?) of the social norms of the dominant. These become the prerequisite of forming a relationship where cultural capital is shared or withheld (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000:6-7). A clear example is seen in the #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall campaigns (simmering at the time this chapter is being written). The student activists in these protests and demonstrations are demanding free, decolonised education. They are propagating the use and acceptance of African scholars’ work and a reform of the colonised curriculum. There is also a call for mother tongue education.

The actions became a battle of classification struggles in which the movement seemed to misunderstand the movement itself at times. Protests started becoming violent and destructive (vandalising) at times, and the influence of social media blew certain aspects out of proportion. Statements were made (blown out of proportion and sensationalised out of context) about the abolishment of all scientific knowledge, as it was said to be colonised knowledge. Yet, this is not the agenda and belief of the movement.

However, returning to the classification struggle and the call for mother tongue education in particular, this call may seem strange after the struggle during the apartheid years, in part, advocating in favour of English education and the *abolishment* of mother tongue education. Yet, this is a very good example of Bourdieu's theory of pedagogic action (Bourdieu, 1991): *"English continues to dominate. Although it is the main language of a minority, English has become both the language of power and the language of educational and socioeconomic advancement, that is, a dominant symbolic resource in the linguistic market in South Africa"* (Setati, et al., 2002:132). Neville Alexander agrees with this statement, but adds that language is linked to the economic climate of a country, which includes African languages in South Africa, leading to greater productivity and efficiency *"if people are able to understand immediately the nuance of the instruction received"* (Patel, 2011). What better way to "struggle" and fight for political domination than through the use of language as pedagogic action because, as Patel (2011) continues *"eventually it will not be the work of government alone to grant African languages the much-needed capital"* and she continues by quoting Alexander: *"It will take a social movement"* (Patel, 2011). And indeed, the pedagogic action took on the form of a social movement under the hashtags #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall. Suddenly, the pedagogic action makes sense – education was envisaged to be used as the vessel to transport domination change. Bourdieu and Passeron (2000:116) refer to the varied use of *specifically language* in the different social classes as *"educationally profitable linguistic capital ... one of the best-hidden mediations through which the relationship ... between social origin and scholastic achievement is set up"*: the selective sharing of language with other members of the dominant class and the selective withholding thereof from dominated members of society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000:6-7).

This reverts to an earlier-mentioned point where the author's language, Afrikaans, was both a barrier and a benefit. According to Bourdieu, the influence of linguistic capital is continually sensed, but is most prominent in early primary schooling when the weight of understanding and use of language dominates teachers' assessments (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000:73). In apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, many learners, especially in primary schools, were and still are being educated in their mother tongue and not in English. Nonetheless, as became evident in the previous chapter, many academics agree that students are progressively under-prepared for university studies. Thus, the author is in agreement with Bourdieu that the importance of language should never be reduced to being a mere communication tool. The question remains why the language in which one is raised in South Africa appears to make a difference to preparedness to study. Why did the author and her peers manage to make the transition from Afrikaans to English rather smoothly, while the same cannot be said about some students speaking other South African languages?

Once more, Bourdieu seems to have some inclination when he states that the complexity of the language transferred by a family, including the range and quality of vocabulary, relates directly to the ability to interpret and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic. *"It follows logically that the educational mortality rate can only increase as one move [sic] towards the classes most distant from scholarly language"* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000:71). To this end, one has to support the call for decolonisation of the South African curriculum. However, the possibility exists that the problem is not so much a colonised curriculum but rather the absence of African scholarly (and non-scholarly) literature. The mere fact that South African literature have not yet been appropriately "Africanised" may well be affecting the "range and quality of vocabulary" transferred to some South African children. It is thereby by no means suggested that introducing a new academic language (Africanising the curriculum) would be an easy task, but merely that the introduction of African scholarly literature may enhance or rather expand the vocabulary of African languages.

The use of educationally profitable linguistic capital in apartheid South Africa may hold the key when English, as the country's only international language, was selectively

taught or withheld with the explicit aim of perpetuating and reproducing the dominant class (and race) (more about this in Chapter 3).

Even in Afrikaans schools, English was taught as a subject which, the author prefers to argue, naturally led to a greater range and better quality of vocabulary. Despite this fact, Afrikaans was a written academic language at the time and Afrikaans people continued to become professors and scholars via studying in Afrikaans.

Pedagogic action, as explained above, necessitates pedagogic work, a process of instruction (inculcation) which requires adequate time to produce a durable training, i.e. habitus, *“the product of internalisation of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself”* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000:31). The habitus created in the spheres of certain South African languages dictated a non-scholarly approach and eventually perpetuated it. After years of perpetuation without new pedagogic work to drive the pedagogic action, the habitus is changing under the payoff lines #feesmustfall and #Rhodesmustfall. In addition, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a growing black middle class that is introduced to different ways of thinking and different cultural capital, thus potentially moulding the habitus in completely different ways to others who may, for example, be growing up in a rural setting with different types of exposure.

Overall, Bourdieu effortlessly merges the person, in whom habitus and symbolic dominance have been ingrained, into the social reality of the time. In apartheid South Africa this was rather evident, but in the current democratic South Africa it poses a problem. As Bourdieu’s *“methodological strategies cannot be easily applied to contexts characterized by social conflict and change”*, the problem exists partly because current social reality is dynamic and ever changing, and partly because collective agency among different groups of people continually challenges the status quo (Naidoo, 2004:467).

It is at this very juncture that South Africans are nowadays misunderstanding one another. It is also this aspect that Bourdieu’s theory fails to address comprehensively. What happens in a society where there is not one clearly identifiable dominant group and one dominated group? Which cultural capital becomes the most sought-after or does it vary from one situation to the next? It may be this very absence of “ingraining”

that adds to the feeling of chaos currently experienced by some people in South Africa. There are no strong dominant class views and values ingrained into the habitus of *all* people alike that makes dominant social structures come across as mostly well-arranged and rational. Domination in such a set-up would become natural and invisible, however, such domination does not exist in contemporary South Africa. Instead, dominance is divided and spread out, perhaps even diluted at times.

Therefore, a gap in Bourdieu's theory becomes evident here as he uses this relationship between dominant and dominated to "*resolve[s] the opposition between agency and structure, but he does so in a way that removes agency from the picture. 'The body is in the social world but the social world is in the body', so that the body can only act in accordance with the social world, by which it is 'pre-occupied' before it acts*". Again, Bourdieu himself is an example of a body that acted contrary to the social world by which it was "pre-occupied" before it acted. Being the son of a rural postal worker, he moved across the structures imposed on him by his class to become an acclaimed academic and writer (Burawoy et al., 2012:105).

What is seen in the South Africa today – an apt illustration once again being the recent #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall movements – is not a "pre-occupation with the acts of the social world" but rather, for the most part at least, an opposition to it (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]:142;152; Burawoy & Von Holdt, 2012:48). Students arising in large numbers to challenge a "colonised curriculum" and to demand education that is free of fees can perhaps only be collective agency with the aim of *winning* dominance. To gain a better understanding hereof, agency as well as resilience are now discussed.

## **2.5. Agency and resilience**

Initially, coming from a psychological background, the author viewed resilience as a useful concept. This view, however, shifted promptly with the realisation that agency and resilience are of equal importance and impact and, as a matter of fact, probably cannot and ought not be used mutually exclusive. In this section, the two concepts are briefly discussed before debating their position in this study.

### 2.5.1. Agency

*“There is action, history, and preservation or transformation of structures only because there are agents”* (Bourdieu, 1998:38). This quotation introduces the importance of actors in any sphere as either preservers or transformers of structures who, in their quest for either of the aforementioned, produces what we call history: those often rich lessons that we can learn from the past and that shape the future. Agency is a term that had been defined extensively by an almost inexhaustible list of researchers and, due to space constraints, this study cannot afford the luxury of an in-depth examination. Hence, the author limited her discussion to the researchers and definitions that had the greatest bearing on this study. In this study, agency refers to *individual agency*. Although agency is often seen as collective mobility the author does not regard it as only that. Agents, as individuals within a context, are also often engaged in the challenging of individual structures that have a great impact on their lives. Considering this, the importance of collective agency is by no means disregarded; the statement is merely made that it is not the focus of this study.

At this stage, it is important to note that agency is often discussed in relation to structure. The structure or agency dichotomy may be, according to Giddens and Sutton (2014:23), one of the most durable over time. Structure can be seen as a source of reproducing social interaction, but it is only within such interaction that it is reconstructed: *“in the same way as a spoken sentence is generated by syntactical rules and yet by virtue of this serves to participate in the reproduction of those rules”* (Giddens, 1996:101). It is hence understood that, in the context of this study, a structure could be a learner growing up in disadvantaged and impoverished circumstances with little access to cultural and economic capital required to attempt tertiary studies. This becomes a structure that reproduces social interaction, where this learner is perhaps often told that he/she will never be suitable or eligible for tertiary studies; another learner may give up because he/she too believes in the power of the system over him/her and as a result, these types of interactions are reconstructed for future use and reference. However, it does not end here as we realise throughout this study, as some people refuse to be confined to this kind of structural reproduction and choose to become agents of their own lives instead.

The author starts the (by no means exhaustive) discussion of agency by referring to the work of two theorists, John Locke and Talcott Parsons (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998:964-966). The significance of their contribution to the understanding of agency is Locke's "*rejection of the binding power of tradition ... [and] ... a new conception ... that affirmed the capacity of human beings to shape the circumstances in which they live*". The importance of Parsons' view of agency is that "[a]n act is always a process in time .... The concept end always implies a future reference, of a state which is ... not yet in existence, and which would not come into existence if something were not done about it by the actor" (Emirbayer et al., 1998:965-966). Agency is, however, not only an individual's capacity to influence their life circumstances by "doing something" – choosing to believe that they can influence their lives and their environments (Keogh et al., 2012:47); it is also the consideration and inclusion (not mere rejection) of their personal history and tradition. Agents can, however, only be seen as effective or efficient as a result of the socialisation that "*a set of dispositions that imply both their propensity and their ability to enter into and play the game*" (Bourdieu, 1998a:38) bestows upon an individual. In addition, it is vital to include the impact that a future orientated view of an actor will have on shaping their adaptations accordingly (Hitlen & Elder, 2007:182).

Agency is defined by Giddens (1979:55) as a "*continuous flow of conduct*", a person's actual, planned or intended interventions forming a stream that intertwines with that person's everyday life as it plays out in an arena that is the greater world surrounding it. However, one must always be mindful of the fact that, whereas people's actions actively shape their life stories (or narratives) taking into account the many restrictions that presents itself, "*people differ in their ability to successfully implement these strategies*" and planned or intended interventions (Hitlen & Elder, 2007:183).

The definition that stood out most was that of Emirbayer et al. (1998:970-971) who conceptualised agency as a chordal triad comprising of "*the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations*" (Emirbayer et al., 1998:970).



The insertion of *“the different temporal orientations of agency”* allows freedom to observe and include *“action that are more oriented (respectively) toward the past, the future, and the present”*. This paves the way for examining the influence of habit and repetition, memory and history while, at the same time, allowing space for *“creative, improvisational, and foresightful dimensions”*. These dimensions enable one to reflect on and even challenge these very elements through a future-orientated outlook, consequently distancing oneself, where necessary, to make the required changes (Emirbayer et al., 1998:975,984).

Thirdly, attention is given to the demands and contingencies of ever-changing situations that constitute the present. Unrealistic ideals should be measured (and where appropriate, adjusted) against the reality of real-world circumstances. This implies the presence of judgments and choices perhaps through *“deliberation with others (or sometimes, self-reflexively, with themselves)”*, but in Bourdieu’s view, as mentioned above, always as a result of the cultural capital possessed by the actor. Through this process that is, in the author’s view, linked closely to metacognition, actors *“gain in the capacity to make considered decisions”* that differentiates the actor as either an intentional decision-maker or, in the author’s understanding, an accidental/silent decision-maker. The more agents then exercise the ability to make these intentional decisions, the more they may become enabled to pursue their plans and make even more intentional decisions that have change as a consequence (Emirbayer et al., 1998:984,993). The author’s reference to metacognition, however, also highlights a gap in Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of agency as he did not allow for much internal reflection outside the parameters of the person’s habitus.

In summary, in this study, agency refers to the capacity of a person to believe that they can influence their lives and their environments and then choosing to shape and/or change the circumstances in which they live. This change can happen through a process in time that may be located in the past in the form of habit, memory, tradition or history; the present, through judgment that shapes the actor’s adaptations and metacognitive reflection, enabling the actor to make intentional decisions; or the future by means of imagination, improvisation, creativity and/or anticipation, or any combination thereof. In addition, the ability to successfully implement such intentional decisions differ among people and their ability to make these intentional decisions,

and may lead to a further increase in ability to make even more intentional decisions with change as consequence.

In this sense, agency can be viewed as a process of decision-making and action. But there is more involved than the mere guiding influence and impetus of the capital that comprises the person's habitus. Subsequent questions are, what supports this decision-making and action?; what are the innate traits that allow a person to make these decisions based on history or judgement of the present or in anticipation of the future?; and what could the factors at play be where tradition and cultural capital fail to account for upward mobility by an agent? In the following section, resilience is examined as a possible factor that could support or bring about agency.

### **2.5.2. Resilience**

Studies on what is known to us today as resilience, can be traced far back. However, according to Ungar (2005:xvi), the longitudinal studies uncovering *“remarkably good mental and physical health outcomes despite the multiple disadvantages of structural, familial, and individual stressors”* by researchers such as Werner and Smith (1982), Rutter (1979), Gamezy (1976) and Murphy and Mortarty (1976) in the middle to late 1900s allowed for the study of resilience to become a rapidly increasing field, allowing different ways of thinking about risk. Initially, resilience was seen purely as individual traits associated with risk. In recent research though, this has shifted towards understanding resilience as a dynamic, multi-determined process (Theron, Liebenberg & Ungar, 2015:9-11), and thus rather viewed as *“a theory that can inform action. It is a concept that changes our focus from the breakdown and disorder attributed to exposure to stressful environments, to the individual characteristics and social processes associated with either normal or unexpectedly positive psychosocial development”* (Ungar, 2008:21). Even more important, a strong focus is now placed on an ecological perspective that includes *“a new emphasis on the processes embedded in contexts of human life and particularly in cultural processes”* (Theron et al., 2015:17). Ferreira & Ebersöhn (2012:36-37) explains this by interweaving the asset-based approach with the bio-ecological model by Bronfenbrenner and Evans (1998). In this model, assets are identified in the various systems at play, namely the micro-system (e.g. the individual's family, school and peers); the meso-system (the

interaction between microsystems); and the macro and exosystems (the broader community and societal views and beliefs, political and economic influences as well as policies and laws of the country at large). These systems are interrelated and interdependent and gives one a sense of the various systems and resources involved in an individual displaying resilience (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012:36-37).

Ebersöhn (2013:97) built on this idea and introduced a new theoretical conceptualisation termed relationship-resourced resilience (RRR) in which teachers in resource-scarce environments made use of relationships as resources. She used the visual representation of a honeycomb, or chicken wire, *“to visualise the way in which relationships are knots/nodules, swollen with resources that decisively create lines among one another as a connection between people”*. In this visualisation, the lines show a network of resources and *“link collective needs with mutual assets. The result is a honeycomb of nurturing relationships that foster resilience; a chicken wire of partnerships to promote protection against adversity”* (Ebersöhn, 2013:116).

Of importance though, is that the individual remains part of the resilience equation, and the onus rests on that individual to access the resources available to them in their ecology in order to display resilience. Additionally, in this study, the focus is on individual students in their ecology, as operating from inside their habitus, and how they navigated university studies. This may be somewhat different to learners from a deep rural area with very little access to any form of resource.

Following on the honeycomb-chicken wire visualisation, regardless of where it is exhibited, resilience remains a beautiful term that conjures up images of strength and perseverance and an ability to rise above even the worst of circumstances. However, as have become evident, *“[a]daptation, in the face of contextual adversity, is always the result of a dynamic interplay of individual and social forces”* (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2008:7). In a quest to then aim to define resilience, based on the aforementioned quotation and other mentioned sources, it would appear that consensus, regarding the definition of resilience, is found in two areas. The first area affirms that many factors and systems contribute to resilience and that it is not simply an interpersonal trait, but a process linked to an individual’s ecosystem, context and culture. Second, resilience may be seen in one area of a persons’ life while being absent in other areas, thus, it

is circumstance-specific (Theron & Malindi, 2010:717; Herrman et al., 2011:260; Coetzee, 2013:31; Rutter, 2012:335). In addition, two concepts are shared among definitions, namely adversity and positive adaptation (Theron et al., 2015:5; Fletcher & Sakar, 2013:14; Crawford, Wright & Masten, 2005:355).

This process, and everything and everyone that contributes to it, is what the author aimed to reveal through the narratives. It has been established that resilience is not merely an interpersonal trait or even a collection of interpersonal traits. Some of the identified interpersonal traits that appear to contribute to resilience, however, remains valuable for purposes of this study as it too forms part of the process. They are consequently listed (Hermann et al., 2011:260):

- Personality traits (openness, extraversion and agreeableness/easy temperament)
- Internal locus of control
- Mastery
- Self-efficacy
- Self-esteem (positive self-concepts)
- Cognitive appraisal (positive interpretation of events and cohesive integration of adversity into self-narrative)
- Optimism

Other traits associated with resilience are (Hermann et al., 2011:260):

- Intellectual functioning
- Cognitive flexibility
- Social attachment
- Emotional regulation
- Positive emotions
- Spirituality
- Active coping
- Hardiness
- Hope
- Resourcefulness
- Adaptability

The reason for including these interpersonal traits is because they are required as part of the analysis, having worked with individual students at UP who are not necessarily living in dire or adverse circumstances. In addition, as discussed later, some students who apply to UP (or any other university for that matter) but do not meet the admission criteria, may not have faced adverse circumstances before. They may, however, have experienced the navigation of university studies as an “adverse circumstance”. In such an instance, one would ideally want to be relatively sure that such a student will be able to muster resilience (in this new ecology and “culture”) and bounce out of the “adverse circumstance”. Therefore, as “[r]esilience notions have generally been interpreted as conveying great optimism regarding the possibility of surviving adversity” (Rutter, 2006:9), one has to consider the presence of traits such as optimism within the individual. Du Preez (2004:52) agrees when he refers to Lewis (1999) and Sarafino (2002) believing that “*resilience seems to incorporate high levels of self-esteem, personal control and optimism. Optimism refers to the standpoint that positive things are likely to happen*”. In the narratives, this often played out in the form of cognitive appraisal (see Chapters 5-11). Fletcher and Sakar (2013:12) added planning skills and support structures, both inside and outside the family, and this is supported by Theron et al. (2010:717) in that resilience may become activated “*when at-risk young people and their ecologies (families, peers, schools, communities) work together to provide and make the most of life-affirming resources.*” In a university environment though, the responsibility of the individual in this process is stressed once more. A university environment often makes vast amounts of resources available to students, but it is in the power of the students to decide, probably through intrapersonal thought process and evaluation, whether or not they will make use of these resources. The intrapersonal thought process fits in perfectly with part of the definition of agency referred to as judgment that shapes the actor’s adaptations and metacognitive reflection enabling the actor to make intentional decisions. Because the ability for successful implementing such intentional decisions differs among people, it is argued that it is at this very juncture that the symbiosis between agency and resilience is most evident. The judgement referred to as part of agency may indeed not be part of agency at all, but rather of resilience working in on agency.

In combining the work of various researchers, the consequent definition is concluded with: Resilience is the developmental and psychosocial capacity of a person in their ecology to adapt well, handle, overcome, learn from, withstand or even be transformed (enriched) by, or thrive on the inevitable hardships, difficulties and pressure they experience in life over time (whether it be sustained hardship, or potentially traumatic events) (Grotberg, 2003:1; Coetzee, 2013:31; Theron et al., 2010:717; Fletcher & Sakar, 2013:12; Graber, Pichon & Carabine, 2015:8; APA, 2017; Rutter, 2006:2). Neil (2003:53), Strümpfer (2013:17) and the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017) calls resilience the bouncing back and moving ahead after serious and/or significant sources of stress, threat, tragedy, or trauma in life. The aforementioned definition links to the origin of the term, derived from the Latin verb *'resilire'* "meaning *to leap or spring back; to rebound, recoil*" (Theron et al., 2015:4).

In summary, for purposes of this study, resilience is defined as the capacity of a person – through the influence and support of many factors, systems and relationships – to adapt positively to (handle, overcome, learn from, withstand, or even be transformed by or thrive on) adversity (the inevitable hardships, difficulties, pressure, serious stress, threat, tragedy or trauma) they experience in life. Resilience is dependent on circumstance, context and ecology and, as a result, may be displayed in one area of a persons' life, yet being absent in other areas.

In broad terms then, if agency is seen as the **decision(s) and action(s)** involved in making a change in one's environment, based on the consideration and interplay of many factors, then resilience may be seen as the **intrapersonal thought process** (internal evaluation of the usefulness of any given resource) **through the influence of the habitus** (a product of social and cultural inculcation and the personification of social, e.g. relationships, and cultural capital) **involved in positive adaptation**. The critical question to answer now though is, how does one identify agency and resilience?

## **2.6. The operationalisation of indicators of agency and resilience**

According to Masten and Coatsworth in Schoon (2006:7), the identification of resilience is based on two fundamental judgments: (a) Is a person "doing ok"?, and (b)

Is there now, or has there been any significant risk or adversity to overcome? It is at this juncture that resilience and agency intertwine as significant risk, or adversity often forms the very structure (such as a lack of certain capital, low APS and social class) that should be overcome? Yet, such structures should not be hypothesised as obstacles in the way of agency but rather as essentially involved in producing it (Giddens, 1979:70). Thus, resilience is identifiable in the presence of structure and structure presupposes the possibility of the presence of agency.

Identifying resilience and agency is not about removing risk or structure, but rather about identifying those who can thrive regardless of the risk; those whose intentional decisions allow them to step outside the boundaries imposed by structures because they can transcend those structures on the basis of possessing agency and/or resilience. Agency and/or resilience is found in actors who intentionally decide to challenge the status quo of their own cultural and social structures (agency) (Loyal, 2003:56-57), and who can “bounce” out of their negative circumstances and excel (resilience) (Grotberg, 2003:1).

*“Risk and resilience are never phenomena that are simply objective fact. They are entangled in the collective ideologies of people and their communities”* (Ungar, 2005: xxiv) and hence there is a need for a *“cultural understanding of resilience”* (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012:32). In addition, there is an increased risk when applying the western cookie-cutter of resilience to the South African context (Theron, 2011). It is thus argued that resilience is found, alongside agency, in a person’s habitus because *“what an actor knows as a competent – but historically and spatially located – member of society (cultural capital), ‘shades off’ in contexts that stretch beyond those of his or her day-to-day activity”* (Giddens, 1979:73). This is echoed by Theron et al. (2010:732) when they refer to *“resilience as a phenomenon that is reachable if communities play active roles in encouraging it and [this is where the emphasis of this study has reference:] if young people are active partners in these resilience-focused endeavours”*. This study has as its aim to uncover exactly what is entailed in being an “active partner” in resilience. Additionally, what accounts for agents such as Bourdieu and Edwin Moshia, and many other students from disadvantaged backgrounds and families who manage to be competent outside of their “day-to-day activity”? Perhaps it is the operationalisation of agency and resilience through their amalgamation within the

person's habitus that allows for the realisation and accompanying decision to change something. Perhaps resilience is the internal thought process (of evaluating the relationships and resources available in their context) that expands the mere involvement of capital inculcation and allows a person to reach beyond the borders (and potential barriers) of their social class to access the capital available in their various contexts. This is illustrated in Edwin Moshia's (2006:72) realisation: "*It is not surprising, I had a negative attitude to general science [which was far outside his poverty stricken day-to-day activities], and this was a big lesson to me. Negative attitudes gives [sic] negative results ... and his actual bouncing out of this negative situation as he continues: 'and I took it from there'.*"

Why such a focus on resilience and agency? One of the extenuating factors is the wide-ranging opinion both among the public and in academic circles that students are increasingly coming to university underprepared and academically "weaker" (Jansen, 2012:2). This discourse and widespread belief is exceedingly alarming, but is it true? If this possibility can be entertained for a moment, the very inclusion of resilience, and also agency in this case, has "*implications for intervention strategies with respect to both prevention and treatment*" which will, in the case of this study, refer to intervention with regard to university placement. Resilience acknowledges that there will be "*huge individual variation*" in students' responses to higher education and, by understanding "*the mechanisms underlying that variation*", the assumption is that it will shed light on the causal processes that links resilience and agency to effective navigation of university studies (Rutter, 2006:3).

Is it not time that institutions of higher education become accountable stakeholders in maintaining our academia despite underprepared (albeit qualifying) students? It is argued with Jansen (2012:1) that universities should perhaps turn their attention to their methods of allowing students entry into university. Returning to Bourdieu's theory,



both black and white (if we have to institute classification according to the B-BBEE<sup>10</sup> policy) students from poor working (or unemployed) families may not have had enough exposure to the cultural capital needed to effectively navigate<sup>11</sup> the field of University studies. And yet, Bourdieu himself and many others like him have proved that, where resilience and agency is at play, such structural limitations are not indicative of failure or the reproduction of those structures. What then is it that prepares students for university? If it is not only their schooling, their culture, how they were socialised, their economic standing, and their advantaged background, then one indeed needs to start explore the habitus, and consider resilience and agency, or possibly merging these latter two concepts.

## **2.7. Amalgamation of resilience and agency**

Presumptuously, this section starts with a quotation from one of the narratives that is still to follow: *“I made it through (laugh) had the most wonderful experience”*. Examining agency and resilience (see Table 2.1 for a definition summary) in the context of this study, soon led me to question the potential symbiosis that exists between them. Many questions arose as a result, is a negative situation that one bounces out of ever *not* a structure?; if agency is supported or even brought about by resilience, what would happen in the absence of resilience?; and can there be resilience without agency or agency without resilience? In this section, each of these questions are addressed and, in the process, ways of possibly amalgamating agency and resilience are considered.

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<sup>10</sup> Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) is an initiative launched by the South African Government to address the restrictions that exist within the country for black individuals to participate fairly in the economy (<http://www.bee.co.za/Content/Information.aspx>).

<sup>11</sup> I grappled with the term “to be successful” and decided that I will use “effectively navigate” instead to refer to a student who performs well in a university environment.

Table 2.1. Summary of the main differences in agency and resilience based on the above discussion

Agency	Resilience
<p>The capacity of a person to believe that they can influence their lives and their environments and then ...</p> <p>making a choice to shape and/or change the circumstances in which they live, through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- habit/memory/tradition/history;</li> <li>- judgment that shapes the actor's adaptations and metacognitive reflection, enabling the them to make intentional decisions;</li> </ul> <p>imagination, improvisation, creativity and/or anticipation; or any combination thereof.</p> <p>The ability to successful implement differ among people and</p> <p>may lead to a further increase in the ability to make even more intentional decisions that has change as its consequence.</p>	<p>The capacity of a person – through the influence and support of many factors, systems and relationships –</p> <p>to adapt positively to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- handle,</li> <li>- overcome,</li> <li>- learn from,</li> <li>- withstand, or even</li> <li>- be transformed by, or</li> <li>- thrive on.</li> </ul> <p>Adversity: the inevitable hardships, difficulties, pressure, serious stress, threat, or trauma a person experiences in life,</p> <p>dependent on circumstance, context and ecology</p> <p>may be displayed in one area of a person's life, yet be absent in other areas.</p>

## 2.8. Addressing the questions regarding the potential symbiosis that exists between agency and resilience

### 2.8.1. Is a negative situation that one bounces out of ever not a structure?

When thinking of a *negative* situation as the inevitable hardships, difficulties, pressure, serious stress, threat, or trauma a person experiences in life, possible examples are death in the family, strained relationships, abuse, rejection, illness of the person or a family member, or academic pressure.

Bourdieu defines structure as *“the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices”* (Bourdieu, 1986:46). It would appear as though each of the negative situations mentioned above, could also be classified as constraints that will govern the functioning and determine the success of a person's practices in those circumstances.

Thus, bouncing out of a *negative situation* could also be seen as bouncing out of a structure; hence, a negative situation would probably also be a structure.

### **2.8.2. What would agency look like in the absence of resilience (if we suppose for the moment that agency is supported or even brought about by the intrapersonal thought processes linked to resilience)?**

If one weighs up the definitions of the two concepts, they both have change at its core, although there is one difference and that is the explicit stating of a *positive* adaptation as far as resilience is concerned. In answering this question, the study refers back to #feesmustfall, a movement clearly illustrating a choice that was made to change circumstances, i.e. high university fees making accessibility to tertiary education difficult for poor students. As it manifests later in the study, the nature of the movement changed and, instead of the end result being a positive adaptation, it rather played out negatively for many individual students. This outcome became evident from a variety of news reports during the time of the protests:

*Students are slowly forming a division as some remain spellbound by the campaign, while others are concerned for their safety as well as their education as campuses are forced to close.*

*Many matriculants are also concerned as the destruction of university property will negatively impact on their studies next year.*

*Ashira Lukhan, a master's industrial psychology student, said that she feels it is the students who are putting them at a disadvantage as their whole academic year is on hold due to these protests.*

*She said that she has assignments due and tests to write, but due to the protests campuses are forced to close. 'These delays are hindering our studies. When will all of this end?' Lukhan added: 'On one side students are fighting for their rights and the very tools to help them combat poverty. On the other, it is disrupting other students and the violence may not be the way to get the government's attention on such matters. They are important matters that must be addressed but at what expense?' (Naicker, 2016).*

The African news agency eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) reported the following: *"The Matric Class of 2016 was initially inspired by the Fees Must Fall movement which has*

*shaken the tertiary education sector in South Africa, but this has quickly dissipated as the protests on university campuses have turned increasingly violent, leading to the view that the free education cause has been lost.*

*Alexandra Wittenberg-Scott, 18, from Rusternburg [sic] Girls' High School, stood firm and said that if free universities were needed, then certain universities needed to be fully government-subsidised so that there was an option for students who could not afford university education.*

*Wittenberg-Scott went on to say that the fight for free education would only get worse. 'They are causing the universities more money troubles by protesting. The real route is the government who then needs to provide the universities with more money and only then, will things get better,' said Scott.*

*'Cutting the fees entirely, would severely decrease the quality of education that we receive. I could understand cutting the fees but to take them away completely would not be beneficial at all.'*

*Chulumanco Mawonga, 18, from the Portlands High School in Mitchells Plain, said the actions of the protesters were not doing future students justice. 'Next year I might not have my opportunity to study due to the actions taken towards the universities and the vandalism. They are taking us 10 steps back.'*

*Lemarco Jones, 18, also from Portlands High, agreed, saying: 'They have lost their cause. Free education is a good cause yes, but the vandalism is not good.'*

*Bronislav Diergaardt, 18, from Lentegeur High School, also in Mitchells Plain, said: 'Fees should fall for all types of education, not just higher education.'*

*However, Amanda Dyonase, 18, from Cape Town High School, said: 'If the fees were to fall completely, I still don't think students will be able to attend universities because they would close down anyway due to no funding.'*

*Nkosibonile Mahlangabeza, 18, from Isilimela High School in Langa said: 'We are afraid that we might not attend university because we heard that our*

*application forms were burnt. The government and the protesters need to sit down and find a way forward without vandalism.” (eNCA, 2016)*

Senior UCT Psychology Lecturer, Dr Shose Kessi, says it has been difficult watching the consequences of militarisation and securitisation off campus. She says it was equally challenging to witness student arrests and the strained relationships with a divided academic staff. Kessi explains that there was a great deal of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among students because of their experiences off the campus space, in addition to police interventions and private security.

*Tweet: It's been a long-protracted movement. People are tired and exhausted.*  
— Dr Shose Kessi, Senior Lecturer at UCT and transformation advisor to the Vice Chancellor's office (Radio 702, 2016).

This Radio 702 (2016) article also contains a recording of listeners phoning in and relaying the psychological trauma that students, academics, support staff and even the greater public had vicariously suffered due to exposure, whether first hand, or through the traditional and social media. The reigning discourse of uncertainty was also mentioned with different role players being uncertain about their futures, either in terms of prospective studies or the continuation of employment.

In this instance, it is argued that the structure of high fees activated agency in students to choose to change this circumstance. However, once the movement became destructive and violent, the very agentic action that initiated the change turned it into a negative situation, one that students were not able to resiliently bounce out of as a unit. In this case, the collective agency lacked the respective intrapersonal thought processes in the form of resilience that leads to positive adaptation. Thus, agency in the absence of resilience may be seen as potentially destructive.

### **2.8.3. Can there be resilience without agency or agency without resilience?**

Moving towards the possibility of resilience without agency may be best addressed by relating it to an example. If a person is faced with adverse circumstances such as the death of a loved one, is the trauma of death classified as a negative situation or as a structure? These aspects may in fact be similar, the difference being in the person's

adaptation thereof, i.e. positive or negative. Hence, if a person applies the intrapersonal thought process and chooses to adapt positively, one could assume that they will likely also act to change the circumstances that is their structure and as a result display R-A. However, if this same person chooses to adapt negatively, one may expect that agency could be absent too and that the circumstances will not change. Such a person may well act in ways that could change their circumstances for the worst. For example, if this person is not able to adapt positively to the death of a loved one, the circumstances are likely to get worse as the person might potentially become depressed, have suicidal ideations and/or tendencies, and/or even engage in self-harm through various means such as over-eating, starvation and social isolation to name but a few.

Thus, even though resilience and agency both have change at its core, it is not implied that change will either be towards a positive or a negative adaptation. In the case of a positive adaptation, R-A may be at play, while negative adaptation may be referred to as non-resilient agency (NR-A). R-A can thus be seen as the choice a person makes to change their adverse circumstances, or challenge a structure of disadvantage through **positive adaptation** that transpires as a result of an **intrapersonal thought process** that leads to **constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances**. On the other hand, NR-A is the choice a person makes to change their adverse circumstances, or challenge their structure of disadvantage without positive adaptation that leads to detrimental individual consequences and potentially worse circumstances.

## **2.9. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the theoretical conceptualisation that guided this study. The chapter opened with questions around the origins of inequality and the unequal distribution of capital as a possible source. This led to a discussion of the various types of capital and the influence thereof in society. Economic capital is a tangible commodity (often money itself), while cultural and social capital are more abstract and not always directly transferable into or exchangeable for money. Cultural capital is more symbolic, usually associated with a particular social class, and includes elements

such as accent/dialect, posture, behaviours, clothing, abilities, tastes, material belongings and credentials.

Furthermore, Bourdieu distinguishes between three forms of cultural capital: (1) embodied, (2) objectified, and (3) institutionalised. Examples of embodied cultural capital includes, among others, one's accent or dialect (associated with a particular class or space), dispositions and opinions. Cultural capital in its objectified state can be seen as owning a luxury car or prized wine collection. Even though these items can be converted into currency, the ease of the conversion and the value thereof are determined by the rules set up by the relevant cultural capital. The institutionalised form of cultural capital is represented by credentials and qualifications such as tertiary degrees, or titles that symbolise competence in a particular culture and/or provides authority or standing.

Social capital refers to social connections (with family, friends, and/or wider social or professional networks) and the consequent sharing of resources. In addition, social capital offers a certain degree of respect and honour and adds to a person's standing in society. The right connections can lead to better jobs or careers, while the wrong connections, or even the absence of the right ones can lead to unreached potential.

The various cultural capitals are incarnate in the habitus where they become the measuring sticks by which we judge and act. These judgements and actions are played out on the field, a multi-dimensional space comprising various positions taken up by various actors, which are all mutually dependent in terms of their existence and reproduction. Dominance and domination between the various actors and positions are determined by the distribution of economic, cultural and social capital.

Actors, however, often act in contravention to dominance through their capacity to believe that they can influence their lives and their environments and then make a choice to shape and/or change the circumstances in which they live. This can be done through a process in time located in the past, the present, or even the future, known as agency. In some cases, agency is accompanied by resilience, the capacity of a person to adapt positively to the adversity they experience in life and it is instances, such as those that refute the usual practice of viewing agency and resilience as mutually exclusive. Instead, this chapter concluded with a reference to an

amalgamation of resilience and agency into two new and distinct concepts, namely R-A and NR-A. These concepts refer to the choice a person makes to change their circumstances through positive adaptation that leads to constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances, or to change their circumstances without positive adaptation that leads to detrimental individual consequences and potentially worse circumstances.

In the process of developing this new conceptual language, the history of education was examined, with special reference to the structure of disadvantage and the role of resilience and agency therein. This is discussed in the next chapter in an effort to understand the context in which contemporary educational issues should be viewed when looking to identify indicators of agency and/or resilience, or rather R-A.



## **CHAPTER 3:**

# **STRUCTURE AND STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE: A BRIEF LOOK AT THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In order to enhance the understanding of agency and resilience in individuals, the field in which these individuals play have to be examined. South Africa's more recent history is (in oversimplified terms) one characterised by two broad eras. The era before 1994 was characterised by the white minority working towards building a country that "belonged" to the white people as an elite race. In April 1994, the ruling National Party (NP), that had hitherto been strong and widely supported by South Africa's white electorate was removed from its proverbial throne when the African National Congress (ANC)<sup>12</sup> was elected as the new ruling party in the country's first democratic elections – before this time black people were not allowed to vote in South Africa. After the 1994 elections, the era of (what was supposed to be) the black people's rise to power dawned. The subsequent reality, however, proves that many black people are still living in abject poverty, so their so-called rise to power seems to have benefited only a select few.

Nevertheless, both eras are strongly infused with issues of segregation and sadly provide evidence of a nation divided. This type of history flows through every vein in a country and affects every part of it. It is argued that such a history especially affects a country's education (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014:94,96,99; Alexander, 2009:3; DHET, 2013:1-2,4). In both eras, the country's education found itself more of a hostage to political agendas than fully catering for the needs of the learners. The importance of including this discussion in the study is to show how the use (and misuse) of cultural

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<sup>12</sup> ANC stands for African National Congress and is "the most important black organization". It was founded in Bloemfontein in January 1912 as the South African Native National Congress (Johnson: 127).

capital developed in South Africa and what its effects were, especially in education. One cannot deny the importance of the education sphere as a fundamental stakeholder in the struggle for control of dominant positions in political agenda. This is due to the critical role it plays in reproducing (and then justifying), the distribution of cultural capital, resulting in the reproduction of the structure of social space (Bourdieu, 1998a:5; Bourdieu, 1990:133).

Investigating the effect of the use of cultural capital is, however, not the only aim of this chapter. It is also very relevant and important to this study to showcase how students could not be contained in such a structure of political agendas. How they agentially strived to change their structure. Bourdieu viewed class as the ultimate power in the reproduction of education and, for a while, South Africa's story supported this hypothesis. But perhaps his causal linkage of agency to structure led to his overlooking the fact that collective and individual agents do not agree. Thus, this discussion confers once more on how agency meets (or perhaps needs) resilience and how the combination of the two, within a setting of political turmoil, trumps class. This is done by briefly summarising the country's education system during the apartheid period up to 1994 and during the post-apartheid era, while highlighting elements of resilience, agency and R-A.

### **3.1. Tracing education back to its earliest roots**

As became evident from the debate between Alexander and Price, South Africa, as a country, envelop an entire history and contemporary existence of racial divide. This has led to the creation of a structure of disadvantage that is becoming unmistakably prominent and problematic in the education sector. While it is important to UP that *“our students should ... be representative in terms of race, gender, social class, and language preference”* (UP Strategic Plan 2025, 2011:15), the reality is that the bigger picture is still telling a different story. According to South Africa's mid-year estimates for 2016, the population is estimated at 55.91 million. *“The black African population is in the majority (45.11 million) and constitutes approximately 81% of the total South African population. The white population is estimated at 4.52 million, the coloured population at 4.90 million and the Indian/Asian population at 1.39 million”* (Statistics South Africa, 2016:7). The official November 2016 profile statistics of UP reflected a

student body consisting of 46.3% Africans, 45.3% Whites, 2.8% Coloureds and 5.6% Indians. Although an improvement was visible when compared with the 2009<sup>13</sup> figures of 35.2% Africans, 59% Whites, 1.9% Coloureds and 3.9% Indians, they are still far removed from being representative of the country's population.

The history that led to this structure of disadvantage (and that is perhaps still reproducing it) will be discussed in this section. If one were to assume that the white minority is still largely in possession of the economic capital in South Africa and have access to western cultural capital, one might see that Bourdieu indeed had a point that class reproduces education. And, according to Van der Berg (2014:202), when one examines the income as divided according to race, this is most probably the case. *“According to the estimates shown in the table, black per-capita incomes had grown from 8% of those of whites in 1970 to almost 12% in 2000”* (Van der Berg, 2014:202).

The question of importance in this study is whether the only element at play is the reproduction of education through cultural capital, or whether there is evidence of agency and resilience as well. To enable the examining of these questions, it is necessary to revisit the history of education in South Africa. While a comprehensive review of the entire history is not possible in a thesis like this, certain key matters are highlighted.

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<sup>13</sup> These are the initial figures provided for use in this study, as it was the latest available data at the time. Due to a system renewal project, newer figures were not available until recently.

Table 3.1. Estimates of total and per-capita income, 1970-2000 (Van der Berg, 2014:203)

**Table 1: Estimates of total and per-capita income, 1970–2000**

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2007
All income in millions (2000 Rand values)								
Blacks	50 454	82 683	108 131	132 553	170 630	212 294	252 071	346 964
Coloureds	17 513	20 999	23 854	29 436	36 784	44 417	53 111	67 081
Indians	6 298	8 361	10 892	13 635	17 181	21 480	26 396	47 332
Whites	151 963	189 279	211 504	235 605	260 835	277 411	326 307	396 329
Total	226 228	301 321	354 381	411 230	485 429	555 601	657 884	857 706
Share of income (%)								
Blacks	22.3	27.4	30.5	32.2	35.2	38.2	38.3	40.5
Coloureds	7.7	7.0	6.7	7.2	7.6	8.0	8.1	7.8
Indians	2.8	2.8	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.9	4.0	5.5
Whites	67.2	62.8	59.7	57.3	53.7	49.9	49.6	46.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Per-capita income (2000 Rand values)								
Blacks	3 134	4 479	5 107	5 423	6 008	6 704	7 283	9 070
Coloureds	8 184	8 630	8 822	9 855	11 404	12 722	14 126	15 331
Indians	9 595	11 244	13 296	15 113	17 637	20 592	23 938	38 028
Whites	39 217	44 242	46 670	48 370	51 951	53 840	62 360	85 661
Total	9 936	11 626	12 125	12 385	12 903	13 436	14 716	17 684

*Sources:* Data up to 2000 taken from Van der Berg & Louw (2004), using estimates derived from many sources; for 2007, an author's own estimate was added, based on applying distributional shares derived from the Community Survey 2007, after applying sequential regression multiple imputation. All estimates use racial shares applied to national accounts-adjusted current household incomes.

### **3.2. Early Education: Tracing the roots of formal schooling and tertiary education**

While tracing the roots of education in South Africa, it was clear that it started out as a family or tribal matter in the fifteenth century because formal schooling of any nature was yet to come into existence. It was only during (and for another century after) the period between 1652 when the first Dutch settlers arrived, and 1688 when the first French Huguenots settled in the Cape that limited education was introduced and provided by the Dutch Reformed Church. This points to the possibility that, before formalisation, schooling and education probably looked vastly different in the different cultures. Diverse and culture or community-specific cultural capital in the form of language, knowledge and skills sets probably existed for the different racial groups based on traditional modes of instruction and oral tradition passed on from one generation to the next. Stemming from a selection of these very early forms of diverse cultural capital (“western” capital to be more specific), is formalised schooling.

With the formalisation of schooling emerging out of an already established and divided cultural capital, it is not surprising that the first appeal for segregation in South African education was made as early as the end of the 1600s (Van Zyl, 2002:9). Black children were seen as slave children who should be educated apart from “European” (white) children, clearly indicating the agenda of advancing and reproducing education solely through “European” capital. And yet, together with the call for segregation came an unspoken recognition of potential, recognition that children of colour can transcend the structure placed on them by the economic class they were born into. “[A]s early as 1676 ... the church council requested the establishment of a separate school for slave children of colour. However, the Political Board ordained that slave learners who performed well could still be taught at the Dutch school until a separate school for slaves had been erected” (Van Zyl, 2002:9). A separate school was indeed built, but towards the eighteenth century, it became clear that (black) slave learners still attended public schools in and around the Cape (Van Zyl, 2002:9). These resilient-agentic learners (and/or resilient-agentic parents) refused to be boxed in by the structures that they had no say or choice over. The qualities identified through this study appear to have been present right from the start. Unfortunately, it was not in the

best interest of the political and economic elite to recognise and nurture these qualities.

As a result, the quest for segregation was fuelled again when the British annexed Cape Town in 1806 and pushed once more for separate schooling based on colour. However, the government schools of the time under Lord Charles Somerset were declared “free” and open to slave learners (even though education was primarily intended for the children of the colonialists). This did not last long and with the abolition of slavery in 1834, “free” government school education came to an end, making it almost impossible for most black children to afford it (Van Zyl, 2002:9).

During a time when many fought (and perhaps failed as a result of poverty) to obtain basic education through schooling, some enjoyed the benefits of the emergence of post-school studies. This was the roots of tertiary education in South Africa and can be traced back to 1829, more than 180 years ago, when the South African College was established by the Cape Colony. Initially, the aim was only to prepare students for study abroad, but it soon started offering its own post-secondary courses. This college was to become what is known today as UCT. Several years later, in 1855, South Africa saw the rise of St. Andrew’s College, now known as Rhodes University. Eleven years after St. Andrew’s, in 1866, the Stellenbosche Gymnasium (today known as the University of Stellenbosch) arose. These institutions heavily resembled their English and Scottish counterparts and the student body was almost exclusively composed of white students (Marcum, 1982:1; De la Rey, 2001:9).

### **3.3. Missionary Education**

In 1841, relief came in the form of subsidies to missionaries from abroad who devoted themselves to teaching black learners. Regardless of the apparent positive nature of this gesture, it was also seen by many as a ploy to strengthen segregation. Nevertheless, these missionary schools would later grow to become the Achilles heel of the *apartheid* government of South Africa (a more detail discussion follows later in this section) (Van Zyl, 2002:10).

During the late 1940s, black children relied heavily on missionary schools due to them not being able to access and/or afford government schools. Johnson (2005:143)

indicated that these missionary schools were often (but not always<sup>14</sup>) “excellent”. This was most probably due to the funding they received and the passion of the missionaries for Africa. The atmosphere of the time, however, did not allow for “excellence” in the education of black children, or for black people in general. Therefore, government soon started attacking this type of provision for black learners, saying that missionary schools led to the rejection of “Bantu” culture (Coutts, 1992:2). In essence, the government feared sharing their “white” cultural and pedagogical capital with black learners as this might cause an upset in their quest to reproduce the white rule.

This led to the Government’s appointment of The Eiselen Committee in 1949. Part of its mandate was:

- a) *The formulation of the principles and aims of education for Natives as an independent race, in which their past and present, their inherent racial qualities, their distinctive characteristics and aptitude, and their needs under ever-changing social conditions are taken into consideration.*
- b) *The extent to which the existing primary, secondary and vocational education system for Natives and the training of Native teachers should be modified in respect of the content and form of syllabuses, in order to conform to the proposed principles and aims, and to prepare Natives more effectively for their future occupations (Unesco, 1967:30-31).*

The report from this committee translated into the “Bantu Education Act of 1953” and represented the “*first major application of the official policy of apartheid to education*”.

The minister of Native affairs introduced the bill by saying:

*Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life according to the sphere in which they live ... Good racial relations cannot exist when the education is given under the control of people who create wrong*

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<sup>14</sup> Some sources indicate that these schools were of a very poor quality. The classrooms were small and textbooks limited.

*expectations on the part of the Native himself ... Native education should be controlled in such a way that it should be in accordance with the policy of the State ... racial relations cannot improve if the result of [N]ative education is the creation of frustrated people* (Quoted from the House of Assemblies Debates, Hansard, Vol. 83, 17 September 1953, Col. 5375 in Unesco, 1967:31).

Did the state really believe that “Natives” were not capable of certain types of training? Or is this just an excellent example of the state abusing its power to ensure that people of their own race and culture remain in power? The force with which the state pursued their ideals, makes one believe it was the latter, in which case, race and/or class can scarcely be accredited with the reproduction of the dominant class. The implication was that an entire race was dumped into poverty, oppression and domination due to state intervention. In the 1900s, the structure of disadvantage was cemented with the passing of the School Board Act (No. 35 of 1905) that explicitly allowed for separate schools based on race.

### **3.4. The Union of South Africa**

Shortly after the passing of the School Board Act, a new era dawned for South African education when the country became a union in 1910. This era brought about the re-organisation of higher education (and the strengthening of segregation therein) through a series of Acts in 1916. One of the contributions of the Acts was the founding of the South African Native College for black students, later known as the University of Fort Hare (Marcum, 1982:1-2; De la Rey, 2001:10).

The Union of South Africa (as it was known at that time) was characterised by a language dualism, Afrikaans and English. This clearly filtered through to the university arena resulting in Afrikaans-medium and English-medium universities. The Afrikaans-medium universities, namely Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom, Pretoria and Orange Free State- *“developed as centres for Afrikaner cultural consciousness and learning”* (Marcum, 1982:2). These universities drew students, staff and faculty from the white Afrikaans population and had policies in place against the admission of black students (Marcum, 1982:2).



The English-medium universities, namely Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Rhodes and Natal, did not enforce such strong policies against admitting students of colour. Black students were, however, not allowed to apply for residence (except for the separate non-white residence at Witwatersrand), or to make use of the University's social or sports facilities. Regardless of their "open" admission policy, few black students qualified for admission and even fewer could afford studies at a university. In 1957, only about 5%-6% of the student population at the universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand, were black students (Marcum, 1982:2).

In the 1930s, these acts of segregation that had been occurring for so long, started evolving into a concept, or theory, when the first discussions around the apartheid doctrine occurred within the Broederbond<sup>15</sup>. *"In theory, apartheid meant neither discrimination nor the domination of any particular race; the races would simply follow their separate paths in all spheres of life in accordance with (what the Nationalists defined as) their own traditions and cultures"*. However, in practice, it was a whole different scenario as *"the [apartheid] doctrine itself and all apartheid laws remained racist and discriminatory"* (Johnson, 2005:140-141), perhaps because those in control had the power to reproduce and selectively withhold their own cultural capital as it suited them, thereby advancing their own cultural capital and neglecting all others.

But then, in the 1940s, the first bilingual and inclusive University of South Africa (UNISA) started offering correspondence courses in both Afrikaans and English that were open to all race groups. UNISA emerged from what was first known as the University of the Cape of Good Hope established in the 1870s (Marcum, 1982:3).

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<sup>15</sup> In the late 1920s a "number of younger, educated Afrikaner professionals, mainly teachers and civil servants founded an organization called Young South Africa to promote the Afrikaner cause, particularly Afrikaans culture and language. The organization, later renamed the Broederbond (the Brotherhood) became a secret society ... bent on stretching its links into every sphere of society. The Broederbond established secret cells within the important organisations and institutions, and developed a set of secret rituals for the initiated – but at the public level, it also waged an energetic campaign to propagate the Afrikaner cultural tradition and historical legacy. This campaign was aimed at developing Afrikaners' self-consciousness: they must see themselves as a distinct and separate group ... thus counterpoising them against all other racial groups in the country, including non-Afrikaner whites." (Johnson, 2005:140-141)

Initially, it was an examining body offering only examinations and no tuition. It was renamed UNISA in 1916 and relocated from Cape Town to Pretoria, marking a shift in focus until it became a full-on, non-residential teaching university in 1946 (UNISA website).

In the light of the Broederbond having been a secret society, one may doubt whether too many “ordinary” South Africans were aware of the “apartheid” talk going on behind the closed Broederbond doors. As a result, people may have experienced the opening of a university that was open to all race groups as signalling changing times. Even black people might have had their hopes of better education raised. But a critical turning point for South Africa and, inevitably, its education system came in 1948. According to Johnson (2005:139):

*Few people foresaw the result of the fateful general election of 26 May 1948. Smuts had been vindicated by the Allied victory, the economy was booming and white immigrants were pouring into the country, many of them former British servicemen who had first seen Cape Town or Durban from a troopship. South Africa's international standing was at its height. Not only had it been a founding member of the United Nations but Smuts had even been asked to draft the UN Charter. The royal visit of 1947 was an acknowledgement of Britain's gratitude and affection. Smuts could not have been riding higher.*

### **3.5. Bantu education**

On the first of January 1954, the Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953) came into effect. This Act separated black and white learners in terms of the type of education (specifically skills) that they were taught. Black learners would not be receiving any skills other than those which they could use in the service of white people or in the Native reserves. The skills that black Africans were allowed to be taught were mainly Afrikaans (a language spoken by a large number of white people in South Africa), some English and “menial skills” (Johnson, 2005:143; Marks & Trapido, 1988:9). The goal of the nationalist government was “to advance Afrikaans and reduce the influence of English in South Africa”. Black education suffered the most under the changes that followed. In effect, the Afrikaner nationalist government went on a deliberate campaign

to uproot white English mother tongue teachers from Bantu Education. With that, they removed all access to “western” cultural capital and denied black children authentic models of English and well-trained, experienced teachers (Banda, 2000:53).

After the passing of the Bantu Education Act, all mission schools fell under the Department of Native Affairs and no longer under the Department of Education. All schools were required to apply for registration. In addition, black learners had to be taught mainly in indigenous languages – an attempt to keep black students from learning English, South Africa’s only international language. As a result, most mission schools that were primarily English had to close. To make matters worse, the Act also provided that no black high schools were allowed to be built in urban areas. This created great challenges for parents living in such areas (Coutts, 1992:2; Unesco, 1967:31) and confined learners even further by permitting them access to only their own cultural capital.

At that time, the nature of schools and universities was a clear reflection of the economic and political interests of the white state. The state had very specific ideas and ideals regarding people of colour and it used education as a driving force in the advancement thereof (Levinson et al., 2002:587; De la Rey, 2001:7). The notion of a distinction in superiority or inferiority of different race groups became an internalised belief (Meighan & Harber, 2007:403). This is the symbolic domination that Bourdieu refers to, this misinterpretation of apartheid as something else, something good and necessary for the survival of the white nation. The internalised belief would have rendered apartheid as altogether “unseen” by many white South Africans, hence the dominated had no choice but to accept the domination that apartheid brought with it.

As a result, many pedagogic adjustments accompanied the Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953), the greatest of which might have been that black learners had to be taught mainly in indigenous languages. Bourdieu called the attempt to reproduce a future generation of white leaders and a black working class, perpetuating domination through pedagogic action. Cultural capital in the form of language and pedagogy (in this case English as an international language, and subjects such as mathematics and science) was transferred to white students and withheld from black students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990:72-74; Coutts, 1992:2; Unesco, 1967:31; Johnson, 2005:143)

through a relationship known to Bourdieu as pedagogic communication (Bourdieu & Passeron,1990:11).

During that time, the political arena created a cultural capital and coined a pedagogical work that formed part of every middle and upper class (white) household. White Afrikaans and English learners had the opportunity to receive the best education and be taught in their mother tongue, which also happened to be the language of the ruling party.

However, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd<sup>16</sup> and his contemporaries misjudged and wrongly assessed the aptitude of black learners as being different to that of white learners. In Verwoerd's view, studying subjects like mathematics was pointless for black learners as it would only leave them with "inflated expectation and frustration". But today, it is clear that this is not the case and that black learners and students have the same capacity and drive as learners and students from any other race.

Thus, regardless of the controlled and segregated nature of Bantu education, it remained based on western ideas and principles. Consequently, it continued to awaken a desire among black learners to be part of, and equal players in the society at large (Coutts, 1992:2). This was reflected in the Freedom Charter adopted by the ANC in 1955. It contained a section called *The doors of learning and education shall be opened*, defining the way they saw education:

*The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace; Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher Education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships on the basis of merit; Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan; Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens; the*

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<sup>16</sup> Hendrik Verwoerd was the Minister of Native affairs from 1950 until he became Prime Minister of South Africa in 1958.

*colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished (ANC, 1990:19-20).*

### **3.6. The role of the 1959 Extension of University Education Act on the establishment and maintenance of the structure of disadvantage**

In the meantime, the new reigning disposition under the Bantu Education Act washed over to tertiary institutions. Under great resistance from English-medium and black universities and black people alike, the 1959 Extension of University Education Act formally and decisively segregated higher and tertiary education by forcing institutions to only admit students from the racial group(s) that they ascribe to (Marcum, 1982:3-4; De la Rey, 2001:12-13). In essence, these pedagogic alterations and withholding of cultural capital, and not the “black skin colour”, led to the creation of a structure of disadvantage. This structure was maintained through oppression of coloured ethnic groups. *“it was, among other things, because they were forced to go to underfunded and generally under-resourced institutions, such as schools and bush colleges, that they were disadvantaged”* (Alexander, 2010:2). This meant increasing difficulty for black learners to enter into “open” universities as they were now required to (a) have permission from the minister, who was Hendrik Verwoerd himself at the time; (2) qualify for entrance; and (3) be allowed by the council of their university of choice to enrol (UNESCO, 1967:86). Table 3.2 gives a summary of the then newly established segregated institutions (UNESCO, 1976:85; Reddy, 2004:10; Christie, 1986:231; De la Rey, 2001:13; The history of separate development, 2015).

This gross act of segregation was opposed by many, among which were the Council of UCT and the Council of WITS. In addition, the Holloway Report was released in 1954 by the Commission of Enquiry on Separate Training Facilities for non-Europeans at Universities. One of its members wrote the following:

*The proposed legislation is a deviation from the age-old university tradition which has so far been maintained throughout the history of South African universities, the tradition by which the universities themselves, and not an external authority, determine the conditions of admission to their classes (Unesco,1967:85).*

Table 3.2. Summary of segregated universities

Name of Institute	Race/Homeland ascribed to
The University College at Durban (Durban-Westville)	Indians
University of the Western Cape (UWC)	Coloureds
Medical Faculty of the University of Natal	Indians, Coloureds and Africans
University College at Fort Hare	Xhosa-speaking people
University College at Ngoye (University of Zululand)	Zulu and Swazi-speaking people
University College of the North	Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Tsonga, Bendoa and Sanga.
University of Transkei (originally a satellite campus of Fort Hare, later taken over by Ciskei)	Transkei
University of Bophuthatswana	Bophuthatswana
University of Venda	Venda

Nonetheless, in 1960, the minister granted permission to four of the 190 black students who applied to “open universities”. Only one these students was allowed into UCT, and one into WITS. The other two were rejected on “academic grounds” by the universities themselves (Reddy, 1994:14-15). This makes one wonder how honest the protest from the universities against the law really was. Still, the effect of the law was a drop in black enrolments in English universities, as tabled by Horrell (1968:116) (see Table 3.3):

Table 3.3. Black enrolment numbers in English universities 1954-1968

Univer- sity	1954	1957	1959		1961	1965	1966	1967	1968
UCT	26	29	39	[Passing of the Extension of University Education Act']*	18	5	3	2	3
Wits	72	59	74		38	10	6	2	4
Natal	102	181	187		181	132	141	133	161
UNISA	555	1085	1252		1171	1310	1616	1863	2236
<b>Total</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>1354</b>	<b>1552</b>		<b>1408</b>	<b>1457</b>	<b>1766</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2404</b>

\*Column inserted by researcher

Although government, in theory, portrayed the segregation as seemingly pure and un-discriminatory, it is clear from the discussion thus far that pure discrimination was at the order of the day throughout (and even before) Bantu education. This (and not the

“western” curriculum as Verwoerd postulated) created feelings of anger and frustration among black students. However, despite threats of boycotts, the establishment of “bush colleges” brought about a rise in the total number of black students enrolling for higher education degrees, as seen in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Number of black students enrolling for higher education degrees 1960-1968

Year	Fort Hare	University of the North (UN)	Zululand	University of the Western Cape (UWC)
1960	360	87	41	156
1961	344	129	53	213
1962	342	194	94	NA
1963	239	248	136	NA
1964	272	305	180	NA
1965	317	389	243	416
1966	402	460	299	NA
1967	436	537	341	560
1968	451	611	368	669

There were, nevertheless, major differences between black and white universities. For one, black universities were located in rural settings, isolated from urban areas and often surrounded by terrain that made it difficult for students to come into contact with surrounding communities. *“The idea was to keep a distance from politics, to have students narrowly focus their attention on their studies without them asking broader questions about apartheid society; the state assumed that political activism was only really attributable to the urban context”* (Reddy, 1994:17). Secondly, these differences were clearly visible in the rules that appeared in the Government Gazette and governed the black universities:

1. *Students may not leave the college precincts without permission from the Hostel Superintendent or a representative duly authorized by the Rector;*
2. *Any student organization or organizational work in which students are involved is subject to the prior approval of the Rector;*

3. *No meetings may be held on the grounds of the college without permission from the Rector. Approved student committees may meet in accordance with the rules of the constitution of the body concerned;*
4. *No magazine, publication or pamphlet for which students are wholly or partly responsible may be circulated without the permission of the Rector in consultation with the Advisory Senate and the Senate;*
5. *'No statement may be given to the Press by or on behalf of the students without the Rector's permission' (Horrell, 1968:121)*
6. *'At Fort Hare students had to re-apply for admission and the application had to include a 'testimonial of good conduct' by a Minister of Religion or a Bantu Affairs Commissioner or Magistrate of the district where the applicant normally resides' (Horrell, 1968:121). This became a regular rule at all Black institutions following student boycotts. The University of the North required students to produce a testimonial that was to the 'satisfaction of the authorities'. In many cases returning students had to sign new contracts with the university promising not to participate in political activities, that their parents will be held responsible for damages, and that their parents would be charged the full fees for the semester in which they may be expelled (Reddy, 1994:17-18).*

In addition, comparative numbers of white and black academic staff numbers at black universities in 1972 (see Table 3.5) show that the staff component of these universities, consisted of mostly white, Afrikaans-speaking academics (Reddy, 1994:18). One has to wonder about the effect on the culture in the black universities of having an almost entire staff corps (including the Rector) made up of people who ascribed to "apartheid" and its laws, were members of the Nationalist Party and the Broederbond, and "*vigilantly displayed a policing, authoritative, and demeaning attitude towards the students*" (Reddy, 1994:18). This is discussed in the following section.



Table 3.5. Staff profile at black universities in 1972

University	Professors		Senior Lecturers		Lecturers		Junior Lecturers		Total
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	
Fort Hare	2	28	2	33	9	29	4	1	<b>108</b>
U of North	5	26	3	33	21	33	6	-	<b>127</b>
UWC	-	17	1	24	3	26	-	-	<b>70</b>
Zululand	1	17	2	40	6	16	-	-	<b>82</b>
UDW <sup>17</sup>	1	23	5	46	24	56	12	10	<b>177</b>
	<b>9</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>563</b>

### 3.7. Black Consciousness and the Black Consciousness Movement

The atmosphere in the black universities was that of repression and conservativeness. Together with a growing black student body (mainly studying humanities and education), this led to brooding unrest and frustration on black campuses (Reddy, 1994:19) and to the emergence of the Black Consciousness (BC) (Christie, 1986:234). BC was seen as a strong political influence and resistance movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, originating on black campuses but soon extending into schools through the influences of young teachers. The success of the influences of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was due to the learners' dissatisfaction of overcrowded schools (Hyslop, 1999:150; Christie, 1986:234). In addition, the changing political situation (in the arena of white politics) was leading to government losing its threatening stature that prevailed during the 1960s. Furthermore, "[t]he rising influence of BC reduced the political influence of conservative black elites in the educational sphere" (Hyslop, 1999:150). It would not be long before the brooding unrest and frustration erupted.

A formal precursor to the eruptions was the formation of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in July 1969 with Steve Biko as president (Reddy, 1994:23;

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<sup>17</sup> University of Durban-Westville

Christie, 1986:234). Reddy (1994:24) referred to Stubbs (1988:4-5), who indicated that “[t]he basic and immediate aims of SASO were to: 1) Mobilise black students by increasing contact nationally, 2) Identify crucial issues/grievances that affected black students, 3) Represent the interests of the black students, 4) Establish a solid and strong identity to boost black students’ confidence in themselves, and 5) Begin concrete programmes to respond to pertinent issues to get the majority of black students directly involved in SASO activities”. This “new stance allowed black students to break their dependence on white society, to develop confidence in themselves and to work out their own strategies and ideas about liberation”.

Included in these strategies and ideas about liberation, was a need for and a move towards the formation of a BC organisation. At a third conference dealing with this issue, a more political direction was chosen and in July of 1972, a politically orientated BCM was founded on SASO’s terms (Hyslop, 1999:155).

### **3.8. Collective agency and resilience in the form of black resistance and/or protests**

The dissatisfaction with Bantu Education and the pursuit of the Freedom Charter of 1955 became visible through “a long and continuing history of resistance by black people to the schooling system” (Christie, 1986:219). This history of resistance included the following resistance and/or protests, both in and outside schools (Christie, 1986:226-237):

- Condemning of Bantu Education by various teacher’s associations in 1952;
- The school boycott on the East Rand and in the Eastern Cape that started on 12 April 1955;
- Symbolic resistance at some universities in the form of marches and resolutions against the 1959 Extensions of Universities Act;
- Ongoing school unrests against South Africa becoming a republic during the 1960s;
- Boycotts at all black universities and a few colleges and attempts at launching a “Free Education” campaign at white universities in June 1972;

- More than 300 strikes took place from January 1973 to mid-1974, followed by Viva Frelimo rallies (stemming from the Mozambican triumph of independence) in September 1974;
- Widespread opposition and protests following the 1975 instruction that Afrikaans was to be the language of instruction for half of the subjects in Standard 5 (now Gr 7) and Form 1.

But probably the most well-known of such actions started on 16 June 1976 in what is known today as the Soweto Uprising. A morning's collective agency in the form of protest, initially aimed against the limited skills taught and Afrikaans as medium of instruction in schools, turned into a violent clash with the police and ended as a country-wide display of protests, riots and marches. After four months, close to 200 communities were affected by these displays (Oertel, 1981:74; Christie. 1986:239). Unfortunately, the displays of collective agency were not accompanied by resilience and “[b]y the end of 1976, classes were empty and buildings destroyed. Teachers had lost confidence and children were hurt, bewildered, and filled with mistrust” (Oertel, 1981:74). At this point, agency without resilience may be a rather destructive act.

Government realised that action was required and many reforms were implemented following these protests. Among these were the abolition of Afrikaans as language of instruction. This led to a soaring in the enrolment figures of black students, but without accompanying improved school structures. The result was overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms and teachers implementing various (ineffective) strategies that would lead to student-teacher conflicts (Hyslop, 1999:151,168). Other attempts at improvement instituted by government were proposing compulsory education in some areas, developing “*teacher upgrading programmes and changing the name of the then Bantu Education Department (BED) to the Department of Education and Training (DET). These attempts were, however, not sufficient and the anger among black learners and students continued to grow*” (Coutts, 1992:4-5).

### **3.9. The growth of student organisations**

*“Student organisations meanwhile strengthened and identified its position. The Congress of South African Students (COSAS), formed in 1979 and based its stance*

*on the Freedom Charter. Another student organisation, the Azanian Students Movement (AZASM), continued to identify with the BCM tradition” (Hyslop, 1999:168).*

Two important things happened in black education shortly before, but especially over the 14 years after the Soweto Uprising. First, the black school system in South Africa had nearly collapsed by 1985. In part, this could probably be attributed to prolonged absenteeism of learners who participated in riots, but partly also due to a change in the learners’ and students’ attitudes and point of view, as evident from their adopting of the slogan *“Liberation first, education later!”* (Van Zyl, 2002:14). Also *“the lack of consultation with stakeholders, the removal of experienced and trained teachers, lack of funding, and generally the lack of interest in black education culminated into the collapse of Bantu education”* (Banda, 2000:53).

Secondly, after the Soweto Uprising, many private white schools decided to allow black learners in their schools. Formal talks on ending segregation in private white schools already commenced before the uprising at the meeting of the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference (HMC) in Cape Town in 1974. The first step towards an “open school movement” was taken early in 1976 when the South African Catholic Bishops Conference made a resolution in this regard. Then, after the uprising *“many Catholic church schools, supported by Anglicans and Methodists in particular, have adopted a policy of steadily integrating their previously whites-only schools”* (Coutts, 1992:6). Government initially warned them and threatened to withdraw their registration, but in 1977 at its annual conference, the South African HMC adopted a new policy *“of open admission, with a commitment to strive for a just and fair provision of education and opportunity for all South Africans”* (Coutts, 1992:6). Government did not attempt to stop them, but tried to restrict the number of admissions of black learners through the use of a permit system. Schools systematically started to disregard the permits. Government turned a blind eye as they realised that closing such schools would lead to them having to accommodate thousands of white learners from those schools and they simply did not have the capacity to do so (Coutts, 1992:7).

In 1980, another eruption occurred in black schools, another act of collective agency, this time in the form of an enormous country-wide boycott that took a stand against

apartheid in its entirety and demanded “*a single, completely non-racial education system*” (Coutts, 1992:5).

“[U]p to 1980, education policy had contributed to social, economic, and political malfunction, and had become part of the problem instead of part of the solution” (Hartshorne, 1999:71). Education was the tool by which to facilitate the reproduction of the dominant race of the time. It was driven as the vehicle that would maintain the economic, social, political and religious status quo.

Would this vehicle succeed in driving the political authoritarians home? Would their gross and discriminative oppression through education lead to the reproduction the government so longed for? It may have seemed as such with urban black education experiencing a total collapse, as mentioned earlier, by the end of 1985 (Hyslop, 1999:173; Christie, 1986:28). Alas, this was not to be the end of it, it was not to become the victorious moment some may have perceived it to become. Indeed, the tide was about to turn and the entire flavour of ruling cultural capital would change.

By order of the South African government, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) carried out a comprehensive review of all levels of South African education in June 1980. The HSRC organised a steering committee chaired by Prof JP de Lange (the Rector of the then Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) – now University of Johannesburg (UJ)). The committee comprised 27 members, including leaders from black educational institutions.

In reporting on the evaluation of what was then the educational dispensation in the country, the committee explicitly stated that differentiation on the basis of race or colour cannot equate disparity of treatment, advantages and privileges but that equitable education should, in fact, see equal distribution of educational resources among all citizens of South Africa (Marcum, 1982:119). The report, furthermore, advocated that all education in South Africa should be managed under the same ministry (Van Zyl, 2002:15).

After the release of the De Lange Report (as it became known), a “bureaucratic” task team examined it for two and a half years to make recommendations to government on the implementation thereof. The result was the 1983 White Paper in which the

Nationalist Government responded with apparent praise and gratitude towards the report and acknowledged all its principles. Nevertheless, its response also included a “however” section, containing its reservations and seemingly discarding all that had previously been acknowledged (Hartshorne, 1999:74-75; Marcum, 1982:133-134):

- They stood by the principle of white Christian education and the laws governing it, also in relation to other population groups.
- The argument for mother tongue education remained pedagogically sound.
- The policy indicating that each population group should have its own schools required each population group to also have its own education authority/ department.
- *“The government finds acceptable the principle of freedom of choice for the individual and for parents in educational matters and in the choice of a career, but within the framework of the policy that each population group is to have its own schools”* (Marcum, 1982:134)
- Any decisions taken had to fit into the constitutional framework.

This White Paper also formed the basis of the 1984 educational legislation (Hartshorne, 1999:74).

Government responded to the suggestion of one education ministry by instituting the Tri-cameral Parliament constitution, so called because of its three-way split of political representation into white, coloured and Indian politically representative structures. This also extended to education, which was three equally split structures, each governed separately by a sector of the population represented in government. White people’s education would be managed by The House of Assemblies, coloured people’s by the House of Representatives and Indian people’s by the House of Delegates. *“Their general affairs, however, were managed by the Cabinet’s white Minister of National Education via the Department of National Education. Black South Africans – unlike White South Africans, so called, coloured people, and Indian people, could not manage their own Educational affairs. Their education functioned under the Minister of Development and Training’s Department of Education and Training. Neither the black South African, so called, coloured or Indian sector were satisfied with this dispensation”* (Van Zyl, 2002:15).

In spite of this negative response, some good news presented itself in 1981, when *“the Financial Relations Amendment Act ... permitted Provincial Councils to subsidize black children in private schools, provided such schools placed a limit on their numbers”* (Coutts, 1992:7). This saw a rise in black learners in private schools and in the period between 1980 and 1984 they made up approximately 10% of enrolments in catholic schools. Government soon realised that they were losing the battle of controlling black numbers in private schools. However, three other things did ensure that numbers stayed low: (1) private schools were expensive; (2) white parents threatened to leave the school if the number of black learners became too high; and (3) admission requirements consisted of *“rigorous entry exams and interviews”* (Coutts, 1992:8).

The year 1984 saw an intensified return of boycotts after the 1983 matric examination produced poor results for black learners and the government refused to allow the election of democratic Student Representative Councils (SRCs). The administration of this examination was believed to be poor and corrupt. The pass rates had dropped sharply since 1980 and suspicions arose that it may be the authorities' attempt at limiting the number of high school graduates, especially since unmarked matric examination scripts were found (Hyslop, 1999:170; Samuel, 1990:27). This, as well as several other educational complaints, were taken up by COSAS: (1) an end to teachers sexually harassing students; (2) the lack of democratic representation; (3) scrapping of the age limit regulations enforced in schools; and (4) an end to excessive corporal punishment. A system of SRCs was also launched by COSAS (Hyslop, 1999:170; Samuel, 1990:26-27; Johnson, 1988:114).

On 22 October 1984, a body supporting learners' demands was formed in the township of KwaThema. The body called the Transvaal Regional Stay-away Committee (TRSC) was made up of COSAS, community organisations and major trade unions and supported student demands, including the establishment of SRCs. They also raised wider demands, such as the withdrawal of the army from townships (Samuel, 1990:26-27, Johnson, 1988:115). *“When the stay-away, act of massive collective agency, took place on 5 and 6 November 1984, about 400 000 students from more than 300 schools and anything between 300 000 and 800 000 workers participated”* (Hyslop, 1999:171).

The boycotts of 1984 continued to spread through the entire country and persisted into 1985. In July, the state declared a state of emergency in 36 magisterial districts in the regions of the Eastern Cape, Southern Transvaal and Northern Free State. COSAS was banned and large numbers of its members were arrested, serving only to intensify the boycotts to the extent that a substantial number of black learners would not return to school for the remainder of 1985 (Hyslop, 1999:171; Samuel, 1990:27; Johnson, 1988:116).

The emergency sparked the outbreak of student protests in the Western Cape and, by the end of September, protests were a nationwide phenomenon (Samuel, 1990:28). A month later, a state of emergency was imposed by the Western Cape government (Hyslop, 1999:172).

Six months under the state of emergency could not put out the flame of resistance and, for the first time, it would appear as if black students felt that freedom was just around the corner, which was evident from the following: *“Mandela told us many years ago it was no easy walk to freedom. But now we are there. Freedom lies only months away”* (Johnson, 1988:121).

During 1985-1986, government attempted to pacify students through increased expenditure in black education. In accordance with the De Lange Report, a unified Ministry of National Education was formed to coordinate educational policy and to develop uniform administrative strategies. Unfortunately for this Ministry, students were aware of the gross discriminations that still existed and the continued discrepancy between funding for white and black education (Hyslop, 1999:172).

Slogans such as *“Liberation Now, Education Later”* became popular and, in light of the assumed impending revolution and the fact that many students spent all their time on the protests, some students began to view any return to school as a betrayal. Boycotts became a principle rather than a tactic. By the end of the year, students were making calls for 1986 to be “The Year of No Schooling” (Hyslop, 1999:172; Johnson, 1988:121).



An example of such thought, found below (Le Roux, 1994:27), clearly illustrates the influence of cultural capital in its embodied form as black learners voiced the cultural capital important to them and questioned the cultural capital forced on them:

*What kind of people are we?*

*We are poor, very poor*

*but we are not stupid.*

*That is why, despite our illiteracy, we still exist.*

*But we have to know*

*why we should become literate ...*

*Why do our teachers feel so superior?*

*They behave as if we were ignorant fools,*

*as if we were little children.*

*Please, do understand that*

*the teacher may know things*

*which we don't.*

*But we know a lot of things*

*which are beyond him ...*

*Literacy should help us live better;*

*at least we look at it that way.*

*They say that things are being planned*

*for us - the poor.*

*Would literacy help us in knowing*

*those government plans?*

*Would it help us know*

*how to raise our yield, and increase*

*our income?*

*And from where could we borrow money*

*on easy terms, and what benefits*

*would we get from the co-operatives?*

*Will this programme teach us how to think*

*and work together?*

*Will 'doing' be made a part of 'learning'?*

*We want a straight answer.*

*Then shall we decide whether*

*we should become literate or not.*

*But if we find out that we*

*are being duped again*

*with empty promises,*

*we will stay away from you ...*

(Hinzen, 1989:514)

### **3.10. The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC)**

The years 1985-1986 saw the rise of a new organisation, the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), birthed out of the concern of parents and community leaders and supported by the ANC. In the author's view, this was the first agentic move that was supported by resilience and it not appear altogether destructive for both the collective as well as the individual within the collective. The strategy of the NECC viewed education, however poor, as building a foundation that was better than no education. With many of the youth leaders arrested at the time, the youth was vulnerable to grow up with virtually no cultural capital in the form of education and schooling, apart from the classes provided during the protests, and even those seemed weak and often uncoordinated or not well thought through. However, the NECC promised alternative education, while the fight for improved government education continued and would prevent self-destruction of the student movement (Hyslop, 1999:173; Marks & Trapido, 1988:44).

Crisis committees similar to the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee (SPCC) sprouted out throughout the country to become a network of Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs). This network felt strongly that they needed to become involved in the education of their children and hence they held a mass meeting and reported back to the various represented PTSAs that all learners should return to school on 28 January (two weeks after the official opening date of 8 January, as the state refused to move the date) (Hyslop, 1999:174; Johnson. 1988:124-125). The SPCC and similar

organisations then evolved into the NECC and gave the state three months to respond to a set of educational and political demands among which was the legalisation of COSAS, the termination of the state of emergency and the release of detainees (Hyslop. 1999:174; Johnson. 1988:127-128).

Unfortunately, government was still determined to accomplish its educational reproduction ideals. Some leaders in government, however, subtly suggested that minor change in the education policy may be possible. In April such negotiations were refused. Military invasion, boycotts and bloodshed started afresh and some schools were suspended in April and May and on 12 June the government once more declared a national state of emergency in which police was given complete discretion, under the regulations of a state of emergency, to deal with unruly youth. A number of 22,000 people (among which were children) were detained. In respect of this disaster, Johnson (1988:131) quoted Murray who called it *“the greatest wave of repression and violence unleashed by the state against the people [of] South Africa”* (Hyslop, 1999:175; Johnson. 1988:128-130).

### **3.11. The turning point: State President FW de Klerk’s parliamentary speech on 2 February 1990**

Van Zyl (2002:17) indicated that the turning point came on 2 February 1990. He quoted the following excerpts from State President FW de Klerk’s parliamentary speech from the House of Assemblies Debates (1992:15) concerning the “overall aims of South Africa”: “[It] *should be acceptable to all reasonable South Africans*” and *“a new, democratic constitution; universal franchise; no domination; equality before an independent judiciary, the protection of minorities as well as of individual rights; freedom of religion; a sound economy on proven economic principles and private enterprise; and dynamic programmes directed at better education, health services, housing and social conditions for all”* [underlining by the author]. The time was ripe for South African education to move to the next frontier and it was to be taken there by government and opposition parties alike.

### **3.12. Education Renewal Strategy (ERS), National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) and policy making**

The Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) emerged from an investigation undertaken by the then Minister of Education in May 1990. Its solutions factored in equal opportunities for all, but no provision was made for “redressing past inequalities” (Van Zyl, 1992:17). The black community had had enough of window dressing and craved to become participants and owners of cultural capital in the form of just, fair and equal education that they had been fighting for so hard. This paved the way for major policy making and a vast number of policies were brought forth by the ruling party and the ANC (Jansen, 2001:17-18; Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani, 2002:175). Operating between the ruling government of the time and the future ANC government, was the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI). The different areas of future policy attention were also mentioned, i.e. “*educare*, [early childhood education], *adult education and training*, *curriculum*, *post-secondary education and governance*” (Jansen, 2001:17). Jansen summarised the main contributions of the NEPI as follows (Jansen & Yusaf, 2001:17-18):

- *Establishing a values framework within which a post-apartheid education policy could be conceived, ie the pillars of nonracialism, nonsexism, equity, democracy and redress;*
- *Engaging academics from universities in policy development, thereby effectively displacing the earlier tradition of policy criticism which characterised progressive academic work in education;*
- *Signalling the parameters within which a more refined education policy could be developed in the future, eg the establishment of educare and adult basic education and training (ABET) as crucial areas within which to shape future policies;*
- *Creating a frame of reference within which oppositional or rival policies would invariably develop their own policy positions.*

A lot is said for and against the NEPI in the literature, but what stood out was Jansen’s (2001:17) view that it became “*policy options’ for the broad democratic movement*”. It could well have been the instigating power behind the future face of education. The

NEPI was, however, widely seen as unrealistic and naïve. The ANC responded to the NEPI with its own Implementation plan for Education and Training (IPET). but even this plan did not (and could not) take into account all the changes and challenges that would confront post-apartheid education. Of these, the instating of nine provinces (as opposed to the four under the apartheid government) each with its own governing power may have been the most significant (Jansen, 2001:18).

During the time that the NEPI was developed, both versions of the ERS were dismissed. Version II of the ERS was a response to criticism received for version I. *“the ERS (I and II) was expressly criticised on the one hand for working within the apartheid paradigm, and on the other for not addressing ‘fundamental’ problems with the education system. For example, by emphasising vocational rather than academic education, the ERS was perhaps predictably being read as once again offering a dual-track system: vocational training for black learners, and academic education for white learners. This was a racial theme established long before the apartheid education of the 1950’s”* (Jansen, 2001:19).

### **3.13. Education under the government of the ANC**

In April of 1994, the ANC won the general elections and, for the first time in the history of the country, the black majority had the political power. This rung in a time of immense change, as a group of severely oppressed and disadvantaged people was to take the lead. In 1995, the 1995 White Paper on Education was released by the new Department of Education, a department consisting, to a large extent, of people who believed in the Freedom Charter, people who could then become owners of the very cultural capital they had been denied for so many years. In reaction, in 1996, the Department of Education issued curricula, purged of *“the most gross and evident apartheid, racial and ethnic stereotypes”* (Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani, 2002:175-176). It was time to construct a new curriculum that took different sets of cultural capital into account. Would it be the democratic oasis the Freedom Charter promised it would be, or would the new government create a new vehicle for disadvantage and marginalisation?

The year 1997 saw the launch of Curriculum 2005. It was phased in, starting with grade 1 in 1998 and grade 7 in 1999, thus completing the implementation by 2005. This new curriculum envisioned education to be “outcomes-based” and more learner-centred (Harley & Wedekind, 2004:197; Hartshorne, 1999:114-115).

This history then brings us to the present-day in South African education where, unfortunately, the current ruling ANC government is trying to make up for all the wrong and disadvantage that black people suffered, by applying a forced and weak method of redress. The question asked by Professor Jonathan Jansen “*whether we can correct apartheid’s wrongs by invoking the very racial categories that offended and divided us in the past*” applies (Jansen, 2010:1). Allowing large numbers of underprepared black students into top South African universities is not going to go a long way to accomplish the initial aim of the freedom charter, namely that “[e]ducation shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children” (Jansen, 2010:1) (interestingly enough, this view is very similar to that of Booker T Washington many years earlier in the USA). Instead, as Jansen (and others in his article) mentioned, what we are creating is a system where university graduates are increasingly unprepared for the workplace and lacking skills needed to perform in the various business sectors (Jansen, 2012:2). The cultural capital needed to effectively navigate oneself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s global world is still not readily available to equip all students to become prosperous individuals.

In the Department for Higher Education and Training’s (DHET’s) White Paper for Post-school Education and Training, the progress made during the almost 20 years of democracy in SA is acknowledged, but with it, also the realisation that the inequalities deeply rooted in our past, were the cause of the remaining inequalities of wealth, educational access and attainment, health status and access to opportunities still largely based on race and gender (DHET, 2013:4).

In this document, the DHET further emphasised how the “*majority of South Africans have still to attain a decent standard of living*”, which continues to haunt education and especially higher education. Its sense is that, as in the past, black people are still not receiving the opportunities they should, due to various disadvantages and the subsequent lack in cultural capital (DHET, 2013:4). The Census 2011 figures

supported this view by indicating that 2,484,492 (28%) black South Africans over the age of 20 have no schooling while 6,343,830 (72%) have passed matric. Among the white population, 20,752 (2%) have no schooling, while 1,339,835 (98%) have passed matric.

At the same time, these opportunities are equally offered to black students from affluent middle-class families simply on the basis of race with no “poor background or disadvantage” evident. Vera Longwe, a black student from UCT, emphasised this point when she was quoted saying: *“Just because we’re black doesn’t mean we’re disadvantaged. I find the [UCT admission] policy very patronising”* (Govender, 2010:2). Thus, providing opportunities (for higher education) purely on the basis of race, does not allow for redress of past disadvantages, but again, rather becomes a political and economic playing field for the new “dominant class” (or in South Africa’s case, the state) by holding on to classification by race. This is explained very well by Siraj-Blatchford (2007:403): *“[P]erhaps the only reason why the term ‘race’ is still in use at all ... is because black and ethnic minority people have chosen to hold on to it in defiance”*. It is, however, not only black and ethnic minorities who hold on to race, rather, *“[f]ew myths in the history of humanity have been as pernicious in relations between societies and peoples as the myth of race. People have gone to wars, undertaken genocidal campaigns and pogroms, enslaved others and installed caste-like structures on the basis of consideration of race. While much has been experienced and, hopefully, learnt about the dangers of the glorification of this myth, there is little indication that humanity has as yet abandoned attachment to the myth of race”* (Prah, 2002:9).

The limited worth of the term “race” is supported by the 2011 census, which indicated that the total population of South Africa was counted as 51,770,560 of which black people made up 41,000,938 (79%) (Statistics South Africa, 2011:26). Black people are thus clearly not a minority and *“[t]he terribly simple fact is that ‘race’ is not real; it is racial prejudice and race thinking that are real”* (Alexander, 2010:2).

The term “black” started as an attempt to unify an oppressed and disadvantaged ethnic group (Meighan et al., 2007:403) as *“[m]erely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against*

*all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you as a subservient human being” – Stephen Biko.*

Racial classification in admission policies does not seem to emancipate students of any race, thus, as discussed in Chapter 1, paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5, we have to search for alternative ways of addressing disadvantage; ways that will look away from race and toward R-A in an attempt to support students with underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds.

In the introduction to his book *The making of education policy in South Africa*, Ken Hartshorne puts it this way “*when one is concerned with fundamental change and transformation in education, one must avoid the trap of searching for a purely educational answer to a problem that has social, economic and political as well as educational dimensions*” (Hartshorne, 1999:i).

### **3.14. Higher education mergers in South Africa**

Indeed, the problem in the South African higher education system of the time (and to this day) requires social, economic and political answers. One attempt at finding at least some sort of answer, was the restructuring process of merging universities, technikons and colleges during the period 2001 to 2007 (Arnolds, Stofile & Lillah, 2013:1).

Accompanying the change in government were extensive changes in higher education, “*particularly with the appointment of the second post-apartheid Education Minister, Professor Kader Asmal*”. Under the management of Asmal, in fact proposed by himself, were mergers of the entire spectrum of post-secondary institutions – universities, technikons, colleges of education and technical colleges. The motion for the call for mergers was two-fold: firstly, racial advancement in an attempt to redress past inequalities and secondly, to keep the South African higher education system in pace with information technology demands (Jansen, 2003:29).

The merger and incorporation plan (see Table 3.6) would lead to the current 23 public universities, including 11 traditional universities, 6 universities of technology (formerly technikons) and 6 comprehensive universities (which offer both university and



technikon-type programmes) (Arnolds et al., 2013:3; Cooper, 2015:248; DHET, 2013:27). Table 3.6 reflects a list of the mergers. Not all 23 public universities in South Africa were part of the merger plan, notably UCT, Stellenbosch University (SU), UP, WITS, University of the Free State (UFS), Rhodes University and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) (South Africa’s Universities, 2017; Cooper, 2015:248).

Table 3.6. The merger and incorporation plan

<b>Traditional universities</b>	
<b>New institution</b>	<b>Institutions merged</b>
North-West University (NWU)	Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE) University of North-West (formerly the University of Bophuthatswana)
University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)	University of Durban-Westville (UDW) Natal universities
University of Limpopo (UL)	University of the North Medical University of Southern Africa (Medunsa), which was incorporated as a full medical faculty
<b>Comprehensive universities</b>	
<b>New institution</b>	<b>Institutions merged</b>
University of Johannesburg (UJ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rand Afrikaans University (RAU)</li> <li>• Technikon Witwatersrand</li> <li>• Vista University’s Johannesburg campuses</li> </ul>
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Port Elizabeth Technikon</li> <li>• University of Port Elizabeth (UPE)</li> <li>• Vista University’s Port Elizabeth campus</li> </ul>
University of South Africa (UNISA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNISA</li> <li>• Technikon SA</li> <li>• Vista University’s distance education division</li> </ul>
Walter Sisulu University (WSU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Border Technikon</li> <li>• Eastern Cape Technikon</li> <li>• University of the Transkei</li> </ul>
<b>Universities of technology</b>	
<b>New institution</b>	<b>Institutions merged</b>
Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cape Technikon</li> <li>• Peninsula Technikon</li> </ul>
The Central University of Technology (CUT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technikon Free State</li> <li>• Vista University’s Welkom campus</li> </ul>
Durban University of Technology (DUT) incorporates the former	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ML Sultan Technikon</li> <li>• Natal Technikon</li> </ul>

Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT)	Originally a technikon
Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) incorporates the former	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Gauteng Technikon</li> <li>• North West Technikon</li> <li>• Pretoria Technikon</li> </ul>
Vaal University of Technology (VUT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Now includes the Sebokeng campus of the former Vista University</li> </ul>

Unfortunately, the mergers did not seem to alleviate either student or staff inequality and no clear efficacy improvements was observed. In addition, the mergers were characterised by curriculum debates and struggles, i.e. in some mergers, one merged institution's curriculum degenerated as a result of neglect and indifference, some merely maintained the status quo and, in others, the curriculum of the large institution subjugated that of the smaller faculty, with the exception of some minor accommodations (Jansen, 2004:16; Cooper, 2011:153).

Vilakazi (2016:49) referred to Fiske and Ladd (2004) and Letseka and Maile (2008) when explaining that the origin of the #feesmustfall protest in one of the universities of technology, TUT, was linked to the mergers. As mentioned, one of the aims of the mergers was to address the inequality, with the rationale that this would be accomplished by merging formerly white institutions with formerly black institutions. However, the result was quite the contrary, as the legacy of the original institutions persisted. As a result, black students felt that they would have received better education from former white institutions. This led to dwindling student numbers in formerly black institutions and the consequent hiking of fees to make up for the shortfall created. This led to high tuition fees and growing upset and dissatisfaction among students. The eventual result was what became known as the #feesmustfall movement.

### **3.15. #Feesmustfall protests**

What is clear at this point is that South African education is still a long way from achieving equilibrium and peace in its education system and seeing the required fundamental change and transformation. Social, economic and political dimensions in education was never more clearly visible than through the student-led protests which characterised the #feesmustfall movement that started in 2015/16 and gained

momentum throughout South Africa. *“The #feesmustfall movement sparked heated debates on fee increases in universities. Other demands by students included the decolonisation of the educational system, transformation of universities to address racial and gender inequalities in terms of staff composition, as well as insourcing of general workers”* (Langa, 2016:6).

Initially, these protests started peacefully as an act that resembled agency, supported by resilience or R-A. The movement was widely supported by academics and other concerned stakeholders alike. *“The message was clear that the costs of higher education were too high and unaffordable for the majority of poor black students”* (Langa, 2016:6). It would appear as though #feesmustfall would allow a large group of students to change their structure of poverty that made tertiary studies difficult and, simultaneously, gain support and perhaps even recognition from others. Unfortunately, the peaceful nature of the protests did not last and the resilience was lost as protests started turning violent (Langa, 2016:6). Collective agency resulted in individuals being disadvantaged in that they could not attend classes in preparation for tests and/or examinations and, at times, had trouble gaining access to Wi-Fi. As many institutions of higher education closed their campuses in the interest of the safety of their staff and students, access to Wi-Fi became a prerequisite during the time when students had to access online resources to make up for lost contact lectures. However, examinations were eventually written at the end of 2016 and the academic year concluded, but more than a year later, #feesmustfall was still simmering, still talked about and still had the potential to re-emerge. One could only imagine what the future for education in South Africa might have in store. But that it will have ever-dynamic change at its core was almost certain.

### **3.16. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the origins and development of education in South Africa was visited and elucidated through references to Bourdieu’s work – as the theoretical underpinning of this study – as well as reference to resilience, agency and R-A. Special attention was given to the state’s use of education as a tool to reproduce their own cultural and educational capital by selectively allowing white learners access thereto and selectively disallowing access to black learners. In addition, segregating was

established in institutions of higher education with white students having access to well-funded, good quality institutions while black institutions were underfunded and lacking in academic offering. At the height of this gross act of segregation under the apartheid government, the country saw massive acts of collective agency when learners and students started protesting and boycotting classes. After years of living under a state of emergency, substantial change was initiated by President FW de Klerk in 1990. This introduced a time of volumes of policies, committees and strategies that led to the country's first democratic elections and a complete change in power from white to black. Consequently, the introduction and implementation of a new education system, Curriculum 2005, followed as well as mergers of several tertiary education institutions.

In the present-day South Africa, the promised, yet long-awaited educational paradise appears to be lacking even to this day and a proclamation made in a book published in 1992, titled *Multicultural education: the way forward*, may be an accurate summary of what many people hoped for:

*We need to move quickly towards a new educational system in which:*

- (a) Race will not be a factor.*
- (b) There will be a focus on primary schooling, without neglect of higher education.*
- (c) There will be equality of opportunity and expenditure per learner.*
- (d) The resources of all communities will be fully used,*
- (e) Learners will be participants in a nation-building exercise, while cultural diversity will be treated as an enrichment for all.*
- (f) Individual needs will be balanced with the needs (e.g. economic) of the wider society.*
- (g) Responsible affirmative action will be implemented.*
- (h) Religious and moral values will be respected. (Coutts, 1992:1)*

This is the change in education that we should strive for. This is the change that the “fallers” in the #feesmustfall movement initially propagated. However, in a country as rich in cultural capital and racial variation as South Africa, the use of a “one-size-fits-

all cookie-cutter” approach is simply not feasible and cannot serve to address the iniquities of the past. This is why this study aimed to investigate the use of a BQ to supplement admission to universities in an attempt to contribute to equitable access and redress. Of equal importance is the author’s goal to ensure that agency is understood in the context of the presence of resilience (and by implication the absence thereof, although this does not form part of the focus of this study) because, as this chapter has clearly illustrated, agency – collective and probably individually alike – could have detrimental effects if resilience is not in equal pursuit. In the next chapter, investigation into this matter is expanded through engaging with the research process and the data it produced.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The broader issues that motivated this study were responsible and equitable admission to the University (UP in this case) by admitting students with a potential to succeed into the Extended Programme at UP's Faculty of Humanities. Certain students who are facing or have faced disadvantage and are consequently excluded based on their marks may, when given a second opportunity through a BQ, display the required potential to succeed in a university environment. The aim of this study, to determine whether a BQ could indeed be used for such a purpose, is discussed in this chapter. The specific goal was to determine whether indicators of resilience and agency could be identified via a BQ and how, if at all, these indicators could predict performance at university.

A further purpose of the study was to stimulate thought and action around the challenges that UP faced (and universities globally, based on the discussion in Chapter 1) with regards to the redress of past disadvantages, coupled with the delivery of improved graduation rates as a positive spin-off (Grinnell, 1993:15; Fouché, 2002:108; Neuman, 2003:21).

This chapter discusses how a mixed methods research design was used to study the abovementioned issues. The research questions are revisited, followed by a discussion of the sampling of participants in the respective quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. Thereafter, the quantitative and qualitative measurement instruments and data collection methods used are explained. This is brought together in a discussion on the narrative analysis used to interpret the data in this mixed methods design and writing them up as re-storied narratives. Finally, ethical issues pertaining to this study are discussed.

## **4.1. Research questions**

### **4.1.1. Overarching research question:**

How, if at all, can a BQ (*see Appendix A*) be used to identify indicators of resilience and agency in a university seeking a way to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

### **4.1.2. Sub-questions:**

1. How, if at all, do the indicators of resilience and agency predict academic performance in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria?
2. How could this biographical instrument be further developed to specifically identify resilience and agency to supplement the indicators of the disadvantaged, such as race and class, to determine equitable access to higher education programmes?
3. How, if at all, can such a biographical instrument be designed in an easily analysable and interpretable manner?

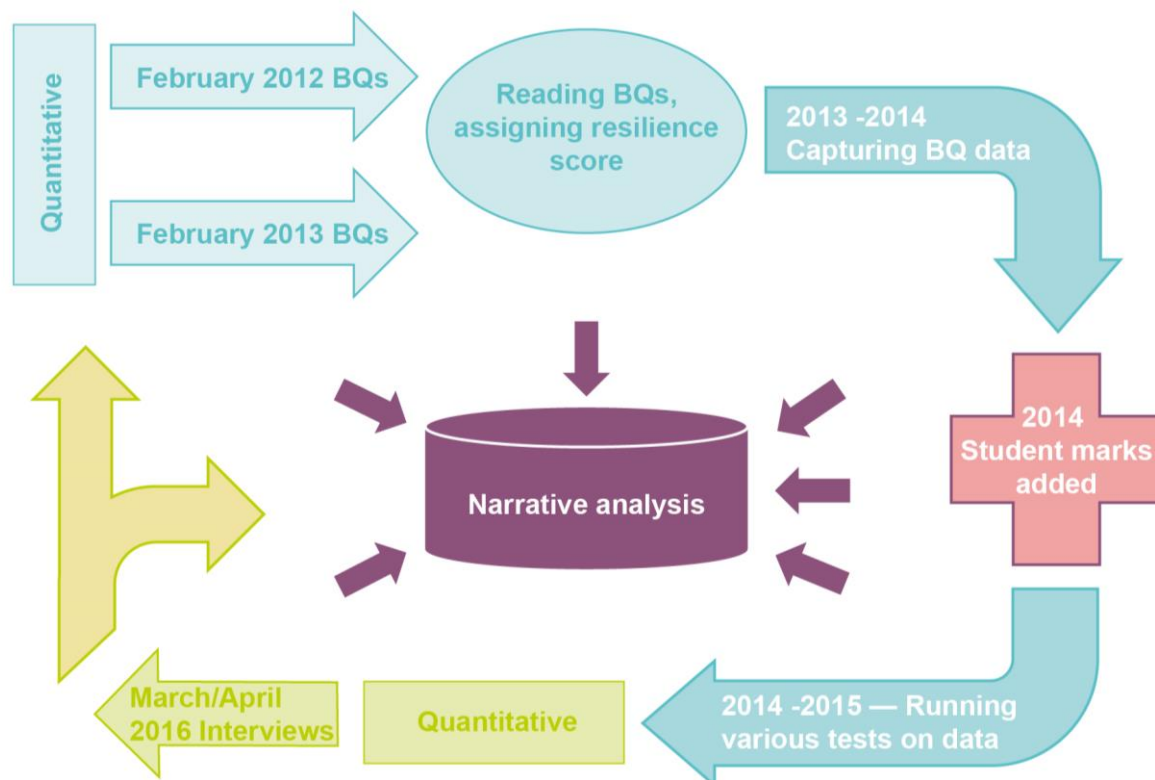
These challenges were all researchable and their meaning had a clear significance and utility for practice as the author had already been working with the identified students. This study started out as part of another institutional study. Globally, there is a call for equitable access using different than or additional measures to grade 12 marks (*see Chapter 1, paragraphs 1.2-1.5*) (Fouché, 2002:102).

## **4.2. Research design**

At the outset, the issue at hand was whether indicators of agency and resilience could be identified from a BQ that was not developed to do so, but was used at another institution to augment the selection process for their Foundational Programme. Furthermore, the question was, if such indicators could indeed be identified from the BQ, could they predict academic completion at tertiary level? To determine this, a mixed methods approach was followed. The explanatory sequential mixed method design (Creswell et al., 2018:15) was applied in order to first study the quantitative data extracted from the mixed quantitative and qualitative BQ of a sample of the

population (2012 and 2013 first-year students at UP). This study was done to understand the type of responses one may expect, and whether any indicators of resilience or agency could be identified from such an analysis. In addition, in an effort to answer the final sub-question, an attempt was made to code the open-ended responses so as to examine the possibility of redesigning such a biographical instrument into an easily analysable and interpretable tool. Hereafter, the quantitative data needed to be explained, elucidated and built out with a qualitative follow-up through interviews with a limited number of respondents. The interviews allowed the opportunity to augment the first phase of completing the BQ, by incorporating the perspectives of individual students (Creswell, 2012:535; Creswell et al., 2018:216). Finally, combining the quantitative and qualitative data through narrative analysis (Johnson, 2006:240-241; Pavlenko, 2002:214; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:339; Clandinin & Connelly, 2002:50-51) provided a better understanding of what would be required from a BQ that could also identify indicators of R-A (Creswell, 2012:535). The research process is graphically illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Graphic representation of the research process





### **4.3. Sampling**

#### **4.3.1. Quantitative sampling**

The selection of first year students who chose to complete the questionnaire was done via the employment of a type of non-probability sampling. The convenience sampling method rendered 118 students out of a population of 976 in 2012, and 229 out of a population of 1181 in 2013, thus a 12.1% and 19.4% response rate, respectively (Creswell, 2012:145; Strydom, 2002c:197).

##### **4.3.1.1. Quantitative sampling process**

During orientation periods, the entire group of first-year students are divided into smaller groups for easier communication. In 2012 and 2013, BQs were handed out to all students who attended the orientation period once they were in their smaller groups. Facilitators of some groups asked the students to complete the questionnaires during the session, while others referred the students to the back page of the BQ, indicating the due date and whereto they should submit the BQs once completed. Of the groups who were asked to complete the BQs during the orientation sessions, were the students identified for the Extended Programme and almost all of them completed a BQ. This proved to be valuable and vital to the study later on, when the decision was made to focus on students in the Extended Programme.

#### **4.3.2. Qualitative sampling**

Initially, the stratified sampling technique was employed to divide (stratify) the population according to students with an APS  $\geq 30$ , and those with an APS  $\leq 29$ . However, after discussions with Dr Laura Dison, an expert in using this specific BQ (see Chapter 1, paragraph 1.5), it was decided to focus on the group with an APS  $< 29$ , as they were the students who did not gain automatic entry into university and may or may not have the potential to succeed at university.

The initial aim was to collect a sample of between 10 and 20 effective and non-effective navigators (5-10 from each year) from the population of first-year students who completed the BQs (Creswell, 2012:144; Strydom & De Vos, 2001:197). Though, once

the population was changed to students with an APS  $\leq 29$ , it effectively reduced the population to 72 students for the two year periods combined, which indicated that the initial sample would probably have been difficult to reach.

After initial efforts to select the final sample did in fact yield unsatisfactory results, purposive sampling was applied. A priority list of potential interview participants were then drawn up from all the students with an APS  $< 29$  who had completed the BQ in an attempt to enlarge the interview sample (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002:103).

#### **4.3.2.1. Qualitative sampling process**

All students who completed a BQ and whose Gr 12 APS  $\leq 29$  (72 students) were selected as possible interview candidates. From this group, two subgroups were formed, namely the *effectively navigating students*<sup>18</sup> and the *non-effectively navigating students*<sup>19</sup>. The rationale behind the two groups was that the *effectively navigating students* would probably display R-A, as they had transcended the structure and disadvantage of a low APS. Their indicators of R-A could then be compared to that of the *non-effectively navigating students*. For this reason, it was decided that the *effectively navigating students* should have a substantially higher first-year GPA than the *non-effectively navigating students*.

It was further decided that the group of students seen as having *effectively navigated* their first year of study, would be defined as having a first-year GPA  $> 65$ . The group of students seen as having *non-effectively navigated* their first year of study would be defined as having a first-year GPA  $< 50$  (constituting a fail mark at UP). This distinction yielded 8 *effectively navigating* students and 21 *non-effectively navigating* students.

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<sup>18</sup> In this study, effectively navigating students refer to those students who passed their first year of studies, despite their initial low APS ( $< 29$ ) that denied them automatic entry into UP's mainstream Bachelor degree programmes.

<sup>19</sup> Non-effectively navigating students, on the other hand, refer to those students who also had an APS  $< 29$  but could not manage to pass their first year of studies.

On Wednesday, 3 February 2016, a first round of invitations to participate in interviews was submitted via SMS to all 29 students identified above. Four students accepted the invitation. The second round of invitations was sent via email. One additional student accepted. These five students all fell into the *effectively navigating* group.

In order to enlarge the interview sample to at least 10 students, of whom five would be *effective navigators* and five *non-effective navigators*, the questionnaires of the remaining potential interview candidates were studied again. A priority list of potential candidates was decided upon, based on the “richness” of answers produced in their questionnaire as they would probably yield the best results. These students were then called in order of priority. Nine interviews were confirmed: five with *effective navigators* and four with *non-effective navigators*. The interviews were scheduled between 22 and 26 February 2016, but most of them had to be postponed due to the #feesmustfall protests that commenced on Monday, 22 February 2016. Nonetheless, two interviews still took place off-campus. Five further interviews were conducted during March and April 2016, while the remaining two interviews were cancelled when those students withdrew.

In summary, five interviews had been conducted with *effectively navigating students* and two with *non-effectively navigating students*. It was decided to accept the sample of seven students as sufficient. After the narrative analysis, major themes were identified across these narratives to a point of saturation. The author was satisfied that adequate information or insight was available to address the research questions. Additionally, based on the repetitive occurrence of the same themes across the narratives, the deduction was made that new information would probably not add to the list of themes or to the elements making up those themes (Creswell, 2012:433).

#### **4.3.3. Summary of the sample and the sampling process**

From the initial 1205 first-years who completed the BQ during the 2012 and 2013 orientation period, 72 students were selected on the basis of having an APS < 29. After a further division was made on the basis of first-year GPA, 29 of the 72 students remained as possible interview candidates. Nine interviews were initially confirmed of which seven realised (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Sample profile of interview participants

	Jennifer	Jamie	Salima	Caren	Dineo	Lisebo	Michael
<b>Age at time of BQ</b>	23	19	21	20	19	20	19
<b>Race</b>	White	African	African	White	African	African	White
<b>Home language</b>	English	Setswana (always attended an English school)	Portuguese	English and Afrikaans (some French)	South Sotho	Northern Sotho	Afrikaans
<b>Nationality</b>	RSA	RSA	Mozambican	RSA	RSA	RSA	RSA
<b>APS</b>	29	26	28	28	26	25	28

#### 4.4. Data collection

##### 4.4.1. Quantitative data collection

Quantitative data was collected by firstly making use of BQs comprising a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. As mentioned, the BQs were handed out to first-year students during the orientation period. Students were asked to fill in the BQs and hand them back (if done during the orientation session) or place them in a secure box in a central area in the Humanities Building.

Secondly, with the permission of the Registrar (Appendix D), students' APSs, and first-year GPAs were accessed.

##### 4.4.1.1. Measurement instruments

###### 4.4.1.1.1. Biographical questionnaires (BQs)

The BQ selected for this study, as mentioned in Chapter 1, was at the time being used by WITS *“to tap into those abilities believed to be closely related to success in tertiary study”* (Enslin et al., 2006:437). The BQ was designed in such a way that it offers students the opportunity to demonstrate that they possess the aforementioned abilities. In this study, the aim was to determine if resilience and agency could be counted among these abilities. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 1, UP's Faculty of Humanities do not have a selection committee to analyse and interpret BQ responses.

For this reason, a further aim was to adapt this BQ into a mostly pre-coded instrument that would be quick and less labour-intensive to analyse.

The BQ (see Appendix A) consisted of the following sections:

Section A: Biographical information

Section B: Information regarding secondary school

- Facilities at school
- Challenges at school
- Language at school

Section C: For students who did not enrol at the university directly after their Grade 12 year

Section D: Achievements at school, at home and in the community

Section E: Interests and career plans

Section F: Finances

Section G: Short paragraph to be written

#### **4.4.2. Qualitative data collection**

As indicated, qualitative data was available from the responses to the open-ended questions asked in the BQ. In addition, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven students who completed the BQs and had an APS < 29 (Creswell, 2012:218,220).

##### **4.4.2.1. Measurement instruments**

###### **4.4.2.1.1. Interviews**

Interviews were conducted in a quiet place, conducive for audio recording and with enough privacy so that participants would feel at ease. All interviews were audiotaped, and brief notes taken during the interview as a proactive measure should the audio recorder malfunction. Taking notes allowed the opportunity to first listen without interrupting the participant unnecessarily to obtain immediate clarification on an issue, as specific notes could be referred to once the participant had finished sharing their

story. Probes were used to clarify concepts and/or ideas and ensure that the correct meaning was assigned to the stories told (Creswell, 2012:221).

Transcribing of interviews were done verbatim and completed as soon as possible after concluding the interviews. During interviews, the responses of respondents could often be compared to that of the BQ they had completed, thus increasing the validity and authenticity of the answers provided (Cohen et al., 2002:121; De Vos, 2002c:354). Records of interview notes and recordings of interviews were put in safekeeping according to themes, and also stored in Microsoft Excel and Word computer programmes for ease of retrieval. The data was of value to this study due to the rich information, at times attributable to the unexpected willingness of participants to share intimate and sensitive details related to R-A (De Vos, 2002c:354). Memos of the different uncovered themes will be retained.

#### **4.4.2.1.2. Interview schedule**

Owing to the explanatory sequential mixed methods design of this study, the aim of the interview was to explain, elucidate and build out the quantitative data (Creswell et al., 2018:216). Consequently, the interviews were conducted by using the BQ questions as an interview schedule and an opportunity for participants to retell the story they “told” in the BQ. This allowed for deeper probing where answers to questions that were left unanswered in the BQ could be provided. In this manner, a richer account of the students’ experiences in the various stages and contexts of their lives (specifically their academic lives, although not excluding social and cultural contexts), could be unearthed in an attempt to identify indicators of R-A.

### **4.5. Data analysis**

#### **4.5.1. Quantitative data analysis**

According to Creswell and Clark (2011:206), addressing the research question(s) is the primary goal in analysing data. A range of descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used to analyse the quantitative data of the study by firstly converting the raw data to a useful form (Creswell and Clark, 2011:206) and thereafter applying the statistical procedures as outlined in Chapter 5.

#### 4.5.1.1. Biographical questionnaires (BQs)

The quantitative information extracted from the BQs included the biographical data such as:

- gender;
- home language (which gave some indication of race);
- nationality;
- facilities available at the respondents' respective schools (see Table 4.2); and
- matric results.

Table 4.2. Facilities available at respondents' schools. BQ question: Indicate with a tick (✓) which of the following facilities you had access to in your high school:

Electricity		Brick classrooms	
Computers		Blackboard	
Science labs		Overhead projectors	
Desks (one per learner)		Playing/Sport fields	
Library		Sport equipment	
Restrooms/Toilets		Gymnasium	

Table 4.3. Empty table for matric results that respondents had to fill in

Matric subject	Result

In attempt to answer the sub-question, *How, if at all, can such a biographical instrument be designed in an easily analysable and interpretable manner*, all qualitative responses were, in addition to being analysed qualitatively, coded (where possible) as 0 or 1 during the quantification process. This would allow the data to be captured into an Excel template that was developed specifically for the purpose of this study (see Appendix C). The template was based on the questions posed by the BQ and themes had to be identified during the data-capturing process. Thereafter, the data would be exported to the SPSS software platform where it could be analysed by

drawing inferences and identifying variables with the aim of extracting themes and groups.

#### **4.5.1.2. Resilience scores**

In an attempt to answer the main research question, *How, if at all, can a BQ (see Appendix A) be used to identify indicators of resilience and agency (later referred to as resilient-agency or R-A) in a university seeking a way to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds*, a subjective resilience/agency “score” was assigned to each BQ after rereading them. The score was based on the author’s own knowledge of and experience with resilience in students, but specifically guided by the following theoretical elements:

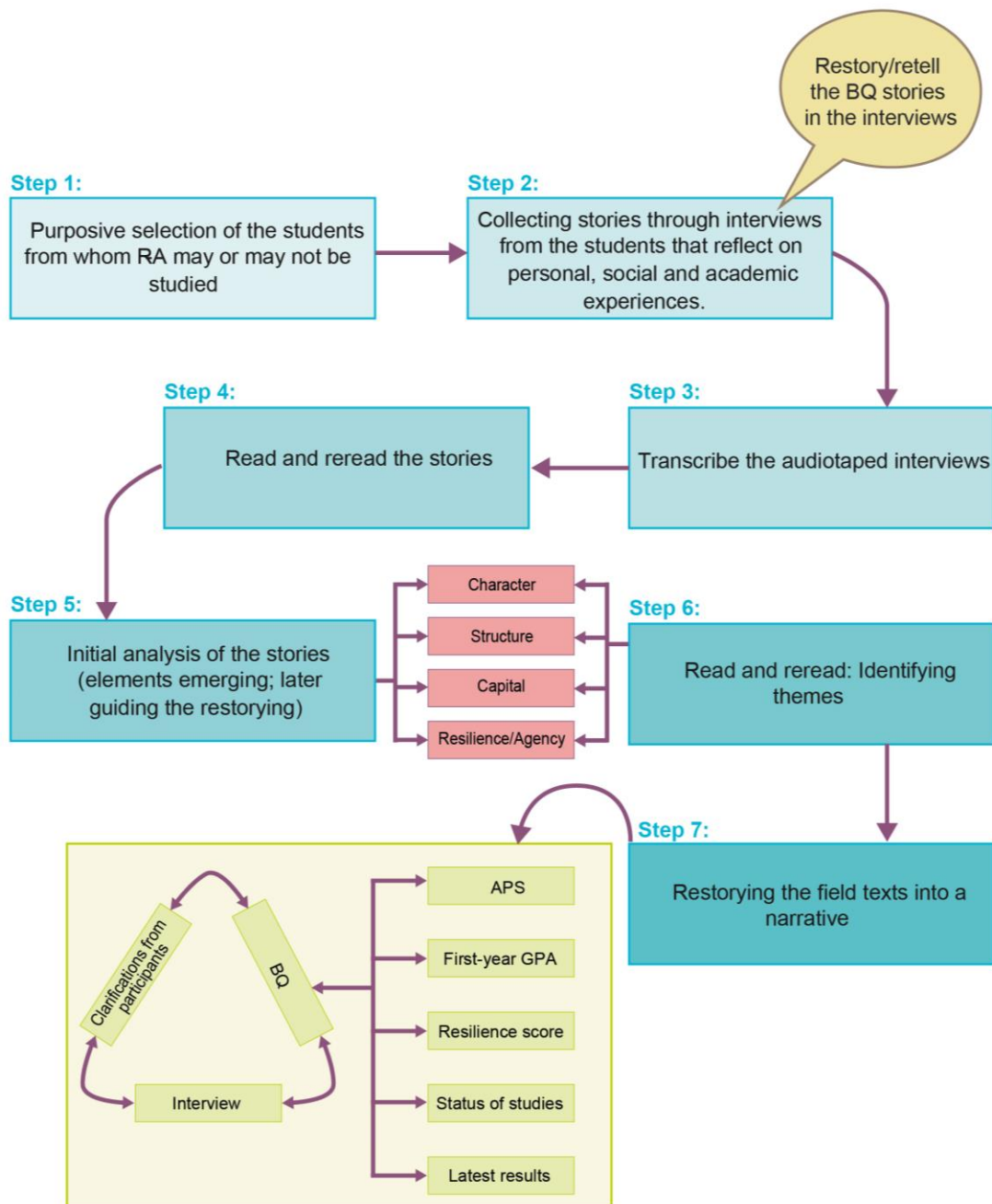
- With regards to the amount of capital available to a student at any given time and how they utilised it, did they demonstrate resourcefulness or helplessness?
- Were elements of reflection and metacognition evident?
- How were challenges, adverse circumstances and/or disadvantage dealt with – in a resilient/agenic manner or in a helpless, despondent manner?
- Did difficulties motivate or demotivate the student?

#### **4.5.2. Qualitative data analysis**

The qualitative analysis, as the second phase in the sequential explanatory mixed methods approach, was in itself characterised by an initial, purely qualitative analysis, but followed by a narrative approach that included data mined from the quantitative phase. For ease of reference, this lengthy and multi-pronged approach is summarised graphically in Figure 4.2, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the process.



Figure 4.2. Steps in narrative analysis of the interviews



### 4.5.3. Narrative analysis

To answer the research questions, the analysis of the data had to include the contexts (habitus and field) of the students' lives, the structural mobility or agency and resilience, and the fact that knowledge and knowing is constructed from and depends on the viewpoint/perspective and social positioning (capital and class) of students in different social and physical contexts. Consequently, the decision was made to analyse the interview data within the three-dimensional space approach of narrative analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002:50-51). In the present globally dynamic higher education arena, it is necessary for both students' and researchers' voices to be heard to ensure that the correct meaning is assigned to those voices (Pavlenko, 2002:213-214).

A narrative analysis is thus a suitable way of making sense of lived experiences by reconsidering and reorganising them (Johnson, 2006:240-241). Repeatedly, the interviews allowed participants to revisit lived experiences that they had not thought of lately, and reflect (often metacognitively) on those experiences. *“As a result, researchers can gain rare insights into learners' motivations, investments, struggles, losses, and gains as well as into language ideologies that guide their learning trajectories”* (Pavlenko, 2002:214). In addition, the narrative analyses provided the opportunity to study R-A as present in and shaped by *“social, cultural, and historical conventions”* (Pavlenko, 2002) that tie in well with Bourdieu's theoretical focus on reproduction based on these very conventions. Finally, narrative analysis is contextual (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:339), thus taking habitus into consideration.

Three aspects that characterise the narrative approach, namely interaction, continuity, and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002:50-51; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:339) are discussed next and summarised in Table 4.4 (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:340).

**Interaction** includes personal and social interaction alike. The transcripts (and later the narratives) were therefore analysed for students' personal experiences and their interaction with different people in their lives who may provide *“different intentions, purposes, and points of view on the topic of the story”* (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:340). The author's own role as narrator of the stories was also included here. Her position and expertise often played a part in making sense of and assigning

meaning to the stories, for example in assigning the resilience score when interpreting certain elements in a story, or by revisiting her own life's narrative.

**Continuity** or **temporality** is fundamental in narrative research. Here, the transcripts were screened for information about the students' *past* experiences, such as childhood memories and schooling. In addition, *present* experiences were analysed, such as the influence that language had on the students' studies and their views on their studies at the time of the interviews. This led to questions about events or actions that might have to take place in the *future*, such as future career aspirations (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:340).

**Situation** or **place** in the transcripts was analysed by looking for specific situations, such as displays of R-A and reactions to structure in the students' landscapes. This involved physical spaces, such as the students' homes, schools and university. Where applicable, the sequence of the students' places of residence were recorded and analysed, for example living in a flat as a first-year student, then moving into a university residence the following year.

Table 4.4. The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:340)

Interaction		Continuity		Situation/Place	
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment, with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view	Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings and stories from earlier times	Look at current experiences, feelings and stories relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries, with characters' intentions, purposes and different points of view

#### 4.5.3.1. The process of three-dimensional space analysis of the data

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed from the audio recordings. These transcriptions are data referred to as *field texts* in narrative analysis (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:332). These field texts were read and reread to get a feel for the data (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:332). Hereafter, an initial analysis was conducted guided by the following elements:

*Key role-players (characters)* in the students' lives: Such as parents, siblings, extended family members, friends, teachers and role models.

*Structure (context)*: Either enabling or disabling structures that served as a context in which students could display either R-A or NR-A.

*Capital (scene and tension)*: As setting the scene in which the student existed, exists and will exist. Capital also relates to tension as students may have had to navigate situations without the necessary capital or were subjected to disadvantage in any form.

*Resilient-agency (R-A) (end point)*: A given situation in the life of a student that would lead to a particular outcome would be dealt with by applying either R-A or NR-A.

These elements would later also be used to structure the retelling of the stories. In the next step, however, further reading and rereading meant that themes had to be identified from the field texts. This was done by uncovering recurring ideas and patterns or beliefs that appeared to respond to the questions of meaning and social significance around the effective navigation of difficult circumstances, or upward mobility from structural boundaries. It is this process that ultimately shape field texts into research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002:131; De Vos, 2002c:344).

Using the three aspects that characterise the narrative approach discussed above, namely interaction, continuity and situation in combination with the initial analysis, led to the identification of a list of themes as possible indicators of R-A, as reflected in Table 4.5:

Table 4.5. A list of themes identified from the narrative analysis as possible indicators of R-A

Themes	Element of three-dimensional space analysis
• Fond family memories	Social interaction Situation/Place
• Gap year	Continuity: Past
• Taking positive out of a negative situation	Personal interaction Continuity: Future
• Influential teacher	Continuity: Past, Future Situation/Place
• Poor coping mechanisms	Personal interaction Continuity: Future
• Metacognition	Personal interaction Continuity: Past, Present, Future
• Support from family	Social interaction Situation/Place
• Expectations from parent(s)	Social interaction Continuity: Past, Present, Future
• Knowing own limits / Not afraid to ask	Personal interaction Continuity: Past, Present, Future
• Realise the importance of language in academics	Continuity: Past, Future Situation/Place
• Skills gained from life activities/experiences	Personal interaction Social interaction Continuity: Past, Future Situation/Place

### Re-storying or retelling the stories

The process of re-storying or retelling the stories into narratives were guided by the idea of a narrative space consisting of three interconnected dimensions, as discussed above (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002:130). This was especially useful to analyse the participants as individual students, and as students and agents in social environments and settings, as well as to compare each other's stories.

The timing of the story coinciding with the #feesmustfall protests, provided the opportunity to unearth the “negative” side of R-A, namely NR-A, but also allowed for past, present and future discussion.

Having UP as the location of the story provided insight in a retrospective manner, as students who had already “succeeded” or “failed” was interviewed and this added a certain richness to the data that could be used to compile possible profiles of R-A students for future use. In addition, the students’ stories upon entering the university – as learners who were in their minds perhaps still situated in high school – could be compared with their stories as senior students.

Using narrative analysis, the author, as both narrator and researcher, could position herself within the stories where she could not only sequence and logically develop them, but also interweave her own position, story and expertise as she gained insight into herself and the data (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:332).

As a result, the process of re-storying was not a linear one, but rather a cyclical process (as depicted in Figure 4.2) of organising and structuring, and then reorganising and restructuring a few times over while, at times, communicating with the respondents to ensure that the meaning they intended, was the meaning conveyed (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002:332). This included combining each student’s narrative with their/the:

- responses from the BQ;
- resilience score;
- APS;
- first-year GPA;
- status of their studies at the time of the interview;
- latest results available, where applicable, with the permission of the Registrar,
- transcribed interview; and
- clarifications from participants where applicable.

The final structure, as mentioned before, was based on the elements from the initial analysis, laid out as follows (see Appendix F for the complete narratives):

- An introduction to each story
- Background information derived from the BQ and the interview
  - Age
  - Race

- Home language
- Field of study
- APS
- Reason for the low APS
- First-year GPA
- Resilience score
- Setting of interviews
- First impressions
- Familial information (such as family constellation, living arrangements, parental education)
- Structure, both enabling and/or disabling
- Capital
- Resilient-agency (R-A)
- Conclusion

Using the perspective of the theoretical framework and shading it with the theoretical notion of R-A, the raw data could be re-storied as narratives to provide adequate research texts. They convey the voice of the participants and, where applicable, the voice of the narrator (author's), and they offer the audience (readers) the opportunity to become part of the story too as they reflect on their own narratives during the reading process.

#### **4.6. Ethical aspects**

The ethical guidelines for research have been designed to help protect the interests of participants. Extensive literature reviews discuss ethical considerations in research and, as a result, the responsibility to ensure that this study met all the ethical requirements at all times during this study was adhered to (Grinnell, 1993:304; Grinnell & Williams, 1990:304; Mouton, 2003:245-246; Neuman, 2003:120-127; Strydom, 2002a:63-64; Welman et al., 2012:181). Special attention was given to obtaining ethical clearance from the then Chair of the Research Ethics Committee, Prof J Sharp, in order to distribute the questionnaires (Appendix E); and from the Registrar, Prof N Grové, in order to access and use students' marks for this study. Further ethical issues are discussed in the following sections.

## **4.6.1. Consequences for human beings**

### **4.6.1.1. Harm to experimental subjects and/or respondents**

The author remained aware of the ethical obligation to protect respondents against any form of discomfort when obtaining sensitive and personal information from them, unless such information is crucial for the purposes of the research. When studying the narratives of subjects, there is always the possibility that events recalled in memory by respondents during the investigation could be the beginning of renewed emotional harm. Bailey (1994:472) asserted, *“in some cases negative effects of a more negative nature than the anticipated harm of the research project exists in respondents’ everyday natural situation. In these cases, it is surely justified that respondents suffer a certain degree of discomfort in order to eventually better circumstances”* (Grinnell, 1993:304; Mouton, 2003:245-246; Neuman, 2003:120-123; Strydom, 2002a:63-64). In this study, none of the participants reported any such negative effects, in fact, many of them felt that the process of talking through their life stories was therapeutic, as is illustrated by the following quotation from one of the participants:

*“I should really go for like therapy sessions, so I can open up more and actually find myself in speaking about myself. ‘Cause we internalise so much, we learn to deal with things, we cover it up and in speaking it opens up so much about who you are and how you’ve dealt with things and you learn to find yourself in speaking about yourself. Wow ...”*

The anticipated consequences of my research were clearly explained to the participants by means of oral (audiotaped) informed consent.

### **4.6.1.2. Informed consent voluntary participation**

Each BQ was accompanied by an explanation of the questionnaire and its aim. Students were informed that completion was voluntary and that their responses would be used to investigate the possibility of improving selections in future but that it will have no effect (positive or negative) on their current position or negatively impact on their existing registration at UP.



Students were also informed that the BQs would not be anonymous as their progress would be tracked. They consequently voluntarily filled in their particulars such as surname, first name(s), student number, date of birth, marital status, home address and gender.

Written informed consent was obtained from each respondent who completed the BQ and the content was discussed and explained beforehand. The possible advantages and disadvantages of the study were discussed with the respondents, especially the fact that the research was aimed at future students and would not in any way benefit or harm the respondents' personal academic careers.

The interview participants were thoroughly informed beforehand regarding the potential impact of the investigation. Each respondent was informed of their right to refuse to participate in this research study and that they could withdraw at any time, as their participation was entirely voluntary (Grinnell, 1993:82-84; Mouton, 2003:245-243; Neuman, 2003:124; Strydom, 2002a:65-66).

#### **4.6.1.3. Confidentiality and violation of privacy**

According to Strydom (2002a:67), privacy implies the element of personal privacy, while confidentiality indicates the handling of information in a confidential manner. As discussed above, questionnaires were not completed anonymously as the academic progress of respondents had to be tracked and then integrated with the themes gathered from their responses. The identities of respondents were, however, protected by using aliases in the narratives. Information was communicated and treated as confidential and, where necessary, information that might lead to the identification of a participant, was either omitted and indicated as such, or substituted with other information for illustrative purposes. As mentioned before, each questionnaire contained an informed consent section that was signed by the respondents.

## **4.7. Release or publication of the findings**

### **4.7.1. Reporting and analysis of data**

As discussed by Strydom (2002a:69), a further ethical issue that was taken into account concerns the correct reporting of the data analysis and the results of this study.

Since the research was conducted across cultural boundaries, the cultural values, norms and customs of the respondents were respected. It is, however, important to note that a lot of emphasis was placed on the so-called hidden curriculum and specifically skills, attitudes and values required by UP. In this regard, Strydom (2002a:70) contributed the following: “[n]o value judgments are to be made, under any circumstances whatsoever, on the cultural aspects of communities” and this was kept in mind throughout the study.

The information in the research report was, as far as possible, formulated accurately and as close as possible to the meaning intended by the participants. Mention of the shortcomings of this research is included. The obligation to avoid plagiarism was respected by acknowledging all sources consulted, including the people collaborated with. Regarding this ethical issue, Strydom quoted Babbie (1988:73), who stated that “*closely related to altering the results are the incorporation of someone else’s work into your own without proper acknowledgement.*”

In closing, ethical clearance was requested and obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at UP.

## **4.8. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the explanatory sequential mixed methods research design and the methodological approach of this study were discussed. This research design followed a sequential process by which qualitative data was collected first to obtain an initial sense of whether indicators of R-A were identifiable from a BQ. Hereafter, a qualitative follow-up was done through interviews with a limited number of respondents. This was done to explain, elucidate and build out the responses from the BQ and other quantitative data, as well as qualitative responses obtained from the BQ. The sampling

of participants, the measurement instruments and the data collection methods in the respective quantitative and qualitative phases of the study were explained. Next, the use of the narrative analyses as a way of interpreting, analysing and then re-storying all the information into narratives was discussed. Finally, ethical issues pertaining to this study were attended to.

In the next chapter, the qualitative data obtained from the BQ is discussed.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

This chapter reports on the quantitative data obtained from the BQ, the students' APSs, their first-year GPAs and the resilience scores assigned to each of their BQs.

Even though the BQ consisted of a combination of quantitative and qualitative elements, a quantitative phase was necessary to determine how, if at all, a BQ could be used to identify indicators of R-A in a university environment as a means of supporting students with underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, the ability of indicators of resilience and agency to predict student success needed to be examined.

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study was born out of a proposal by the Faculty of Humanities at UP to examine the possibility of introducing a Foundational Programme in the Faculty. The proposal was rejected on the grounds of it not being financially feasible. One of the concerns raised during the consultation process preceding the writing of the proposal was the labour-intensive nature of the BQ that was to inform the selection process for the Foundational Programme. Thus, the possibility of adding more pre-coded answers to questions used in the BQ used for this study needed to be examined. Including such answers would reduce the labour intensiveness of the interpretation of the BQ substantially and perchance make it more feasible to use.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the BQs were completed during the 2012 and 2013 orientation periods by new first-year students who had already been admitted to the Faculty of Humanities at UP.

#### 5.1. Data analysis

One of the first arguments tested in this study was the effect of the availability of resources or facilities in a student's school. It was argued that a student who had to navigate their studies in an environment deprived of facilities, yet managed to gain entrance into university, would probably have done so on the account of R-A. As a result, facilities in schools were coded as 0 – not present, or 1 – present. Regression

analysis was, however, not possible as there was not enough variation in spread in the use of high school facilities, as is evident in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Frequency table: Spread in the use of high school facilities

Facilities	n=348	%	Facilities	n=348	%
Electricity	344	98.85	Classrooms	335	96.26
Computers	311	89.37	Blackboard	336	97.67
Science labs	289	83.05	Overhead projectors	284	91.32
Desks (one per learner)	330	94.83	Playing/Sport fields	312	89.66
Library	264	75.86	Sport equipment	293	88.79
Restroom/Toilets	339	97.41	Gymnasium	169	64.02

Next, the results presented in Table 5.1 were grouped in SPSS to obtain a composite score for the use of facilities and were labelled “school index score”. A Pearson’s correlation was performed between the school index score and first year GPA. The results showed no significant correlation between the variables (see Table 5.2.).

Table 5.2. Correlation between students’ first year GPA and their school index score

<b>Correlations</b>			
		<b>Students' first year GPA</b>	<b>School index score</b>
Students' first year GPA	Pearson correlation	1	0.024
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.650
	N	348	345
School index score	Pearson correlation	0.024	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.650	
	N	345	345

The question remained, do the responses to the BQs tell us anything regarding R-A? To drill down on this question, the questionnaires were reread once more, this time keeping the theory on resilience in mind. Based on her psychological understanding of resilience, the author assigned a resilience score out of 5 (1 being poor evidence of resilience and 5 being strong evidence of resilience) to each questionnaire (see Chapter 4, paragraph 4.18.2 for a discussion on the criteria for this score). The

resilience scores were populated into the Excel spreadsheet and exported to SPSS. There, the respondents were divided into three groups:

- 0: Resilience score of 0-3
- 1: Resilience score of 3.5 & 4
- 2: Resilience score of 4.5 & 5

This distribution was decided upon to obtain groups that were approximately equal in size and thus comparable. Most students obtained a medium to high score and to even this out, the distribution of the first group (0) was larger than the others. The respondents were further divided into two groups, based on their APSs:

- 0: 0-29 (Students who did not meet the APS entry requirement)
- 1: 30+ (Students who met the APS entry requirement)

Next, as shown in Table 5.3, cross tabulation was done by running Pearson’s chi-square test to examine whether there was an association between the resilience score and the APS and to see if resilience had any statistical influence (Field, 2005:691).

Table 5.3. Cross tabulation by running Pearson’s chi-square

<b>ResilienceBIN * APS_BIN cross tabulation</b>					
			<b>APS_BIN</b>		<b>Total</b>
			<b>Not meeting APS</b>	<b>Meeting APS</b>	
<b>ResilienceBIN</b>	0-3	Count	22	37	59
		% within ResilienceBIN	37.3%	62.7%	100.0%
		% within APS_BIN	19.0%	16.0%	17.0%
	3.5-4	Count	57	102	159
		% within ResilienceBIN	35.8%	64.2%	100.0%
		% within APS_BIN	49.1%	44.2%	45.8%
	4.5-5	Count	37	92	129
		% within ResilienceBIN	28.7%	71.3%	100.0%
		% within APS_BIN	31.9%	39.8%	37.2%
<b>Total</b>	Count	116	231	347	
	% within ResilienceBIN	33.4%	66.6%	100.0%	
	% within APS_BIN	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

The chi-square value shown in Table 5.4 was insignificant and indicated that the two variables were independent and unrelated (Field, 2005:691).

Table 5.4. Person's chi-square test

Chi-square tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	2.119 <sup>a</sup>	2	0.347
Likelihood ratio	2.142	2	0.343
Linear-by-linear association	1.818	1	0.177
N of valid cases	347		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.72.			

What was of interest though, regardless of the poor relationship, was that 28.7% of the students in the group who did not meet the APS requirement was given a high resilience score. This warranted an investigation into the effect that this resilience score might have had on their academic performance. Therefore, in the next step, the first-year GPA of students were added to the descriptives, which yielded the results shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5. Descriptive statistics adding first-year GPA

Descriptive Statistics							
APS_BIN	ResilienceBIN		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviat
Not meeting APS	0-3	Students' first year GPA	22	0.00	71.09	43.9586	23.30737
		Valid N (list-wise)	22				
	3.5-4	Students' first year GPA	57	0.00	73.75	41.6430	24.16051
		Valid N (list-wise)	57				
	4.5-5	Students' first year GPA	37	0.00	93.52	44.0427	23.40490
		Valid N (list-wise)	37				
Meeting APS	.	Students' first year GPA	1	40.52	40.52	40.5200	.
		Valid N (list-wise)	1				
	0-3	Students' first year GPA	37	0.00	72.18	45.8154	18.87101
		Valid N (list-wise)	37				
	3.5-4	Students' first year GPA	102	0.00	80.19	53.2161	18.14360
		Valid N (list-wise)	102				
4.5-5	Students' first year GPA	92	0.00	86.33	56.6691	20.66121	
	Valid N (list-wise)	92					

The results show an association between the resilience scores and first-year GPAs for the group who met the APS requirement. However, in the group who did not meet the APS requirement, there was no difference between the mean GPA.

## 5.2. Discussion

In a BQ “[c]andidates present themselves as agents, each with a life history, a narrative whose telling describes the context of that life ... The life history sketched in response to the BQ offers a brief but rich account of the educational trajectory over time of an individual between two institutions, of their engagement with the challenges of schooling in the context of a particular family and community” (Enslin et al., 2006:434). The “*challenges of schooling in the context of a particular family*” can be seen as the structure that is established or ingrained in a given candidate. The “structure” in this instance, could well be the boundaries resulting from an absence of the cultural capital that is presumably needed to complete tertiary studies, or it could be the very factor that sparks R-A.

What I hoped to find in the brief, rich accounts from the BQ were the actions that enabled a student to become upwardly mobile to transcend the boundaries of their familial or class structures. These actions were anticipated to be visible in a BQ, since an action is a choice and the actor could have chosen to act differently – either positively or negatively, and yet chose that particular action (Giddens, 1979:56). This could then serve as a possible indicator of R-A, especially when that choice was made *against* the dominant social order that “governs” the agent’s life. Through the BQ, the hope was to identify those students whose actions would have led to positive academic and life decisions.

Unfortunately, this was not significantly evident and, even though the responses were indeed brief, they were often not *rich accounts of the educational trajectory over time*. The *challenges of schooling in the context of a particular family and community* was also scarcely described. This could probably be attributed to the fact that the students who completed the BQs were already enrolled as UP students and did not depend on the BQ for placement. Alternatively, expression through the English written language



may not be equally attainable for all first-year students due to varying home languages and converseness in the written English language.

Notwithstanding this fact, the reality remained that there were students in the sample who did not meet the APS requirement, but passed their first year at university. This led to more determination to find a measure of ensuring, or at least improving, equitable and fair admission into university. The quantitative phase and findings available up to this point was to form only the basis of developing such an assessment tool.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

This study offered the opportunity to stroll down many avenues, similar to discovering a new city. Some of the avenues led to places never known to exist and others brought immense surprise. One of the biggest surprises was the realisation that the data obtained from the BQs would not serve as the main pillar of the study as initially anticipated. What consequently unfolded turned out to be one of the most exciting avenues one could have ever hoped to walk: the narratives of the sample of students interviewed.

In this chapter, the seven participants' narratives, incorporated in Appendix F, are discussed by means of a summative table devised from the elements uncovered during the initial narrative analysis. Each narrative comprises the participant's interview, combined with their responses to the initial BQ and additional information such as their APSs and first-year GPAs. All this information is then elucidated with theory by exploring, among other things, the cultural and social capital, habitus, agency and resilience (or lack thereof) as well as R-A, as presented in each narrative.

Individual narratives provided their own insights into R-A and, through working and reworking the narrative analytical process, the new theoretical conceptualisation, as presented in Chapter 2, emerged and evolved. This chapter unpacks the themes identified through the process of narrative analysis as possible indicators of R-A by providing a short discussion of each theme, using quotations from the seven narratives' presentation of that theme.

Analysing the narratives of this unique group of students in search of indicators of R-A that may be linked to students with the potential to effectively navigate university studies, may per chance contribute to improved selection should it be possible to capture and somehow rework it into a new and improved BQ. This chapter alludes to how such a reworking may be done, by presenting and discussing suggested questions that may be added to a future BQ aimed at identifying R-A. Finally,

suggested answers are provided to the aforementioned questions, as found in the narratives of the students.

## **6.1. Summary of the elements of the initial narrative analysis**

The initial narrative analysis was guided by key role-players (characters) in the students' lives, both enabling and disabling structures (context), capital (scene and tension) and resilient-agency (R-A) (end point). The results that speak specifically to these elements are discussed below and reflects in Table 6.1. This table revolves around the centrality and theoretical innovation of the idea of R-A, the purpose of it being to provide a summary of the lengthy narratives (found in Appendix F) in aid of the discussion on R-A.

### **6.1.1. Key role-players in the students' lives (*characters*)**

The initial analysis of characters involved in the students' lives gave an indication of the capital available to the students, the structures in place in their lives and the role of R-A. The characters are therefore discussed under the findings obtained from the subsequent analysis, with special reference to the themes: support from family; expectations from (a) parent(s); and influential teacher. For ease of reference, the biographical information, including the family constellation, is again presented in the Table 6.1.

### **6.1.2. Structure (context)**

It was evident from the narratives that students encountered various enabling as well as disabling structures in their lives. These are summarised in Table 6.1. A difference in the reaction to the various structures was observed in the effectively navigating group vs the non-effectively navigating student. This was of particular interest as it provided the context in which students could display either R-A or NR-A (discussed in paragraph 6.2.4, Resilient-Agency).

### **6.1.3. Capital (scene and tension)**

Social, economic, cultural and educational capital all played a role in the narratives. The extent to which the different modes of capital were available in or absent from the

lives of the students were important factors in this study and can be seen in Table 6.1. Where capital was absent from a student's past, it motivated the effectively navigating students to gain that capital in the future by changing things in their present. The non-effectively navigating student was either paralysed in such a way that no change was evident in their future, or it resulted in the making of changes that brought about even more negative consequences. This led to the deduction that capital might not be the determining factor according to Bourdieu's conclusion, but that R-A could in fact be used in an attempt to "predict" future success.

#### **6.1.4. Resilient-agency (R-A) (end point) as an overall theme emerging from the narratives**

To introduce this discussion, the definition of R-A needs to be revisited. It was defined in Chapter 2 as the choice a person makes to change their adverse circumstances or challenge a structure of disadvantage through **positive adaptation** that transpires as a result of an **intrapersonal thought process** that leads to **constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances**.

R-A was evident and prevalent among all effectively navigating students, as indicated in Table 6.1 below.

The university arena is one of those spaces where challenges are the order of the day. Most students will be pushed beyond what they even imagined they could bear. In such a setting, a necessary skill a student should possess, would be R-A. The first illustration hereof was found in the narrative of Salima, the student who presented herself as an underdog but also as a fighter with heaps of determination. R-A was evident in her implementing her mother's advice to be a "fighter" and to "never give up" when she found university to be "hard". The important device here is the *choice* she made to muster this social and cultural capital and resilience as is evident in the following quotation: "... *I'm no genius so even with that I would never give up, I would never drop out, I wouldn't do that. 'Cause I'm here, I'm striving one day to get a job so I can become independent*". Here we have a clear image of a choice that could potentially lead to constructive individual consequences, upward mobility and improved circumstances. In addition to the choice though, one gets a sense of an

additional underlying thought process, probably along the lines of: *I am no genius but ...* Salima's choice was not made purely on account of her social capital, but also as a result of this thought process.

In other instances, the constructive individual consequences, upward mobility and improved circumstances (this will henceforth be referred to as positive changes) were not only implied, but actually reported while again linked to a choice that was made. The next illustration was Caren overcoming adversity and realising, once again (as transpired so often in her story), that anything is possible. This was entrenched in a quotation that referred to her subject choices at university. "... *for me it was also like such a big step in first year to take French, I was like 'o gosh another language' but I was also like 'I can do this'.*" Here we find the choice which is then followed by the positive changes as seen in the following: "... *anything is possible (laugh), I passed, I still got through it all ...*". Embedded somewhere in the middle is once again, the thought process referred to earlier: "*but I was also*", indicating an intrapersonal wrestling.

Jennifer had a similar experience when she joined the camp for people with disabilities and made the choice: "okay, let's just try" again with positive changes: "... *I made it through (laugh) had the most wonderful experience*". It seems as if it is becoming increasingly evident how agency and resilience meet. How the choice and the action (agency) is linked through the internal thought process (resilience) that allows the students to make the choice and take the action. Jennifer did not arrive at her "okay, let's try" purely on account of capital or even her ecology, she probably had to drill down deep within herself to find the conviction to make this choice.

This is supported by the knowledge that neither of these three students had all the necessary cultural capital to effectively navigate university studies – Salima did not have the language skills, while both Caren and Jennifer were first generation students – effectively confirming that there must be something more. Something more in this instance came in the form of the *combination* of resilience and agency and, in the end, this translated into effective navigation.

The resilient-agentic choice that Jamie made was to persevere with her studies even though she realised that it was not her preferred career. She made the choice that she

would adapt positively to any direction that her study path may take and this enabled her to eventually navigate herself in her preferred career, which she was pursuing at the time of this study.

In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 2, resilience and agency build future resilience and agency. It would appear that the same can be said of R-A. Both Jennifer and Caren took their positive changes to heart and turned it into additional motivation for the future. Jennifer stated, “... look, even though this happened to me I am not a failure”, while Caren said, “... no you know what, there’s been way worse, this is nothing, this is nothing, you’ll be fine”.

Nowhere was R-A, however, illustrated as clearly as in Dineo’s narrative: “*What I know of him [her father] is that initially he wanted me aborted. He then found out that my mom was too far along and insisted that she take me to an orphanage but then well, my mom didn’t do that, and here I am*”. After Dineo was able to make the choice to not allow this occurrence to impede her potential, she continually displayed R-A in her academic as well as in her personal life. Academically she conquered the one module that continuously challenged her. On a personal level she saw positive changes after making a choice to adapt positively to the negative and potentially debilitating circumstances created by both her grandmother and her brother. Concerning her grandmother, Dineo reported that, “*She thought I was going nowhere fast. But if anything, I became the example for all my cousins.*” Dineo experienced her brother as rooting for her to fail but this led her to make a choice: “*Oh it meant I had to prove him wrong*”. Again, positive changes transpired when she continued, “*That’s what it did. And I actually did*”.

Dineo too did not enter the university with the capital that one would usually link to effective navigation of university studies. Yet, her intrapersonal quest to adapt positively led her to prove her grandmother wrong, in addition to becoming an example of positive adaptation and change for her cousins. Moreover, it pushed her to work hard in order to obtain placement in a university residence, effectively unearthing positive changes from her brother’s negative input.

The quotations discussed in this section illustrates R-A in that each of them represents a choice that the student made to change their circumstances or challenge structures

of disadvantage through **positive adaptation**. In every instance this led to **constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances**. What also became evident was that there was more at play than capital, as most of the students did not possess the capital traditionally linked to effective navigation of university studies. Furthermore, the thought process attributable to resilience, that may be the very link to agentic actions in the face of a capital deficit, was also evident in these illustrations. For ease of reference and to provide a more thorough illustration of R-A, additional quotations were added to this discussion, but were omitted from table 6.1 due to space constraints.

Table 6.1. Summary of the initial narrative analysis

	Jennifer	Jamie	Salima	Caren	Dineo	Lisebo	Michael
<b>Age at time of BQ</b>	23	19	21	20	19	20	19
<b>Race</b>	White	African	African	White	African	African	White
<b>Home language</b>	English	Setswana, although she had always attended an English school	Portuguese	English (also fluent in Afrikaans, Croatian and French)	Southern Sotho	Northern Sotho	Afrikaans
<b>Nationality</b>	RSA	RSA	Mozambican	RSA	RSA	RSA	RSA
<b>APS</b>	29	26	28	28	26	25	28
<b>Reason for low APS</b>	She had to self-study in her final year of the Cambridge system, while she does better in a classroom setting.	The final IEB exams were different to IEB standards taught at school and the final paper differed significantly from the exams set by her school.	Her thriving social life was to blame for her low matric marks because she did not put in the necessary effort in her studies.	She underwent major surgery in her grade 11 year and, as a result, missed a substantial amount of schoolwork.	She believes that she could have obtained a higher mark as evident in her previous years in school.	She believes she could have done better had she put in more effort.	Matric required more effort but he held back.
<b>1<sup>st</sup> year GPA</b>	93.52	71.09	69.36	67.9	66	43.6	36.13



<p><b>Family constellation</b></p>	<p>Jennifer was the youngest of three children. The older siblings are both boys.</p> <p>She lives with her husband on her parent's property.</p> <p>Her mother passed on in 2014 and her father suffers from suicidal depression.</p>	<p>Jamie's father is a senior prosecutor, and her mother a qualified English teacher who retired in 2014.</p> <p>She has a younger sister.</p>	<p>Salima's father studied law and her mother accounting and auditing. Her mother also obtained a Master's degree in business management.</p> <p>Salima has a younger sister.</p>	<p>Caren's father is from European decent. He has a diploma and started an engineering business. Her mother studies communications through UNISA.</p> <p>Caren has a younger sister and brother.</p>	<p>Dineo's parents got divorced when she was in Gr 1.</p> <p>Her mother attempted studying public relations through UNISA, but never completed her studies. Dineo grew up with her mother in her grand-parent's home.</p> <p>She has an older brother and a younger step-sister.</p>	<p>Both Lisebo's grand-parents were teachers. Her father studied BCom Accounting Science and joined the family business. Her mother completed several short courses at college level and is currently employed at the Department of Education.</p> <p>Lisebo did not mention any siblings.</p>	<p>Michael's parents got divorced when he was in high school, whereafter he lived with his father. Neither his parents has any tertiary qualification.</p> <p>He is an only child.</p>
<p><b>Structure</b></p>	<p>Jennifer's family created both an enabling and a disabling structure – enabling because of the support and the social capital gained from spending</p>	<p>Even though possessing a habitus endowed with a myriad of capital, especially with regards to education, Jamie was faced with a structure of being ill-prepared for</p>	<p>Moving to the US when Salima was in the fourth grade and being unable to speak English created a structure that made it difficult for her to make</p>	<p>Undergoing major back surgery towards the end of her Gr 11 year caused Caren to miss a lot of schoolwork and consequent preparation for her final matric</p>	<p>Dineo dealt with a lack of finances, secured a NSFAS grant and working hard to obtain residence placement.</p>	<p>Lisebo's apparent and speculated struggle in dealing with her parent's divorce, even many years later, appears to be a</p>	<p>Michael had a very turbulent relationship with his father and this often became a disabling structure is his life.</p>

	<p>time with her family, but disabling as she felt that her brothers were jealous of her achievements.</p> <p>She experienced a scarce supply of cultural capital in its institutionalised form from her parents, appears to have motivated her to change this structure.</p> <p>Religion was an enabling structure offering the rules by which Jennifer could navigate the world as black and white, right and wrong. It is something of an internalised belief system (structure).</p>	<p>making the choice of what and where to study. In the process of overcoming this individual structure, her father's support and guidance formed an enabling structure even though it might have, at the same time, given rise to a potentially disabling structure when she made the wrong study choice. She however managed to overcome this structure.</p>	<p>friends.</p>	<p>examination. This caused her marks to drop significantly, with her subsequently having trouble being accepted into university.</p> <p>Caren drew on her experiences with the above structure when her father became seriously ill a few years ago.</p>	<p>She adapted positively to long-distance travel to and from school by managing her time and planning.</p> <p>She was living with her brother, who continually tried to put her down during her first year of study</p>	<p>structure that she struggles with.</p> <p>Her second structure came in the form of mathematics and accounting</p>	<p>He dealt with adversity by visiting friends instead of facing the challenge and changing the structure, or bouncing out of the negative situation.</p>
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<p><b>Capital</b></p>	<p>Jennifer gained social capital through spending time with her close as well as extended family.</p> <p>Witnessing the divorces and changes that happened in her family, may have strengthened her R-A as she learned the different rules of the field.</p> <p>Music and religion were important elements of cultural capital.</p> <p>Social capital from the support of her teacher and principal during the time of her father's suicidal depression. This teacher also had</p>	<p>Help and support from her father made up important social capital in Jamie's habitus, together with support from the rest of her family.</p> <p>Jamie's Gr 10 register teacher was supportive and available to help any learner in the school and contributed social capital to her habitus.</p> <p>She had always been in good English schools and she felt this benefited her greatly as understanding the English language was vital capital in her life.</p>	<p>Salima's exposure to the different cultures and people in the US afforded her much cultural capital gain.</p> <p>She gained social capital in the form of strong relationships with her mother and sister and living with her sister during her studies.</p> <p>She learned from her mother to be a fighter who never gives up.</p> <p>Prayer was a way in which Salima dealt with difficult situations.</p>	<p>Caren's father came from abroad and thus brought the cultural capital he gained there with him, becoming available to his family. Her mother has a degree from UNISA.</p> <p>Growing up in their parent's factory gave Caren and her siblings a sense of belonging and of position in the world. In addition, Caren worked in the business at times and learned skills as a result.</p> <p>Social capital was available in the form of family</p>	<p>Dineo attended a European school where she was exposed to and gained varied cultural capital, and learned time management skills. She was also introduced to athletics and sports and learned valuable lessons and coping strategies in the process. Being in this school also helped her to learn English which made her transition to university much easier.</p> <p>Dineo also gained leadership skills as she was a prefect and part</p>	<p>Two of Lisebo's grandparents and her father have university degrees.</p> <p>She gained social capital in the form of a good support system from her mother and grandmother. In addition, Lisebo chose friends who were academically stronger than her as she felt that they would pull her up.</p> <p>Lisebo listed two teachers who influenced her life and added social capital.</p> <p>Lisebo had always been in an English school and thus</p>	<p>To an extent it would appear that Michael's father used economic capital to maintain the disabling structure so Michael was not able to transcend.</p> <p>Artistically related capital was found in his grandmother who was a pottery artist, while his maternal grandmother was said to be musical and his grandfather a carpenter.</p> <p>Social capital was gained in visiting his nephews and cousins but no mention was</p>
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	<p>a lot of passion for his subjects which inspired Jennifer.</p> <p>She realised the importance of English as academic language as cultural capital.</p> <p>Economic capital played a role in that Jennifer and her husband saved by living on her parent's smallholding. Their social standing meant that she could get financing for her studies, thereafter securing a loan from her church.</p>			<p>relationships, not only with her close family unit, but also with extended family.</p> <p>Caren also gained social capital from two teachers who played influential parts in her life.</p> <p>Caren speaks four languages.</p>	<p>of the executive committee of their school's society.</p> <p>Her mother insisted on waiting for Dineo at the bus stop all through her school career and supported her in her academic life, which added to her social capital.</p> <p>Four teachers added to her social capital.</p> <p>She grew up living with her mother, grandmother and grandfather; had regular contact with her cousins and extended family.</p>	<p>acquired cultural capital in the form of language.</p>	<p>made of close interaction with his parents.</p> <p>Michael's habitus does include negative relationship elements such as the divorce of his parents and the sad ending of his own romantic relationship.</p> <p>Michael identified with his English teacher in High School as they both had trouble controlling their anger and the teacher told a story that resonated with Michael.</p>
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<p><b>Resilient-agency (R-A)</b></p> <p><b>The choice a person makes to change their adverse circumstances or challenge a structure of disadvantage through positive adaptation that transpires from an intrapersonal thought process that leads to constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Her father's suicidal depression</li> <li>• Adversity: Her mother's death</li> </ul> <p><i>In both these instances R-A was displayed when Jennifer applied an intra-personal thought process that can be summarised as follows: "I don't have to rely on somebody else to make me feel happy and in control because I can just take it and make it controlled for myself". This thought process and resulting choice led her to submerge herself in her schoolwork and consequently obtaining even higher grades.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: She made the wrong career choice and had three options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quit and start over;</li> <li>- Finish her degree and then apply for a postgraduate qualification in her chosen career;</li> <li>- Make the best of the degree she was about to finish.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>She opted for the last option while still pursuing the postgraduate qualification which she was enrolled for at the time. However, she prepared a plausible solution in the event of her not being selected for that</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Adapting in the US while unable to speak English. <i>She learned to speak English within three months and experienced her time in the US very positively.</i></li> <li>• Adversity: Adapting to the British curriculum in Mozambique after returning from the US <i>Even though she found this hard, she managed to obtain grades that won her a scholarship to study in India.</i></li> <li>• Adversity: Losing her scholarship to study in India.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Recovery from back surgery</li> <li>• Adversity: Drop in marks, unable to study medicine</li> </ul> <p><i>She remained positive despite pain and suffering.</i></p> <p><i>She took a gap year to gain perspective, enrolled for a course in beauty therapy and worked as a beautician for a while. This gave her the confidence she needed. Hereafter, she made the decision to work with what she had and made an informed and well thought through decision</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Dineo lived with her brother during her first year of studies. <i>She worked diligently in order to obtain placement in a residence.</i></li> <li>• Adversity: Initially her biological father wanted her aborted but when he found out that her mother's pregnancy was too advanced, he insisted that Dineo be taken to an orphanage. <i>Her mother not doing any of these things, Dineo managed to rise above</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: <i>Lisebo experienced financial crisis. She managed to enrol and remain at university regardless.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>In addition, she used it as an opportunity to motivate herself to work even harder at securing her future.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: She did not have the marks to be accepted into university after matric. <i>She, however, rewrote some subjects and improved her marks, while enrolling at a</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Michael appeared to have a misconception about his own habitus. He would often talk about things, for example, his father's attitude towards him, or the learners in school making fun of his hobby, as if it did not affect him, or as if it motivated him to be better (as in the case of the other students), however, this was never what actually took place.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Being unjustly fired from the camp in the US <i>She immediately decided to fight the camp coordinators and, as a result, was relieved of any financial obligation towards them. She found another camp that she feared, as it was a camp for disabled persons. Again, she made the choice to conquer the challenge and ended up gaining many positive experiences from that camp that not only changed her negative circumstances, but also benefited future.</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>postgraduate programme.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Jamie felt she conducted herself poorly when ending a relationship with a friend. This became a structure and adverse circumstance in that she found it difficult to forgive her friend. <i>Metacognitive reflection on this allowed her to gain insight that may inform future conduct in a similar situation and could lead to the mending of this relationship, or at least to her forgiving herself and her friend.</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>She was forced to take a gap year but used that time to enrol for a certificate course and gained valuable skills as a result.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Her academic literacy was not of a university standard upon her registering at UP. <i>Through working hard in the academic literacy modules, she improved to such an extent that she was top of her class and was then enjoying writing.</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>to study Archaeology, which she had never regretted.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversity: Her father's illness <i>Caren kept working at her studies while helping to care for her father, by having an open relationship with her lecturers.</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>the rejection and did not allow it to restrict her potential.</i></p> <p><i>She became a prefect despite not being a top student academically.</i></p>	<p><i>college so as to not waste the year.</i></p>	<p><i>Instances where R-A was activated could not be identified from Michael's narrative.</i></p>
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## 6.2. Themes emerging from the narrative analysis

The absence of clear indicators of R-A from the BQ led to the narrative analysis of the BQ, the interviews and other field texts, and re-storying them into narratives. This process proved to be successful in yielding a list of themes that were identified as possible indicators of R-A. These themes were represented in various combinations in the narratives of all the effectively navigating students and were absent from the narrative of the non-effectively navigating student. The themes identified were:

- **Cognitive appraisal:** Harvesting positive skills from negative events or circumstances
- **Metacognition:** Reflecting on one's own thinking with the aim of gleaning positive elements, or instituting positive change in similar situations in future
- **Religion:** Positive mustering of one's internalised belief system
- **Support from family:** Caring and supportive relationships with parents and/or siblings
- **Expectations from parent(s)** as a driving force and motivation
- **Spending time with family/Family closeness**
- **Influential teacher** as a positive role model and source of inspiration and motivation
- **Gap year:** Removing of the self out of a situation where a choice cannot be made in order to reflect and gain perspective on that situation to enable the making of an effective and well-suited decision
- Realising the importance of **language in academics**
- **Skills** gained from life activities/experiences

Working through the narrative analysis, the big picture started to emerge and a sense was acquired of questions that could be included in a future BQ that could potentially yield richer answers. In the following section, each theme is discussed briefly in relation to R-A, accompanied by a table comparing a summary of the themes as found in the seven narratives. Thereafter, the potential questions are discussed by referring to quotations from the narratives in an attempt to provide guideline answers to the potential questions. The questions for inclusion in a future BQ would differ from one

faculty or department to the next and should be selected based on its relevance to the demands that a specific faculty or department places on its students.

### **6.2.1. Theme 1 - Cognitive appraisal**

In this study, cognitive appraisal refers to the positive interpretation of events and cohesive integration of adversity into the self-narrative. All effectively navigating students could harvest positive elements out of a variety of negative situations throughout their lives. Cognitive appraisal assists in measuring R-A, because it points to **positive adaptation**: “Because even when things go bad you try to find the silver lining in anything”. Cognitive appraisal often serves to motivate students to work harder when faced with negative or potentially debilitating circumstances. This skill is frequently needed in university when work increases in both difficulty and volume. A student needs cognitive appraisal to motivate themselves when the reality wants to overwhelm them so that they can adapt positively and open a door for resulting constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances.

This was, however, not the case with the non-effectively navigating student, Michael. Throughout his narrative we found instances where he did not apply cognitive appraisal but chose to employ less effective coping mechanisms. One such example was found in the way he dealt with the ending of a romantic relationship in matric: “... *it was very rough .... I almost tried to kill myself a few times ... for the first week or so I drank a lot, because I couldn't deal with my sober self ...*”. Had he been able to glean even a speck of positivity from this ordeal, he might have handled the situation quite differently as evident in the lives of the effectively navigating students that was analysed.

#### **6.2.1. Cognitive appraisal - Implications for the BQ**

Cognitive appraisal was often displayed in instances where the students encountered a person in their family whom they found difficult to impress. This, however, often motivated them to work even harder to either gain this person's support or change the situation in a positive way. As a result, the following question may be considered:



### **6.2.1.1.a. Possible cognitive appraisal question to include in a future BQ**

*Think of the person you have found most difficult to impress throughout your life. What influence did this have on you?*

#### **6.2.1.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

*“With my dad, sometimes I even find myself wanting to impress him more because it is so difficult to impress him, so in a way that keeps me on my toes and like knowing that I need to work harder so that he can actually acknowledge that I am working”.*

In this quotation Salima displays her fighting spirit once more in the choice she made to aim continuously to impress her father. In applying cognitive appraisal, she was able to adapt positively by seeing this as something that “keeps her on her toes” rather than something that discourages her. In this, she displays R-A.

*“Oh, it meant I had to prove him wrong. That’s what it did. And I actually did”.*

When Dineo’s brother continually tried to discourage her while she was living with him, it activated R-A which resulted in her improving many circumstances, notably her living arrangements. The phrase “Oh it meant...” may point us in the direction of an internal thought process that preceded the choice to adapt positively to this situation. Many other students, like Dineo, may also find themselves in a situation characterised by unfavourable living conditions (or perhaps for different reasons) and a lack of support from a close family structure. In such instances, that student will need to harness themselves with (and obviously possess) cognitive appraisal in order to change the structure.

Lisebo’s interview offered a particularly good example of the link between the intrapersonal thought process and the choice and action involved in R-A. This was portrayed in the form of cognitive appraisal in the face of the person who was being disheartening. Even though Lisebo reported that everyone in her close family supported her, unsupportiveness was found outside of her immediate family circle, as indicated in her statement: *“I didn’t take it to heart. I just knew that they’re just always trying to bring you down because you are a reflection of what they want. So basically, jealousy leads people to act in very negative ways”.* It is true that Lisebo’s supportive

family contributed the capital and ecology to enable her to have this point of view, however, this is still a good illustration of the R-A link.

#### **6.2.1.1.b. Possible cognitive appraisal question to include in a future BQ**

Effectively navigating students all exhibited an ability to learn and accumulate skills from failures. They were able to stand up after failure and often emerged stronger thereafter. Many university students face some form of failure (especially academic) during their years of study. As a result, being able to interpret a failure in a positive way – in order to grow from it – is an important skill to possess if effective navigation of the university field is the goal. To assess this, the following question is proposed:

*Every person has failed at times. Think of that one failure in your life that stands out above all others. How did this influence your life?*

##### **6.2.1.1.b.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

*“... that makes you a person who wants to work harder ... for me I think I learned a lot from my failures in life. ... I consider myself an underdog ... but that just makes you want to work even harder”.* It is clear that resilient agency transpired in that Salima thought about her failures and realised that she might have failed because she is an underdog, but that does not make her a failure and thus she adapted positively. It enabled her to make a choice to work harder. This is reiterated in another quotation by Salima: *“... hardships just teach you how to be stronger, how to cope with problems I think a little bit better, since not everything has always been handed over to me I have always had to work harder for what I want”.*

Dineo’s thought process was one that resulted in perseverance when she failed one of her modules twice and then had to write a supplementary examination for it before passing it. Regardless of this fact, however, she made the choice to adapt positively and consequently reaped success: *“... regardless of how long it took, I made sure I passed”.*

#### **6.2.1.1.c. Possible cognitive appraisal question to include in a future BQ**

The interviewed students in this study all had at least one highly challenging situation that they had to deal with in their lives. The effectively navigating students were once again able to glean positive elements from this, while the non-effectively navigating student was unable to do so. As university studies in itself can be seen as a challenging situation, possessing the skill to emerge victoriously from it may prove to be vital. As a result, the following question may be included in a future BQ:

*Think about a time when you were met with a really challenging situation. How did you respond to this?*

#### **6.2.1.1.c.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Caren allows us a peek into her intrapersonal thought process involved in R-A through this quotation: “... *no, you know what, there’s been way worse, this is nothing, this is nothing, you’ll be fine*”. Here, she clearly illustrated how she conversed with herself regarding the challenging situation she faced. She drew from past experiences to facilitate her thought process and this then led to the choice to change her circumstances. Again, the *choice* is facilitated through the *thought process* amalgamating into R-A. Caren offered us even deeper understanding of her thoughts when she said later in the interview, “... *you have to find, you have to dig deep and find strength [and find the resilience in your habitus] to carry on, get up every day and still get on with your life*”.

Dineo apparently shares this sentiment if we examine her response upon being asked how she dealt with the challenge of a break-up: “*Cause I mean books don’t care. Books don’t really know that you are sick today, if you’ve got a submission date or an exam date that needs to be written*”. Here we are again met with the thought process behind the decision to conquer this challenge and especially how rational she was in her reasoning and decision-making. Dineo appears to be a person who is not scared to make decisions and to act as she stated later in the interview: “*I am brave enough to face unfavourable circumstances, situations*”. This was her observation when she had to deal with her grandfather’s sudden death and she was the one who remained

calm and took control of the situation, effectively invoking positive changes for all involved.

Jennifer was in a very similar position when her mother passed away and she and her brother discovered her body. Not only did she take charge of that immediate crisis, but she also reported: *"... I mean I got granted supplementary exams of course because she died right as exams were starting and I got the best results of my entire university career in those exams, like right after she died"*. This again refers to the thought process and corresponding choice to change her circumstances in a positive way, as discussed earlier. The positive change, according to Jennifer, was: *"... it made me strong and independent ..."*.

The thought process that preceded the choices that Salima and Caren made when faced with challenges, was that of seeing the challenge in a positive light and adapting positively. Salima's reflection on her struggle to adapt to the British curriculum serves to prove this: *"... but I think it was challenging in a good way"*. This is echoed by Caren's assessment of her decision not to divide her subject load in two at the outset of her studies: *"I was struggling to cope and then I mean look now I'm finished ..."*

### **6.2.2. Theme 2 - Metacognition**

In addition to harvesting positive elements from a negative situation, the effectively navigating students were all able to reflect on their own thinking by applying metacognition. This allowed them to glean skills and cultural capital that they could apply in similar situations in future, thus enabling their habitus through gaining additional skills to navigate the different fields in which they operated. This has an important impact on R-A as it often either leads to constructive individual consequences, upward mobility and improved circumstances, or the acquisition of a new skill set that should enable this behaviour in the future.

Michael showed us at different times that he did not employ metacognitive thought. The only instance during the interview where there was a slight inkling of metacognition, was really not much more than stating a few points without thinking about its implications: *"I wish I could live elsewhere during my end exam and my mid[-]exam periods. ... Procrastination is quite a big thing I struggle with ... I wish I had a*

*more structured study time table ... and not go to [a] friend's house while I should be studying ...*". In contrast, effectively navigating students would reflect on such matters and how they could have intervened practically to improve the situation, which might effectively equip them to deal with similar situations in future, as is clear in the next section.

### **6.2.2.1. Metacognition - Implications for the BQ**

#### **6.2.2.1.a. Possible metacognition question to include in a future BQ**

*Name your greatest weakness. Explain how you can turn this weakness into one of your greatest strengths.*

##### **6.2.2.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

In answer to this question, the reader would yet again want to see snippets of the student's thought process. This time around, the reflection should however reveal an even deeper level of thinking with positive adaptation as its goal. Thus, a student should demonstrate that they are reflecting on their own thinking.

This was observed while interviewing Dineo, the first interview candidate, who reflected on how she found the process of speaking about herself to be helpful: *"Cause we internalise so much, we learn to deal with things, we cover it up and in speaking it opens up so much about who you are and how you've dealt with things and you learn to find yourself in speaking about yourself. Wow..."*. Dineo firstly thought about herself and how she thinks and deals with things, namely to "internalise" and "cover it up". Then she reflected on that by stating that speaking about it, opens it up and allows you to "find yourself". This also alludes to the fact that students (as is the case with people in general, and Dineo specifically) may oftentimes have an inadequate understanding of their own thought processes, but being able to reflect on them, to think about them, may allow that student to adapt positively and make choices to change their circumstances. Continuing in the words of Dineo: *"... the only limitations you have are the ones that you make for yourself"*.

Lisebo who was the most introverted of all the students and initially fell into the non-effectively navigating group, reflected on her own thinking when referring to her

discovery of the most suitable study method for her. She stated that, had she found this study method earlier, she might have done better at school, but, upon reflecting on this, she claimed: *“I think it’s because sometimes we think we know what we are doing”*. She effectively reflected on her thinking that she did not need additional study methods as she “knew what she was doing”, but then realised that that was not the case.

When faced with new subjects at university, or increasingly complex subjects as one progresses through university, a student may be required to adapt continuously. In cases such as these, metacognition may be the indicator for R-A most needed to make the choice and the change.

#### **6.2.2.1.b. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Write about a time when you reacted to a situation and later on thought that you should have acted differently.*

##### **6.2.2.1.b.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Metacognition was often displayed in a context of regret about a past situation that could have been handled differently. In such cases, reflecting on these thoughts may lead to a gain in cultural capital that could be used in handling similar situations more effectively in the future.

The first example of the above was found in Jennifer’s reflection about the strained relationship she had with her mother *“... I’d change that relationship and I’d try a little harder to understand her, you know, and where she was coming from so that when she died I didn’t [wouldn’t] have this regret about this horrible relationship that we had”*. This thought process may thus lead Jennifer to make different choices about relationships in future as these realisations may be added to her habitus as capital available for future use. She may then adapt positively and change similar situations in future to result in positive changes.

Jamie had a similar experience with a friendship relationship that ended badly. Initially she blamed the other person and could not see any fault on her part. However, after some reflection, she contended, *“... so the way I handled it could have been different.*

*I just could have actually listened to what she was saying and try and listen to her perspective of our friendship ...".* Again, valuable insights were gained that may increase R-A in future, as the thought process that underlies the choice to make a change may be impacted and enhanced by these insights.

#### **6.2.2.1.c. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Discuss your thought process during a time when you were weighing up your options about a certain matter.*

##### **6.2.2.1.c.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Students often have to make difficult choices while at university: Do I write the examination for a module for which I obtained a low progress mark, or do I deregister that module just before the examination? This question, in particular, may have far-reaching consequences for students as many modules are tied to progression requirements (being prerequisites of subsequent modules). Deregistering such a module will result in not being able to register for the subsequent module in the following year as the modules are required to be completed in sequence of progression. At UP, this will in most cases set the student back a full year as modules are only presented once per annum.

We saw this in Jamie's decision not to abandon her social work degree to pursue criminology which was what she actually wanted to study. This choice enabled her to finish her social work degree and thereafter pursue criminology as a postgraduate qualification. This choice effectively saved her time and enriched the thought processes that would inform future choices in order for her to change circumstances that would have a significant impact on her life, i.e. equipping her with enhanced R-A for future use.

Other important decisions that transpired from metacognitive reflection was Jennifer's contention about what to study. She reported that she was equally fond of and able to enrol for a degree in the sciences as she was for a degree in Humanities. Her thoughts were settled in the following quotation: *"I always wanted to be a stay-at-home mom so it made sense to study the thing that I could do from home [humanities] rather than the*

*thing that would require me to be in an office all the time [sciences]”. As neither of Jennifer’s parents, nor three of her four grandparents had studied, the options would have looked vastly different had this choice been made purely based on Bourdieu’s understanding of cultural and social capital. However, a thought process was involved that allowed Jennifer to think beyond her immediate structures, add agency to resilience and effect positive change by choosing to enrol for tertiary studies by selecting a degree in the humanities, which she enjoyed tremendously.*

#### **6.2.2.1.d. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Discuss a time when you blamed yourself for something, only to find out you were not to blame because there were other factors involved.*

##### **6.2.2.1.d.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Making changes to one’s structure is influenced by having the correct facts and information (i.e. making informed decisions). At times, that may mean understanding that your own understanding of the situation may be erroneous. This was clearly illustrated in the narrative of Salima who was under the impression that her poor marks could only be attributed to her own lack of hard work and dedication. However, as she has proven through her effective navigation of university studies, she is a hard worker and a determined student. Metacognitive thought in her case allowed her to arrive at the following realisation “... *but then again when I got there [the school with the British curriculum] it wasn’t really the beginning of the year, it was almost toward the middle so I think that’s why it was even more difficult for me to adapt and [make the] transition. ‘Cause I was having to catch up with what was already done”*. By realising that there may be other factors involved, a student could relieve a lot of the pressure that they may place upon themselves and become empowered to make a more effective choice that would lead to positive adaptation and change.

#### **6.2.2.1.e. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Tell us about a mistake you made in the past and how you would handle a similar situation differently this time around.*



#### **6.2.2.1.e.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Often R-A was found when the students had to make a decision to change their structure, even after circumstances might have restricted them. This is an important element to note as students could be confronted with situations in their academic careers that may cause them to become despondent and even consider quitting. One such situation was found in Salima's narrative after she had received the scholarship to study in India and then learned that she would not be receiving it after all. She could have given up on her ideals but she did not. In fact, the thought process surrounding her actions to change this situation, afforded her the acquisition of a deeper understanding that may make her even more resilient-agentic in future. She remarked, *"I think I should have applied to different places and kept my options open"*. This realisation should have a significant impact on the choices she will make in future situations such as this, and indeed might have contributed to the fact that, regardless of this hurdle, she became an effectively navigating student.

Jamie, on the other hand, was convinced that she had done everything in her power to do well in her final matric examination. After some metacognitive reflection, she however concluded: *"I could have gotten past papers for matric exams ... looking back I should have done that"*. This may enrich her habitus in such a way that, when faced with a similar situation in future, she will be better prepared so that constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances will result.

#### **6.2.2.1.f. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Write about a time when something did not work out according to your initial plan.*

##### **6.2.2.1.f.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

It is a reality of life that things do not always work out according to one's planning. And at times, unlike the above-mentioned scenarios, you cannot always intervene to change that particular aspect, but you can change how it affects you. In Caren's case, her marks did not allow her to study the medical degree that she wanted to pursue. She could not change her marks, but she could change the effect this had on her future. She did not allow this to discourage her from tertiary studies, but decided

instead, “... *let me work with what I’ve got, obviously there’s a reason I can’t get into medical*”. Now, completing her postgraduate studies in anthropology, she states unequivocally that this was the best choice she could have made. Her intrapersonal thought process allowed her to make a choice that led to positive changes.

Another view that illustrates the intrapersonal thought process at work when examining a situation that did not work out as planned, was Dineo’s view: “*So whether or not you regret it or you don’t, it’s a moment to [in] your life that could have ... that put you in that position, be it small or a big moment ... I’m too afraid of changing my destiny or my path by taking back anything*”. But because of the reference to destiny, the thought process here may have some reference to religion or spirituality. In the next section, this very element is examined, and religion discussed.

### **6.2.3. Theme 3 - Religion**

Many of the effectively navigating students were influenced by their religion which they found to be a coping mechanism: “... *and church, especially religion was very, very vital to us ... religion is like the foundation of our family*”. It may well be that religion offered a set of “rules” by which to “play the game” and base decisions on which, in this study, would include decisions to change one’s circumstances through positive adaptation. In addition, religion appeared to influence the intrapersonal thought process that underlay the choices made. Once again, this led to constructive individual consequences, upward mobility and improved circumstances.

Religion was mentioned by Michael a couple of times. He was in the church youth band and he was a youth leader. He even listed Jesus as his most important role model. Yet, in the face of adversity, Michael would turn to friends or alcohol and not to his religion, unlike the effectively navigating students who reported how religion influenced their lives at different times and in different circumstances as is illustrated in the following discussion.

It should be recognised and kept in mind when redesigning a future BQ, especially the interpretation thereof, that religion may be interpreted by different students in a culturally specific way, especially with regards to its application to questions in a BQ.

### **6.2.3.1. Religion - Implications for the BQ**

#### **6.2.3.1.a. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Tell us about a time when religion played a big part in your life, if applicable, and why.*

##### **6.2.3.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Religion played an especially large role in Jennifer's life and fulfilled different purposes at different times. Starting with school, religion taught Jennifer to stand up for what she believed in: "... *fighting to maintain my standards, religiously as well, doing books at school that I didn't feel comfortable with, I was then able to go and approach the teachers privately and say, 'I'm not comfortable with this' and then they would change the syllabus for me*". This situation potentially influenced her intrapersonal thought process and it became embedded in her habitus in such a way that it allowed her to make similar choices later on, in even more difficult circumstances such as the time when she had to fight the camp coordinators that she was fired from. This was a result of R-A as she was able to make positive changes and learn a great deal that would contribute significantly to her future.

Religion further influenced her habitus and thought process through the experience it gave her. She stated that in their church, and consequently in their family, "... *we emphasized doing things outside your comfort zone a little bit and getting to know other people, working hard and not giving up and those types of things so I guess that influenced, in fact, who I became at university as well*". In the end, working hard and not giving up allowed her to graduate at the top of her class and effectively be a resilient agent who made positive changes to her circumstances by realising her life-long ideal of obtaining a tertiary education.

When the teacher who had an immense influence in Jamie's life passed away, she made a choice to harvest positive elements from it. She could do this because she used religion/spirituality in her intrapersonal thought process and reached the following conclusion: "... *that God indeed works in mysterious ways and that we really do have the greater strength within us*".

Salima withstood her sister's illness by also entrenching her thoughts in religion and making the resulting choice to stay positive for her sister's and her own sake in support of their mother. Even though her R-A could not heal her sister, it improved the emotional experience and led to even closer relationships between mother and daughters and between the sisters. "... *I felt that was the only thing I could do given that I was so far away from home and from my sister so I prayed a lot*". During this time, it was however not only religion that sustained Salima, but also the support from her mother. The effectively navigating students all reported on support they received from their families and as a result, this led to the next point of discussion.

#### **6.2.4. Theme 4 - Support from family**

Social capital was discussed in Chapter 2 as the commodity with the potential to ensure either ultimate or average capitalisation on, for example, a qualification. In addition, social capital, specifically in the form of support from family appears to play an important role among effectively navigating students. The fact that individuals can rely on their families to support them in times of crisis may partly be responsible for enabling them to make the choice to change their circumstances. The absence of this theme from the BQ of students who otherwise show the potential to become effective navigators of university studies, may offer a department or faculty the insight on the type of support such students require (i.e. psychosocial) to reach their goals.

Michael, being the only non-effectively navigating student, was also the only student who did not report elaborately on the support of at least one parent. While he listed his father as the least supportive person in his life, he simply stated that his mother "... *was supportive in most areas*". In the next section, the way in which support from family can be linked to R-A is explored.

##### **6.2.4.1. Support from family - Implications for the BQ**

###### **6.4.2.1.a. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Tell us about a time when the support of your family, or the lack thereof, made a difference in your life?*

#### 6.2.4.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives

Financial struggle is a reality that many students have to deal with and one of the factors that can withhold a student from finishing a degree. This could have ensued in Jennifer's life had it not been for the support of her family, as she reported: "... so in first year we struggled a lot financially, needing to get help from family and stuff like that a lot ... we had family who bought us groceries you know (laugh) ...". If a family cannot, for example, buy groceries, a student may not be able to eat at all and, as a result, will not be able to concentrate at university. In this case, support from family on a physical needs level enabled Jennifer to change her circumstances and be a resilient-agent.

As mentioned earlier, caution should be exercised when using this theme (a lack of family support) "against" a student. It should rather be used in the light of the overall picture derived from the BQ and as a tool for providing support. There is no telling how Jennifer would have reacted had her family not been there to provide her with food but one could, with reasonable confidence, speculate that she probably would have found a resilient-agentic solution along some other avenue. Thus, it needs to be reiterated that this section should be seen in relation to the picture of the student as a whole and additionally as a roadmap to providing support to a student who show the potential to excel regardless of whether this support structure is in place or not.

Other instances where family support could be linked more directly to intrapersonal thought patterns is Dineo's mother's resolve: "... my [m]other always insist on walking me to the bus stop ... [t]ill my last day of matric she walked me to the bus stop ... there were days where we'd go to competitions ... and I got home at around 10 and my [m]om was waiting at the gate. She was just happy to have me home and she was encouraging". The crucial element is found in the last part of this quotation, "she was encouraging". Thus, Dineo had to make a choice that related to this scenario, for example, Can I participate in this competition that will end late in the evening? It will be dangerous to walk back home from the bus stop in the dark. However, her thought process will include this encouragement and she will be able to transcend that barrier by arguing that it will be in order, as her mother will be there to wait for her and do something about it if she does not arrive on time. In addition, this same encouragement

enriches the thought process with a kind of pressure that students do not want to disappoint their supportive parent, as Dineo remarked: *“I think it [her mother’s support] puts pressure on me to not fail”*. This is discussed in more detail in a subsequent section. Reverting to family support, another possible question may be the following:

#### **6.2.4.1.b. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Would you describe your parent(s)/guardian(s) as being proud of you? Discuss this question by referring to the parent(s)/guardian(s) who raised you.*

##### **6.2.4.1.b.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Jamie apparently made most decisions with her father in mind, thus pointing to the influence of social capital on the thought process. *“Oh they [parents] were very proud, my dad especially. He’s very supportive, he’s always been very supportive and he’s very proud of me and of my school performance ... It was a nice feeling knowing that someone’s in your corner and always willing to help”*. This could be translated to the fact that Jamie may have, at times, similar to the example of Dineo, made choices based on the fact that her parents, and especially her father, would be there to support her. It reiterates the role of resilience as an intrapersonal thought process in mitigating agency. Rephrased, capital may be digested through resilience and made available for the agent to act on. For example, when Jamie is faced with difficult circumstances, she would access her social capital and digest it through an intrapersonal thought process that would provide her with the following conclusion: because my father always sees my potential and always tells me that he is proud of me ... *“I could [be able to] do whatever I want to do”*. Social capital was entrenched in Jamie’s habitus and it enabled her to act based on the aforementioned thoughts that underlie the choice to change her circumstances. Similar thoughts (perhaps it could be called intrapersonal knowledge), were reported by Salima: *“... my mom ... she’s like, she is my biggest cheerleader, me and my sister both”* and Caren: *“Ah my mother, definitely my mother, (laugh) she’s the one that will cry, she’s like so proud and whatever ... it created like a deeper bond and then you want to do more to make this person proud again ...”*. This generates what will be discussed in the next section: the pressure that serves to enrich the thought processes of students in that they do not want to disappoint their supportive parent.

### **6.2.5. Theme 5 - Expectations from parents/guardians**

Expectations from parents (or a parent), as mentioned before, have often been a motivational force among the effectively navigating students. In some cases, it would appear that parents' failure to have engaged in tertiary studies themselves, or their inability to finish their own studies, motivated students to study. Frequently, these parents had disappointed their own parents by not having obtained a tertiary education and consequently might have endowed their children's habitus with the capital to obtain the tertiary education that *they* never could never achieve. As in the case of social capital, this might have filtered into the thought processes of these students and enabled them to make the choice to change their circumstances. This choice could realise through positive adaptation (in the form of preparing and applying for admission to university) that (often) lead to becoming the first in the family to graduate from a tertiary institution, thus improving the student's own circumstances and, in particular, career prospects.

For the most part, Michael's story is very similar. His father had disappointed his own father by not pursuing tertiary studies, but he did provide for Michael to study. There is however a vital difference. The supposition is that Michael failed to assimilate the expectations of his father into his thought process where it could become available for him to turn into action. At this juncture, the combined effect of Michael's story with non-effective navigation may be called to the fore in that his inability to apply metacognition and cognitive appraisal, for example, might have had an influence on his failed assimilation. Attention is now focussed on those students who managed to assimilate the expectations of their parents into their thought processes.

#### **6.2.5.1. Expectations from parents - Implications for the BQ**

##### **6.2.5.1.a. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Explain the expectations of your parent(s)/guardian(s) of your studies at university. Also write about the example they have set with regards to going to university.*

### **6.2.5.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Jennifer grew up with the following assimilation in her thought process: “... *and he [her father] was always just of the feeling ... that his kids were going to do very great things ... he expected it really ... just that he knew there was something good coming for everybody...*”. Having been able to employ cognitive appraisal and metacognition, Jennifer was able to see the positivity in this expectation and consequently used it to activate agency, specifically R-A – as a result of the influence of the intrapersonal thought process. Thus, in this case, the lack of cultural capital in the form of parents who had studied filtered through the resilient thought process and turned into motivation that was used to trigger agency.

Jamie explained it in this way: “*My dad ..., he graduated last year for his [M]aster[']s in Law, so I don't want to say it[']s pressure but I don't just want to have a degree. I want to also qualify and maybe get my [M]aster[']s ... So, his hard work ... it is also something that motivates me to study hard and pass in record time and just get a good job*”.

In Dineo's case, her grandfather's belief in her and his willingness to support her was the element that filtered into her thought process and strengthened her R-A as she stated, “... *my grandfather passed away after my June exams, once I like got my final results for first semester and I went back, if anything to make him proud*”. As reflected in the next section, not only expectations from family made a difference in students' thoughts and actions, but also spending time with them.

### **6.2.6. Theme 6 - Spending time with family – family closeness**

Linked to the support of family is the importance of spending time with family. All the students (with the exception of Salima), listed their fondest memories as time spent with family. Initially, this theme was intended to be grouped together with the theme “support from family” under the umbrella term “family”. However, family closeness and the positive effect thereof was especially evident among the effectively navigating students and the two themes were consequently kept separate. The amount of cultural capital and “feel for the game” that is transferred in a setting of family closeness is probably why this theme links so well with R-A. Additionally, family, as the core of



social capital and the space where many of the rules of the game are taught and practiced, can never be underestimated in the process of cultivating the habitus. That being said, it is recognised that different students may interpret family closeness in a culturally specific way. Questions should be formulated with this in mind.

Even Michael reported that time spent with his family was his fondest childhood memory. However, he specified that he enjoyed spending time with his nephews and cousins, effectively excluding members of his close family unit. Furthermore, based on previous discussions, it may again be that Michael was not able to assimilate the positive skills and elements gained from family interaction into the thought process linked to R-A. This hypothesis becomes even more plausible when revealing, in the next section, that effectively navigating students likewise referred to extended family.

#### **6.2.6.1. Spending time with family - Implications for the BQ**

##### **6.2.6.1.a. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Describe how your family operates. Distinguish between your immediate family (parent(s)/guardian(s) and sibling(s)) and your extended family.*

##### **6.2.6.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

In answer to this question, the important thing would be to look for elements in family interactions that might have contributed to the thought process and eventual R-A of a student. In Jennifer's case, it is clear how imagination, teamwork and general feelings of happiness might have assimilated in her habitus through her thought process while spending time with family: *"Playing with my brothers, I'm the only girl, two older brothers, and we used to play outside a lot, imaginary worlds ... imagination was very important ... working together as a family, singing, music ... [a]nd holidays; travelling; road trips especially, (laugh) down to Cape Town visiting my grandparents in \*\*\*. Ya, so, being together I guess"*. These elements may aid her later on when imagination may turn into creative and even critical thinking. Teamwork, as will be discussed later, is an important skill linked to R-A and, here, had its origins in family interaction. Again, social capital, assimilated through the thought process and linked to resilience into the habitus, enabled Jennifer to later excel in her life.

The same can be deduced from Dineo's report: *"So my childhood was the best, I grew up with my cousins and [a] lot of extended family around. I lived with both my grandparents at the time. So, I think my childhood shaped a lot of who I've become"*. This may even be what transpired in Lisebo's account of her fondest childhood memory: *"Travelling, (laugh) ya, just spending time with family during holidays"*. It was, however, not only the influence of family members that contributed to R-A, but also that of certain teachers.

### **6.2.7. Theme 7 - Influential teacher**

The effectively navigating students all had an influential teacher who inspired and supported them on an academic level, but often also beyond that. Many of these teachers saw potential in their students which might have led to their assimilating these same elements in their own habitus, thus activating R-A to make positive changes and adaptations. A similar pattern was found by Theron and Theron (2014:299), who stated that *"[w]hen education services supported resilience processes they were characterised by teacher-community connections, ordinary and extraordinary teacher actions, and student responsiveness"*.

Michael also identified with one of his teachers, but unlike the effectively navigating students, it was not for this reason that the teacher saw his potential, encouraged him or showed a passion for his subject. It was rather because Michael could identify with the teacher's difficulties with anger management: *"he was always a very aggressive man, but he taught himself to control that anger ... that pretty much put me in my place"*. However, it was evident later on in the interview, when he talked about his mother's boyfriend who mistreated her, that his own struggles to control his anger may still be simmering despite the teacher's influence, as he talked about feeling like he could kill the boyfriend. In stark comparison to Michael's story, the other participants all focussed on positive elements as reflected in the next section.

#### **6.2.7.1. Implications for the BQ**

##### **6.2.7.1.a. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Describe a teacher whose teaching (or example) made a difference in your life?*

### **6.2.7.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Jennifer, Salima and Jamie recounted the passion and enthusiasm of an influential teacher. All of them illustrated how they had assimilated these influences into their thought processes and activated R-A as a result because they felt that it motivated them to work even harder to not disappoint the particular teacher. Assimilating hard work into their thought processes and habitus may contribute to them employing hard work and finding their own passion for subjects that they may study at university level, effectively translating this thought process into action, thus employing R-A.

Jennifer:

*“... he was funny, he was hilarious, he used to like be very physical in class and he would do very physical demonstrations like talking about how particles move in a liquid and he would like dance around in the front of the class and stuff like that”.*

*“... he just had this passion for his subject ... and they love it so much that they just have to express it and that just comes across to you and you just have to start loving it as a student as well”.*

Jamie:

*“I think my teacher, she was very ... it was a very fun class for me, she was really nice and interactive and she liked me so I liked her too. And back in high school I was doing well in it so I guess that’s why I liked it so much”*

Salima:

*“... and I guess when I saw a teacher who felt that way, I felt like I needed to work ten times harder, you know, just to live up to the standards ...”.*

### **6.2.7.1.b. Possible question to include in future BQ**

*Describe how, if at all, a teacher had made an impact on your life (academically or otherwise)*

#### **6.2.7.1.b.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

A positive impact of a teacher appears to have a similar effect to that of a supportive parent in that it infuses the habitus and thinking process with a belief that one can do

more and be more than you may think. In Salima's case, this helped her realise that there might have been other factors that influenced her poor matric marks when she compared the teacher who quickly moved her down to a lower level, with the teacher who gave her some time to adapt: "... *that's because my teacher ... I think she really invested in her students. She was a person who didn't give up on her students easily ...*". This taught Salima that she too should not give up on herself easily and, through R-A, it allowed her to excel in language after she was initially concerned about her language ability.

Lisebo had a similar experience with her Gr 10 English teacher: "... *really supportive and she had time for students to come and engage with her on an academic level or personal level. So, if you had any problems you can go to her and she would talk to the relevant subject teachers and deal with whatever problems you have*".

Jennifer's principal and teacher helped her through the difficult time when her father lost his employment and suffered from suicidal depression. This might have provided elements of comfort and security in her thought process that linked social capital to agency and thus activated R-A. She stated that she had "... *a very close relationship with the principal. I mean when my mom couldn't come and fetch us sometimes because of my dad's issues and stuff, then he would wait with us at school and be silly and sing Lion King songs (laugh) and whatever and cheer us up and type of thing. So ya that was a good support structure there*".

Jamie thought back on her favourite teacher who had passed away: "... *she influenced the whole school in that whenever anyone had a problem, she was there. She never even used to go to the staff room, she was always in her classroom to talk to us as learners and give us advice. She was more like a friend than a teacher and so being exposed to that side of a teacher was really inspiring*". The fact that Jamie encountered this teacher infused her habitus with inspiration. The caring attitude of this teacher might have contributed to the learners who had a relationship with her believing that they were worth caring about. Effectively strengthening skills, such as positive self-esteem, linked to R-A.

These sentiments were shared by Caren when she reported: “... *she was amazing. She was also just so caring, and she really helped me a lot with my science and like she saw potential in me that I didn't even see. And that really helped me a lot*”.

Lastly, we find a good example of the influence of a teacher in Dineo's story too. This teacher who believed in her regardless of the apparent lack in social capital, allowed Dineo to assimilate this into her thought process and consequently activate agency: “*Cause I didn't even believe I could become a prefect ... I mean she said she would like someone like myself to actually apply to be a prefect and then when the outcome was favourable ... that made me realise that I can do more than ... the bare minimum*”. In this case, influence was clearly linked to positive changes, as Dineo was selected as a prefect and her belief that she could “do more than the bare minimum” might consequently have been re-enforced. What appears to have as great an impact as an influential teacher *in* school, is a gap year *after* school, as is visible in the next section.

#### **6.2.8. Theme 8 - Gap year**

Many of the effectively navigating students felt that a gap year would be beneficial to them and their future: “*I'm glad I didn't go directly to varsity after high school and that I had these other experiences*”. The gap year had offered them the opportunity to delve into their habitus and reach deeper levels of understanding of themselves. By engaging in resilient thought process during this time, they could make good, rational choices that led to positive changes.

In contrast, Michael, the non-effectively navigating student, regretted not taking a gap year. It appeared as though a gap year itself was a choice these students made to change their circumstances through positive adaptation and it consequently led to constructive individual consequences, upward mobilisation and improved circumstances. This may be due to these students being in a position to “visit museums” (as discussed in Chapter 2 under the heading capital) in new and unknown territory and gain cultural – and perhaps social – capital to ensure their effective navigation in a new, unknown field that is university studies. The effect of a gap year is now discussed.

### **6.2.8.1. Gap year - Implications for the BQ**

#### **6.2.8.1.a. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*If you took a gap year, tell us what difference, if any, it made to your life.*

##### **6.2.8.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Jennifer, being a person who wants to be in control and make things controllable for herself, gained valuable skills during her gap year. Assimilating these skills into her habitus and thought process whereby she could filter instances, would aid her in future as she stated: *"... it prepared me for experiencing the unexpected and getting comfortable with something that is not necessarily comfortable to begin with"*. She admitted in the interview that she was not comfortable with many of the aspects of university life. But due to the skills assimilated into her habitus, her thought process was resilient and allowed her to act in ways that would result in positive change.

In addition, Carin's contention between the humanities and sciences was resolved in a way that she felt at peace with, and on the grounds of reasoning that made her feel comfortable in the knowledge that it had been the correct decision. Had she not taken a gap year and gained the insights that she had, she might have based her decision on something that would not have led to positive change. One can clearly deduce from the following quotation that there was a definite concern about this very possibility in Jennifer's mind too: *"I didn't know which one to do and I didn't want to start ... and then change my mind and then choose something else and waste money and stuff ... I'm glad I only started studying when I did because then I knew it was the right thing that I was studying"*.

After recovering from her back surgery and finishing matric with the challenges of the backlog that accumulated during the recovery period, Caren did not feel ready for tertiary studies. Her gap year had given her the opportunity to gain the elements of positive adaptation in her thought process that allowed her to be a resilient agent and pursue her studies two years later: *"I took a year off and I went overseas and that also just really helped me to kind of get perspective on life, ... you don't need to straight*

*away go to university ... and I think for me personally it taught me to like 'vasbyt' [hang in there], you know that you are stronger than you think".*

Salima was forced to take a gap year after had she lost her scholarship and place to study in India. Thus, her gap year did not have much to do with her choice of what to study but rather prepared her for what to expect at university: *"... it has nothing to do with what I'm doing now, but the intensity of the studies and academic writing, it helped me a little bit."*

Lisebo made a similar choice when she too enrolled for courses that did not have much relevance to that which she wanted to study and, through that choice, she gained valuable skills for future use: *"Just that now even though I feel that I wasted a year it's also something onto my transcripts [N4 and N5 in financial management]"*. At this stage, the question arise whether the choice to take a gap year is not perhaps in itself an act of R-A? It appears as if it had been a choice made after a process of intrapersonal thought guiding the students to take action that would improve their future careers. Indeed, it may proof that the skills and thoughts gained during the gap year, rather served to strengthen R-A than to activate it (as it was already activated). The pressure to commence tertiary studies directly after school, as seen clearly in Caren's and Jamie's narratives, can be so strong that to decide against it in favour of a gap year, may potentially be seen as nothing short of R-A in itself.

When Michael did take a gap year after discontinuing his studies at UP, he had a similar experience to that explained above: *"From there I took a gap year and worked a bit. And this year, well last year, I enrolled for jewellery design at \*\*\*. And ja, I got accepted and now that's me, first year"*. As became evident from his narrative, this appears to have been a good match and a much better choice than to pursue university studies.

From the narratives it became evident that it was, however, not only the decision of what to study that was important, but also realising the importance of language once enrolled at university, as indicated in the next section.

## **6.2.9. Theme 9 - Importance of language**

Effectively navigating students realised the importance of language in the academic environment as not merely being a means of communication. *“I think if you don’t have a standard understanding of English, you are likely not to make it”*. This quotation clearly points to the understanding of the importance of English being a positive adaptation leading to positive change.

Michael did not communicate the importance of language in such a fashion, but instead related it to his current studies, indicating that it was vitally important since miscommunication or a language barrier could lead to him creating a piece of jewellery that does not fit the expectations of his customer. He also felt that, when people misunderstand each other it leads to conflict. The effectively navigating students had a completely different understanding, as discussed next.

### **6.2.9.1. Importance of language - Implications for the BQ**

#### **6.2.9.1.a. Possible question to include in a future BQ**

*Explain the role of language in one’s university career.*

##### **6.2.9.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Understanding the important role that language (in the South African context, English as the primary language of instruction in universities) plays in tertiary studies, far surpasses the actual language in effectively navigating students. For them, language as the means of communicating your academic understanding, formulating academic arguments and generally conveying your knowledge of a subject was paramount. This manner of thinking about language and academic studies offers one insight into a student’s habitus and could point to them using these thoughts to make choices and take action that would result in positive changes in their studies. An example of such a line of thought is: [language in academics are] *“really, really important. I mean that’s how you have to put your arguments across.”*

Jennifer, the top student who views creative writing (in English) as an escape and a coping mechanism stated: *“...it’s very important because you need to learn how to be*



*formal and it influences the way you interact in business in future ... so it's really important to put what you think into words otherwise it's kind of a trap I think. Language can be quite limiting if you can't use it properly ya*". She saw this trap in action in some of the students she tutored in university. I believe that we can find the thought process that would prevent language from becoming a trap in Salima's response: "... *it is very important ... I could say that because when I first applied to UP, because I did the lower English ... I was like 'okay I probably can't do it because I was never in higher English' ... I ended up having to do academic literacy ... I really enjoyed it, I actually ended up being one of the top students ... it was so much easier to write academic essays ... I enjoy writing now*". Here Salima shows how her thoughts that she should work hard in academic literacy activated agency and the joining of the two (thought and action) again leading to R-A from which positive changes resulted. Salima's thoughts about academic literacy are evident in that she saw academic literacy as (1) an opportunity, where many other students see it as a waste of time: "*The fact that I had the **opportunity** to do academic literacy ...*"; and (2) she made use of the opportunity for self-reflection: "... *I started realising what was my strengths and weaknesses and because of it ... I improved so immensely in first year*" (positive adaptation that lead to positive changes).

Lisebo explains the trap itself as follows: "... *it can be more difficult for you to break down and understand if you are new to the language ... some of the people who maybe did qualify very well but then they don't know the language, they don't know how to now start thinking in English because it's very difficult for someone who comes from a Zulu school or a Tswana school*".

It is thus very important in the answer to this question, to decipher the student's attitude towards language as the vehicle for academic communication and delivery: "...*English, not just any language, but the English language is very important because that's how you communicate with everyone, your reports and whatever documents you get are in English and it's the universal language and I think it's very important for all of us to know English and to be very fluent in it*". Here Jamie summarises how students should make peace with the fact that, at least for the foreseeable future, the language of instruction will be English. If the student is not prepared to include this in

their thought patterns, one will need to consider the fact that language may become a trap in that student's life.

In addition to understanding the importance of language in the academic sphere, three other skills were also identified as vital in the process of identifying R-A and these are now discussed.

### **6.2.10. Theme 10 - Skills**

Many different skills were identified by the effectively navigating students who displayed R-A. Often similar skills were reported by most of the participants (notably absent from Michael's narrative). To allow for easier perusal, the skills were grouped together according to sub-themes and questions formulated accordingly. Each of these skills contributed towards the individual's habitus and hence formed part of their ability to make the choice to change their circumstances through positive adaptation. This, in turn, led to constructive individual consequences, upward mobility and improved circumstances.

#### **6.2.10.a. Communication skills**

##### **6.2.10.a.1. Implications for the BQ**

###### **6.2.10.a.1.a. Possible communication skills question to include in a future BQ**

*Write down two incidences where you made use of your communication skills.*

###### **6.2.10.a.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

Both Jennifer and Caren mentioned the importance of being able to communicate with lecturers: (Jennifer) *"... communication skills definitely, being able to approach lecturers directly instead of trying to just go through my friends. I'm not scared to speak to a lecturer to find out what I really need to be doing here"*. (Caren) *"I'm not scared to ask, if I need help"*.

This points to a thought process in which the decision was made that they will approach lecturers as it is more important to have a good relationship with them and

to be aware of exactly what they expect than to, for example, adhere to shyness or being afraid to approach them. This thought process can once again be linked to the action taken that, in turn, contributes to R-A.

Salima viewed communication skills as linked to “... *an opportunity to network with people and to get to know people from different backgrounds ...*”. Being a person who is willing to engage with others will lead to that person’s habitus being continually enriched with social capital. Communication skills thus become important in creating opportunities for the assimilation of capital into the habitus.

### **6.2.10.b. Leadership**

#### **6.2.10.b.1. Implications for the BQ**

##### **6.2.10.b.1.a. Possible leadership questions to include in a future BQ**

*Did you gain any leadership skills in your life?*

*If yes, describe where you gained those leadership skills.*

*What role has your leadership skills played in your life?*

##### **6.2.10.b.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

The acquisition of leadership skills in Jamie’s life became evident as contributing to her thought processes. In this sense, it is perhaps not so much the leadership position in itself (as asked in the BQ), but rather the consequent accompanying skills assimilated into the habitus. “*I think leadership skills and being able to work with people and delegate and not trying to do things on my own and also just being patient with people. Because I’m not really patient but when you work with people and you’re trying to reach a certain goal, you need to be patient and understanding and that things happen and that people go through other things so I think those are skills that I learned.*” Thus, leadership skills or rather being in a leadership role, enhanced Jamie’s R-A in that she could positively adapt in situations where she previously may not have been able to, such as situations calling for patience and understanding. Again, this

points to the relationship between thought processes (resilience) and consequent action (agency).

Similarly, in Salima's case, it was the influence on her thought process rather than the leadership position in itself that was significant: *"...leadership skills and being able to know what being a leader is all about because often times we think being a leader is telling people what to do ..., being the only person to set the rules but I think the more you are part of team activities you actually end up noticing that even if there is somebody in front that is considered the leader, that we will not be able to achieve our goals if everybody is not on the same page as you."* This realisation is very important in a university context where groupwork often becomes a negative situation for many students, and without this kind of thought process a student may be hampered by groupwork.

Similarly, Dineo also gained many accompanying skills as a result of being in a leadership position. This infused her thought process and habitus with confidence and positive changes for the future: *"But the being a prefect, holding a leadership position and being a class prefect those helped in me getting funding to further my studies ... the leadership skills self because I was part of executive committee of our society on campus ... they helped me with my confidence levels and public speaking. I joined [E]nactus last year and I was speaker in the intervarsity. So being in front and being able to approach people helped me in so many spaces of my life. 'Cause right now I am a tutor and the public speaking has helped me to not be shy of meeting new people or making mistakes or being in front of others to, I don't know, lead them moving forward, yes."*

### **6.2.10.c. Teamwork**

#### **6.2.10.c.1. Implications for the BQ**

##### **6.2.10.c.1.a. Possible questions to include in a future BQ**

*Tell us about your **best** experience with regards to teamwork.*

*Tell us about your **worst** experience with regards to teamwork.*

### **6.2.10.c.1.a.1. Guideline answers from the narratives**

What was interesting here was how the students again gleaned elements that enriched their thought patterns and habitus. While thinking about teamwork, Salima realised how this related to the career she would want to pursue. She consequently acted in a certain way towards groupwork, effectively preparing herself for the future in the process, and thus portraying herself as a resilient agent: “... *teamwork is very important. People skills, the fact that I was involved in these activities and meeting a lot of people with different characters was especially beneficial to me because I want to do psychology and that requires you to really understand the human mind and ... know people so I needed people skills, leadership, teamwork ...*”.

In Jennifer’s case, teamwork offered her the opportunity to change a structure in her life, namely operating outside her comfort zone: “... *I learned about team work and about doing things that are outside your comfort zone and how it can benefit you and actually getting through when you are really not happy with the situation and you are really struggling with it*”. During the course of studies at university, a student may at times be expected to act outside their comfort zone and they may find themselves in situations in which they may not be entirely happy. Being able to work as a team, helped Jennifer to deal with such a situation in a resilient-agentic way once by adapting positively and bringing about positive changes and, as a result, empowered her thought process and habitus to deal with similar situations in future.

As indicated in the next section, the important element here (and in many other answers provided to the BQ questions) is to find out what the student felt they had gained from the skills and the consequent experiences they had that can be related back to R-A.

### **6.3. Conclusion**

This chapter opened with a discussion around the elements uncovered during the initial analysis of the seven narratives. These elements included key role-players (characters) in the students’ lives; both enabling and disabling structures (context); capital (scene and tension); and R-A (end point). In returning to the field texts to expand the narrative analysis by a process of re-storying, the following themes

emerged: cognitive appraisal; metacognition; religion; support from family; expectations from parent(s) as a driving force and motivation; spending time with family – family closeness; influential teacher as a positive role model and source of inspiration and motivation; gap year; realising the importance of language in academics; and skills gained from life activities/experiences.

The themes identified above were unpacked through a short discussion of each, making use of quotations from the seven narratives' presentation of that theme. This led to the emergence of suggested questions that may be added to a future BQ aimed at identifying R-A. Each theme concluded by offering suggested answers to the aforementioned questions, as found in the narratives of the students.

In the next chapter, these possible questions are inserted into what could become a future tool to ensure more equitable and fair admission.

## CHAPTER 7

### PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE BQ

#### 7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, some proposed changes to the BQ are discussed by unpacking the responses received (from the BQ as well as the interviews) in each section of the BQ, and then suggesting possibilities for future consideration based on feedback from the narratives.

After analysing the narratives and Chapter 6, the conclusion was reached that it is probably not ideal to convert the BQ into a purely quantitative instrument. New computer-based social science qualitative analysis programmes like NVivo or Atlas.ti could be options used to reduce the labour requirements accompanying the initial screening of the BQ. Depending on the numbers, a subsample of those BQs should, however, still be studied by a human analyst in order to gain deeper information and discuss it with a panel of experts. The panel should then make the decision on whether or not to allow a student entry into the Extended Programme of the Faculty of Humanities at UP.

Should this BQ nonetheless be used as an electronic questionnaire, some questions could be posted with pre-coded answers. In addition, and where applicable, possibilities of pre-coded answers for some of the open-ended questions are listed too. The use, validity and accuracy of such questions (especially in terms of identifying R-A) will, however, need to be studied in-depth in future research to determine its value in any selection process.

A combination of the aforementioned pre-coded and open-ended questions may be more ideal. This could be done in the form of an electronic questionnaire with some of the *biographical* and *more generic questions* containing pre-coded answers for easier capturing, combined with open-ended questions aimed at *identifying R-A*.

## 7.2. SECTION A: Personal and background details

Participants are asked to enter personal and background details:

1. *Surname; First name(s); Student number; Date of birth; Home address; Marital status; Gender; Contact telephone number; Home language; Nationality.*

As discussed in Chapter 5, students had to be identified for this study and their consent obtained in order to allow the author to track their progress. Outside this study, this section will, on the one hand, be used for selection of students and, on the other hand, for statistical purposes, thus this information is critical. Additionally, the following suggestions may be considered:

Under home language the following pre-coded options may be used in a drop-down list as they were most frequently mentioned in the answers received from the BQ:

Afrikaans; English; IsiNdebele; IsiVenda; IsiZulu; Northern Sotho; Sepedi; Sesotho; Setswana; Shona; Siswati; South Sotho; Tsonga; Tswana; Xhosa; European languages (French; German; Portuguese); Other.

## 7.3. SECTION B: Schooling

Next participants are asked:

2. *Describe the area in which your high school is situated by choosing between: Suburban; Township; Rural, or Other.*

More options could be added here for example:

City; Town; Township; Informal settlement, as the choices offered do not distinguish areas accurately enough. Rural could mean an affluent farm that is situated far from the nearest city or it could refer to a poor informal settlement.



3. Indicate with a tick (✓) which of the following facilities you had access to in your high school:

<b>Facilities</b>		<b>Facilities</b>	
<i>Electricity</i>		<i>Classrooms</i>	
<i>Computers</i>		<i>Blackboard</i>	
<i>Science labs</i>		<i>Overhead projectors</i>	
<i>Desks (one per learner)</i>		<i>Playing/Sports fields</i>	
<i>Library</i>		<i>Sport equipment</i>	
<i>Restrooms /Toilets</i>		<i>Gymnasium</i>	

It was gathered from this study that, in the presence of R-A, access to facilities at school may, to some extent at least, open the possibility for a student to make the choice to change their circumstances, albeit in the future, leading to positive change. In many cases, it will probably not change the unavailability of resources, but their success, despite the lack of resources, may provide R-A skills that can be applied in the future.

4. Regarding matric:

4.1. Do you think your matric results are a true reflection of your ability? Yes

No

4.1.1. If no, please explain.

4.2. Did you repeat matric? Yes  No

4.2.1. If yes, please explain.

4.3. Did you re-write some matric subjects? Yes  No

4.3.1. If yes, please list the subjects you rewrote.

This question may have more relevance to certain departments in the Faculty of Humanities than others as there may be direct links between effective navigation in a given department and performance in a certain school subject.

5. *What language(s) were used by your high school teachers while teaching?*

Initially this question was included, as there was a concern that a learner who received schooling in languages other than English may be at a higher risk of failing. However, this was not measurable through the results obtained from the BQ, as an insignificant number of students indicated that their teachers spoke languages other than English (54/348 = 16%) and in the majority of these cases, English was spoken as well.

An option could be to provide a dropdown list for teaching languages spoken most often or in most subjects, and another dropdown list for teaching languages spoken less often.

Another important suggestion would be to include a section on teachers here, as influential teachers appeared to be a common factor among the respondents who displayed R-A. At this juncture, it is important to revisit the open-ended questions listed in Chapter 6, paragraph 6.8 *Influential teacher* as a possible indicator of R-A. The value of these open-ended questions and their in-depth interpretation instead of dropdown lists should be reiterated. However, should a specific department wish to study the possibility of using a quantitative questionnaire, the following questions are proposed for use in the revised BQ:

6. *Did you have an influential teacher(s) during your schooling career?* Yes   
No

6.1. *If yes, why would you classify them as influential?*

Optional: Dropdown list with pre-coded answers:

- a) *They offered me support.*
- b) *They gave me a feeling of safety.*
- c) *They cared about their learners.*
- d) *They were interactive in class.*
- e) *I could identify with the teacher.*
- f) *They believed in my potential.*
- g) *They were passionate about their subject.*

This dropdown list may give respondents the option to tick more than one option. The more options ticked, the heavier the weight of the answer.

After studying the narratives, the following questions concerning language are proposed for use in the revised BQ:

7. *Which languages were you exposed to during your childhood?*

7.1. *Language 1\*:* (Dropdown list with options)

7.2. *In what way were you exposed to this language?*

- a) *I spoke the language.*
- b) *Someone in my family or circle of friends spoke to you me in this language fairly often.*
- c) *Someone read me stories in this language.*
- d) *I heard it on TV?*
- e) *I have books in this language?*

*\*This question can be repeated to allow the respondent to indicate more than one language.*

It may even be a good idea to ask respondents to indicate the languages in order of prevalence as pertaining to their lives. Additionally, this question offers the opportunity to explore to what extent the respondent had access to resources in languages other than their home language.

The importance of including a question on exposure to different cultures (and hence cultural capital) was also highlighted by the narratives. Qualitative answers to such a question may again open up the habitus of the prospective student and offer a panel the opportunity to gain insight into the student's R-A capacity.

#### **7.4. SECTION C: Cultural exposure and parental support**

In revisiting the ideal world where this BQ would consist mainly of open-ended questions of which the subsequent responses would be reviewed by a panel, the following questions are proposed for use in the revised BQ, as they have the potential to elicit rich descriptions of cultural exposure and parental support.

8. *Have you ever been exposed to cultures and cultural practices other than your own? Yes  No*

*If yes, please answer the following:*

8.1. *Was this culture similar to, or different from your own culture?*

*If different, please answer the following:*

8.1.1. *How often were you exposed to this culture?*

8.1.2. *What influence did this culture have on you?*

Optional possibilities for pre-coded answers to these questions:

8.1.1. *How often were you exposed to this culture?*

- a) *Daily*
- b) *Weekly*
- c) *Monthly*
- d) *A couple of times a year*
- e) *A few times throughout my life*

8.1.2. *What impact did this have on you?*

- a) *I could not relate to this culture.*
- b) *It opened my mind to new and different ways of doing things.*
- c) *It made me sensitive towards people of other cultures.*
- d) *It made me question certain aspects of my own culture and ways that I can improve my life.*

Another critical aspect that transpired from the narratives was the role of parental/guardian safekeeping and/or support and other influences as reflected in Chapter 6, paragraph 6.5 *Support from family*. This section should ideally remain open-ended.

9. *Would you say you had more (choose one):*

- a) *support in your life, or*
- b) *people who tried to discourage you?*
- c) *A bit of both?*

9.1. *Who supported you most in your life?*

9.2. *What did this support mean to you?*

9.3. *Were there people in your life who discouraged you? Yes  No*

9.3.1. *If yes, please tell us about them.*

9.4. *What influence did this discouragement have on you?*

9.5. *Were there people in your life that rooted for you to fail? Yes  No*

9.5.1. *If yes, tell us about them.*

9.6. *What influence did this “rooting for you to fail” have on you?*

Optional: Suggestions for pre-coded answers:

9.1. *Who supported you most in your life?*

- a) *Parent(s)*
- b) *Sibling(s)*
- c) *Grandparent(s)*
- d) *Friend(s)*
- e) *Other family member(s)*
- f) *Guardian(s)*
- g) *Teacher(s)*
- h) *Other; Please specify.*

9.2. *Did this support:*

- a) *enable to you to do even better?*
- b) *suffocate you?*
- c) *caused you to get into a lot of trouble?*
- d) *keep you away from your schoolwork?*
- e) *Other? Please specify.*

9.3. *Please tell us about this support?*

9.4. *Were there people in your life who discouraged you? Yes  No*

9.4.1. *If yes, choose below (you may choose more than one):*

- a) *Parent(s)*
- b) *Sibling(s)*
- c) *Grandparent(s)*
- d) *Friend(s)*
- e) *Other family member(s)*
- f) *Guardian(s)*
- g) *Teacher(s)*
- h) *Other; Please specify*

- 9.5. *Did this discouragement (you may choose more than one):*
- a) *motivate you to work even harder and do even better?*
  - b) *suffocate you?*
  - c) *demotivate you?*
  - d) *cause you to get into a lot of trouble?*
  - e) *keep you away from your schoolwork?*
  - f) *make you question yourself and your abilities?*
- 9.6. *Were there people in your life that rooted for you to fail? Yes  No*
- 9.6.1 *If yes, choose below (you may choose more than one):*
- a) *Parent(s)*
  - b) *Sibling(s)*
  - c) *Grandparent(s)*
  - d) *Friend(s)*
  - e) *Other family member(s)*
  - f) *Guardian(s)*
  - g) *Teacher(s)*
  - h) *Other; Please specify*
- 9.7. *Did their rooting for you to fail (you may choose more than one):*
- a) *motivate you to work even harder and do even better?*
  - b) *suffocate you?*
  - c) *demotivate you?*
  - d) *cause you to get into a lot of trouble?*
  - e) *keep you away from your schoolwork?*
  - f) *make you question yourself and your abilities?*
  - g) *Other; Please specify*

10. *Describe the most difficult or challenging situation you encountered during your life.*
- 10.1. *How did you deal with this challenge?*

In the original BQ, these questions were combined into one question with two parts but the results obtained warranted rethinking. At times the BQ answer did not reflect

the interview answer and at other times the question was either left blank or the answer was cryptic and of little value.

- Dineo omitted her father's wish to have her aborted from the BQ, while she did mention it in her interview. This could be a potential indicator of R-A. The question is, how does one measure this, or ensure that such indicators are shared during the admission process?
- Michael referred to his break-up in matric in the BQ, whereas he listed his parent's divorce in the interview. His mentioning the break-up in the interview, and especially the way he dealt with it, unearthed important information and is vital to extract in a BQ such as the one used in this study.

An important consideration is that students may feel uncomfortable sharing intimate details in a BQ, especially since it is not anonymous. This situation could be remedied by including case studies with a selection of potential answers as examples, from which indicators that relate to the presence or absence of traits associated with R-A could be identified. The potential answers will have to include various options that range from reactions indicative of R-A on the one end (where students change a structure and adapts positively), to non-resilient reactions (where students change a structure to their own detriment).

It is furthermore important to determine whether a student who had dealt with a challenge constructively before will indeed utilise the cultural capital and R-A once more to overcome a similar challenge in future, regardless of whether it was added to their habitus as a result of this challenge, or whether R-A was inborn and had been part of the habitus for an unknown period.

#### **7.5. SECTION D: Post-school involvement**

Not all students who effectively navigated their first year at university, had taken a gap year prior to the commencement of their studies, however, it had a significant influence on Jennifer, Salima, Caren and Lisebo. There is the possibility that a gap year might also have made a notable difference in the choices Michael made, thus making it an important aspect to consider for the future development of the BQ.

11. *In which year did you matriculate?*
12. *If you did not take a gap year, what would you have done if you had the opportunity?*
- (a) Travel
  - (b) Work
  - (c) Improve my matric results
  - (d) Gain experience before deciding what to study
  - (e) Study something else before deciding what to study
  - (f) Other? Please specify.
13. *If you matriculated before 20\_\_<sup>20</sup>, what did you do before applying for admission to the University of Pretoria? (e.g. study, part-time or full-time work)*
14. *If you have been studying, please provide the following details:*
- 14.1. *Name of institution*
  - 14.2. *Year(s) of registration: From \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_*
  - 14.3. *Course studied*
  - 14.4. *Reason(s) for leaving:*

If the questionnaire is to include mainly open-ended questions, it is proposed that this section should include the questions listed in paragraph 6.3.1.1.a *Possible gap year questions to include in a future BQ.*

## **7.6. SECTION E: Achievements, extracurricular and/or community involvement**

*We would like to know of any achievements at school, in your home and in your community that you think are likely to contribute to your success at university.*

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<sup>20</sup> This would be the year prior to the historic first year of the student completing the BQ in a particular year.



This section comprised four questions:

*List awards, prizes or recognition you received at school for your **academic achievement** and in which grade.*

*List extra-curricular (non-academic) activities in which you participated (such as sport, culture, community engagement).*

*List positions of leadership or office you held.*

*Describe any other achievements that you are proud of.*

Many respondents, however, confused the different questions and it may be a better option to either group these questions together, or to make a distinction based on:

- sport;
- culture;
- leadership; and
- community engagement.

Conversely, caution needs to be taken, as many activities, as is evident in Jennifer's narrative, should never be listed in the first place. The challenge is to reformulate this section in such a way that one rather captures the lessons learned than the activities itself. This is evident in Dineo's narrative too. Even though Jennifer did not participate in most of the activities for extended periods, the lesson learned is of great importance. The following questions are proposed for use in the revised BQ:

*15.1. Discuss the extra-curricular activities and achievements that you were proudest of (it may be a good idea to provide space for a few different activities, each with the following question accompanying it. Ideally however, this question too should remain qualitative in nature):*

*15.1.1. How did your participation in this activity impact on your life?*

*15.2. Have you ever worked (voluntary or paid) inside or outside of your home? Yes  No*

*15.2.1. If yes, describe this work and indicate how long and how often you have worked.*

## 7.7. SECTION F: Interests and career plans

This section contains the questions that are currently in the BQ but may need revision, as will be discussed later.

*We would like to know more about your interests and career plans.*

*Who would you regard as your most important role model(s)?*

*What have you learnt from them?*

*Describe any events or experiences in your life that you consider as having contributed to who you are now or what you want to achieve in the future.*

*What recent news items attracted your attention, and why?*

*If you were given an opportunity to spend an hour with a well-known person, who would you choose, and why?*

I found this section to be of little value (again keeping the limitations of the BQ in mind). Many students did not answer these questions and it is time- and resource-intensive to score. What may, however, be of greater importance is to ask what impact this had on a person's life, how it ingrained in the habitus. The following question is proposed for use in the revised BQ:

*16. Who would you regard as your most important role model(s)?*

*16.1. What have you learnt from them?*

*16.2. How would this change how you approach your life in future?*

*17. Describe any event(s) or experience(s) in your life that you consider as having contributed to who you are now or what you want to achieve in the future.*

*17.1. How would this change how you approach your life in the future?*

This does not solve the issue of subjective interpretation and labour-intensive scoring, but it does make the question more focussed and may provide a richer response.

Alternatively, a dropdown list with possible answers may be provided based on the responses found in the narratives.

*Is a degree in the Faculty of Humanities your first choice? Yes  No*

*If no, please explain.*

In the interviews, some of the respondents changed their answer even though they did not change their faculty. The following question is proposed for use in the revised BQ:

*18. Is the degree you are currently enrolled for your first choice? Yes  No*

*18.1 If no, please explain.*

- Jamie wanted to change from social work to criminology.
- Caren indicated on the BQ that Humanities was not her first choice, but she changed this answer during the interview.
- Dineo initially wanted to be a lawyer, but has since changed her mind and is how happy studying criminology.
- Michael embarked on a completely new career and, contrary to this answer in the BQ, he is now of the opinion that a degree in the Faculty of Humanities is no longer his first choice, neither is it appropriate to him.

*19. Why do you think a Humanities degree is most appropriate for you?*

*20. What career would you be interested in following after completing your degree?*

*21. Which four subjects offered in the Faculty of Humanities would you consider studying?*

*a) Subject 1: \_\_\_\_\_*

*b) Subject 2: \_\_\_\_\_*

*c) Subject 3: \_\_\_\_\_*

*d) Subject 4: \_\_\_\_\_*

Also of importance is to determine whether cultural capital plays a part and to what extent respondents' social structure provide cultural capital that would enable them to navigate themselves successfully in a particular field of study.

*22. Were there any influences in your social circle that could have contributed to your choice of degree and/or future career being a good fit for you? Examples may include family members who pursued this career or other forms of exposure to this career.*

It is suggested to include a question that further probes the reason for the choice of career. The following question is proposed for use in the revised BQ:

*23. Who advised you that this degree is appropriate for you? (You may name more than one person)*

Optional: Dropdown list with pre-coded answers:

- 23. Who advised you that this degree is appropriate for you?*
- a) I did job shadowing and/or interviewed a professional person in this field.*
  - b) I was advised by a family member that this is the degree for me.*
  - c) I went for career counselling and/or assessment.*
  - d) I saw this career in action in a TV series or movie and knew that it was what I wanted to do.*
  - e) I was told I will make a lot of money with this career.*
  - f) Other; Please specify.*

## **7.8. SECTION G Finances**

*24. How do you intend to finance your studies?*

*25. Where will you live while studying?*

*26. If you intend staying in a University residence, have you applied? Yes  No*

*27. List any factor(s) (e.g. disability, family circumstances, a recent death) that you think might affect your studies?*

## **7.9. SECTION H: Personal reflection**

The narratives revealed increasing evidence that cognitive appraisal and metacognition may be vital indicators of R-A. It would thus be critical to assess the presence thereof in a BQ. This question is proposed for use in the revised BQ, although any of the other questions listed in paragraph 6.3.1 *Metacognition* and 6.3.2 *Cognitive appraisal* may also be included:

*28. Think back on a situation that you handled badly in the past. Tell us how would you handle it differently if you were given the opportunity to redo it?*

In this question reliance on external vs internal coping and superficial vs deep levels of metacognition should be assessed.

*29. At university, lecturers expect students to express themselves well. Tell us about the personal qualities you have that you believe will contribute to your success at university and in your future career.*

Unfortunately, most students merely listed some qualities, while very few wrote a paragraph. During the interviews, students were asked the same question and they elaborated, although this question did not provide rich information. Should one endeavour to search for indicators of R-A and delve into capital, this question may be redundant (especially in light of the questions used in the first part of this section), unless, of course, it is important for a given field of study to assess students' writing skills, and the manpower that such assessment demands, is available.

## **7.10. Caution regarding the interpretation of the BQ**

It should be kept in mind that a BQ is the respondent's own subjective presentation of themselves as agents. They describe the context of their lives in the form of a narrative that represents their life history. This is thus dependent on the respondents' knowledge of themselves as agents in their own contexts and may be influenced if the respondents have an inaccurate, incomplete or even distorted view of themselves. *"The life history sketched in response to the BQ offers a brief but rich account of the educational trajectory over time of an individual between two institutions, of their engagement with the challenges of schooling in the context of a particular family and*

*community*” (Enslin et al., 2006:434). Again, the respondent’s view of engagement with challenges of schooling or any other challenges remains a subjective report that is exposed to personal interpretation, experience and understanding.

Two prominent examples from this study are:

1. the difference between the image that the author gained of Lisebo, based on her description of herself as a very social person who loves people, and the reality of her coming across as extremely shy and uncertain about herself.
2. Dineo’s reference to her external locus of control in the BQ that was far removed from the reality of her resilient-agentive approach to life and its challenges.

One option of circumventing such inaccurate descriptions could, for example, be the inclusion of case studies with accompanying answers that represent reactions to various circumstances/challenges (in addition to the qualitative component of the BQ). This will then provide the respondent with a potential response as if the case study was their story, instead of only relying on the subjective accounts of the respondent. Additionally, it may serve to substantiate or cross-check their qualitative answer.

### **7.11. Conclusion**

In an attempt to develop a BQ that can be used to identify indicators of R-A in a university environment, in seeking a way to support students with underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds while, at the same time, being designed in an easily analysable and interpretable manner, this chapter offered suggested changes to the BQ that was used in this study. The suggested changes were discussed in the context of the BQ and with reference to the narratives.

This chapter concludes that it is probably ideal to design the BQ in such a way that it uses pre-coded questions for the biographical and more generic questions, while retaining open-ended questions to identify R-A.

In the next chapter, this thesis concludes by offering the overall discussion of this study.

## CHAPTER 8

### OVERALL DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overall discussion on the global question of how to improve true equitable access to higher education for disadvantaged or marginalised groups. The chapter briefly describes the goals of the study, revisits the research questions that guided it and explains the context of the study and its relevance.

In a subsequent section, the theoretical construct R-A is mirrored shortly by referring to implications for theory, policy and practice in the context of higher education. In doing so, the experiment of using the BQ proposed in Chapter 7 to address the question of the equity dilemma by selecting students from the underrepresented sociodemographic groups is discussed by referring to the national and international literature examined in Chapter 1.

In the latter part of the chapter, the research questions that guided this study is addressed, followed by a discussion of the shortcomings, limitations and trustworthiness of the study, as well as the potential transferability of the research in another context outside South Africa. Finally, before concluding the chapter, directions for future research are provided.

#### **8.1. The goals of the study**

This study aimed to better understand/approach the equity dilemma with regards to university access by examining a BQ for its ability to identify indicators of resilience and agency, or rather R-A, in students with potential to effectively navigate university studies. The study further proposed suggestions as to how the chosen BQ could be converted in an effort to allow easier analysis. To guide the pursuit of these goals, the study was directed by the following overarching question:

How, if at all, can a BQ (*see Appendix A*) be used to identify indicators of resilience and agency in a university seeking a way to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

In addition to the above overarching question, the following sub-questions formed part of the study:

1. How, if at all, can the indicators of resilience and agency predict academic performance in the Faculty of Humanities at UP?
2. How can this biographical instrument be further developed to specifically identify resilience and agency to supplement the indicators of the disadvantaged, such as race and class, so equitable access to higher education programmes can be determined?
3. How, if at all, can such a biographical instrument be designed in an easily analysable and interpretable manner?

## **8.2. The context of this study and its relevance**

This study was undertaken in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. A need for alternative and supplementary admission practices to address the race, class and equity dilemma, was identified in the Faculty. Given that South Africa's past is characterised by severe oppression and disadvantage of certain groups, the equity dilemma in higher education is a relevant topic. In addition, this dilemma, as mentioned before, is not unique to South Africa, in fact, it is a worldwide challenge, which adds to the relevance of this study.

This study was located in an interdisciplinary context where it represented the *“synthesis of ideas and the synthesis of characteristics”* (Appleby, 2015) of psychology, sociology and higher education. Given the dynamic and fluid nature of higher education in a global world, it makes sense to include both the individual and the human society when studying issues of access in higher education. All of the aforementioned contributes to the relevance of this study.

## **8.3. The theoretical construct resilient-agency (R-A) in the context of higher education: implications for theory, policy and practice**

This study allowed the opportunity to look at the person as an individual and as part of society and at society as part of the individual. the author became cognisant of the



fact that no field, whether it be politics, economy, education, or any other, should ever be judged or even examined in any other fashion than by taking into consideration all the above-mentioned relations. In this, the individual is a product of the society in which it operates, and the society is a product of the individual and groups of individuals that it comprises, but the individual is also a product of the individual. And this is where a new conceptual language, building on resilience and agency, is introduced. R-A or NR-A, points to the choice a person makes to change their circumstances either through positive adaptation or not. This indicates that attempts to address inequality of access to higher education, using general categories such as race or class, should be supplemented by admitting students who, in addition, also demonstrate R-A and subsequently have a potentially fair chance of success in higher education. In the following sections, this notion is discussed in more detail.

### **8.3.1. Resilient-agency (R-A): Implications for theory in higher education**

In Chapter 1, the equity dilemma in South Africa was introduced by referring to the debate between Max Price (2010:1) and Neville Alexander (2010:1) over criteria used for equitable access to university programmes. It was also pointed out that this dilemma is not unique to South Africa, but poses a worldwide challenge (see 1.2) Thus, the abovementioned debate could arguably be seen as globally applicable and is thus used to facilitate this discussion.

Price argued for the use of race as a proxy for disadvantage, while Alexander reasoned that class would be the more equitable criteria. The crucial part of Alexander's argument, however, is that there should really be concern about building a multi-racial as well as multicultural society with a collective identity. A university environment should not affirm Bourdieu's argument (Burawoy & Von Holdt, 2012:105) that class is the leading predictor of success and that universities reproduce the dominant class. Instead, based on the notion that R-A is the choice a person makes to change their adverse circumstances, or challenge a structure of disadvantage through positive adaptation, this study would like to suggest that universities need to look at the essential traits that make a student cross the boundaries of racial, class or other structures. The race/class debate, however, affirms how entrenched categories such as race and class really are in societies. Thus, this study did not enter into this

debate to “choose a winner” between race and class. Although the study acknowledges the dilemma and the importance of including race and/or class, it offers additional options that will supplement admission criteria.

In Chapter 1, Soudien (2016:199) postulated that a primary focus on race provides a partial view that leads to incompleteness when it comes to policy decisions. While agreeing with this statement, the same can be said for class or even a combination of race and class. It is essential to refer back to the argument in Chapter 1 that *in addition* to the role universities play in redress, they also have a responsibility to produce graduates who will add to the skills, social and economic capital of the country, thus, resulting in a two-fold responsibility.

Following the racial disadvantages discussed in Chapter 3, the importance of including race and/or class in the admission criteria of a university is not denied. In fact, the use of race and class may go, and have already gone, some way in addressing the responsibility of redress through access (the equitability of which is debatable, as became evident in Chapter 1). However, there are other characteristics that are relevant for student success, such as R-A, which race and class as criteria cannot identify. This is supported by Wilson-Strydom (2015:5) who argued that “*Universities need to develop much deeper, contextualised understandings of who their students are and the complex web of conditions that influence what they can and cannot be and do as students*”. She continued by saying that, to improve current access practices, universities should “*ask different questions and apply new theoretical approaches to understanding access and success*” (Wilson-Strydom, 2015:5).

If students are selected based on race (and/or class), without taking other important characteristics into consideration, universities select based on a *partial view*. As such, race and/or class as sole admission criteria in addition to matric results, may not fully address the second responsibility of universities, namely to produce graduates that will essentially contribute to the growth and well-being of a country. This is so because the use of race and class as admission criteria will make no difference to the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 1, students enrolling for higher education worldwide are not prepared for higher education studies (Marnewick, 2012:123; Rassen et al., 2013:6; Nel & Kirstner, 2009:953-954; Day & Nolde, 2009:135;150). As a result, perhaps due

to the absence of R-A that may enable these students to change their negative academic circumstances through positive adaptation, they often do not navigate their university studies successfully. This was illustrated by the UNESCO statistics in Chapter 1, paragraph 1.4 and Table 1.1 as well as in Michael's narrative (see Appendix F: Michael's narrative). He was the only student who did not appear to display R-A and who discontinued his studies. This decision of Michael could have led to him not contributing optimally to the skills and capital resources of the country as he was left with a grade 12 certificate instead of a higher education qualification and all the related capital. Although Michael eventually enrolled at a different type of higher education institution, this will arguably not be the case for all students in Michael's position. Hence, this call for appropriate placement of students in the type of higher education institution that will best serve their needs (see 8.3.3).

To concur with Palmer et al. (2011:3), it becomes vital for universities to admit students to higher education institutions by considering characteristics such as R-A that are associated with success at university. The inclusion of measures of R-A to supplement admission criteria (see 8.3.2) is hence argued for again. Such an inclusion of R-A is supported by Marginson (2011:34) who argued that universities should facilitate true equitable and fair access by supplementing prior academic performance as criteria for admission with a measure of prior agency, or as this study has argued, R-A.

To illustrate the significance of including R-A to supplement admission criteria, the literature on agency and resilience is referred to as discussed in Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.8.1 and 2.8.2. Firstly, as far as agency is concerned, the author disagrees with Bourdieu (1998a:38) that an agent can only be seen as effective or efficient as a result of their socialisation wherein they are bestowed upon "*a set of dispositions that imply both their propensity and their ability to enter into and play the game*". In this study, R-A was displayed by students from different levels of "socialisation" and most of them succeeded regardless of a set of dispositions (low APS, for example) that implied that they could not enter the game of higher education. In addition, she agrees with Keogh et al. (2012:47) that people, in this case students, have the ability to shape their circumstances because they choose to believe that they can influence their lives and their environment. What is lacking in this illustration though, is an indication of the nature or "direction" of such shaping of circumstances.

The negative (and potentially devastating) effects of agency on higher education and student marks, as highlighted in the case of the #feesmustfall protests, caution against the assumption that agency necessitates a positive change. Consequently, resilience was introduced to focus on unexpectedly positive psychosocial development in negative situations (Ungar, 2008:21). In addition, even greater value can be found in the combined use of resilience and agency when using such a combination to distinguish between either positive or negative adaptation. In the case of a positive adaptation, R-A is at play. When the adaptation is negative, it may be referred to as NR-A. When defining the two concepts, R-A is the choice a person makes to change their circumstances through positive adaptation that leads to constructive individual consequences, upward mobility and improved circumstances. NR-A on the other hand is the choice a person makes to change their circumstances without positive adaptation that leads to detrimental individual consequences, a change in circumstances, but potentially without improved outcomes.

This highlights how the inclusion of R-A to supplement admission criteria could identify those students who would make the choice to utilise the vast amounts of resources available to them in order to succeed in their studies. Wilson-Strydom (2015:4) agreed that it is fundamental to allow for diversity in social, personal and environmental factors influencing students' abilities to make use of the resources available to them (for example, receiving access and funding). Consequently, the value of resilience as both an intra- and interpersonal trait that will allow the aforementioned diversity is highlighted once more. Establishing resilience in the ecology and cultural processes of the individual (Theron et al., 2015:17) could point to a student's probability of harnessing relationships and networks as resources in a university environment once access is granted (this could be relationships with lecturers, tutors, mentors or even peers). Intrapersonally, it places the responsibility of choice (at least to an extent) with the individual and may indicate that an individual student who displays R-A, would make the choice to utilise the necessary resources to succeed in their studies. Such a student then, despite perchance appearing underprepared, may still possess the capabilities to succeed (Rendón, Novak & Dowell, 2005:241).

In this study, the "ability" of a student to shape their circumstances through choosing to "bounce out" of those circumstances (such as transcending shortcomings in

schooling, language and social capital) by using available resources was displayed by students from different racial and social class groupings. Thus, using R-A as a measure to supplement admission criteria will not hinder equitable redress. As discussed previously in this study, race, as it currently forms part of the admission criteria at UP, may favour a black student from the middle class who had a privileged education over a black student from a rural area whose education was deficient. As such, education still reproduce the middle class instead of uplifting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Including R-A, however, could address this concern as it will identify potential for success within racial groupings, but without being influenced by class. To clarify, a black student from a good middle-class urban school may not show R-A, as R-A does not appear to be reproduced by social class. At the same time a black student from a deficient rural school, may display R-A and thus be selected. This study argues that the abovementioned scenario that used a combination of race and R-A, may be the answer to equitable redress.

Furthermore, the abovementioned scenario illustrates R-A's value in the sphere of higher education in that it could contribute to the explanation of why certain students succeed at university, against all odds. The context of higher education, as borrowed from Bourdieu, is a field in which any prospective student, as situated in their habitus, wishes to play. According to Bourdieu, these opportunities for play are predetermined by the amount of capital accumulated in the prospective student's habitus. As a result, the habitus (see Chapter 2, paragraph 2.5) will either become a barrier (Figure 8.1. a) or enable (Figure 8.1.b) a prospective student to play in the field of higher education.

Figure 8.1.a.

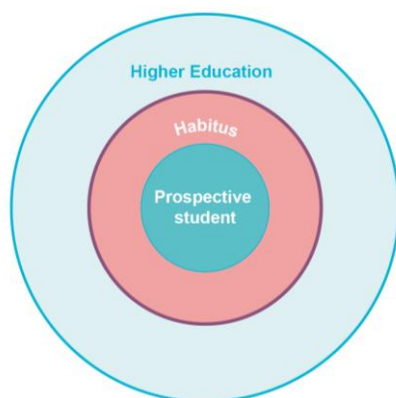
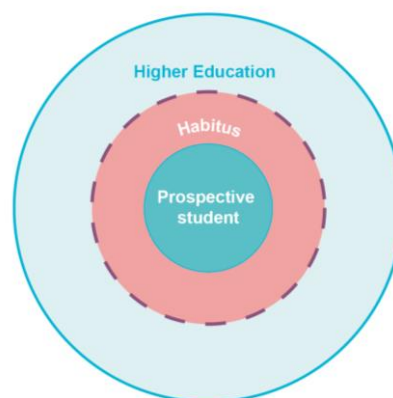
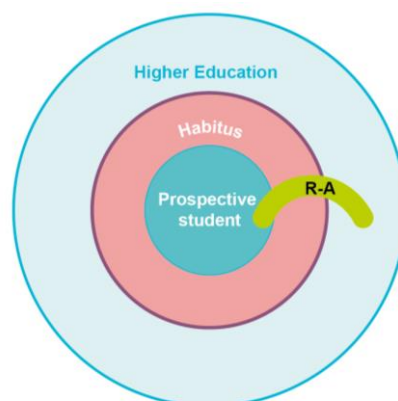


Figure 8.1.b.



As seen in the abovementioned scenario, habitus may not be as limiting as Bourdieu suggested. It illustrates the gap that exists in Bourdieu's theory as he neglected to consider that a prospective student's self-reflexive deliberation or metacognition (see Chapter 2, paragraph 2.8.1) can bring about judgments, choices and decisions with change as its consequence. Additionally, Bourdieu also did not recognise the resilient individual's ability to harness relationships with people (as resources) that are situated outside the habitus and in the student's various social contexts (home and university environment, for example) as is acknowledged by resilience studies' new focus on its ecological placement. A student who actively pursues relationships with human resources such as lecturers will in all probability change their academic circumstances. If the change, whether through intra- or interpersonal traits or a combination thereof, leads to positive adaptation, the prospective student displays R-A which will form a bridge whereby they will be enabled to cross the barrier created by their habitus (see Figure 8.1.c).

Figure 8.1.c.



Perceiving R-A as a bridge that allows a student to transcend barriers of their own habitus, sheds some light on the question of why certain students succeed at university, against all odds. It also addresses the gap in Bourdieu's theory by allowing a student to transcend a "restricting" habitus through the application of R-A. R-A may also have some implications for policy as discussed in the next section.

### 8.3.2. Resilient-agency (R-A): Implications for policy in higher education

To arrive at admission policies that are inclusive and "fair" and that aim for both a multicultural, multiracial and inclusive society, this study argues for holistic change on

all levels of the institution and the higher education arena at large, as discussed in Chapter 1. On the one hand, as argued by Palmer et al. (2011:3), it is proposed that the change take psychological (non-cognitive) factors such as R-A on a micro level into account as supplementary admission criteria. On the other hand, macro level changes in the higher education system as a whole should be brought about through the provision and effective channelling of students to various higher education options to suit their unique needs. Globally, the provision of various higher education options is recognised and, in many cases, addressed through policy. As a result, various higher education options are either already being offered or are in the process of being rolled out, as is the case in South Africa.

What appears to be lacking from policy, however, although it is mentioned in passing, is a plan to develop and implement admission measures based on prior non-cognitive skills such as R-A, that recognises the importance of both intra- and interpersonal traits and skills, to supplement the use of grade 12 results and race as admission tools, especially in alternative entry programmes (as this was the focus of this study).

Why the need to include prior non-cognitive skills such as R-A? Three important considerations, based on other studies, are highlighted. Firstly, race and/or class should not be disregarded as part of the admission criteria, as this may lead to a reversal of the progress already made in redressing past disadvantage, as appears to be the case in some American institutions (Rendón et al., 2005:241; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009:410). That being said, disadvantage itself, in South Africa and elsewhere, often implies poor quality schooling and subsequent underpreparedness for university. This underpreparedness is frequently wrongly viewed as inability and, as such, may hide a student's ability to succeed (Rendón et al., 227-228; 240-241; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014:54). Thus, as this study argues, the use of race in admission criteria and policy should be supplemented with a non-cognitive measure such as R-A that does not rely on previous academic achievements.

Finally, the issue of race and underpreparedness opens up another potential advantage in the marketing of a university to potential students, insofar it concerns the use of R-A as a measure in supplementing admission. In view of the underpreparedness of students (and perhaps particularly students from disadvantaged

backgrounds), Wilson-Strydom (2015:5) suggested that universities should perhaps focus less on marketing themselves as an institution and rather focus on the capabilities required to be prepared for university studies. If a measure of R-A is introduced to admission criteria and policy, the skills identified as possible indicators of R-A may be used in such a marketing strategy, alerting students like Michael to the fact that university studies might not be the appropriate option for them.

Thus, it is argued that the BQ studied and suggested in Chapter 7 (if proven to be successful in predicting students' potential) could serve to supplement admission policy and even improve the equity thereof at both government and institutional levels. This argument is based on the above discussion and the single, coordinated higher education system envisioned by DHET (2013:5) in South Africa and similar systems envisioned by or already in place in other countries. Such an instrument may aid students' awareness of the skills required for university studies and potentially those required by other types of higher education. It may be possible to communicate which skills are required by what type of institution in the single, coordinated higher education system when a non-cognitive measure such as R-A forms part of admission criteria and policy, and consequently offers a skill-set that can be measured and hence communicated.

The potential contribution of a measuring tool such as the BQ measuring R-A is that it will provide a complete view of a student without favouring a certain cognitive (and potentially advantaged) learner, or specific types of capital or social class or even race. As such, including measures of R-A in the admission policy will take care of the gap in the 2013 White Paper and the 2017 Draft National Plan for Post-School Education and Training. This will be achieved by addressing the need for institutions to improve their systems for apposite, equitable and inclusive placement of students through recognising potential and the likelihood of success (DHET, 2017:86).

### **8.3.3. Resilient-agency (R-A): Implications for practice in higher education**

In an attempt to ensure equitable access, as discussed in Chapter 1, many higher education institutions provide alternative entry programmes aimed at admitting students with lower marks and, at some institutions such as UP, students from



designated racial groups. The “fairness” of such programmes, however, has to be questioned when considering a case such as Michael’s. “Fairness” in this case, does not only pertain to race, as Michael is not from a previously disadvantaged racial group, but may have more to do with the ethical dilemma of admitting a student who does not show the necessary potential to succeed at university. Michael’s case also substantiates the earlier argument that the inclusion of measures of R-A to supplement admission criteria will not hinder equitable access. If a measure of R-A had been used in admitting Michael into university, it would not have privileged him with regards to access, even though he is from a previously advantaged race. In fact, it may have denied him access on the basis of a lack of the skills necessary to succeed at university.

Michael was admitted to UP by way of the Faculty of Humanities’ Extended Programme, based on his lower APS. This APS immediately indicated potential risk factors, yet no non-cognitive measures were used to identify R-A that would have equipped Michael to overcome the risk. After much trauma, he eventually discontinued his studies. Had a measure of R-A been used as supplementary admission criteria, Michael may have been spared the additional trauma and could have found a more suitable alternative to university studies sooner.

At the same time, a non-cognitive measure of R-A would have identified a student like Lisebo as having the potential to succeed at university despite her lower APS and her even failing her first year. R-A, however, enabled her to change her circumstances, which resulted in positive adaptation and the eventual completion of her degree.

These two cases highlight the argument that universities should ensure, as discussed in paragraph 8.3.1, that the students they admit are reasonably prepared for university studies and have a reasonable chance of success. “Reasonable” in this case would refer to students who are presenting with risk but demonstrate R-A which may enable them to overcome the risk. Supplementing admission criteria with a measure of R-A, such as the BQ in Chapter 7 (pending the outcome of more studies) will allow a university to redirect students in Michael’s position to a higher education institution offering a different type or level of education before subjecting him to failure at a university.

Such a referral system will create an ideal higher education arena where students are advised based on the best opportunities for success based on their unique skills. In South Africa, such a system will contribute to the enabling of the envisaged CAS (DHET, 2013:31), as discussed in Chapter 1, to channel students to the various institutions in the country's proposed multi-optioned higher education system like universities, institutions providing vocational and skills training, and community colleges.

This section concludes by arguing that the selection criteria used in the current model, i.e. providing alternative entry programmes to address the equity dilemma, should be supplemented with measures of R-A to improve equity and fairness.

#### **8.4. Addressing the research questions**

The overarching question that guided this study was: *How, if at all, can a BQ (see Appendix A) be used to identify indicators of resilience and agency (later referred to as resilient-agency or R-A) in a university seeking a way to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds?*

The BQ used in this study did not identify indicators of R-A. This can be attributed to the inherent limitations of the instrument itself, as it was not designed to identify R-A. It can also be attributed to the fact that the students who completed the BQ were already admitted to university and therefore not as motivated to complete the BQ as prospective students may be.

That being said, it is recommended that a pilot study be undertaken to test the validity of the proposed BQ presented in Chapter 7. If that BQ manages to unearth the indicators found in the interviews, the BQ may be used in conjunction with grade 12 marks to supplement the admission policies and practices of higher education institutions. Consequently, students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be supported, as the BQ does not rely on the kinds of capital that is required to excel in cognitive measures that these students may be lacking. Instead, the BQ looks for potential in students in the form of R-A.

In addition to the overarching question, three sub-questions were posed and will be addressed next:

1. *How, if at all, do the indicators of resilience and agency predict academic performance in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria in South Africa?*

One can only really answer this question by means of statistical proof, which this study did not provide. However, the indicators identified were present in the narrative of every effectively navigating student. Even Lisebo, who was initially identified as a non-effectively navigating student, displayed indicators of R-A and eventually completed her studies successfully. In stark comparison, the only non-effectively navigating student, did not exhibit the indicators of R-A. Therefore, it is argued that the direct correlation between these indicators and academic success merit further investigation.

2. *How could this biographical instrument be further developed to specifically identify resilience and agency to supplement the indicators of the disadvantaged, such as race and class, to determine equitable access to higher education programmes?*

Proposed changes to the BQ used in this study is suggested in Chapter 7, with the intention of identifying R-A as a possible non-cognitive predictor of academic success in higher education. The non-cognitive nature of this measure has the potential to, if implemented (pending future pilot studies as discussed above) as an additional admission measure, transcend the very rigid (and inequitable) classification of race and class, as well as the cognitive requirements of Gr 12 marks. Such an admission measure could offer equal opportunities to all students who possess the potential for higher education at university level.

3. *How, if at all, can such a biographical instrument be designed in an easily analysable and interpretable manner?*

In an ideal world, the BQ proposed in Chapter 7 needs to retain questions of an open-ended nature. As further proposed in that chapter, some of the biographical data and generic questions could be set up using pre-coded answers. It is believed that, especially as far as the Humanities Faculty at UP is concerned, this is

feasible, as approximately only 30 students are allowed on the Extended Programme. It would be recommended that these students complete the BQ and placement be made based on the combination of APS, NBT and the BQ.

Alternative possibilities would be to use computer software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti to analyse the responses in cases of large volumes of students, with a subsample still being scrutinised for profounder information.

In Chapter 7, optional suggestions were made for questions with pre-coded answers that may be used in certain sections of the BQ. The reliability and validity of such pre-coded questions in identifying R-A would, however, first have to be studied before attempting to include them in the BQ.

### **8.5. The shortcomings, limitations and trustworthiness of the study**

Although the admission policy of the Faculty of Humanities formed an integral baseline to this study, and various local and international literature on the issue of admission were consulted, it was neither the aim nor the mandate of this study to be or to attempt to be a comparative study on various admission policies and processes.

Due to the nature of this study, various opinions were expressed by the author and through the inclusion of other scholars' work on the status of academia in the present day. This study, however, does not offer, and should not be seen, as a systematic critique of the ruling order in the academia. The opinions expressed should be seen in the context of this study as pertaining solely to the aspect to which it speaks.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the study recognises, for example, the existence, importance and potential impact of collective agency, although its focus was largely on individual agency in relation to the individual student's ability to effectively navigate university studies.

Respondents who completed the questionnaires were students already admitted into the Faculty of Humanities at UP. The quality and content of these responses may thus differ from those provided by students still seeking placement at the university. That being said, the two criteria of importance, namely students with an APS < 29 and the desire to study at UP correspond and thus increase the relevance of the responses.

Moreover, these students have not been tested with a similar BQ before and were therefore not corrupted by previous exposure to this type of testing. Finally, the BQ eventually served to initiate the process of narrative analysis and formed part of the narratives. The responses from the BQ did not contribute to the main data contained in the narratives. To conclude, the respondents still met the requirements of the study.

Respondents included only Faculty of Humanities students, which may raise questions of generalisability in other faculties and, consequently, other universities. Transcending of structures and bouncing out of negative situations is, however, a universal phenomenon which may address this concern to some extent.

Questions may arise around the generalisability of the results due to the small interview sample of only seven students. It should be noted though that saturation was reached in the narrative analysis of the field texts. Besides, although small, the sample included students from different racial and cultural backgrounds and fields of study in the Faculty of Humanities.

The trustworthiness of the data was enhanced by comparing the responses to the BQ questions with those given to the same questions in the interviews. Where disparity arose, probing was used to obtain clarity.

The study presents sufficient descriptive data to allow for comparison in future studies by including both a summary of the narratives (Chapter 6); the complete narratives (Appendix F); and suggested answers, extracted from the narratives, to proposed questions for possible inclusion in a future BQ (Chapter 7).

## **8.6. The potential transferability of the research results in another context outside South Africa**

As discussed previously, the need to explore more appropriate and equitable ways of selecting students who show the potential to complete degree studies at university level is an international challenge. For this reason, the outcomes of this study may be applicable to other countries and higher education institutions that face similar equity dilemmas as South Africa.

This study has the potential to benefit the international university communities in terms of providing a tool that could be piloted in their institution. Should the BQ prove to be useful, it may improve institutions' ability to responsibly select students who are best suited for university studies, consequently also increasing the number of graduates.

Because the BQ is a non-cognitive measure focussing on R-A (a human trait displayed worldwide), it does not advantage a certain type of cognitive learner and is therefore transferable to various cultural contexts.

The results obtained from an instrument such as the BQ proposed in Chapter 7 may provide the opportunity to direct students to other institutions in the coordinated system of higher education, thereby ensuring that the varying needs of students are met.

### **8.7. Directions for future research**

A pilot study should be undertaken to test the validity of the proposed changes to the BQ as found in Chapter 7.

Should the need arise, a separate pilot study may be needed to test the possibility of using the optional pre-coded answers, also provided in Chapter 7.

The ability of a BQ used as a measure to direct students between the various higher education institutions could be examined.

Further research should be undertaken to develop additional measures to ensure equitable access to higher education, especially in view of South Africa's proposed multi-optioned higher education system.

### **8.8. Overall conclusion**

This study explored the use of a BQ as an instrument that will identify indicators of R-A in students with potential to effectively navigate university studies, thereby addressing true disadvantage in supplementing race and/or class as criteria. Using only race and/or class as admission criteria together with Grade12 results will only serve to perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Conversely, what started out as two separate concepts amalgamated through the process of this study and led to the

introduction of a new conceptual language in the form of two distinct amalgamated concepts, R-A and NR-A. The distinction between the two concepts is valuable in order to understand individual positive adaptations in the face of adversity. However, it also holds the promise of understanding individual attempts at mobility or collective agentic efforts such as #feesmustfall with eventual detrimental consequences.

It is the author's hope that this study will pave the way towards equitable and "fair" selection of students, thereby addressing the equity dilemma, redressing past disadvantages, but most importantly, setting the stage for future advancement of university graduates as active and well-equipped members of a global society. The equity dilemma is not unique to UP or even to South Africa, but is a global phenomenon that has to be addressed so that future generations can take this planet upwards and forward. #makedisadvantagehistory!

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## APPENDIX A: Biographical questionnaire

**ONCE COMPLETED, PLEASE RETURN TO HSB 13-2 OR PLACE IN BOX 32,  
HSB VOYER**

**PILOT BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS,  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

### **SECTION A**

SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_

FIRST NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

HOME ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

MARITAL STATUS \_\_\_\_\_

GENDER \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT TEL NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

HOME LANGUAGE \_\_\_\_\_

NATIONALITY \_\_\_\_\_

---

In the Faculty of Humanities, not all students gain automatic entrance to study. The Institutional Proficiency Test is then used as an additional measure for placement. However even though the NBT is good measure, it is not sufficient in identifying students who should be allowed to study in the Faculty. As a result, this questionnaire will be used to support the Institutional Proficiency Test and improve the selection process by enabling the Faculty's Admissions Committee to understand your personal circumstances and experiences. Please answer this questionnaire as fully and honestly as possible. The information you provide will be treated confidentially. **For 2013 this questionnaire will only form part of a pilot study and will not be used in any way to place students.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**SECTION B**

How would you describe the area in which your high school is situated?

Suburban  Township  Rural  Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate with a tick (✓) which of the following facilities you had access to in your high school:

Electricity		Brick classrooms	
Computers		Blackboard	
Science labs		Overhead projectors	
Desks (one for each learner)		Playing/sports fields	
Library		Sport equipment	
Restroom / toilets		Gymnasium	

Describe the most difficult or challenging situation you encountered during your schooling.

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How did you deal with this challenge?

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What language(s) were used by your high school teachers while teaching?

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What were your matric subjects, and what were your results in each of these subjects?

Matric subject	Result

Do you think your results are a true reflection of your ability? Yes  No

If no, please explain.

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Did you repeat matric or re-write some subjects? Yes  No

If yes, please explain.

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**SECTION C**

In which year did you matriculate? \_\_\_\_\_

If you matriculated before 2012, what did you do before applying for entry to the university (e.g. study, part-time or full-time work)

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If you have been studying, please provide the following details:

Name of Institution \_\_\_\_\_

Year/s of registration: From \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Course studied \_\_\_\_\_

Reason(s) for leaving:

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### **SECTION D**

We would like to know of any achievements at school, in your home and in your community that you think are likely to contribute to your success at university

List awards, prizes, or recognition you received at school for your **academic achievement** and in which grade

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List extra-curricular (non-academic) activities in which you have participated (Sport, cultural, community engagement etc.)

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List positions of leadership or office you have held

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Describe any other achievements that you are proud of

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Have you ever done any work (voluntary or paid) inside or outside of your home?  
Yes  No

If yes, describe this work and for you long and how often you did the work

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**SECTION E**

We would like to know more about your interests and career plans.

Who would you regard as your most important role model(s)?

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What have you learnt from them?

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Describe any events or experiences in your life that you consider to have contributed to who you are now or what you want to achieve in the future.

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What recent news items attracted your attention, and why?

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If you were given an opportunity to spend an hour with a well-known person, who would you choose, and why?

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Is a degree in the Faculty of Humanities your first choice? Yes  No

If no, please explain

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Why do you think a Humanities degree is most appropriate for you?

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What career would you be interested in following after completing your degree?

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Which four subjects offered in the Faculty would you consider studying?

Subject 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Subject 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Subject 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Subject 4 \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION F**

How do you intend to finance your studies?

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Where will you live while studying?

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If your intention is to stay in a University residence, have you applied? Yes  No

Is there any factor, (e.g. disability, family circumstances, a recent death etc.) that you think might affect your studies?

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## APPENDIX B

### Faculty of Humanities

### Faculty Plan for 2014

Diversity and Transformation

#### EE profile against Faculty target

Table 18. Staffing: Racial Diversity Trends

	Black	Coloured	Indian	Total	Other	White	Total
2011	48	13	6	67	0	219	286
2012	58	13	6	77	1	231	309
July 2013	65	13	9	87	0	215	302

Table 19. EE Planning Cycle: 2009 to 2012. Progress towards EE Goals (as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012)

	South African								Foreign		Total
	Male				Female				Male	Female	
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	African	Coloured	Indian	White			
Goals – Academic Staff 2009-2012	8	4	2	53	22	0	6	96			197
Academic Staff 03/2012	10	3	1	72	13	2	5	102	7	6	221
Goals – Support Staff 2009-2012	17	0	0	11	13	10	1	42	0	1	95
Support Staff 03/2012	21	0	0	14	14	6	1	47	0	2	105

Table 20. Students: Racial Diversity Trends

Indicator	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
16. % UG Black contact students	41.37	42.21	43.43	45.09	47.01
17. % PG Black contact students	49.65	50.61	52.29	53.25	54.63

## 2013 Targets

In order to address the significantly skewed employment and student enrolment patterns in the Faculty, the Faculty had decided to develop plans to enable it to meet the following targets.

- a. Increasing the complement of academic staff of colour in the Faculty by 2 per cent per annum, so that we can reach the University average by 2016
- b. Increasing the complement of under- and postgraduate students of colour in the Faculty by 2 per cent per annum, so that we can reach at least the University average by 2016

**Table 21.** Student Enrolments (by 'race')

Total number of registered students (as on 2 April 2013)								
	Asian	Black	Coloured	Total		White	Undisclosed	Total
2010	33	356	37	426	29%	1041		1467
2011	32	455	43	530	36.45%	924		1454
2012	42	384	39	465	34.65%	877		1342
2013	37	534	66	637	40%	964	5	1606

## Progress

- a. The Faculty had clearly not met the first target listed above
- b. The number of first-year Black students in Faculty of Humanities has increased from 29 per cent in 2010 to 40 per cent in 2013. There was a steady growth in the number of students of colour between 2010 and 2013, except for 2012 when there was a slump. It is also clear from Table 21 that the number of Black students in the Faculty of Humanities is far lower than that of the University. In order to address this problem, we have to look at the marketing of our Faculty, and the realization rate of admitted new admission of students.

## 2014 Targets

- a. To increase the percentage of staff of colour to 20 per cent

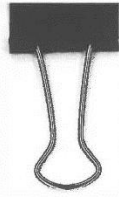
To increase the percentage of Black first-year students to 43 per cent in 2014.



## **APPENDIX C: Excel spreadsheet**

(Please find this template as a separate attachment.)

## APPENDIX D: Permission from the Registrar



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Research Ethics Committee

13 June 2014

Prof N Grové  
Registrar  
Administration Building 4-23  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

KANTOOR VAN DIE REGISTRATEUR  
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

2014 -06- 17

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
PRETORIA 0002

Dear Prof. Grové

**Project:** Race, class and equity dilemma: using a biographical questionnaire to place/ select students at the University of Pretoria based on indicators for potential namely resilience and agency

**Researcher:** HS Byles

**Supervisor:** Prof A Bezuidenhout

**Department:** Sociology

**Reference Number:** 01294520

The study was *conditionally* approved by the Research Ethics Committee at a meeting held on 13 June 2014 as students and the institutional identity are involved. We request your consideration of the proposed research and will inform the researcher of your decision.

Attached is a copy of the research proposal as well as the ethical clearance application.

Regards

**Tracey Andrew**  
Research Ethics Committee

**Recommendation:**

*Approved*

-----  
**Prof N Grové**  
Registrar, University of Pretoria

Research Ethics Committee Members: Dr L Blokland; Prof M-H Coetzee; Dr JEH Grobler; Prof KL Harris; Ms H Klopper; Prof A Mlambo, Dr C Panebianco-Warrens; Dr C Puttergill; Prof GM Spies; Prof E Tajard, Dr P Wood

## APPENDIX E: Permission from Prof Sharp



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Office of the Deputy Dean

27/02/2012

**RE: Permission to administer questionnaires to first year students during the 2012 and 2013 Orientation periods.**

Dear Hestie Byles

You are herewith granted permission to administer the Biographical Questionnaires that will form part of your PhD study to the first year students during the above mentioned periods.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Sharp', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Prof. John Sharp**  
**Chair: Postgraduate Committee &**  
**Research Ethics Committee**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
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## **APPENDIX F: The seven Narratives**

### **A. JENNIFER'S NARRATIVE**

Four elements stand out in Jennifer's narrative namely the immense role the cultural capital she gained from religion plays in her life; the way she submerges herself in her academic work in the face of traumatic events and how it propels her towards R-A; the pivotal part her gap year played in her journey towards tertiary studies and the vast amounts of R-A that transpired as a result; and her use of language as a way of expression, a vehicle for R-A.

#### **A.1. Background information derived from the BQ and the interview**

Jennifer completed the BQ in 2013 when she was 23 years old and married. She is the youngest of 3 children, her older siblings both being boys. According to the Employment Equity Act classification she is a white South African and her home language is English. She was enrolled for BA Languages and had an APS of 29 in matric. She attributed this low APS to the fact that she had to self-study in her final year of the Cambridge system whereas she does better in a classroom setting. This definitely appears to be the case as her first-year grade point average shot up to 93.52.

My initial qualitative grading of her questionnaire, gave her a resilience mark of 5/5. I based this mark on the fact that she appeared to possess ample (linguistic and pedagogical) cultural capital. She attended private schools and listed many awards and achievements. She indicated that she was a leader in various capacities and she appeared passionate about what she wanted to study at that time.

Jennifer was the first student who replied to my SMS inviting her to participate in an interview. She replied with "Absolutely. I am willing". She was one of the students with whom I had an interview scheduled before the student protests on #feesmustfall but had to reschedule as a result.

I met with Jennifer on March 16, 2016. She was 25 years old at the time of the interview and had been married for about four to five years. She had a class in another building just before the interview and informed me via whatsapp that she was going to be a bit

late. She arrived shortly after and my first impression was one of slight surprise as she looked very different from her profile photo on whatsapp. She struck me as someone to whom appearance was not a top priority but she was friendly and appeared confident.

Early on in the interview I realised that Jennifer is a very expressive person, this is mentioned as a trait associated with resilience in Chapter 2. Of all the interviewees, she spoke the most, often repeating herself unnecessarily or elaborating on redundant arguments. Nonetheless the interview went well and she was forthcoming and willing to share, often taking time to think in order to give comprehensive, apparently honest answers.

## **A.2. Structure**

When mentioning structure, one of the most important components to visit in Jennifer's case, is family. It became obvious to me that family is important to Jennifer and an important structure in her life. At times family served as a strong motivator, not only because of the positivity of the structure and its support, but often because of negative factors that stimulated upward mobility. When family members tried to discourage her, it made her want to prove them wrong. This seemed especially true in the case of her brothers whom she experienced as jealous, "because they didn't have that type of achievement, none of my brothers had gotten a degree yet even though they are older than me". Jennifer felt hurt by this, "don't lessen my achievements just because they are not important to you, you know like, they are important to me so that should make them important to you, even if you are jealous, even if you do resent me for it you should hide those feelings and put on a pretty face and just be like 'oh my goodness Jennifer, wow well done' you know that's what you should do. It made me resentful towards them like ya, it's just not nice". Jennifer however admits that even though this hurt, she applied cognitive appraisal and it made her work harder and made her more determined: "I'm super competitive". A negative and potentially disabling structure nudged Jennifer to apply cognitive appraisal and be a resilient-agent by bouncing back from a negative situation and at the same time changing her individual structure.

If one were to revisit Bourdieu for a moment and place Jennifer's structure in terms of cultural capital in its institutionalised form, it in actual fact contained very little thereof. Rather her family consisted of two generations (with the exception of one grandfather) of children who disappointed their parents by not pursuing tertiary education. This one grandfather contributed the only cultural capital in institutionalised form in Jennifer's habitus and thus there was very little cultural capital in the form of education that should have been reproduced according to Bourdieu. Jennifer's structure then, according to Bourdieu, would almost dictate that she would also not attempt tertiary studies. On the other hand, this grandfather's own achievements together with his desire to see his children educated and replicating cultural capital in the institutionalised form to future generations, may have sparked Jennifer's strong will to study. Jennifer remarked of her paternal grandfather that he "...graduated university at something like 17 years, kind of a genius. He saw himself as a genius as well. Very, very academic and very into the sciences. So ya, which is interesting that my dad would then not go to university uhm but ya, it just worked out that way. I think my granddad was quite unhappy about his children that weren't getting degrees because he was so academic but ya".

Did this become a motivating force – an enabling structure - in Jennifer's own life? Perhaps there were subtle messages implanted in her mind and consequently in her habitus - that she needed to obtain a degree. Whatever the case may have been, it became obvious to me that Jennifer had always had her mind set on studying further and she would do whatever was required to make sure that happened. In this case the absence of pedagogical capital from her habitus seems to have created an enabling structure and activated resilient agency in her to transcend the barriers that may have existed through positive adaptations.

Religion forms another structure in Jennifer's life, an enabling structure at that. I found her to be comfortable in a space where she can clearly define black and white, right and wrong. Religion offered her this comfort and may be why in her case, it was an enabling system. As will become evident later, Jennifer links certain deeds or acts to rewards, or blessings, in a very causal way. This provides her comfort and security within which her daily existence and behaviour can be causally aligned. Religion

becomes a safety net against which she can check herself. A moral compass that reinforces her choices and directs her decisions.

Jennifer emphasised the importance of religion in her family: “religion is like the foundation of our family”. Again, it would appear that Jennifer’s family and religion is what motivates her most (and the interaction of two traits linked to resilience probably may strengthen the R-A in her habitus). Her religion appears to be more than something she merely believes in; it is something that drives her to transcend barriers. It is part and parcel of her cultural capital, habitus and a way in which she views the world.

### **A.3. Capital**

Jennifer’s story of social capital starts with her being part of an involved family and, to this day, living in close proximity to them. At the time of the interview, she lived with her husband in a cottage on her parents’ small holding. Jennifer’s family structure invested much time in the acquisition of social capital in the form of family-time. She recalled her fondest memories as a child as spending time with her family, “... getting together, doing big family things with the extended family. Every Christmas Eve we used to have everyone over at our house and my mom would do the whole meal and whatever and so we’d have cousins and second cousins and everybody coming through. Which was then sad because they left the country ... so then the family got smaller, divorces happened in other sections of the family and stuff so she [Jennifer’s mother] ended up hating the Christmas thing a little bit”. This evolution or transition of her family life may have boosted her levels of social capital as it sensitised her to various institutions and orderings of family structures, and in effect, different family and social structures and varying rules in the field of family interaction. Could it be that learning different rules of the field could expand the habitus of a person by enhancing the interpersonal thought processes and thereby improving the skills of the resilient-agent? Perhaps this event adds to cognitive appraisal. To this effect this one occurrence related to social capital may very well boost R-A for the future as it may have taught Jennifer skills to bounce out of a similar negative situation or challenge and change a structure that may exist around family and family life, even relationships in general.

Within Jennifer's immediate family structure social capital was gained as she had the advantage of growing up with her siblings. She mentioned that she enjoyed playing outside with her brothers and engaging in imaginary play. She recalled feeling left out when her family would leave her to sleep in over weekends and she would wake to noises outside and they were working in the garden together but they did not wake her to join them. Her fondest memories with her family shows that within the acquiring of social capital, Jennifer also gained cultural capital (music and religion) that included "... working together as a family, singing, music was a very important part of growing up as well and church, especially religion was very, very vital to us (both are important elements of cultural capital in its embodied form) ... [a]nd holidays; travelling; road trips especially, (laugh) down to Cape Town visiting my grandparents in \*\*\*. Ya, so, being together I guess". In "being together", a lot of social skills and understanding towards others are shared and your own skills of negotiating the world is extended. This could have led to social attachment which is mentioned in Chapter 2 as a trait associated with resilience.

Jennifer and her husband's living on the same property as her parents' impacts in economic capital as it makes it much more affordable than it would have been had they lived on their own. She also experienced living with her husband while studying in general as positive: "Good, everything was good and nice, living with your husband means there's not like chores that have to, have to, have to be done. If the house doesn't get cleaned, oh well, it's not like your mom's on your back saying "why didn't you clean your room' and stuff like that so that's kind of nice...".

Jennifer listed her mother and father as her most important role models and indicated that they imparted the following cultural capital: leadership skills, problem solving skills, how to succeed, how to work hard, how to learn to do things herself and be independent and how to be goal centred and driven. Many of these attributes are also linked to resilience. Jennifer described an incidence in her life where this had an impact on her as the time in 2009 when she applied to become a camp counsellor, specifically a horse-riding counsellor, at an American camp. This was to serve as a gap year while she was still unsure what she wanted to study at that time. Apparently, a few days after she arrived at the camp she was let go due to a lack of experience with horses. According to Jennifer she never misrepresented her skills, however, the camp did not



specify that their horses were rather wild horses and that Jennifer did not have experience with. “My mom was a go-getter, a don’t-mess-with-me type of a thing. She was a tiny person but people just fell before her because she was this presence and this power ... and that’s why we clashed so much I think because I’m like that as well, and you can’t have two in the same room together so ... when I got fired I fought them, like that’s when everybody said that I should actually become a lawyer because that’s what I’m actually good at, I’m good at fighting back (R-A) you know and not allowing people to take advantage of me so ... that’s what I did with the camp and eventually I got out of the financial obligations that they were trying to force on me because I said this was not my fault (self-efficacy□), this is your misjudgement, you sort it out (cognitive appraisal), I’m not paying you your money and it ended up that they just didn’t want to fight with me anymore so they were just like ‘okay fine’. So I suppose the ability to fight for what I believe in and then also when it came to studying at school for example (she also challenged and transcended curriculum structures – R-A), fighting to maintain my standards, religiously as well, doing books at school that I didn’t feel comfortable with, I was then able to go and approach the teachers privately and say ‘I’m not comfortable with this’ and then they would change the syllabus for me”.

As mentioned earlier, and linked to the previous section, is the large part religion plays in Jennifer’s life in setting the rules by which she lives. “I don’t study on Sundays because we believe firmly in keeping the Sabbath day holy and the Sabbath day is a day of rest so studying on a Sunday is not resting so it’s not sanctioned by God as we believe, some people in our church do it, I believe firmly that I don’t, that’s how I was raised and I believe that I’ve seen those blessings, I mean if you look at my results, I’ve never ever studied on a Sunday and yet I have an average of 91.3 for my entire degree so it’s paid off”. This is the causal fashion in which Jennifer views religion, and life, that was mentioned earlier.

Apart from keeping Sundays as a day of rest, Jennifer is also very involved in her church and they serve a lot at church. She however feels that these commitments impacted her studies positively and “because there was a level of sacrificing something for something better (again the causal relationship is indicated here) and then you get blessed by God”.

Jennifer found having friends who shared the same sort of religious feelings (or rather religious cultural capital) as her to be beneficial: "... which helped a lot in first year to find that actual foundation and connect with somebody with the same sort of value system as you ...". This supports Bourdieu's claim, discussed in Chapter 2, that people who share similar cultural capital, communicates better.

Her family was a strong support system during her school years. Jennifer felt that her maternal grandmother was the most supportive person when she did well academically (this soon became a recurring theme in Jennifer's life, and indicates the rules for her immediate social field – do certain actions such as performing well academically – and reap benefits: support from her grandmother). Furthermore, her parents were continuously proud and supportive of all of Jennifer's achievements: "my mom for example would jump up and down with me until she broke her toe, (laugh) that's how excited she would get. She would probably be close up there with my grandmother in how proud she was ... my dad's a man of few words but ya he was always very proud, and he was always just of the feeling, with his background and stuff, that his kids were going to do very great things and stuff and so he expected it really\*, not like in a 'you will do this' way, just that he knew there was something good coming for everybody ...". I am of the opinion that this "expectation", this desire for cultural capital in its institutionalised form, may have deposited cultural capital that formed part of the bridge in her habitus that allows Jennifer to transcend her structural barriers. It may also be the very fuel that allows her to make the choice to change her circumstances, and adapt positively through R-A She may not have grown up in a home that offered all the passed-on generational pedagogical capital, which is according to my understanding a precursor to cultural capital in its institutionalised form, but it made up for that with social capital in the form of support and (embodied) cultural capital in the form of expectation (adding to this off course that she attended good schools). Expectation that gave Jennifer the agentic skills to transcend her structure that should, according to Bourdieu, have reproduced yet another generation of children who did not study to tertiary level.

When Jennifer talks about her father's "background and stuff", she alludes to the fact that there appear to have been a lot of pressure placed on some of Jennifer's grandparents and her own father to study for tertiary degrees, but this apparently never

realised. This forms part of the desire for pedagogical capital, and not merely accepting the lack thereof and this desire would later surface in Jennifer's own life. As mentioned earlier, neither of her parents studied to tertiary level, in fact her mother only obtained her matric later on in her life through a private college (highlighting that education, at least to a certain extent, was important to them). Her father works in IT but never received that much desired (albeit from his own father) formal qualification post school.

When Jennifer was around 14 years old and just two years into high school, her father employment was terminated and he consequently developed suicidal depression. Jennifer described this as the most difficult or challenging situation that she encountered during her schooling. Yet, she accumulated social capital through the support of her school principal during this difficult time. The school she attended during that time was a new private school that had just opened and had only eight learners in the entire school. As a result, and because he was a family friend, they had a very close relationship with the principal. "I mean when my mom couldn't come and fetch us sometimes because of my dad's issues and stuff, then he would wait with us at school and be silly and sing Lion King songs (laugh) and whatever and cheer us up ... So ya that was a good support structure there".

That same principal who was their physics teacher as well, became one of Jennifer's favourite teachers because "... he was funny, he was hilarious, he used to like be very physical in class and he would do very physical demonstrations like talking about how particles move in a liquid and he would like dance around in the front of the class and stuff like that". Jennifer also mentions that her maths teacher at that same school, was also very influential in her life: "he just had this passion for his subject that just kind of, you know it's those teachers that have like this passion and they love it so much that they just have to express it and that just comes across to you and you just have to start loving it as a student as well so ... that was probably the characteristic in him and the school principal and physics teacher ...". It was probably also a characteristic that taught Jennifer a curriculum of pedagogical cultural capital that is almost as important as growing up in a home entrenched with pedagogical cultural capital.

Moving along Jennifer's academic career, she views language in academics as "... really, really important. I mean I studied BA languages so (laugh), very, very important because it's how you express yourself, I mean that's how you have to put your arguments across ...". She is currently a tutor and therefore has first-hand experience of how students, with English as their second language, find it difficult to translate their thoughts into academic writing. "... it's very important because you need to learn how to be formal and it influences the way you interact in business in future and all of those types of things so it's really important to learn how to put what you think into words otherwise it's kind of a trap I think. Language can be quite limiting if you can't use it properly ...". This categorises language as a system of cultural capital that can enable or disable in the most profound ways and supports Bourdieu's view on the use of language as a tool to reproduce the dominant through the selective withholding and sharing of language, and closer to home, this clearly reflects the goal of the #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall movements in demanding decolonised education in instruction in other African languages.

Personally, Jennifer also finds language to be an important tool in her own life "... I don't know, I talk a lot so (laugh) that's always been my thing ... I just use words a lot, language is very important to me because that's how I express myself and it always has been". Jennifer also found that language enabled her to talk to fellow students and approach lecturers in order to find out exactly what is expected of her. On another level, "... it is a means of expression which has gotten me through I mean, this year I'm doing creative writing and it's like really an outlet, it helps you to cope with the stresses of university and stuff like that. So, without it I think I would be a bit lost (laugh)". This is an illustration of my previous point. Language became a system that enabled Jennifer to excel and to be resilient-agentic, to approach lecturers and teachers - an important skill to own once at university. This is a very good example of active coping which is a trait associated with resilience in Chapter 2. Students who do not operate in a sphere where a language structure enables them to own the cultural capital to behave in such manners, may find themselves lost in their academic work, unable and/or unwilling (due to the lack of cultural capital) to make use of the resources available to them.

The strong influence of academic performance as a pillar in her life was also mentioned when Jennifer looked back on her being a top student in school: "I mean I loved the way it felt to be the top student, I'm very competitive ... (laugh). It was like ... searching for this high type of thing, something to hold onto (and building self-esteem). Like it could be a coping mechanism, like I said with the hardships that I went through, ...that was something ... concrete that I could say, 'look, even though this happened to me I am not a failure', you know. I guess that's kind of the motivation behind it. Perhaps it also translates into mastery\* and positive self-esteem\*, and it definitely adds to cognitive appraisal. Here one also sees a good example of how resilience and agency imprints on Jennifer's habitus and equips her to act as a potential agent in future when she will probably also be able to say to herself "... look, even though this happened to me I am not a failure".

Other cultural and social capital Jennifer credits herself with are leadership skills, communication with other people and working with people in groups and teams "... although I am still a very controlling person so even when I am working in a team I'll probably still do everything just to double check, (laugh) you know, ...".

In 2012, Jennifer finally decided that it was time to pursue her life-long ideal of studying further: "... probably in 2012 was the year that I spent thinking it out and talking to my [then] husband-to-be (utilising social capital) ... and then eventually I settled on BA languages because I always wanted to be a stay-at-home mom so it made sense to study the thing that I could do from home rather than the thing that would require me to be in an office all the time. Now that I had found my companion ... in life and we were going to marry, then I guess the decision was easier to make, ... and I guess I felt old so I had to start studying (laugh)". It is interesting to see here how she is embarking on her own future with the reproduction of the social capital that had been central to her own life, at the front of her mind when she arranges all her decisions around her desire to be a stay-at-home mom who can provide social capital in the form of family support and closeness to her future children.

Apart from a degree in the Faculty of Humanities enabling Jennifer to do things like freelance editing or writing for example and be a stay-at-home mom, it is also, as mentioned earlier, a means of expression to her, a coping mechanism ingrained in her

habitus: “I mean, creative writing, ... and the analytical side of literature and stuff like that, it’s helped me to learn skills about looking at life and questioning things and not just taking everything at face value and all those types of things so it’s got such a broad range of stuff, it’s not just analytical, it’s not just creative, it’s like a whole mix of everything which I feel is very satisfying because I’m left and right brain equally so. I think if I was just doing maths for example I would go crazy because there’s no creative expression there at all”.

In terms of economic capital, even though Jennifer’s parents were not in a position to pay for her studies, their economic standing did allow Jennifer to apply for a student loan that financed her studies for the first two years. In her third year she was able to merge economic and cultural capital when she was accepted into her church’s loan programme that offered a very low interest rate. This again points to the importance of religion in her life, not purely on an emotional or spiritual level, but also on a survival/coping level in terms of providing for her financial needs and helping her to align her life.

For honours she was awarded achievement bursaries that now cover all her expenses. She found it difficult to find bursaries for her undergraduate degree as she felt “... it was just not there”. Apart from Jennifer’s parents not being in a position to pay for her higher education, she felt that as she was married at the time of starting her studies, paying for it had become hers and her husband’s responsibility. However, she again did not allow her social standing to dictate to her but social capital in the form of family support assisted her in transcending the structure of financial restriction. Additionally, internal locus of control\*, adaptability\* and her belief in herself\* and that she can and should be studying at tertiary level, shaped her habitus and allowed her to do what was necessary. “... so in first year we struggled a lot financially, needing to get help from family ... a lot ... we had family who bought us groceries you know (laugh), ya it was mainly family, and also we got into a bit of debt, credit card debt ... which we eventually were able to pay off with the big job that my husband got with his freelancing ... now I am in a situation with having achieved such good results, my bursaries for honours pay for my whole four years of study. So it’s very good encouragement for people to do well”.

#### **A.4. Resilient-agency (R-A)**

Jennifer felt that her father's job loss and suicidal depression forced her to grow up quickly and be a resilient-agent. "... because you actually have to watch your dad so that he doesn't do anything dangerous and kill himself. My mom chose not to put him in an institution or whatever to get him better, she chose to look after him herself so we had that responsibility on us and so we had to grow up very fast so ya (laugh) imaginary things kind of had an end real quickly".

She goes on to explain how she rose from this hardship in a very resilient-agentic way. Not only did she bounce back from a rather negative and potentially disabling situation, she also managed to change her individual structure that was the situation with her father. In many other people, a similar situation may, in my opinion, have caused great difficulty in coping with academic demands, but not in Jennifer's case. "We were very focused on schoolwork I guess as probably an escape from what was going on at home, so it was a challenge on one hand, to the schoolwork because it formed like an emotional baggage kind of thing ... but for me I like academics so I buried myself in my school work because that's something that was familiar to me, it was something that could be right or wrong, no question about it type of thing, ... you could control it ..., probably actually drove me to succeed more, ... (laugh) in my high school years".

Throughout the interview it became clear that Jennifer's habitus was entrenched with skills that allowed her to use hardships or challenges to her advantage and excel in such times. And again she draws on the strategy in her habitus that pacifies her most, the linear dualism that allows her to gauge her life as right or wrong. It is interesting though that she does not mention religion here as a coping mechanism while at other times she refers to it as being vital in her life, yet not once did she mention it when referring to difficult or crisis times.

She mentions that her mother was not much of a support during the time of her father's mental illness as she was looking after her husband. Jennifer's eldest brother was serving a mission at their church at the time and as a result was not at home. Jennifer recalls that it was the social capital in the form of family relationships that once again contributed immensely as she and her other brother who was 16 months older than her, "... sort of stuck together, we had a very close relationship". The then girlfriend,

who is now the wife of Jennifer's eldest brother, was also a great support during that time. "... she would take care of us and we would play together and swim and whatever so that was helpful ...". In addition to this being social capital that equips an agent, it is also the social context or ecology that is part of the make-up of resilience, mentioned in Chapter 2.

Jennifer thinks back on her life with one big regret, the turbulent relationship she had with her mother: "... all the time that I was dating (laugh) and I started dating probably around the age of 17 and then from then on we just didn't connect, my mom and I, unless somebody broke up with me and then she was there for me but even with my husband, when we started dating and stuff like that we had a very bad relationship, my mom and I because she would see things in a certain way and I wouldn't see it the same way and I would rebel against that and it really, really hurt her and sometimes I didn't understand why. So, but then she died in 2014, half way through second year, so if there was anything I'd change, I'd change that relationship and I'd try a little harder to understand her, you know, and where she was coming from so that when she died I didn't have this regret about this horrible relationship that we had".

Two prominent things came to mind after reading this, one is the metacognitive thought at play (that I will discuss in a moment) but the second is something that bothered me while reading this account. To an extent, it relates back to Jennifer's causal view of and approach to life as she mentions that she wishes she had a better relationship with her mother so that she did not have this regret now: better relationship equals no regret. In my mind I would have thought that the regret would be not spending more quality time together, not having more good memories etc. But perhaps it is just a case of word play that comes out of a "causal habitus".

Jennifer's metacognitive thought is well developed and she would often think about and reflect on her own thoughts. Her metacognitive reflection – specifically on her relationship with her mother - stood out in her life, and in the lives of some of the other interviewees. The habitus of those students who apply metacognition appears to enable the students to see debilitating situations as an opportunity, through cognitive appraisal, to transcend their barriers and or bounce out of negative situations. To not only see it a disabling structure that it appears to be at first glance, but rather to learn



how such a structure can teach them something to take forward once they mobilise upward. This relates closely to cognitive flexibility and may be another instance where resilience meets agency and together infuses habitus.

Once again though, Jennifer dealt with this great tragedy through R-A by throwing herself into her work and coming out stronger from this adversity “What’s interesting about it is that right after she died, that same trend reflected again, the way that I dealt with my dad and his depression, ... is the same way I dealt with my mom’s death ..., I mean I got granted supplementary exams of course because she died right as exams were starting and I got the best results of my entire university career in those exams, like right after she died, three weeks after she died or whatever it was when I wrote the sups, so that was clearly my escape”.

R-A was also evident from experiences outside of her family and in particular when she was fired from the first American camp. Immediately, Jennifer’s tenacious habitus kicked in and her resilient-agentic response was “...I refused to come home, and my sponsors withdrew their sponsorships and I didn’t have a visa anymore, a working visa, so I contacted lawyers and all kinds of things and asked can I stay in America because there’s no way that I’m flying home from America after only a week of being here. So then I just searched day and night for a job and I found that nobody could give me a job that paid me because I didn’t have a working visa ... but they could give me accommodation and food and whatever so I found this camp, which was a few kilometres away from the camp that my boyfriend was working at ... it was a disabled camp ..., it was a four-week contract that I had with them to just be a volunteer counsellor and help out there”. Jennifer recalls feeling “... that was a really scary experience because I had no idea what to expect, I specifically, when we were applying to go to become camp counsellors, I did not want to work at a disabled camp because I was afraid of that type of responsibility but since I wanted to stay in America and there was no other real way for me to do it ... I was like okay, let’s just try ...”. This points to cognitive appraisal again, in fact, I am starting to get a sense that maybe this could point to a pliable habitus. A habitus that allows for thinking beyond structure, especially disabling structure, a habitus with a resilient intrapersonal thought pattern. Looking back at the experience Jennifer feels that, in the end, it equipped her to deal with her grandmother who went through Alzheimer’s and, her nephew who has now

been diagnosed with autism. This to me is such a telling example of R-A as Jennifer was able to change an individual disabling structure in her life (the being fired from the first camp, and her preconceived ideas about her ability to deal with disabled children) in such a way that it allowed her to enter the disabled camp and stay in America as well as glean skills that contributed positively to her future life.

Jennifer's R-A facilitated her navigating of this situation and in the end she stated: "... I made it through (laugh) had the most wonderful experience because the last week we had a group of young kids that were like from the age of nine tot fifteen ... with Asperger's syndrome. And they were just phenomenal because Asperger's is such a high form of Autism so they were fun. So we learnt a lot from them, and it was just fantastic, I mean I loved looking after those kids, it was lots of fun. So ja I learned about team work and about doing things that are outside of your comfort zone and how it can benefit you and actually getting through when you are really not happy with the situation and you are really struggling with it, I mean I was terribly depressed for a lot of the time that I was there because I didn't like it, I felt so uncomfortable but by the time I got to my Asperger's campers, I would go back and do it again a thousand times because that was a very rewarding experience ..., it was definitely a growing experience and I'm glad I didn't go directly to varsity after high school and that I had these other experiences. Again metacognition and cognitive appraisal appears to be the catalyst that enabled her to transform a potentially disabling structure into an enabling one.

She feels these experiences prepared her for university studies in some ways: "I mean big lecture halls and stuff was not in my comfort zone at all. ... I mean I always wanted to study until doctoral level, I always wanted to be doctor of something ..., but I had no idea what to expect so it prepared me for experiencing the unexpected and getting comfortable with something that is not necessarily comfortable to begin with".

Apart from this gap year experience in the US, Jennifer also, upon her return, started working, before commencing her academic career. "I was working, mainly to pay off ... debts from being in the states because I wasn't earning money there, my parents and my brother had to send me money... I was just working and trying to figure out what to do next. ... I was as good at science and maths as I was at languages ...,

music, languages, stuff like that. So it was a very difficult decision what to study because I could have done Applied Mathematics or I could have done Languages and I didn't know which one to do and I didn't want to start with one and then change my mind and then choose something else and waste money ...”.

Jennifer feels taking “gap years” was a very wise decision on her part: “I'm glad I only started studying when I did because then I knew it was the right thing that I was studying. And I was mature enough, when I saw some of the people in my first year, some of the 18 year olds and whatever you're just like 'you're not ready to be at university' you see them and you're just like 'you don't even know what you want from life yet'. I mean I was already married when I started studying”.

As mentioned previously the metacognitive processes that occurred in Jennifer's life counted a lot towards her resilience, and her approach to extra-curricular activities in school once again provides evident thereof. She listed being a top student and being used in the Pretoria News (a local newspaper) as an advertisement due to her excellent marks. She did Latin American and ballroom dancing, horse-riding, church youth and young single adult groups and the leader of these. She also did candle making, cooking, karate, swimming, ballet, tap dancing, drama, school play, singing and piano. In addition, she was a prefect in grade 7 and a camp counsellor and dance instructor. Upon asking her which skills etc. she gained from these activities, Jennifer laughed and replied: “I think many of the things I did like a quitter, I did them for a little while and then they were like 'oh were going to have an exam' you know for tap and then I was like 'oh exam no!' and then I left and I didn't do it again you know, so those experiences taught me that maybe you should stick things out otherwise you are not going to get anywhere ... and also with the church background and so, we emphasized doing things outside of your comfort zone a little bit and getting to know other people, working hard and not giving up and those types of things so I guess that influenced, in fact, who I became at university as well”. Could one also say that she erected self-made structures that said you cannot finish things/you are not good enough to do examinations, but then she transcended those self-made structures by applying R-A?

As mentioned earlier, Jennifer displayed R-A in the face of her father's breakdown when she experienced many heart-breaking moments such as an unwanted moving

of house and consequent drop in social standing but, in her opinion, this taught her how to rely on herself and not on outside circumstances. She felt this experience have contributed to who she is now and what she wants to achieve in the future. In effect it also contributed to her habitus as it made her want to be more firmly in control of things and be more responsible and more “there for my family and more aware of what’s going on with everyone”.

In addition, she once again needed to be very responsible after her mother’s death. She and her brother walked in and discovered the body of their mother in her bed. Jennifer recalled: “... it was horrible and I was screaming in my husband’s arms and whatever when they told us she’d been dead for hours and we were on the property and we didn’t even know, it was horrible but at the same time I knew that my dad was fragile, because of the breakdown that he’s been through and that he would react very badly obviously to losing his companion and we knew that he was on his way home and we knew that he was going to come home and see her body ... so when he came home, I don’t know something just took over and I acted all responsible and something made me be like ‘I have to be my mom in this situation’ (laugh). Jennifer once again displayed R-A.

Again Jennifer’s R-A in the face of hardships was shown as for the first few weeks after her mother’s death “... it wasn’t about morning for my mom, it was getting things done that needed to be done, I’m the responsible one, I’m the one that has to take control, I’m the one who has to be in power here because I can’t expect anyone else to do it because they’re grieving the loss of their wife and of their mother ..., without stopping to think what about me and what do I have to grieve about ... until everything was done and then I was like okay now it’s my turn type of thing, which is also probably unhealthy to some degree but that’s how that experience influenced me so it made me strong and independent, in the sense that I don’t have to rely on somebody else to make me feel happy and in control because I can just take it and make it controlled for myself”. Again translating into cognitive appraisal, self-efficacy and adapting positively: R-A.

Apart from Jennifer’s mother’s death, her grandmother’s Alzheimer’s, and eventual death in 2015 also had an impact on her studies. “I mean, Alzheimer’s, we were

praying for her to die pretty much from the time she was diagnosed, it was horrible you know, it was really, really horrible to watch her go through, and when my mom died I had to take over the responsibility ..., my gran was in a home but you know, we're not the type of family that would just leave you in a home and go '... oh you've got Alzheimer's you won't remember if I come or not'. I would go twice a week like my mom used to do so that interrupted my studies a lot as well. Sometimes I just couldn't go visit my gran because I just had too much work to do ..., which made me feel horrible, obviously. And when she died there was a questioning of did I do enough, did I do what my mom would have done type of thing. This pressure to like, be my mom, you know. And still there's this pressure in my studies to look after my dad because my mom's not here anymore ... and to make sure that he's okay and that he's surviving because I know that he struggles with depression so you know I don't want him to do anything stupid so there's this responsibility all the time which affects my studies as well, the time that I can give to it, those are probably the main factors". I wonder if, to an extent, this does not also have something to do with her viewpoint of cause and effect; deeds and rewards. She places a lot of emphasis on good deeds she does. This driving force seems to have become entrenched in her habitus and appears to give her the courage/strength to be a resilient-agent.

#### **A.5. Conclusion**

Jennifer's narrative concludes in much the same way as it started in that hers is a story that demonstrates how a person can use submersion in something that they love as a means of activating R-A. She displayed it in the face of her father's breakdown and mustered the courage to not only bounce back out of a negative situation, but to care for other members of her family while doing so and in the process changing the circumstances for all of them.

Resilient agency was also evident in that Jennifer did not allow the absence of pedagogical capital as a form of cultural capital to rob her of upward mobility. Instead, it may very well have activated the transcending of the structures in ways that allowed her to improve her situation. In the process she then bestows herself with an array of additional experiences that only adds even further to the repertoire of capital in her habitus.

Finally, Jennifer also uses R-A to transcend structures – social or individual – that do not fit in with her causal life view. Never sacrificing her own conscience but continually building her habitus for future structural challenges.

## **B. JAMIE'S NARRATIVE**

Jamie's story is one where a contention can be found in the Bourdieuan view of reproduction of cultural capital. Her possessing a vast amount of cultural capital in the form of being raised in a well-educated family did not put her in a position where she was sufficiently prepared for university studies. Quite to the contrary, it appeared to have caused her to take it for granted instead of investing time in preparation thereof.

Another rarity was how the pertinent and almost extreme involvement of her father, served to empower Jamie, where it could easily have produced a learned-helplessness attitude. In her story, we once again find a link between parental involvement and support and R-A.

Jamie also clearly demonstrates the power of metacognitive thought in the activation of R-A and once again shows the importance of cognitive appraisal\*.

### **B.1. Background information derived from the BQ and the interview**

Jamie completed the BQ in 2012 when she was 19 years old and single. She is, according to the Employment Equity Act, a black South African and her home language is Setswana, although she had always been in English schools. She was enrolled in the BA Extended Programme and had an APS of 26 in matric. She attributed this low APS to the fact that Final IEB exams were different to IEB standards they were taught at school and that the final paper differed significantly from the exams set by her school. Jamie regained her momentum in university as her first year grade point average was 71.09. My initial qualitative grading of her questionnaire, gave her a resilience mark of 3/5. This mark was the result of a scarcely completed questionnaire and many of the answers that were given, reflecting rather superficially. There were however some elements of reflection and a sense of assertiveness and identification with strength.

Jamie was a final year social work student at the time of the interview. In her first year she stayed with a friend but from her second year she lived with her siblings. She found living with them much better than staying with a friend: "Because it's easier to fight with family and it happens all the time and you forgive each other. But with a

friend, staying together really strained our friendship but I prefer staying with family over a friend”.

Jamie was the second student who replied to my SMS that invited her to participate in an interview. She replied with “Dear Mrs Byles. I would like to participate in the interview. However, I do not remember ever completing the questionnaire, so I am not sure what the interview will be about”. She was also one of the students with whom I had an interview scheduled before the student protests and strikes. I eventually met with Jamie on March 15, 2016. She was well dressed and poised. She declined the refreshments available saying that they were too unhealthy hence she did not eat them. Initially, I found her somewhat apprehensive and hoped that it would not impact on the interview. It was clear that she came from a good home and background. After a very brief introduction, I asked the first question that confirmed my suspicions regarding her background. Her father is a senior prosecutor, and her mother, a qualified English teacher who retired two years ago. She recalls her maternal grandmother being an English teacher too.

## **B.2. Structure**

Being a child born into a well-educated family that possessed vast quantities of capital, especially cultural capital in its institutionalised form namely education, one would think that she would be ready for university. However, in Jamie’s opinion, the most challenging situation she encountered during her schooling, “... was applying to university and actually knowing what to apply for. That was really difficult for me because I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. I mean it’s still a challenge for me now but I hope I will get there this year because it’s my final year and I need to get my mind and my life in order”. She recalls that she also was unsure of where she wanted to study: “Honestly I didn’t even know that the University of Pretoria existed. I just knew of Wits and UJ and UCT. And my dad just brought me these application forms from here and that’s how I knew of this University”. It was clear from the interview that her father is very proud of her and helped her wherever possible and again we see the clear influence of parental support on R-A. Initially I was of the opinion that the intervention from her father was rather invasive and that such an intervention would



hamper a student and even become a disabling structure in later years. Yet, Jamie proved me wrong as this structure enabled her to do well.

### **B.3. Capital**

In fact, Jamie went on to explain that she dealt with the challenge of deciding on tertiary education with social capital in the very form of the help of her father. At some point Jamie wanted to study teaching but her parents discouraged her. So strong was the influence of this social capital that when she then started looking at other alternatives, she was hesitant to share them with her father: "... so to me social work was the closest thing that would be as rewarding as teaching is and I was afraid to even suggest social work until he suggested '... apply for social work' and then that's how I got into social work".

Regardless though, Jamie experienced her family, especially her father, as always being proud of her achievements and supportive, adding a steady helping of social capital to her habitus: "Oh they were very proud, my dad especially. He's very supportive, he's always been very supportive and he's very proud of me and of my school performance ... It was a nice feeling knowing that someone's in your corner and always willing to help".

At this point it became evident that Jamie's R-A may have been as a result of her experience of her father's "interference" (as I saw it). Her experience was rather different from my assumption: "... with the applying to here he was there, he was in charge and doing everything for me and saw my potential I guess and he always told me that he was proud of me and that I could do whatever I want to do. So knowing that someone in your family, your father, because mostly people would say their moms are very supportive so with me it was like a change of ... parents or roles so it was a different side to how people would describe their fathers". Her father's considerable belief in her and the social capital that it added to her habitus, enabled Jamie to activate R-A when faced with difficult circumstances and structures. As a result, she was able to believe in herself and act with confidence and determination.

Furthermore, Jamie sees her parents as her most important role models and indicated that they taught her that nothing is achieved without hard work. To see how hard her parents, especially her father, work, motivates and inspires Jamie to work equally hard and confirms Bourdieu's theory on the reproduction of education as cultural capital. "My dad is, he graduated last year for his masters in Law, so I don't want to say its pressure but I don't just want to have a degree. I want to also qualify and maybe get my masters... So his hard work and he says that he's doing it for us so that we can have a better life, it is also something that motivates me to study hard and pass in record time and just get a good job".

Jamie listed several activities that similarly account for cultural capital: she received academic half colours, as well as awards for Mathematics, English, Life Sciences and Business Studies. She also participated in drama and hockey and was a counsellor at school. She felt that she acquired various skills from these activities. She felt being a counsellor and being co-director of the school play taught her leadership skills and being able to work with people. She learnt how to delegate instead of trying to do things on her own. It also taught her patience towards people: "Because I'm not really patient but when you work with people and you're trying to reach a certain goal, you need to be patient and understanding and that things happen and that people go through other things so I think those are skills that I learned".

Social capital was produced during Jamie's fondest childhood memories: Christmas and New Year's Eve at her maternal side. She remembered that there was "... always a lot of fireworks and food and the whole family was there, happy and dancing just laughter, it was really nice". It may also have been an opportunity to learn how to navigate various social scenes and interact with different personalities.

Turning then to Jamie's teachers, she listed her gr 10 register teacher as her favourite also because of the social capital she invested in Jamie's life: "... she influenced the whole school in that whenever anyone had a problem, she was there. She never even used to go to the staff room, she was always in her classroom to talk to us as learners and give us advice. She was more like a friend than a teacher and so being exposed to that side of a teacher was really inspiring".

This teacher sadly passed away while Jamie was still in school. She felt that her passing contributed to who she is now or what she wants to achieve in the future because this teacher was the joy of the school and a shoulder to cry on. In this we once again see the positive influence of religion as part of the cultural capital and habitus of a person. It enabled Jamie to apply cognitive appraisal and hence R-A as she was able to glean positive additions to her habitus. She stated that this teacher's death made her realise that God indeed works in mysterious ways and that we really do have the greater strength within us. "My friends and I (social capital), just said after she passed that good people die first and they come into the world for a short time and they come to change your life for the better, they come as a positive factor in your life and when they go you will never forget them. No matter how long they were here, they will just always have an impact in your life". It could very well have been the influence of teachers like this one that led Jamie to want to become a teacher herself.

Another teacher Jamie mentioned later on in the interview was her Afrikaans teacher: "... it was a very fun class for me, she was really nice and interactive and she liked me so I liked her too. And back in high school I was doing well in it so I guess that's why I liked it so much". Could this be an element of appraisal where Jamie's self-esteem was validated through her "doing well" and her teacher acknowledging this? This would be evident from some of the narratives still to follow too, hence supporting the ecological and systems contribution, by way of an encouraging teacher, to R-A, in addition to the cultural and social capital that it offers.

Jamie recognised the importance of cultural capital in the form of language in a person's academic career as she stated that "... English, not just any language, but the English language is very important because that's how you communicate with everyone [at university], your reports and whatever documents you get are in English and it's the universal language and I think it's very important for all of us to know English and to be very fluent in it". Jamie thought the fact that she had always been in an English school had a good influence on her "... because I could understand what was written or said...".

#### **B.4. Resilient-agency (R-A)**

The only time Jamie appeared to struggle academically, was during her matric final examinations. She indicated that she did not think her matric results were a true reflection of her ability because she felt the IEB exams were rather different to the IEB standards they were taught at school. In reaction to the question: "What would you have done differently?" Jamie's initial response was "I mean I feel like I studied hard and I studied the way I've been studying because my marks for prelims were really good ... compared to the matric result, ...those papers are external and the prelims are set by my high school so they set them in a way that we were used to not the way the IEB sets the question so I really don't think I would have done...". She then paused to think and through apparent metacognitive reflection added: "I could have gotten past papers for matric exams, that's all I could have done. But because I thought I was capable of getting like four distinctions, based on my schooling performance, I didn't think I needed to do that. But looking back I should have done that". Metacognitive reflection such as this appears vital in R-A as it allows the person to apply cognitive appraisal retrospectively and to gather skills and elements from the process that could enrich the habitus. This serves to support this study's definition of agency as also being evident in the past.

Jamie furthermore reflected on one of her friendships that ended gravely. She specifically felt the way she handled it, could have been done differently on her part. "... it still upsets me to this day and she's tried to apologise but I just can't get over it. So the way I handled it could have been different". I asked her what she could have done differently "I just could have actually listened to what she was saying and try and listen to her perspective of our friendship and the way I treated her I guess ... I was just too angry to listen to whatever she was saying trying to understand it". Again, judging from the metacognitive process involved here and my limited understanding of her character, I felt that such a realisation must be rather hard for her to accept. I saw a lot of R-A in her willingness to admit that she was wrong and should have handled it differently. I have a sense that through this process, she may even change the individual structure that was created through her inability to forgive this friend. Her retrospective metacognition may enable her to act as an agent and change this structure hence forward. It should however also be noted that her initial reaction,

where she made the first choice to change her circumstances by ending the friendship (that appears to have created a disabling structure in her life), could be seen as NR-A as the change was effectively to Jamie's own detriment.

Another trying incident happened at the hand of her aunt and cousin: "I just feel like her and her child, my cousin, were in competition with my sister and I over what we're studying and ... both my sister and I got into university via the extended programme and they once made a comment that why would you even want to tell people that you failed matric, you didn't pass matric nicely and that's how you got into university, people just felt sorry for you that's why you're in the extended programme. So they're very, just bring people down". Jamie however stated that the social capital she possessed in the form of support from her parents, enabled her to be resiliently-agentic, hence comments such as these did not affect her negatively.

R-A was also evident in Jamie's tenacious ability to see things through. Perhaps due to the strong influence her father had on the decisions she made, she erroneously decided to study social work (instead of teaching), however, she persevered and is working on a plausible outcome even though she realised that social work may not be the correct career path for her. "... I don't really want to practice as a social worker, I want to do criminology ... last year, I wanted to, ... not study social work anymore ... and my practice lecturer just told me that it's better to have a solid degree and because I only had fourth year to finish and to start all over again arg. If I get accepted into honours for criminology, I'd like to go into forensics and if not and I have to use my social work degree, I would like to do occupational social work and work in corporate". Jamie was not prepared to allow one wrong decision to become a disabling structure in her life, she would rather approach the potential structure with R-A through cognitive appraisal and turn it into an enabling structure.

Jamie's passion for criminology is evident when she speaks about the subject: "Just understanding the offender and different crimes ... I think two years ago in my third year for KRM, we learned about the Stockholm Syndrome, I didn't even know something like that could even exist. Where the victim or the captured develops feelings for like someone who is not making you happy, someone who has captured

you and your family is worried but here you are starting to care for that person, it just didn't make sense to me".

But as I am concluding this narrative, Jamie is indeed enrolled for honours in Criminology and pursuing her dream. She worked hard even though Social Work was not her degree of choice, she completed it with a cumulative weighted average of 70.35.

### **B.5. Conclusion**

Jamie's story challenged a couple of my own assumptions. What I viewed as "meddling-in in her affairs", she experienced as support and what I anticipated would cause a learned-helplessness attitude, activated R-A.

The influence of possessing cultural capital in the form of being raised in well-educated family is once again evident. Even though it did not drive her towards preparing sufficiently for university studies, it did propel her studies in that she determinately worked towards concluding it even though she felt that it was not her first choice. She applied cognitive appraisal and called on her cultural capital to become the resilient-agent who chose to make the best out of the situation as she had decided that she will work as hard as her father had.

## **C. SALIMA'S NARRATIVE**

Salima's story is one of never giving up. It illustrates the power of cognitive appraisal as an indicator for R-A superbly as Salima describes herself as an underdog, but importantly, as being motivated and driven by that very fact. This young lady demonstrated a refusal to be discouraged to the point that it influenced her future negatively. Instead she conquered difficult adaptations after having moved to a new country as a pre-teen and then moving back to her homeland as a teenager. Both times facing adversity in different spheres of her life, but emerging stronger after working through them.

The importance of social capital in the form of family support and cultural capital in the form of religion is once again demonstrated through Salima's story. In addition, we find the influence of varied cultural capital to have been significant too.

### **C.1. Background information derived from the BQ and the interview**

Salima completed the BQ in 2013 just before her 21st birthday. She was single at the time of the interview. In terms of the Employment Equity Act Salima will be seen as a black lady. She is originally from Mozambique and her home language is Portuguese. She was enrolled in the BA Extended Programme and had an APS of 28 in matric. She believes that her thriving social life was to blame for her low matric marks because as a result she did not put in the necessary effort in her studies. Salima apparently found a balance once at university as her first year grade point average was 69.36. My initial qualitative grading of her questionnaire, gave her a resilience mark of 4/5 based on her description of how she dealt with the challenge of adapting to a new curriculum in a new school after having lived in a different country for five years.

Salima agreed to an interview after I had a telephone conversation with her. We rescheduled our interview after the student protests and strikes and I met her just before the April recess in an office at UP.

My first impressions of Salima were that she seemed to be a very upbeat and positive person. She came across as confident and level-headed, as if she knew exactly what she wanted from life and how to go about obtaining just that.

At the time of the interview Salima was enrolled for a BA degree, specialising in Psychology. It is her hope and vision to be able to practice “Psychology, specifically something to do with community psychology”.

### **C.2. Structure**

As mentioned earlier, Salima grew up in the African country Mozambique where she was exposed almost exclusively to Portuguese as a language. When she was in the fourth grade however, her parents moved to the United States of America for five years due to work commitments. When they moved to the US, Salima was unable to speak English and this created a huge structure in her life. “Yeah so when I first went there I didn’t know how to speak English at all ... I went there when I was in fourth grade, so obviously it was very difficult for me to make friends because I didn’t speak English but it didn’t take too long, I think I became quite fluent about three months after I was there”.

### **C.3. Capital**

In learning this new language so quickly, she awarded herself the opportunity to add vast amounts of cultural capital to her habitus during the five years she spent in the US. In fact, she refers to that time as her fondest childhood memories: “... that was really a great experience. It was a different scenario from back home, from anywhere I’ve ever been. Yeah I think that’s one of the greatest highlights from when I was younger”. The aspect that captured her attention most was the diversity of the country which would have afforded her the opportunity to expand her cultural capital and habitus with leaps and bounds compared to most of her contemporaries who may never have crossed the borders of their own country: “... it’s a melting pot of people from different backgrounds ...”.

Yet, even before leaving her homeland, Salima grew up in a home with no shortage in cultural capital in the form of education. Her father studied law and her mother accounting and auditing. Salima’s mother also obtained a master’s degree in business management.



In addition, Salima possess social capital in that after sharing an apartment that is close to UP with a fellow Mozambican during her first and second years of study, Salima is currently sharing with her sister. “I think the fact that me and my sister know each other well, I think it’s better. It wasn’t bad living with the person that I used to live with previously but, you know, we did have certain clashes every once in a while because we were so different, our personalities. In a way I think it’s better that we no longer live together because we might preserve the friendship a little bit more while with my sister it’s different, I think we know what we like or dislike and even if we fight we’re always going to end up making up so ya”. This also provides an opportunity for the sharing and accumulating of social capital in the form of a close family network and the resulting support and a relaxing and homely environment. Interestingly, this report is very similar to Jamie’s in the previous narrative.

Salima reports that both her parents are equally proud of her, “though my mother shows it more than my dad. Yeah, it’s very difficult to get a compliment out of my dad .... From my mom I’m used to it, ... she is my biggest cheerleader, me and my sister both. So it’s never a shock, it’s pleasant, it’s nice, especially because she is my best friend. With my dad, sometimes I even find myself wanting to impress him more because it is so difficult to impress him, so in a way that keeps me on my toes and like knowing that I need to work harder so that he can actually acknowledge that I am working”. Again, we find the vital impact of a supporting parent in the accumulation of social capital in the habitus. Similarly, the role of a parent who sets high expectations but does not communicate pride frequently, is also displayed. A resilient-agent seems to frequently cognitively appraise such occurrences as motivation for self-improvement.

Salima listed her mother as her most important role model and indicated that she taught her (cultural capital) to always be a fighter and never give up and that in life you should never rely on anyone financially but that you should be your own person and strive to be the best that you could be but still remain humble. How does this translate to her life? “The whole ‘being humble’ part and guess like helping people, giving back has always been a big part of my life. I really like to be a part of whatever non-profit organisation I find, if it’s a cause I really believe in then I really like to be a part of”. Salima also took her mother’s advice to be a “fighter” and to “never give up” to heart

and with that demonstrates the importance of social capital. "...obviously being at university is now difficult, especially because I'm no genius so even with that I would never give up, I would never drop out, I wouldn't do that. Cause I'm here, I'm striving one day to get a job so I can become independent, because I really wouldn't want to depend on anyone financially. So, I think her words, the person that she is, like she influences me every day, for sure".

Her mother also provided cultural capital in the form of healthy living advice "...she always encourages us to be physically active ..., she is the kind of person who believes that if you are okay physically, healthy then obviously you can even improve in things like academics and things like that ...".

Incidentally then, one of the pivotal events in Salima's life was during the previous year when her sister became ill. It was something that was causing her to be anaemic ... So she got really, really sick ... she had to be on intense medication, every day, same time, I don't know how many pills she'd take but she'd take a lot. And that ended up having a really big toll on her body, her immune system was sort of like shutting down ... so it was really difficult, especially because I wasn't back home and I couldn't be there with my sister, my family ... so that was definitely something big but now she is much better".

Salima recalls dealing with this ordeal through prayer "I felt that was the only thing I could do given that I was so far away from home and from my sister so I prayed a lot". As was the case in the narratives of some of the other respondents, the importance of religion as cultural capital and part of a habitus rich in R-A, is once again highlighted here. In addition, she spoke to her mother every day (drawing on cultural and social capital in the form of family networks and support) in order to know what progress her sister was making. "Yeah I'd always just try and talk to my sister and just keep her upbeat (R-A) because obviously that also took a toll on her emotionally as well so yeah".

She remembers adapting positively by staying as busy as possible during that time, "... I think if you just stay in one place, just thinking about it, I don't know it can be very negative, especially because I wanted to be positive for her, so I kept myself very busy ... even though it was always on my mind, just for it not to take a huge toll on me

because I wanted to be strong for her”. This show of R-A in the end may have led to an even stronger family bond, it also helped not only Salima’s sister, but Salima herself and perhaps even her mother, to come out stronger. I would even risk the assumption that the strength this potentially added to their habitus, may allow for even greater R-A in future as they know that they can rely on their social capital in the form of family.

It became obvious to me that my initial assessment was accurate and that Salima indeed has a very positive outlook on life. She confirmed it too and in effect defined her own habitus of R-A: “Yeah, definitely, when it comes to others I always do [have a positive outlook on life], definitely. That’s how I am”.

Salima accumulated cultural and social capital from the extra-curricular activities and leadership positions such as running track in the States, playing soccer back home, and she was a leader for a group project at \*\*\* College. She feels what she gained from it is “... leadership skills and being able to know what being a leader is all about because often times we think being a leader is telling people what to do ..., being the only person to set the rules but I think the more you are part of team activities you actually end up noticing that even if there is somebody in front that is considered the leader, that we will not be able to achieve our goals if everybody is not on the same page as you. Yeah so basically teamwork is very important. People skills, the fact that I was involved in these activities and meeting a lot of people with different characters was especially beneficial to me because I want to do psychology and that requires you to really understand the human mind and ... know people so I needed people skills, leadership, teamwork, yeah”.

#### **C.4. Resilient-agency (R-A)**

In her life, Salima encountered many people who tried to discourage her, especially when she first arrived in the US. Her positive attitude and R-A however enabled her to, not only survive, but to conquer such situations. As she was a foreigner, specifically from Mozambique, the American people viewed her as an “African” “... and Africa to them is a country, where it is actually a continent with many countries”. Salima recalls how she would get bullied in the US, since she was not able to speak English, “... because I was from Africa people think that you speak to animals or things like that

...". As mentioned earlier, Salima only learned to speak English once in the US "... because you're kind of forced to learn English there because it's a place where everybody speaks English so, yeah, it wasn't that bad". The fact that "it wasn't that bad" probably has direct bearing on the fact that she chose to change this structure and bounce back through R-A.

Initially Salima indicated that the bullying stopped once she left primary school. If this really was the case, it equates to four years of being subjected to bullying. It is rather astonishing that after this bad experience, Salima thinks back to her time in the US as her fondest childhood memories. This attests to cognitive appraisal and a clear exhibition of R-A. The aforementioned was supported when she added "I think you just develop a tough skin; I guess that's what I did. And now even when someone says something, it doesn't affect me as much anymore. I think before I was younger so whatever people would say I would believe it but I think now that I'm growing up and I'm older, I don't just take what people say". Apart from this being R-A, it is also valuable social capital to add to one's habitus.

After the five years in the US, Salima and her family returned to Mozambique and Salima was enrolled in a British school upon their return. She described the most difficult or challenging situation she encountered during her schooling as the difference in grammar used by that British School, compared to the grammar used by the American School she attended in the states: "... it was a big transition". She experienced the British curriculum as "... strict, but I think it was challenging in a good way". Another difference was that the British curriculum's syllabus covered lessons from the entire world while syllabi in the US is more US based, "... whatever you learn is applicable to the context that you are in while the British curriculum was nice because it would teach you history that relate to even where I was and anywhere in the world".

Salima explained the challenge as follows: "When I first arrived, they do different levels of English, different levels of math so when you first arrive they tend to put you in the higher level to see if you can cope and if you can't they just take you to a maybe medium or lower level and I didn't last too long on the higher level, I think it's because I didn't really try hard enough, if I saw it was challenging and I think, I don't know, I just

wasn't willing to work as hard so ... they took me to the middle level. So I think that's one of the reasons I passed, but then again when I got there it wasn't really the beginning of the year, it was almost toward the middle so I think that's why it was even more difficult for me to adapt and transition. 'Cause I was having to catch up with what was already done".

This case is very similar to some of the other participants who had a specific idea or explanation about an event but then applied metacognitive thought to reach a different conclusion. Initially she alluded to her being on a "medium level" was what made the difference, however, she then thought about it and stated: "In terms of math for example, I actually remained in the higher math but that's because my teacher ..., I think she really invested in her students. She was a person who didn't give up on her students easily while I think the English teacher in the higher levels, it was very easy for her to dismiss. I think she moved me down in two weeks and I don't think in two weeks you can prove yourself ..., if you can work at the level that everyone else is working ...". This also once more illustrates the importance of social capital in the form of a supportive teacher where R-A is concerned.

It was however her history teacher who would become this source of social capital and who had the greatest influence on Salima. "History became my favourite subject. Even though I wasn't able to do the first tests when I first got there because ... again when I came in it was kind of in the middle of everything but ..., it was a teacher who really just invested in her students and never gave up and I guess when I saw a teacher who felt that way, I felt like I needed to work ten times harder, you know, just to live up to the standards that he has for all of us. So my history teacher was definitely my favourite teacher".

Thinking back to other obstacles apart from language and the two different schooling systems, illustrated Salima's metacognitive thought (as a possible indicator of R-A) once more as she believes that "... procrastination is basically my worst enemy. ... I don't know what happened, in GR 11 I actually did quite well, but then in Gr 12 everything just went down, I don't know it's because you had less subjects and I guess when you get older your parents trust that you're doing enough to pass so it's not like there's a lot of surveillance from their part so I think I slacked because of that as well.

... I think what I would have changed is time management, really organised myself a bit more, maybe creating a calendar, try to improve my study methods which is something I incorporated when I came here ... for me I think time management is the biggest issue, procrastination”.

Being exposed to two vastly different sets of (pedagogical) cultural capital in the form of academic language, Salima had first-hand experience of how important language is in a person’s academic career. And in her opinion, “... it is very important”. “I could say that ... when I first applied to UP, because I did the lower English, in grade 12 ... that’s basically the Cambridge system, ... because I was like ‘okay I probably can’t do it because I was never in higher English’ and when I got here I ended up having to do academic literacy which is basically just to see where you are at in terms of your academic writing, where you can improve, which for me was really beneficial, I really enjoyed it, I actually ended up being one of the top students in my class .... I just think it’s really important, especially in the Humanities department, because you write a lot of essays, read a lot so yeah, I think it’s really, really important”. It also illustrates her being a resilient-agent and changing the structure her English teacher in school set for her. From believing that she could not achieve mastery in English because her teacher did not believe in her, to becoming a top student in this module was a gigantic upward mobility in Salima’s life.

“The fact that I had the opportunity to do academic literacy, I started realising what was my strengths and weaknesses and because of it, because I improved so immensely in first year, it was so much easier to write academic essays for subjects like philosophy, sociology, ‘cause they require ... good academic writing ...so yeah, I think it was positive. In terms of my writing I feel that I improved immensely and I enjoy writing now”.

However, even though her writing improved, it did not grant her immunity from other factors that may cause her problems. Salima hence reflected: “... second year [at UP] was the year when I got involved in a lot of things on campus, like societies and all of that, which was great because it gives you an opportunity to network with people [and gain social capital] and to get to know people from different backgrounds [cultural capital] ... but I think I was so into that, that in a way there was imbalance in terms of

my academics ... being part of societies and all these other organisations, which could be beneficial but wasn't a priority, but I made it my priority. So I started slacking a bit ... and unfortunately that was one of the causes why I had to be held back for one subject but I already did it and I passed it but now it's like, I could have finished last year, graduated this year, but now I am only going to graduate in September because I have a module that I had to do now to finish ...".

And now, a couple years after completing the BQ, Salima still feels that she made the right choice in choosing a degree in Humanities. "Yeah, I think in terms of the kind of person I am, I think it matches perfectly. I like to consider myself a humanitarian, I really like to help people and I feel that there is no better programme around here that enhances that kind of skill and which allows you to look at the world from a completely different perspective".

It was however not only her involvement in the social and cultural aspects of student life that placed stumbling blocks in her road to graduating from a university. In her matric year, Salima applied for a scholarship in India where she was planning on studying psychology. "But I got the scholarship, I got the call back and I was supposed to travel, I think two weeks after they called. But ... due to ... corruption back home, sometimes scholarships there get diverted to minister kids and people in higher positions ... 'cause then we heard that students had already left and we weren't understanding the why because I had already been called so I can sort out my visa and everything like that so it was unfortunate because that, the fact that I was waiting for that scholarship held me back a whole year and I ended up having to take a gap year because I was only going to travel around I think in September, so because I was hoping for that scholarship I didn't apply to any other place.... I think I should have applied to different places and kept my options open".

Nonetheless, Salima arose from this unfortunate turn of events and "...right after that I started looking for options here in SA because it was the closest to Mozambique, especially because back home we don't have universities in English, though we have schools, high schools in English, everything tertiary is in Portuguese so I really would have had to have gone somewhere else for tertiary level so I just remember really just looking immensely and all the time consistently looking for options. Even asking my

mom to come, even if it's just for a day or two, to come sit down and look at the different universities, talk to different student advisors because I really wanted it, I didn't just want to stay home ... and let life pass me by so definitely that, it really pushed me to find a solution, not wait for my parents to find a solution for me.

And even while weighing her options, Salima "... didn't just ... stay home ..." as in 2012, she enrolled for a Higher Certificate in Business Principles and Practices at a private college. Where she could have been lazing around at home, feeling despondent and bereft, she instead acted like a resilient-agent and did something productive that taught her new skills and new social and cultural capital. She feels that in some ways it even prepared her for her studies UP. "... it has nothing to do with what I'm doing now, but the intensity of the studies and academic writing, it helped me a little bit but I won't lie, the transition from \*\*\*College to UP it's still very, very big. ... you can tell that here, everything is at university level and everything it's ten times harder, you need to put in more time, the standards are higher".

The fact that it was so difficult for Salima to get admitted to university, in her opinion, "... makes you a person who wants to work harder. And for the umpteenth time during my writing up of the narratives, I encounter a definition of the R-A "... for me I think I learned a lot from my failures in life. That's how I am ... I consider myself an underdog, what I mean by that is I'm never the top student [potential structure] ..., but that just makes you want to work even harder because there are so many people like me. I think, hardships just teach you how to be stronger, how to cope with problems ... a little bit better, since not everything has always been handed over to me I have always had to work harder for what I want. I think that's the advantage of always being an underdog. I don't take it as a disadvantage, I rather take it as motivation to work harder because I would like to show people, just like myself that even though you may not be the brightest person, whatever skill you have you can somehow make a contribution and you can achieve whatever it is that you want to achieve" [R-A].

### **C.5. Conclusion**

In Salima I saw the impact of perseverance and of allowing oneself to believe in your own habitus while at the same time improving it. Elements found in her habitus



included social capital in the form of family support and cultural capital in the form of religion, especially in the wake of difficult and trying times where R-A or was activated. In addition, Salima's exposure to varied cultural capital was significant too in opening up her mind to different world views and ways of life.

Probably most prevalent of her story is the way Salima came forth as a resilient-agent many times as a result of having conquered many difficulties in the past. Her description of herself as an underdog never became a disabling structure but rather served to motivate her to live her life as a resilient-agent and seize every opportunity.

In the next chapter we meet Caren, a young lady who had to overcome a physical challenge that became a mental battle as she was recovering from major surgery. Nonetheless, in the end she was able to transcend this structure and choose a destiny that she is grateful for to this day.

## **D. CAREN'S NARRATIVE**

Caren is a beautiful young woman who, at first glance, appeared to be a humble and laisses-faire person who had her feet firmly on the ground. Those very grounded feet had however left the ground a few times to transcend the barriers of structure. Caren faced two major structures in her life, the first when she experienced great challenges with regards to her own health, and then again when her father became ill. She however dealt with both these challenges in a resilient-agentic way and changed both structures.

In between changing structures, Caren also drew on her habitus to access R-A when she fought feelings of despondency even after changing the structure that was her own health challenges. And through it all she appears to have, for the most part at least, remained positive and refused to give up.

Apart from these major structures, Caren was also faced with her father whom she experienced as uninterested in her. She ascribed this to his European<sup>21</sup> descent but she was nonetheless affected rather severely by this. Nonetheless, her father's very descent meant that Caren's habitus was endowed with additional cultural capital, the impact of which one could only speculate about.

### **D.1. Background information derived from the BQ and the interview**

Caren completed the BQ in 2013 when she was 20 years old. She was single at the time of the interview, a white South African lady, when classified according to the Employment Equity Act, with English as her home language. She is however also fluent in Afrikaans, A European language and French (to a lesser degree). She was enrolled in the BA Extended Programme and had an APS of 28 in matric. Caren underwent major surgery in her Grade 11 year and as a result missed a substantial

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<sup>21</sup> The exact nature of his decent was omitted to ensure anonymity.

amount of school work, contributing to her low matric marks. Caren's marks improved rather significantly once at university as her first year grade point average was 67.90.

My initial qualitative grading of her BQ, gave her a resilience mark of 4/5 due to the very adverse circumstances she faced with regards to her own health and how she was able to raise above them even stronger than before.

Caren agreed to an interview after I had a telephone conversation with her. We rescheduled our interview twice after the student protests and strikes and I met her just after the April recess in an office at UP. At the time of the interview Caren was enrolled for an honours degree in Anthropology.

## **D.2. Structure**

A prominent structure that presented itself in Caren's life was a back operation she underwent at the end of her Grade 11 year. This caused her to miss a substantial part of her matric year as she only went back to school in the middle of her matric year. "So, I missed a lot of work and my mark went down quite badly and that's also why I struggled to get into university, like I used to be quite a top student and then it just went like south. So that was the worst".

I grappled with this part and whether to see it as a structure, or rather a situation that she bounced back from. My conclusion was however that it became a structure as it had the power to keep her back, to alter her life path dramatically, had she allowed it to restrict her. This once again highlighted the often intertwined inclination of resilience and agency. Caren mentions that this structure challenged her "physically [and] emotionally, I was just a mess (laugh)". She feels that she dealt with this challenge "quite badly, ... honestly, I fell into this deep dark hole of depression, in that time because it was difficult to keep up at school, especially with the pressure of everyone telling you 'this is an important year, you need to get into university' and I'm like 'oh my goodness I don't know what to do' and ... then eventually when I finished school, I took a year off and I went overseas and that also just really helped me to kind of get perspective on life, ... you can take a step back, you don't need to straight away go to university ... and I think for me personally it taught me to like 'vasbyt' [hang in there], you know that you are stronger than you think". Caren could have given up and

submitted to her structure. She could have accepted that university studies were not for her and made a decision to follow a different path. But she went about challenging this structure in a resilient-agentic way. She did not make a hasty and emotional decision but rather chose to get some distance from her structure to seek perspective. And as will become evident later on, she managed to change this structure rather significantly.

Apart from her mobility out of the disabling structure that was her back surgery, she also experienced “strength in hardship”, or an enabling structure, when her father recently became rather ill. “... you have to find, you have to dig deep [into your habitus – which was stocked with R-A after her recovery from the back operation] and find strength to carry on, get up every day and still get on with your life”. Her father’s illness saw a drop in Caren’s marks but she still passed the year and was selected for honours.

### **D.3. Capital**

Caren’s father came to South Africa from an European when he was in the region of 34 years old and started working, possessing only a diploma. In terms of capital though, he brought with him his own set of cultural capital that is probably vastly different from anything in South Africa. This would ultimately be available to his family, especially his children. He eventually started his own engineering business which is still operational today. Her mother is South African, and contributed cultural capital in the form of her experience of studying Communications at UNISA. Even though UNISA is a distance education university, it is a university non the less. When she met Caren’s father, she joined his business, “... running the business and those things. So the two of them basically do the business, or my father works the engineering part and she does running the business and those things”. Caren has pleasant memories of her parent’s factory: “... my brother and sister and I, we would like grow up in the factory and that was always a lot of fun to be part of ... and like go there every day and everyone knows you, you feel like a little celebrity (laugh). Through this, they were probably afforded the opportunity to learn skills and gain cultural and social capital that many others will never have the opportunity to do. And they learned these things the way children learn best, through play and observation. Later on, as a teenager and

young adult, the opportunities increased when Caren did administration work for her parents in their business and were probably exposed to at least some form of business intelligence and “street smarts” in the world of business.

Caren never met her paternal grandparents and knows little about them. She does not think any of them studied as she says: “it was war times and that so it was a different world”. Her maternal grandmother, according to Caren’s knowledge, did not study at tertiary level, “but I know my grandfather, he did accounting and he worked all over like in Angola also and in his later years he had a wood work factory. But I’d say maybe more my generation like my sister and me ... may be more academics”. It could however be noted that the cultural capital Caren’s mother grew up with – as a result of her father’s accounting studies – put her in a position to pursue her own tertiary studies. And this was reproduced in Caren and her sister (according to my understanding her brother was still at school at the time of the interview).

Caren gained social capital from when “... our family would get together on Easter Monday and then ... the kids didn’t know this but everyone would bring a whole lot of chocolate and then they would put us in a dark room and say ‘die paashaas kom!!’ [the Easter bunny is coming]. And we were like so excited and they hide it in the garden ... I’d say the holidays were always the greatest”.

In addition, she continuously experienced her family as very supportive of everything she attempted but she felt that her mother was most proud of her. “Ah my mother, definitely my mother, (laugh) she’s the one that will cry, she’s like so proud and whatever”. This had a very positive effect on Caren and made her feel proud of herself. It also motivated her to want to work harder: “it created like a deeper bond and then you want to do more to make this person proud again so you just want to keep getting better and creating a better yourself, create a better person out of yourself”. Could one get a stronger explanation of cultural capital in action and resilience in the ecology? Even how social capital in the form of family support and resilience as partly resulting from it, may serve to activate R-A. Consequently, Caren may have been in a position to transcend or change structures purely because she wanted to make her mother even more proud. A child who does not have this, may fail to find the motivation to transcend or change a similar structure or be resilient, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Staying with social capital, this was also cultivated by teacher Marlene. She was Caren's Grade 0 teacher and "... she was ... almost like my mother when I wasn't at home ... she said I painted her a mug and when I was in Gr 7 she said "I still have your mu g..." and it just felt so special". The second teacher Caren spoke about was her Grade 10 science teacher: "... she was amazing. She was also just so caring and she really helped me a lot with my science and like she saw potential in me that I didn't even see. And that really helped me a lot". Again, we see the importance of support from a teacher, in this case even as far back as gr 0. That however does not lessen the impact the teacher had on inculcating social capital on Caren and boosting her self-confidence as she experienced that someone important such as "my teacher" cares about me and believes in me. This probably again illustrates how a teacher can validate a person's self-worth.

Being the daughter of an European Father and a South Africa (Afrikaans) mother, Caren grew up speaking quite a few languages and was privileged therefore to receive ample cultural capital. Language can never really be separated from the culture in which it is spoken and thus she would have been exposed to the practices of varied cultures, acquiring varied cultural capital in the process. As a result, I was particularly interested in her opinion on the importance of language in academics. "... I think language also creates such barriers between people ... Well I think for me also it was important to know more than one language, I think that also helps you in your academics to kind of communicate with everyone and pull resources everywhere, cause not everything is always in English or not everything is in your home language. I was quite lucky because I was in an Afrikaans high school but in the English class but then because I was fluent in Afrikaans, I had more option of what classes I wanted to take. So I could take science and ... maths in Afrikaans and it wasn't a problem for me so that ... really helped that I ... wasn't blocked by what they offered the English students, I could also go into what the Afrikaans ones were so that helped...". This is a very important point, particularly in South Africa where we have so many different home languages. I do believe that this point should be explored in the BQ too. For many non-English mother tongue speakers, this changing between classes offered in different languages is not an option due to classes at the University of Pretoria only being presented in English and to a lesser extent in Afrikaans. It then becomes

important to evaluate the types of (linguistic) cultural capital that a student has access to, to draw from.

Caren, in being exposed to various (linguistic) cultural capital experienced a smooth transition to university in terms of language. “I did French also throughout my whole degree ..., and also did English but ... there was never any issues ... at university”. Caren was surprised to learn that not everyone at university could speak Afrikaans. This made her realise that language, being multilingual specifically, “... is helpful if you meet people who are not necessarily that great in English, you can communicate with them”.

Dancing was another aspect of Caren’s life that allowed her to accumulate cultural capital. Dancing teaches one poise and body posture that is widely appreciated in ‘western’ culture. It also allows for social interaction and the building of one’s social capital reserves. For Caren, it also meant achievements and again the validation of her self-esteem in all probability as she obtained national colours for tap and hip hop.

As dancing was taken as an extra-curricular activity and was not hosted by the school, Caren felt that it taught her “... self-confidence, a kind of a sense of yourself like take care of yourself, and I’d say all of them [all the activities] also a sense of responsibility and punctuality... just that sense of there’s more to the world than just your daily school life, there’s more going on in the world and there’s more than just gossip and school work and things like that and so I think that would round up all those activities, it’s what I got from that”. And what she “got from that” was a whole array of cultural and social capital that equipped her habitus for the future as we will see next.

#### **D.4. Resilient-agency (R-A)**

Caren’s back surgery was one occurrence where she needed to draw on her habitus and applied R-A. During the suffering of recovery and trying to catch up on matric work - that became a potentially disabling structure in her life - she learnt about overcoming adversity, strength through hardships, perseverance, always being true to yourself and that anything is possible (R-A). As a result, Caren listed herself as her most important role model in the BQ. When I mentioned this in the interview she however first commented: “Sjo I actually can’t believe I wrote myself. (laugh)”. She thought about

this and then decided that it was in fact a good answer: “uhm ya I would say myself because if I look at what I’ve been through in my life, like I still always smile, and always still happy and then if I think like what I’m going through now I think ‘no you know what, there’s been way worse, this is nothing, this is nothing, you’ll be fine’. And ... I think sometimes the problem if you have a role model that’s someone else, ... you try too hard and maybe lose yourself a bit in trying to be this person. So I thought you know I should look in myself for that kind of inspiration to be better and to aim higher, should I say”.

She also went on to share this inspiration she found in her habitus with others as she resiliently remarked: “... for me I hated when I saw someone struggling, ... it doesn’t matter in what way, I would always want to try to help them, ... even ... sometimes work gets to a lot of people so I try to help them and ... just give them a bit of a hand...”

This made her feel that she wanted to study something in the medical field, and hence she applied for speech therapy. When she was not accepted into speech therapy, as a result of her matric results – that was the result of the presenting structure at that time – R-A was at work again and she started investigating the Faculty of Humanities as she thought “... let me work with what I’ve got, obviously there’s a reason I can’t get into medical”. Caren recalls that when she was younger, she dreamt of becoming a palaeontologist . This degree however required science and math “... so then I said “no, no, no”. This led her to discover the Humanities degree in Archaeology and she arranged her modules in such a way that she was able to complete both her first and second year together in 2014. “I’m so happy. I’m so happy, I’m so happy, I don’t regret it because I originally thought maybe I should split my two subjects over two years because I was struggling to cope and then I mean look now I’m finished ... And I’m so happy I mean I’m doing my Honnours now in it so ... I’m actually very glad I’m in humanities. I’m actually very glad I didn’t get into medical”.

What also changed was Caren’s initial concern that the two-year age gap between her and her fellow first years, who were mostly fresh out of high school, would make it difficult for her to make friends. “... [B]ut I said to myself ag you know what if you’re alone that’s fine, don’t try to change just to fit in with people ...”. In the end, Caren made many good friends by staying true to herself.



Her studies presented yet another incidence where Caren displayed R-A, when she decided to take French in her first year: "... I was like 'o gosh another language' but I was also like 'I can do this'. And also ... I still took French in third year and it was terrible, I cried so much, I thought I can't do this, but you know I just, anything is possible (laugh), I passed, I still got through it all...".

Not only did she finish French, but it also went on to become one of her favourite subjects together with Archaeology. French also made her realise that she has "... quite a knack for languages and I really love learning languages, I think it also just opens the world up to you so I think it was nice to get another language onto my CV...", and into her habitus.

In her opinion Archaeology, her other favourite subject, also appears to have added cultural capital to her habitus as Caren states, "... it just gives you like a whole sense of ... not just what went on in the past but also gives you more of a sense of what's going on today and it's really opened my mind a lot, broadened my horizons quite a lot and it's also fascinating".

Caren regrets not spending the whole of her 2011 gap year overseas as she did not do anything constructive once she arrived home after spending three months abroad. But by her own admission, she was still "... kind of in that lower stage of my life". Regardless of her apparent depressed state, Caren mustered the R-A and enrolled for a course in beauty therapy the following year. According to her this was a very good decision "... 'cause I still didn't have a lot of self-confidence and that really boosted that, and because I got quite good feedback on what I was doing and I felt like okay I'm actually capable of doing something and it was fun and enjoyable. It also built my confidence to speak to people and ... because often people tell you things in the therapy session while you're busy with them, it also makes you aware of life, what's going on in other people's lives.

Earlier on in her own life, Caren had to deal with her father who she experienced as having "that old European mentality kind of in him, he was maybe quite nonchalant about everything so he wouldn't really take too much interest shall I say. I wouldn't say he wasn't proud or maybe put me down but he had very little interest so that also made me feel a bit like you know: notice me, and be proud, ... but ... it stopped affecting me

maybe like a few years ago, so I got over that". But before Caren "got over that", it did affect her rather significantly: "Oh gosh I cried, it's terrible, it just makes you feel like you know: I'm your child you should take interest in my life and things I do, you know reinforce me and tell me you're proud of me. But to be honest, as soon as I stopped caring then he started to say "I'm so proud of you" so I mean at least now he's proud of me".

I wondered whether she really stopped caring, or if she didn't perhaps take his inability to show that he cared and that he was proud as a motivation to work harder and to be resilient-agentic. She recalls "...[b]ut back then it was terrible for me, especially because I didn't come to university after high school for two years, he'd tell me every day '... you need to go to university, you need to go to university" so it felt like he didn't understand me kind of a thing you know". But then in 2013 she went to University and that made her father proud. She used the negative feelings that arose from his lack of display of his feelings to push her into motion on-route to advance herself.

And then her father became ill. She once more dealt with this crisis resilient-agentially by drawing on the family around her to support her. She was also forthcoming with lecturers about the situation she found herself in, "... to kind of when you need an extension, and also when I wasn't always in class, so that relationship with lecturers also helped me, 'cause they knew when I wasn't in class, I wasn't sitting at home. I would say the people around me helped.

Caren joked that what she learned from this ordeal was: "Sjo .... how to become a semi nurse ... Sjo, it was just a horrible time". But on a serious note, she feels that she learned that "... the world doesn't stop for you. Just because something has gone wrong in your life, the world does not stop. You still have to get up and do everything, ... you still have to be somewhere on time, you still have to carry on. I think that's also (laugh) life carries on". At the time of the interview Caren's father was apparently still slightly ill, "... but at least now it's more alright".

## **D.5. Conclusion**

In Caren's story we see an illustration of R-A that allowed Caren to transcend the structure of her own and her father's ill health and enabled her to deal with the

aftermath of despondency post her recovery from her back operation. Part of her strategy was to take a gap year in which she went overseas to gain some perspective and thereafter completing a beauty therapy course once she returned. She also worked as a beauty therapist for a while and gained the confidence boost she needed as a result.

The enormous impact of cultural capital in the form of language is also clearly demonstrated as a way of either opening or closing doors, enabling or disabling – the former of each being at play in Caren’s life. Of equal importance is the role that communication played, especially when Caren communicated with her lecturers during her father’s illness. Whether language ability contributed in any way to her ability to communicate one can only guess, but it surely gave Caren the confidence (even if it was only a placebo-effect) to approach her lecturers. This in the end, went a long way toward enabling her to marshal herself and change a structure.

## **E. DINEO'S NARRATIVE**

Dineo's story is one in which the rejection of a father and the consequent support of a mother and various teachers played a significant role in cultivating R-A. These in turn pushed Dineo to work harder and to be more. In addition, Dineo challenges stereotypes, perhaps as a result of her exposure to diverse cultural capital. She is open to different ways of doing things and to sharing these with others.

When faced with difficult situations, Dineo faces it head-on and to her, pressure and negative input from others is motivation to perform better. In fact, Dineo appears to possess the ability to turn most any challenging and difficult situation into motivation, be it rejection, dejection, external pressure or even actual constraints. Hers is a good example of a habitus well equipped with R-A.

### **E.1. Background information derived from the BQ and the interview**

Dineo completed the BQ in 2012 when she was 19 years old and single. According to the Employment Equity Act, she is a black South African and her home language is South Sotho. She was enrolled in the BA Extended Programme and had an APS of 26 in matric. She believes that she could have obtained a higher mark as was evident in her previous years in school. Dineo's marks did indeed improve once at university as her first-year grade point average was 66. My initial qualitative grading of her questionnaire gave her a resilience mark of 4/5 based on the fact that she identified two negative factors namely lack of finances and her poor matric results as reasons why she wanted to work harder in the future and ensure that she achieves success. This epitomises and could potentially predict R-A.

Dineo replied to my invitation to participate in an interview via sms saying: "Thank you for the opportunity Hestie, I would like to participate provided that I am made aware of the research topic". She was one of only two students that still met with me during the student protests and strikes.

I met Dineo at a coffee shop close to UP campus as campus was on lock down due to the #feesmustfall student protests. I picked her up from her residence. She was immaculately dressed and came across as well-groomed and confident. She

experienced our interview in a very positive way as she remarked somewhere during our discussions: “I should really go for like therapy sessions, so I can open up more and actually find myself in speaking about myself. ‘Cause we internalise so much, we learn to deal with things, we cover it up and in speaking it opens up so much about who you are and how you’ve dealt with things and you learn to find yourself in speaking about yourself. Wow ...”

At the time of the interview Dineo was enrolled for an Honours degree in Anthropology. She is a first-generation student who is currently staying with her mother and stepfather when not in the residence. She grew up with her mother living in her grandfather’s house. Her grandmother passed away while Dineo was still in primary school and her grandfather passed away in 2015. Dineo has a brother, who is nine years older than her and obtained a diploma from UNISA. She is therefore the first person from her family who acquired a degree. Dineo recalls that her mother attempted studying Public Relations through UNISA but she never completed her studies. “I don’t know what were the reasons but I think it was because she had to provide for myself and my brother, she was a single parent at the time”. Again, could her mother’s projected regret have anything to do with Dineo’s determination to study? Dineo mentions that her step-father “... says he has a qualification but I am yet to see it. I’m not disputing it nor am I saying he’s lying; I just haven’t seen it”.

## **E.2. Structure**

I would like to start my discussion of Dineo’s structures by referring to the two things that I based my qualitative resilience score on. These two things were also her answer to the BQ’s question: What contributed to who you are now and what you want to achieve in the future. Dineo remarked that firstly a lack of finances made her want to improve her future, by ensuring that she used her education to sustain her wealth. Secondly, she felt that low grades made her want to improve and push herself even harder to perform better. I cannot help but once again reflect on Edwin Mosia’s quotation here: “... poverty could not be the wall that boundary my potential ...” Her hard work in her studies was her way of transcending the boundary of poverty, it was her successful attempt to organise upward and be a resilient-agent who refuses to be restricted but rather worked harder in order to be more.

This was however not going to be an easy road as Dineo's studies were financed through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). She experienced some challenges in this regard when in her second year she failed a subject. It impacted her average "[a]nd if you don't have a favourable average to get the marks then you have to send in a motivational letter, so it meant another step further, of me trying to convince the institution itself that I'm worth being funded to continue studying".

In her discussion of how she dealt with this challenge, Dineo, in my opinion, exhibits metacognition and a sense of ownership and responsibility that may equip her to successfully deal with future challenges as she was able to learn from this one. "I want to say I made sure I passed, but the module still kicked my butt 'cause when I did it in first year in my social sciences degree, I didn't get admitted for the exam in my first year and in my second year I failed the module and then in final year last year I got a supplement exam for it so oh my goodness, I'd say ..., 'cause it still gave me challenges, literally until the last drop like it really drained my energy. But I don't know, I made sure I passed I guess, that's it. Yeah, regardless of how long it took, I made sure I passed". This module had the potential of hampering her mobility past the structure of poverty but she transcended it through perseverance, and in the process bounced out of this negative situation that is poverty. She could have given up, even tried to register for a different module in its place, but she pushed through by activating R-A and she succeeded in passing the module.

An important spatial structure also presented itself in the BQ where the question asked respondents to describe the most difficult or challenging situation they encountered during their schooling. Dineo recorded traveling a long distance to school and elaborated in the interview: "I stayed in Soweto and then the school was all the way in Auckland Park". She mentioned that the transport provided save travelling but the long hours took away from sufficient sleep. Showcasing herself as a resilient-agent she went on to say that she adjusted by going to bed early. "... 'cause thing is the time weren't adjustable and you had to start waking up a bit earlier like I had to be at bus stop at around sometime past five in the morning". This is such an important point and one that not many students seem to be aware of. Time cannot be adjusted, only properly spent. In retrospect I wonder if this is not a bit of a chicken and egg scenario. Did the travelling teach her to manage her time properly and in turn add cultural capital

to her habitus or is this inborn R-A that had been part of her habitus for an unknown period? Naturally, the influence of her ecology and the systems and social capital involved cannot be overlooked either. One may never be in a position to determine this but it is an important point to ponder. At this juncture I wish to continue my writing on this point under the heading of capital as it became clear that capital also formed an integral part of this process of upward mobility.

### **E.3. Capital**

Thinking back, Dineo feels that this challenge taught her time management “in terms of having to calculate my time in terms of time for sleeping, time for homework ‘cause when you get back you still need to relax but then still do your homework”. She attended a European<sup>22</sup> school and time management was a core value in the school (it is also core cultural capital in the “western” culture). “If you’re not there by the minute or the second they agreed on then it’s a big problem. So time management became something I learned from that one challenge”. Apart from this spatial structure offering Dineo the opportunity to gain cultural capital in the form of time management skills, she learnt that some things cannot be changed but you can choose how you react to and deal with it. Added benefits emanated from changing this structure as she gained social capital cultural capital in its embodied form by learning that her mother will be there through challenges. She has to overcome them but her mother will provide safety and stability while she does the “overcoming”. “... my mother always insist (sic) on walking me to bus stop because it was too dark in winter and still in summer. Till my last day of matric she walked me to the bus stop”. I am of the opinion that this show of support and this type of safety provided by a close family member may establish the environment in which R-A is cultivated.

As had been discussed in the previous narratives, capital gained from a similar sense of security offered by teachers in school, may be of equal importance and was evident

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<sup>22</sup> European was used instead of revealing the specific type of school to ensure anonymity

in Dineo's life in the persona of her math and European teachers. She feels that they "... built a personal relationship beyond the ... teacher-learner relationship ... My European teacher in gr 6, my European teacher in gr 8 and my two maths teachers that was in gr 8 as well".

What Dineo gained from her math teacher, who was also her "prefect mom" from gr 10 to gr 12, was to realise her own potential, especially her ability to be a resilient-agent. "Cause I didn't even believe I could become a prefect 'cause usually its either your 'A' students (identifying a structure based on cultural capital) and I was just above average. I mean she said she would like someone like myself to actually apply to be a prefect and then when the outcome was favourable (transcending the structure) for me and I became a prefect that made me realise that I can do more than, I don't know, the bare minimum (again echoing Salima's "underdog" theory). This ties in with the ecological understanding of resilience, but transcends it too, as the sense of security provided, on the one hand by her mother who was always there and always encouraging her and on the other hand, this teacher who believed in her and who believed that a child is more than the grades on her report card activated not only resilience, but R-A that will in future provide even more R-A Perhaps then one may say that the more a person applies R-A, the more resiliently-agentic that person will become.

My suspicion about the influence of a teacher who looks past marks and scholastic performance was supported in the following: Dineo found two of the other teachers, to be "... encouraging learning... they encouraged learning, sports, ... overall well-being". She experienced the European teacher in gr 6 as a father-figure, "... very accommodating and welcoming, ... he had a black daughter ... that he had adopted, so I found him to be more understanding as a person, [this may be because it made identifying with him easier due to the perception of shared cultural capital in the sense of he understands me as a black girl because he has a black daughter)] 'cause there was a time when we'd write math and algebra and ... geometrics were just difficult to me and he just always encouraged us to not panic. He says when you get a paper don't panic 'cause like if you don't know the answer it's the first thing a person does and forgets. He just encouraged us to not panic, he just took it easy. He didn't force you to over perform or push yourself too hard even though that was, I mean, what we



should have done but he didn't stress good marks over our, I don't know, our mental state".

At this point Dineo remarked: "This is quite nostalgic. 'Cause I'm thinking back to high school and I haven't been there much until last year when we had our [Festival<sup>23</sup>], so now we do it every year in May so now it's a bit of a reunion where the students see each other but we don't see more of the teachers 'cause then you're old enough to just drink and have a good time instead of trying to catch up".

Dineo describes the an European school she attended as "very mixed" in terms of race and class. This presented the opportunity for Dineo to come into contact with various forms of cultural capital from various cultures. That being said, Dineo elaborated: "... but even the white people mixed with themselves 'cause there's a friend of mine whose father is an European and his mother is coloured some people have black and white parents so they are literally mixed raced yeah so it was very mixed but social circles remained of race like race defined social circles a lot. Unless you found people who were from your suburban areas and obviously grew up around white people. So they are more drawn to make friends who they relate to or can relate with better. 'Cause I found that us from Soweto literally we kept to ourselves cause we saw each other on the bus we saw each other in class and took similar classes. So, if you were in a bus that was more prone to go to like white areas and suburb areas you were going to make friends with people in there so it makes sense". But drawing from Bourdieu, similar racial and/or cultural groups, also share similar cultural capital. The formation of social circles here appears to be centred more on cultural capital than colour of skin. As Dineo mentions that black people from the suburbs chose to make white friends from the suburbs. The common factor here is then "the suburbs" and the cultural capital shared there, and not race. The important factor here however is that Dineo

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<sup>23</sup> The name of the Festival is omitted to ensure anonymity

was exposed to suburban capital whereas her peers who lived in Soweto, a township, and attended the local schools, were probably not.

In addition, high school introduced Dineo to athletics and sports and thus to more cultural capital. I myself have been an athlete throughout my life and thus I can attest that many life lessons are learned in and through sport i.e. you cannot always win, sometimes, even though you worked extremely hard, it will still not be enough. It teaches good sportsmanship as you have to be happy for someone else should they win. But a crucial aspect is that sport often teaches you to never give up, to push yourself and to strive for excellence.

In Dineo's primary school, sport was an extra-curricular activity and that meant sometimes travelling at night. This was unsafe and thus made playing sports difficult. However, "... the European school provided transport when you went to do extra-curricular activities ... on Wednesdays there was a subject towards the end of the day where you choose what you want to do personally, you can either go into song writing and ... (can't hear) club or sports. So I chose sports".

"It taught me to value physical health. 'Cause there was a point in my life in high school where I used to tell myself that I am going to redefine a black woman's body (R-A). 'Cause everyone thinks oh you get old and you get fat and that's not right. Thing is we don't eat right always ... or eat a little but the food that we eat is not right. So us having sports and other alternatives to your fast foods or fatty foods that I usually were accustomed to at home (again a show of the influence of other cultural capital), helped me realise that actually if you go into sports you need to take care of what you eat, you need to ensure that your heart is healthy. And you don't indulge in too much of the unhealthy stuff". Statements such as these portray Dineo as such a strong young woman who allowed herself to be open to the influence of other cultural capital, she allowed it to change her habitus in constructive ways, ways that opened her mind to other possibilities and options. The vital thing for me though is that often people have access to the knowledge of other options and yet they choose not to act on that knowledge. Again agency meets resilience: making the choice to transcend the boundaries of cultural capital, challenging and amending your own habitus, and then bouncing out of that negative (unhealthy living) situation: R-A.

Dineo's school offered other advantages too: "So I think my advantage of being in a multi-racial school helped with like learning in English 'cause I didn't find it difficult to adjust to new terms, all I needed was to read more and widen my vocabulary, if anything".

Dineo feels that it is important for a student to accustom themselves with English as an academic language before enrolling at UP (or another English tertiary institution). Yet again I am treading dangerous territory, especially in the South African context in the present time. As mentioned before, language is currently a weapon in the struggle for political and educational domination and it is not a topic that can be discussed free from emotion. That being said, English is currently the major language of instruction at UP and South Africa's only international language. I therefore ask you, the reader, to bear with me as I explore the influence cultural capital in the form of proficiency in English as an academic language in South Africa.

Dineo worked with students during the orientation week in the year we had the interview and realised it "... can be more difficult for you to break down and understand if you are new to the language. So ya, your EOT's and your ALL's literally could help, some of the people who maybe did qualify very well but then they don't know the language, they don't know how to now start thinking in English because it's very difficult for someone who comes from a Zulu school or a Tswana school" (due to the absence of this particular cultural capital).

This is such a clear and accurate summary. The reality in our country is that the availability of international material in any of the ten other South African languages is limited to say the least. Therefore, there is a case to be made for English as language of instruction. That being said, I want to stress again that I realise that objective fact cannot be the only measure used where language issues are concerned. For the moment however, I think the important factor to wrestle with, is not so much a student's proficiency in English per se, but his will to learn the language simply because it is the language of instruction at the moment. His will to make space for it in their lives and in their cultural capital and accompanying habitus. Because, at least for the moment, this will have an impact on a student's ability to navigate the jungle that is university studies.

Capital is also found in Dineo's fondest memories as a child, those of growing up with her cousins. She states feeling that she "... had much nicer of a childhood than I did my adolescence stage 'cause that's when I started liking boys and my mom has a big problem with that because she's gone through so much heartache with men that any chance of me getting hurt would be through a guy I like and that I would get as hurt as her or even more. So my childhood was the best, I grew up with my cousins and lot of extended family around. I lived with both my grandparents at the time. So I think my childhood shaped a lot of who I've become in terms of valuing friendship and having people in my life that I love yes. 'Cause even if I'm in a relationship, my friends come first 'cause I find them more to be family than the guys". Dineo's early life was thus characterised by social capital in the form of family and extended family. This, together with her mother's attitude towards boys, however also taught her that family and friendship is to be valued above all. Dineo's habitus is consequently entrenched with a decision, friends before romantic relationships. This may however also be a defence mechanism where she is afraid to be hurt in a romantic relationship and therefore tells herself that she values friendship more. This surfaced later on in the interview too.

She remembers her family being very supportive, her mother in particular. Again we find social capital in the form of a feeling of safety here, a knowing that there is a part of the world that will always be right because "mom will be at the gate". She remarked: "I remember there were days where we'd go to competitions late. There was a time when we came to UNISA to perform and I got home at around 10 and my Mom was waiting at the gate. She was just happy to have me home and she was encouraging". Dineo did however feel that her mother mostly allowed her "... to do things that would groom me. If it was any other thing she would not have allowed it, like if it was the valentine's ball or a fashion show. If it was just an activity for fun and it didn't quite add value to my life she didn't, she wasn't for it but she was quite happy that I made prefect and she is still very proud of my achievements. So ya, her supportiveness helped me ... her supporting me lead to the person I am". Dineo's mother's behaviour perhaps also modelled an emphasis on activities and events that will "groom" a person and may have found a nesting place in Dineo's habitus. Cultivating a habit of choosing work over pleasure, focussing on cultural capital like gaining an education and focussing on that which will lead to progress in one's life.

In the BQ I asked the respondents to list extracurricular and leadership activities. Dineo listed Choir, Samba, Netball, and being class representative in grades 9, 10 and 11, as well as prefect of the year term 2010/2011. I realise now however that none of these activities will ever be as important as the cultural capital gained from it. And perhaps a better question would have been: Discuss the extra-curricular activities and achievements that you were proudest of and how your participation in them impacted on your life.

During the interview Dineo answered this question by stating that the leadership positions in high school assisted her in getting funding for her studies, a very good illustration of how cultural capital can have a direct bearing on the gaining of economic capital or more accurately, almost the replacement of or proxy for it. In addition, she gained cultural capital in the form of leadership skills through being part of the executive committee of their society on campus. Dineo also grew in confidence and her public speaking abilities improved and the cultural capital gained here, directly impacted on her future career (or CV building and ability to earn economic capital). “So being in front and being able to approach people helped me in so many spaces of my life. ‘Cause right now I am a tutor and the public speaking has helped me to not be shy of meeting new people or making mistakes or being in front of others to, I don’t know, lead them moving forward, yes”. In essence, this is what I need to know because there is a lot of R-A involved here too. Her structure was that of being shy and afraid to make a mistake, but when given the opportunity, she transcended it because she gained the necessary capital in school in a smaller set-up. Perhaps the leadership position, which in itself was a structure that she transcended, did not only teach her these skills, it also gave her the opportunity to activate her R-A.

#### **E.4. Resilient-agency (R-A)**

Dineo’s story was the first one I encountered that I found rather difficult to categorise, I found R-A in so many aspects that it was difficult to definitively separate it. Yet, for the sake of my own journey of grappling with the concepts, I decided to adhere to the structure. Thus, I start my discussion on R-A in Dineo’s life, by revisiting her belief that her matric results could have been better and what she feels she could have done differently. She alludes to external locus of control when she suggests: “Maybe more

pressure, like I would have appreciated the pressure to perform more. 'Cause now in Varsity if you're staying at res the pressure to perform is testament to marks that people get in order to get placement. 'Cause if you're told that you need to get an above 50 average, you are going to ensure that you keep those marks as high as possible in order to secure your place in res". I am however of the opinion this is another example of R-A as Dineo wanted to avoid having to live with her brother and in doing so, she was able to overcome the structure it placed on her and move into residence.

Thinking about her time in the residence Dineo states: "Res was quite amazing 'cause I lived in mixed resses for the whole of my undergrad (which would have once more contributed to varied and various forms of cultural capital). And now that I'm in my honours I'm living in a female only res. But it helped, it helped in terms of me becoming who I am, it helped me gain like a social life now that I'm away from authoritative figures like my brother and my guardians, it allowed me to grow. Living there has contributed a lot to the person I am. Cause the only limitations you have are the ones that you make for yourself". Indeed, this is especially true if you have become skilled in R-A.

However, during the first year of her studies, when Dineo was enrolled for the Extended Programme, she stayed with her brother. As she mentioned above, her relationship with her brother was rather turbulent. She feels staying with him made her determined to pass so that she could live in a university residence "... 'cause obviously everyone stressed the average to get into res so I made sure I got that average in order to leave my brother's place and literally living with my brother itself became so torturous that every weekend I made sure that I was home regardless or not I could afford going I made sure that even when I did have pocket money I saved it up to make sure I got my ticket to go home. It was horrible, oh my goodness". But this "horrible" time in Dineo's life, offers yet another chronicle to her R-A story and another glimpse into the habitus of a young woman who is willing to do what it takes to make the decision to bounce out of a negative situation, transcend the boundaries that wants to hamper her potential, and then act upon that decision with success. Hence, I do believe it has a lot less to do with external locus of control and external pressure and more with R-A of the past, once again yielding more R-A.

Dineo considered her brother to be the least supportive person in her life: “Cause even when he said that he wants what’s best for me there were times when we would fight. Like when I was doing the extended programme self in my first year, any mistake I made, I literally... we even got into a few physical altercations like serious like physical. So me and my brother we get along with each other from a distance. If we’re too close to each other we always fight, yeah so he was the least [proud] person and as much as you try and encourage someone by scaring them, or threatening that if they don’t make the right decisions then they would fail in life or something ... to me it didn’t come through as tough love it came through as, I don’t know, as if he wished something bad happened to me so I could learn from that mistake. So he put me down a lot to do that”.

Once again Dineo’s reaction to her brother’s approach was one of pure R-A: “Oh it meant I had to prove him wrong. That’s what it did. And I actually did. But then now we are quite distant”. This is unfortunate but I do believe that even such circumstances build a person’s habitus as Dineo had to learn how to deal with negative input, how to keep herself strong and be proud of herself even when others were rooting for her to fail. In life there will be many such instances and lessons learned in this department enhance the CV of life substantially.

Earlier on Dineo alluded to the fact that she wished she had more external pressure, (from parents etc.) in matric as it would have helped her perform better. Here, that topic is once again addressed when she stated that she found her mother’s support to add an additional benefit: “I think it puts pressure on me to not fail ... it’s a lot of pressure ‘cause I can’t slip up, at all”. In addition, Dineo also finds that she is an example to her step-sister and this adds additional pressure on her to not be a failure. “Cause obviously I’m an example to her ‘cause she is younger than me, but because she has made previous decisions that have impacted her life negatively ... I have just so much more pressure to make sure that every decision I make is right. I won’t be allowed room for mistakes ... It’s very unfair cause I should be treated as equal or as unique as the next person but whatever happens around us, impacts the kind of pressure I receive from home”. And here is the conundrum; does she experience external pressure as constructive or destructive? Looking at her interview though, and reading through her questionnaire again, I do believe that the pressure that drives her,

is internal and more specifically, R-A. Although her mother was always there and expected a lot from Dineo (which is linked to resilience), it was Dineo who made the decision to take part in activities and to study hard for her spot in university residence etc.

Her step-father and Dineo's mother had been married for seven years at the time of the interview. Dineo stated that her biological father "... is not an active part of my life". And then Dineo shared a part of her being that I would never have expected in an interview such as ours. "What I know of him is that initially he wanted me aborted. He then found out that my mom was too far along and insisted that she take me to an orphanage but then well, my mom didn't do that, and here I am".

Dineo's honesty and openness in this regard was unexpected and much appreciated. R-A was resonating from her story from the start and was echoing yet again. Being able to move past such rejection and going on to become a successful student, certainly deserves some accolades. Growing up with this negative structure but continually transcending it as she grew up, would potentially contribute enormously to her resilient-agentic habitus.

When I asked Dineo about events in her life that she would like to redo or undo, her first response was: "Redo... But why one (laughing) one is so limiting, there's so many". It then became clear that she is of a strong opinion that one should not change any event in one's life and I hear her in effect, define habitus: "Cause even with past mistakes I feel that like they lead you to the person you become. So whether or not you regret it or you don't, it's a moment to your life ... that put you in that position, be it small or a big moment...I'm too afraid of changing my destiny or my path by taking back anything".

Dineo indicated that she did not have a role model as she feels the meaning of role model is very subjective: "... there are people I look up to. But there's no one person that I'd say I'd like to be like. Yeah, I don't aspire to be like anyone ... I don't think there's any one path or person's experience that would make me want to become like that or live their path". Again, Dineo looks inside herself for strength and motivation and her said dependence on external pressures dwindles even more as R-A ascends her list of qualities.



I found Dineo to be a very reflective person with interesting views. She has a wonderful ability to glean from life, for instance when applying the fact that she does not have a role model in her life, she said: "... say maybe, someone asks me what have you learned from your parents? Sometimes it's not lessons that they have given me but things I learned by observing what not to do. Sometimes you learn what not to do instead of what to do. So I'd say I learned to define myself, to be my own person [R-A]. 'Cause there was a time where I thought I looked up to Tebogo Letsego, some motivational speaker and what that only taught me is that it is a business in itself. I mean I could go into that, and venture into that and sell people dreams as much as he is and then I make a success of myself and you could do the same, but anyone and everyone can say that and the thing is the difference comes in when you get paid. That becomes his commodity so I've learnt to not try too hard to be like anyone else, ... but make a success out of myself in my own way".

One way in which she made a success in her own way, was passing the module that she had failed twice. The cause of her initial failing of this subject appears to have been the ending of a romantic relationship. "... it impacted on my studies at large. I missed my sick test, failed and didn't make exam entrance for that one module. Hence it became a nightmare". She could however recover from this experience and reveals yet another resilient-agentive episode as she recalls: "I faced it head on I guess. There was no hiding from it there was no stopping life and taking a breather and saying I'll come back next year, ... the show must go on basically. So I had to keep on keeping on regardless of what's going on. Cause I mean books don't care. Books don't really know that you are sick today, if you've got a submission date or an exam date that needs to be written". This is such a realistic and sober way of looking at studies and a very good example of R-A at play. Always, at every moment, life goes on and one has to, in Dineo's words, "keep on keeping on".

"I moved on from it, I don't know. I don't know what are ways of dealing with things ..." but again she displays that innate strength and reason when she says: "I allowed myself to actually obviously feel the feelings and cry about it so that I can get over it, so that at a later stage it doesn't come back to me and now I remember somebody broke my heart and now I want to cry about it. I guess that with anything that to my life

I deal with it head on". This is a rather vital skill, one that realises that things are better dealt with, than wiped under the carpet.

Dineo feels that she was able to deal with the break up by making use of emotional intelligence. "... because I can't wallow and walk around and ask for sympathy so I guess emotional intelligence is important. 'Cause you can't blame everyone for what you're going through and you can't show everyone what you are going through. So having to put up like a brave face and smile. That's something I had to learn". From Dineo's story at this point, I start to realise that personal responsibility plays a large role in her R-A.

One other quality that Dineo feels she possesses in the face of adversity, is being brave. "... when my grandfather passed away I, even though I was hurt, I was braver than most people. 'Cause my mother broke down and she couldn't even be with the paramedic, we had to be the people to check his pulse and make sure when the paramedic came there we were present so we could tell them the events prior to the passing. So ja, I don't know I am brave enough to face unfavourable circumstances, situations". I think I can safely say that braveness in this instance also alludes to Dineo taking charge of the situation, being responsible and being a resilient-agent.

Something else that transpired from the death of her grandfather was that she wanted to make him proud: "... my grandfather passed away after my June exams, once I like got my final results for first semester and I went back, if anything to make him proud". The cultural capital in the form of expectations from a grandfather who believed in her here shapes a part of her success in her studies and her ability to apply R-A.

Dineo also recalls the death of her grandmother in 2003. "... she used to think I was too confident and too loud and too extraverted. She thought I was going nowhere fast. But if anything I became the example for all my cousins 'cause one of them is now a drug lord apparently and other is ... (cannot make out) about her life, but I guess now she is trying to fix things and I'm the prime example, the only one out of the cousins I grew up with, the ones who added a lot to who I am and my childhood, who is, I don't know, at varsity". At this point one might make the assumption that part of the structure that Dineo grew up in, was that of, shall I call it wrong choices? As it seems that is

what was perpetuated by her cousins. However, Dineo, through R-A, managed to mobilise herself across this structure to become her own success story.

### **E.5. Conclusion**

Dineo's life-history is one that tells the story of how R-A can drive a person to work harder and be more. It also illustrates the impact that the support of a mother and caring teachers have on the cultivation and/or activation of R-A. Dineo had many opportunities to give up, she even had enough excuses to justify giving up, but she persevered by activating R-A. In fact, it was often the hard and difficult circumstances such as having to travel far to and from school and her biological father's rejection that potentially added R-A to her habitus. In other instances, the negativity with which her brother tried to discourage her, nudged her to make the decision to bounce out of a negative situation and transcend the boundaries that wanted to impede her potential through R-A. She came out of such situations in ways that improved her status quo and added additional strength.

Of equal importance is varied cultural capital that Dineo was exposed to and the fact that this appears to have contributed in the same way to her habitus. As a result, she challenges many structures, for instance when she decided that she was "... going to redefine a black woman's body" and does so by mustering R-A and then conquering those structures.

In the next chapter the story of Lisebo will be told. She was initially one of the two students who formed part of the non-effectively navigating students but through hard work and drawing on her resources, she elevated herself into becoming an effectively navigating student.

## **F. LISEBO'S NARRATIVE**

Lisebo's story turned out to be the shortest of all the participants but it also happened to become one of the most fascinating. It unfolded itself, almost in layers, throughout the process of writing it up. It was surprising in some instances when expectations were refuted. Nonetheless, her story turned out to be almost designed around R-A. And even though certain structural elements were found that one can only speculate about, others unfolded itself rather convincingly and Lisebo managed to transcend them.

### **F.1. Background information derived from the BQ and the interview**

Lisebo completed the BQ in 2013 just before her 21st birthday. She was single at the time. According to the Employment Equity Act, she is a Black South African and her home language is Northern Sesotho. She was enrolled in the BA Extended Programme and had an APS of 25 in matric. She did not feel that her matric results were an accurate reflection of her abilities and she is of the opinion that she could have done better had she put in more effort. Lisebo's marks did not improve significantly once at university as her first year grade point average was 43.6 and her consequent GPAs were 53.11 (2014), 40.85 (2015) and 56.59 (2016). My initial qualitative grading of her questionnaire, gave her a resilience mark of 5/5 based on the amount of cultural capital I noticed. In addition, she rewrote her matric examination to improve her marks sufficiently to gain university entry and while waiting for her marks, she enrolled in a FET college. She also listed a number of extra-mural activities and in particular quite a few achievements. I was however also inclined to give a higher score due to her involvement in the community and her apparent general love for people.

Lisebo agreed to an interview after I had a telephonic conversation with her. We had to reschedule our interview after the student protests and I met Lisebo just before the April recess in an office at UP. Lisebo came across as extremely shy and uncertain about herself and hence my choice of the name Lisebo (whisper) for her. This was unexpected as she described herself in the questionnaire as a very social person who

loves people. I do realise though that this does not necessarily mean that you are also “social” in the presence of strangers.

Lesebo was one of the two students who formed part of the non-effective navigators as she effectively failed her first year. However as stated above, her marks improved slightly in consequent years and as this thesis is being finalised, she is enrolled for one final module that is still outstanding in order for her to receive her degree.

At the time of the interview Lisebo was enrolled for a degree in Industrial Sociology and Labour Studies. Lisebo felt that a degree in the Faculty of Humanities was still her first choice because “I think I’m quite sociable, I like working with people, just trying to help and I don’t know, just working with people”. But given the chance, Lisebo does feel that she would perhaps have rather studied a BCom degree in Human Resources or industrial psychology. Based on the repeated theme of her being very social and a peoples-person, I started wondering how true the reflection I saw of her during the interview really was. More possibilities would however unfold as I endeavoured through her life-history.

## **F.2. Structure**

Lisebo’s story required a rather in-depth reflection, perhaps since she was not as forthcoming as many of the other participants were and perhaps by the time I interviewed her, I had become accustomed to the students being open to share. Thus, at the risk of being entirely mistaken, this discussion on structure will commence with one of the conclusions that was derived from reflecting on her story namely the impact of the divorce of Lisebo’s parents when she was in Grade 1 or Grade 2. It is the one thing that she feels influenced her negatively and that she would want to undo if she had the chance. “I think it really had an impact on me, psychologically”. Her being very reserved, she consequently did not elaborate on this matter but I do believe that it created a structure in her life that she perhaps repeatedly faced and failed to transcend. Even though I do not have evidence for this, I base it on my training as a psychologist and believe that it offers me some room to speculate to this regard. This would explain – to some degree at least, and based on the very limited information

that I have on her – her reserved behaviour and apparent lack of self-confidence when faced with a stranger.

The second structure I could identify was what she experienced as the most difficult or challenging situation she encountered during her schooling: "... I really had a problem with maths and a bit of accounting because I took the commerce route. Maths ... I didn't understand a thing". She dealt with this problem by firstly consulting with the teacher, when that did not yield sufficient results, she enrolled for extra classes, "... but still it didn't help out and I had to eventually change to mathematical literacy ". Why I see this as a structure is because it may have affirmed an already poor self-esteem - I am not good enough to conquer maths. It may have altered her (academic) habitus so that she may think once I struggle with something I will never get it right or some things are just too difficult for me. It may however also be a structure because of intellectual limitations.

The above seemed to be reinforced in what followed next. Lisebo's favourite subjects were Anthropology, Labour relations and Labour law. It was however the reason she offered that was of particular interest: "I could easily understand the content, and I would say I was the average 60's student (laugh) so when I had to prepare for tests and assignments it wasn't that much of a hassle". It was supported again when she listed her least favourite subjects as Sociology, Economics and AIM (a basic computer course for first year students). "Cause the sociology personally boiled down to the lectures. Some of the lectures ... I just couldn't understand. They used a lot of jargon and it's got heavy content, it's just too much, too stressful, and there's just too much to read on a daily basis or even preparing for a test. Economics, I'm not that good in, what can I say, I'm not that good in economics. And with AIM, technology also, okay I can use a computer but for some what reason we were tested on other stuff that I felt was a bit challenging".

With structures such as these governing a person's life, it is not surprising that Lisebo found university hard and failed many of her subjects. She did however manage to pass most of them after subsequent attempts but not before reaffirming her structure. Regardless of this, there is evidence of her at least attempting to change the structure

of academics by consulting the teacher and enrolling for extra classes before changing to mathematics literacy.

### **F.3. Capital**

The interesting fact is that Lisebo comes from an educated family and was thus raised with a fair supply of cultural capital. Both her grandparents were teachers, in fact, her grandfather was a principal. They both decided to take an early retirement to enable them to start a business. Lisebo's father studied BCom Accounting Science but did not serve his articles to become a CA. He immediately joined the family business. Her mother completed several short courses at college level and is currently an employee at the Department of Education. Thus, if Bourdieu's theory can be revisited again, Lisebo should have been in a position of almost naturally replicating cultural capital in the form of tertiary education and yet, it was not the case. Again, the impact that the divorce of her parents had on Lisebo comes to mind but also, the possibility of intellectual limitations. In the latter case, Lisebo's ability to pass all the subjects that she has up to this point, reflect R-A.

Regardless though, Lisebo views her parents as her most important role models and from what she reported, they imparted important cultural capital in its embodied form namely responsibility and that hard work and determination will help her obtain what she deserves. Apart from this though, she did not elaborate much on social capital such as her family life or the type of relationship she had with her parents. She did mention that the "... good support system from my mother and grandmother ..." helped her to not take it to heart when someone in her life put her down or gave her the idea that they were not proud of her. "I just knew that they're just always trying to bring you down because you are a reflection of what they want. So basically jealousy leads people to act in very negative ways". Apart from this she only stated that her fondest memories as a child are "[t]ravelling, (laugh) ya, just spending time with family during holidays".

Social capital was evident in that she felt that the type of friends she associated herself with, helped her tremendously. This acquiring of social capital also had the additional benefit of helping her work with her structure of poor self-esteem and being a resilient-

agent: “I’d say, my friends were rather in the top 10, top 20 of our grade. So they would help me, we’d study together and I think making that choice of associating myself with people on a better academic level helped me with my studies and my outlook on life as well”. She describes this outlook on life as: “Just being positive about life, and making rational decisions. Keeping positive”. Through R-A Lisebo was able to organise herself out of this structure, as she would eventually pass matric, only to be faced with a similar structure once she reached university. Should one not at this juncture assign more probability to the possibility that Lisebo’s intellectual or cognitive functioning is the real structure here. If that is the case, then what she had exhibited until this point, changes into pure R-A and a constant battle to transcend the structure of her own mind. One can then only speculate that this structure may be exacerbated by parental expectation of the replication of cultural capital and a child’s attempts at not disappointing her parents – with the accompanying stress factors that it carries. She nonetheless experienced her mother and grandmother as proudest of her. The impact this had on her was that: “It felt as if I’m doing something good or better. A sense of self-accomplishment, that I’m doing something right”.

Social capital was also evident in that her family “were happy” about her participation and involvement in various extramural activities. Lisebo listed that she was in the top 5 among the Grade 12 Afrikaans learners, she won gold in the Afrikaans Olympiad. She participated in choir, hockey, swimming, and visited schools for disabled children. In addition, Lisebo served on the RCL and was a hostel executive. Through these activities she gained social and cultural capital in the form of leadership skills and time management skills. She learned about commitment, to be goal orientated and how to work with people and in teams. The social capital imparted on her as a result of being on the RCL and a hostel executive, stands out over all the activities Lisebo participated in “... because there you are in charge of like groups of people and you had to represent them, what they felt and what they stood for”.

In addition, Lisebo acquired social capital from her teachers. She found her Grade 10 English teacher to be “... really supportive and she had time for students to come and engage with her on an academic level or personal level. So if you had any problems you can go to her and she would talk to the relevant subject teachers and deal with



whatever problems you have". The deputy principal was Lisebo's life orientation teacher and also a psychologist. She helped Lisebo choose subjects in Grade 9.

In school she was also endowed with cultural capital in the form of language. English is very important in Lisebo's opinion as it is a universal language "I think if you don't have a standard understanding of English, you are likely not to make it". Lisebo had always been in an English medium school and she feels: "I think learning English and Afrikaans did make it a bit easy. Since the schools that I went to were mostly English home language and Afrikaans as a second language".

Moving on to her university career, Lisebo was exposed to different study methods and this enabled her to discover a more suitable study method for herself. She feels that had she discovered this, and had she been "... more serious, more motivated", she would have performed better in matric. She concludes the sentiment by saying: "I think it's because sometimes we think we know what we are doing". However, sometimes one has to accept the limitations of one's own intellect and, even though one has to, in one's own endeavours, continually strive to be a resilient-agent, it cannot be to your own detriment as a result of unrealistic expectations. In such a case the efforts to change a structure may be classified as NR-A when the structure is changed but the individual is perhaps scarred as a result. I do not hereby classify Lisebo's case as such though. In this instance she was able to successfully change her structure even if it did mean putting in substantial effort, taking longer than the prescribed time and suffering emotionally on the way, in the end, her actions had positive change as its consequence.

#### **F.4. Resilient-agency (R-A)**

Following on the previous point is a financial crisis that Lisebo reported contributed to who she is now or what she wants to achieve in the future. It made her see that "I just had to study and make a life for myself. I just felt that I really, really needed to study hard because I believe that a good education means a good job and a good job means a good salary". Thus, Lisebo worked hard and endured some set-backs and emotional trauma, but, she changed this individual structure, so that it would not throw her into a future of poverty.

Because Lisebo was this determined to study, she regrets not performing better in grade 11. As a result, she had to wait for her matric results before she could apply to a university. "... and that added another year, a gap year for me to finally get to university". She however approached this gap year in a resilient-agent way as she used it to complete her N4 and N5 in financial management at a FET college during 2012. This shows changing of a structure and a consequent bounce back out of a negative situation of a wasted year into one where she felt that she gained new knowledge that will help her in the future with financing and budgeting. "... now even though I feel that I wasted a year it's also something onto my transcripts". Her plan is to complete her N6 next year, part time, in order to receive her diploma in financial management.

Once she finally started her studies, she experienced a set-back when her father passed on in her first year of studies. This had an impact on her studies as she mentioned that she failed her second semester exams and as a result she had to repeat her first year in 2014. Upon investigating her results, it was however discovered that she had also failed a number of her first semester modules (before the passing of her father).

She dealt with this ordeal in a constructive way by talking about it. "...I felt like talking to whoever I could talk to, my best friend or my mom or my cousins really helped releasing my emotions and talking about how I felt". And in the end, as I am writing this, Lisebo is in her fifth year and needs to complete only one last module before graduating.

## **F.5. Conclusion**

Lisebo's interview yielded less information than the others and a lot of what I had to work on may appear to be speculation. However, in bringing her story together, she presents herself as a resilient-agent time and again, challenging her difficulties with education. First, she had trouble finishing matric with marks that were high enough to apply for university. Then she had trouble finishing her degree, failing many modules and passing others by just obtaining the 50% minimum required. Based on the evidence in her story and on my training as an educational psychologist, I have to

consider the possibility that the greatest structure at play here was her intellectual limitations (although I cannot state this as fact). But Lisebo did not allow this to incapacitate her, she simply applied R-A, worked harder and in the end, managed to transcend the structure.

In addition, Lesebo once again reiterates the fact that one cannot base selection purely on marks because then Lesebo may never have been awarded the opportunity to study at tertiary level. The vital indicator indeed does appear to be that of R-A.

## **G. MICHAEL'S NARRATIVE**

Michael's story stands in stark contrast to that of the five students who passed their first year and even to that of Lesebo who was the other non-effectively navigating student who agreed to an interview. Interestingly enough, indicators of R-A were practically absent from his story even upon thorough investigation. If anything, Michael's habitus appeared void of such indicators and this in the end serves to substantiate what I have been discussing up to this point. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the study, this leads to the continual pointing out of "negative" elements in his narrative. The aim is however not to break down his character, but rather an attempt at drawing a comparison with the aim of identifying those indicators associated with R-A, that one should aim to identify with the BQ.

Michael's story is filled with moments where he did not feel strong enough to face things head-on and even though he struck me as someone with a lot of compassion, this sometimes seems to become an excuse for not being able to stand up against other people in constructive ways, to the point that one can even label it as NR-A when he made changes that had detrimental consequences. He allowed others' perceptions to dictate to him and when this then upsets him, he looks for explanations in external considerations and fails to glean positive skills that he can take forward with him.

### **G.1. Background information derived from the BQ and the interview**

Michael completed the BQ in 2013 when he was 19 years old and single. He is South African, and his home language is Afrikaans. He will be classified as white according to the Employment Equity Act. At the time of completing the questionnaire, Michael was enrolled in the BA Extended Programme and he had an APS of 28 in matric. He attributed this low APS to the fact that matric required more effort, but he held back. Michael's marks did not improve once at university as his first-year grade point average was 36.13. My initial qualitative grading of his questionnaire, gave him a resilience mark of 5/5. I gave him this mark because of the strong religious thread that appeared to exist within his life and the relationship between spirituality/religion and resilience. In addition, he listed his parents' divorce as the biggest challenge he had had to deal with and mentioned that he dealt with this challenge "with patience". In

hindsight, this should probably have hinted to the possibility of poor coping as it is not a constructive nor pro-active answer. Of all the BQs I worked through, I probably misjudged Michael's the most. This increasingly propels me to search for a way of improving the BQ in a manner that either makes scoring more objective or enhances interpretation since perhaps then, Michael would have been spared a lot of added feelings of failure and additions to his poor self-esteem had he not been allowed to UP but forced from the start looking for other alternatives (such as jewellery design).

Michael replied to my invitation to participate in an interview via whatsapp, about ten days after my initial sms, saying: "Hey Hestie, I'm one of the people you asked to interview. I only realized much later that my confirmation did not get through to you. My apologies. Here's my email if I could still be of use to you..." He was one of two students that still met with me during the student protests and strikes.

I met Michael at a restaurant that was conveniently situated for both of us and usually quiet and conducive for an interview. He arrived on a small motorcycle and my first impression was that he had the appearance of an artist or musician. At first glance he gave the impression of being laid back and relaxed but upon closer examination he seemed extremely shy and was very soft spoken.

At the time of the interview Michael was no longer studying at UP but had enrolled at another tertiary institution. He indicated that after two years of studying at UP, he discontinued his studies due to "financial and domestic reasons". "From there I took a gap year and worked a bit. And this year, well last year, I enrolled for jewellery design at \*\*\* . And ja, I got accepted and now that's me, first year". It appears as though he is enjoying his studies this time around and I cannot help but think that my first impressions of Michael fit this new field of study perfectly. I have to wonder whether cultural capital plays a part. Were there any artistic influences in his direct social environment that could contribute to this good fit? Perhaps it would be a good idea to determine this in the BQ – to what extent the respondent's social field provided cultural capital that would enable a student to navigate themselves effectively within a particular field of study. For now, however, the focus should be shifted to the difficult and emotional journey that is Michael's life.

## G.2. Structure

From the interview, the most prevalent structure present in Michael's life appears to be his relationship with his father. This relationship seems to be characterised by a lot of conflict and gives the impression of a disabling structure. As Michael lived with his father during his schooling years, their strained relationship may have placed further pressure on Michael – in addition to the stress associated with schoolwork and examinations and his consequent studies at UP. Adding Michael's inability to apply R-A to this equation, the disabling structure became increasingly incapacitating up to the point where he discontinued his studies at UP.

Michael's studies at UP were financed through a staff discount his father received as part of the incentives of being an employee at UP. This too led to a lot of conflict between Michael and his father. Michael was still living with his father during his studies however he recalls: "After school it was, I'd say it was a bit better because there was a ... my dad starting treating me as, I don't know, more ... adult-like I guess". This treatment appears rather conditional as Michael continues: "Well, me and my dad we ... he didn't like the fact that I went out so much and he held the finances of my studies against me, so it was a constant conflict and it affected my drive to like study for the test the next day". In these instances, adversity did not become a driving force in Michael's life. His habitus did not equip him with the skills for upward mobility but rather increasingly cemented the debilitating structure. Michael dealt with the forces of this disabling structure by applying his self-confessed "poor coping mechanism" namely going out to "[f]riends, that's why I was there so much". Unfortunately, this would have added fuel to the fire as this was one of the direct causes of conflict between Michael and his father. Perhaps Michael lacked social and/or cultural capital that would have enabled him to see that he was entwined in a vicious circle that he had the power to end.

Michael laughs when he mentions his father as the person who was least proud of him. "Well I don't know if he wasn't proud of me, ... I've never heard him say that he's proud of me". He found his father's standards to be high and recalls: "I found him, I started finding him very intimidating because it was, I felt that it was very hard to please him. ... it also challenged me because I wanted to please him". Unfortunately, Michael

never seemed to succeed as he was always “fighting” with his father, even over one of the few things Michael enjoyed namely the church band. His father did not equally appreciate Michael being a youth leader at church as he is not a Christian himself, “... but he still gave me the freedom to do so. We had a lot of arguments about that ...”. Likewise, this challenge did not do well in helping Michael succeed at university whereas many of the other students were able to turn similar situations into opportunities for upward mobility or were able to bounce back out of such situations.

Additionally, we find a contention at this juncture between (1) “but he still gave me the freedom to do so” and (2) “We had a lot of arguments about that”. How much freedom did this structure really allow if there were so many arguments about that very thing? And why was Michael not able to transcend this structure? Similar contentions became evident in later parts of the interview too. Perhaps some clues may be available in the capital available in (or absent from) his habitus.

### **G.3. Capital**

Two particular interests guided the investigation of capital in Michael’s life: (1) were there any artistic influences that could contribute to the seemingly good fit of his new field of study and (2) the extent to which his social structure provided cultural capital that would enable him to navigate himself successfully within his new field of study but also in life in general. To investigate this, one has to start at the beginning at his core family circle.

Michael’s father initially worked as an estate agent but later accepted a position at UP. He has since retired. His mother works as a debit and credit clerk. She enrolled for a degree in education but never completed it. As discussed earlier, Michael’s relationship with his father was strained and finances or economic capital was one of the main reasons. To an extent it would appear that Michael’s father used economic capital to maintain the disabling structure that Michael was not able to transcend (in addition to the role the absence of social capital, as discussed above, may have played).

Of the rest of his family Michael says: “My Grandfather on my dad’s side was dr \*\*\* founder of \*\*\*, he was a homeopath. My Grandmother was a pottery artist”. Here then

the first proof of art as cultural capital and the possibility of artistic tendencies being ingrained in Michael's habitus. It however does not end here as he elaborates: "Then my grandparents on my mom's side, I didn't know her mother at all but I know she was very musically talented and her father, my mom's father, he was a carpenter. ... I also didn't know him very long before he died". Regardless of the fact that Michael did not know them well, this still alludes to the possibility that his habitus included cultural capital in the embodied form of artistic appreciation and sensitivity. Could this point to why his first studies failed since, as will become evident later-on, finances did not play as big a part as Michael indicated. At least not in the way he suggested.

Michael's tale, compared to the other participants, is only scarcely speckled with social capital in the form of family interaction. His fondest memories as a child are of family gatherings with nephews and cousins. Nonetheless, such family interactions are always a potential platform for the sharing of views and acquiring of social knowledge and abilities and skills – skills to negotiate various social situations and issues. Judging from the limited insight gained into Michael's life, his habitus appears deficient in familial social capital. Only one other area of family interaction within his own close family circle was mentioned explicitly when Michael recalls his father being very enthusiastic about the fact that he played a sport, hockey in particular, as his father played hockey too. "... that was an area (according to my knowledge the only area) we could relate in". From the other narratives (as well as the theory on resilience), it would appear that family closeness contributes to R-A as the other students reported extensively about familial support and "togetherness" in various formats. Where the other students talked fondly about at least one parent, Michael simply says of his mother: "she was supportive in most areas". He does feel that she was the one who was proudest of him and it made him feel appreciated "... and because she went through such tough times in her life coming from ... a person who has been through so many things, ... it meant a lot to me and I felt very accomplished". This is peculiar as in my experience – and from the other interviews – children often (but not always) relate very fondly to their mothers. It was not clear why Michael ended up staying with his father after the divorce since most children in such instances will stay with the mother.



When Michael talks about what I would translate as habitus, he says that he believes his involvement in the church and relationships have contributed to who he is now or what he wants to achieve in the future and he explains why by saying: "... my mom had a "boyfriend" you can say, who was ... very abusive at a stage and for any boy you are going to go kill that guy and ... I just realised that I am not different from him, because we all make mistakes in, I don't know, situations where we should be angry and we say things to people, and so I thought just who am I to go justify [sic] [judge] his actions. I'm not in a place where I can tell someone that he is wrong and I am right. Not that I am saying I am abusive". This is, in my opinion, another contention as his involvement in church never seemed to become the place of safety during the storms in his life and by his own admission, he struggles with some anger issues. It is very interesting to see how he appears to have a wrong understanding of his own habitus. Those skills he thinks form part of it, really appears to be absent. Also, my own understanding of this situation would be that standing up to an abusive person, may in fact be seen as R-A as his transcending of this structure may have caused change in his mother's life and the bouncing back out of a negative situation. Although I acknowledge the fact that Michael was still in school at the time of this relationship, his reference to not being judgemental seems almost like an escape route in order for him not to confront the situation – and challenge the structure.

Michael appears to camouflage his circumvention of confrontation even further, by listing Jesus as his most important role model. He indicated that he has learnt how to live from Jesus. He felt that he learned how to accept people easily and not to look down on people because they are different from you. "... to ... keep calm in stormy situations. ... I guess, how to love people. Although I am still practicing". However, standing up against an abusive person, or people who judge you and try to discourage you, is not "looking down" on them or even judging them, it is merely allowing yourself to apply the R-A in order to navigate your field successfully and made positive adaptations and changes. Once more, had his religion really been such an integral part of his habitus, wouldn't one expect it to play out in times of crisis as a life line? Yet, throughout his story, one continually fail to see this.

Another person Michael identified with was his English teacher "... he was always a very aggressive man but he taught himself to control that anger and by telling us a

story, a simple story of him being in a fight at school for a very silly reason and he ended up beating up a guy and I don't know just came to the fact that it was completely unnecessary and it was pretty much the same as just talking things out or you know whatever that was. So ... he probably also had a bit of anger issues or used to have back in school. So ... that pretty much put me in my place". Michael confessed to experiencing trouble controlling his anger while still in school and in effect ruling out another trait associated with resilience namely emotional regulation.

What Michael's cultural capital in its embodied form does include, is negative relationship elements such as the divorce of his parents and the gloomy ending of his own relationship. In the initial BQ Michael described the divorce of his parents as the most difficult or challenging situation he encountered during his schooling. In the interview he was however surprised to learn that this was his answer and I encouraged him to change his answer should he wish. He did and then referred to another negative relationship experience: "Ok ya hindsight – I saw it coming so the divorce didn't really catch me off guard. If it was different it would have been worse". Of course, I have to take into account that two years had lapsed since Michael completed the BQ and a lot of healing could have happened in that time. Alternatively, he may not have felt comfortable sharing his true challenge on paper and with a stranger without a face. Or perhaps the time was just ripe for him to speak to someone about his real greatest challenge during the interview. Whatever the case may be, Michael continued: "It's probably a break-up I had in matric, it was very rough. ... I almost tried to kill myself a few times. Michael stated that he dealt with this break up in a less than ideal manner: "... for the first week or so I drank a lot, because I couldn't deal with my sober self, ... after that I just, I just tried my best not thinking about it, just ignoring. And also, friends as well". This would be one of the unfavourable situations in which one would have expected to see religion be Michael's refuge had it really been as ingrained in his habitus as he appears to believe. But it is in fact evidence to the contrary.

On another note, this heartfelt response, even though upsetting, leads one to reflect on the factors of resilience mentioned in Chapter 2 that are not present here: Self-efficacy, self-esteem, cognitive appraisal, optimism, positive self-concepts, emotional regulation, positive emotions, spirituality and positive adaptation. Spirituality was specifically included because it played such a big role in some of the other participants'

lives and because Michael himself was an active member of a church and youth leader at the time of this event. Perhaps it can then be asked if it is not so much participation in spirituality or religion, but rather whether it forms part of a person's habitus. The question is then how does one assess this in a BQ?

Throughout Michael's interview it became clear that he resorted to his friends when he had difficult things to deal with. It would appear however, that this often caused more harm than good. It may also point to yet another antonym to a trait associated with resilience namely internal locus of control. Could it be that Michael did not have the social capital within his habitus to deal with difficult situations, and instead had to resort to external (and damaging) sources of "coping". Was it because his model of relationships – and contributor to embodied cultural capital – was the failed marriage of his parents and his strained relationship with his father?

Michael felt that his experience with this traumatic ending of a relationship taught him to "... choose carefully between the people I expose myself to and ya, I guess not to depend on people too much because we're all human and we make mistakes". It also appears to me that this displays, in contrast with the other participants, a rather superficial level of metacognition and cognitive appraisal - as he did not reflect on the way he handled the situation(s), but rather again on external aspects. The potential absence of cognitive appraisal here may allude to the fact that Michael's habitus is not equipped with the capital that will enable him to move upward and bounce out of similar situations in the future.

The last type of capital evident in Michael's story, is embodied capital in the form of language. Upon being asked how important he thought language is in a person's academic career, Michael related the question to his current studies and indicated that it is vitally important since "... if there's a miscommunication or a language barrier, I don't know it could lead to, well in my field it could lead to like a piece of jewellery that's gone totally wrong and you have to, you know". He also felt that when people misunderstand each other it leads to conflict. However, Michael did not feel that not being a first language speaker in a particular language, in his case English, necessarily disadvantages a person. I asked Michael about his transition from an Afrikaans school to an English university. He stated that he did not find it difficult to make the transition

and that he only had one subject in Afrikaans. In Michael's opinion, studying in a second language had an advantage "... because I am given a lecture in another language now I tend to pay a bit more attention. Because it's not something I am totally used to, like having class in Afrikaans. And I'm faced with it every day". In this case, being a non-mother tongue English speaker became an enabling structure.

#### **G.4. Resilient-agency (R-A)**

In Michael's case, in contrast to the other participants, resilience and agency is represented only by the apparent lack of the very traits that activated R-A in the other participants. The first "absent" trait, and one that appears vital to the identification of R-A, is cognitive appraisal.

Michael attended an all-boys high school with strong traditions and values. A school that places a lot of emphasis on certain kinds of capital and the reproduction thereof. The very capital that Michael, with his creative and artistic approach to and outlook on life, probably did not care for much in his own life. In his Grade eight year he felt: "... I let people look down on me ..., for a passion I had and... if I didn't allow them to do that I would probably have been in a way better place regarding that passion". He then laughs and mentions that he is now in the process of rekindling this passion, a passion for Skateboarding. He elaborates by dramatically telling me how "a skater" was not an acceptable person in his high school, he shook his head and continued, "I guess you're probably young and I don't blame them that much". Sadly, Michael does not display cognitive appraisal or the ability here to glean positive elements from a negative situation. And here yet another contention in Michael's thinking unfolds.

Regardless of the lack of appreciation he experienced in his high school, Michael does not regret attending that school. He laughs and explains "... because it was an environment I was not totally comfortable in, I think that's, it is part of my character today, what formed me the most, to stand firm in what you feel is acceptable and not caring about what other people think". The important thing here is that, in my opinion, this is an incorrect assessment of the situation as Michael did care about what other people thought. In fact, he cared so much that it led to his discontinuation of skateboarding, for which he reportedly has a great passion. In some of the other

interviews, submerging themselves in that one thing they had a passion for, became a vital coping mechanism and perhaps the vehicle that drove, at least partly, cognitive appraisal and opened up the opportunity for R-A. Thus to his own detriment, Michael withheld a potential coping mechanism from himself and due to its detrimental effect, activated non-resilient agency.

Michael's challenges in school was however not limited to skateboarding. As mentioned earlier, his matric results were not good. He indicated, both in the BQ and in the interview that he did not think his matric results were a true reflection of his ability because it required more effort yet he felt he "held back". Upon being asked what he would have done differently, Michael stated: "I wish I could live elsewhere during my end exam and my mid exam periods. ... Procrastination is quite a big thing I struggle with. ... I wish I had a more structured study time table ... and not go to friend's house while I should be studying. ... I guess ... it could be ... ya it's procrastination". After working through the narratives of all the students, Michael's summary feels almost incomplete, as if he is merely listing a few details but not thinking them through. That being said, this was, compared to Michael's entire interview the one moment where he applied at least some thought process, yet, he still did not really arrive at other insights that can be applied in future (cognitive appraisal) as the other students have – thus no positive change or improvement occurred in his habitus – or does it suggest that skills to apply deep metacognition were not present in Michael's habitus to begin with? This to me, may indicate that should Michael face a similar challenge in future, he may once again struggle to navigate it successfully. And surely this appear to have been the case when he could not finish his degree studies at UP.

Even in a milieu that Michael reportedly enjoyed a lot (the youth band), traits associated with resilience appeared absent. What Michael reported to have gained from his time in the youth band, where he learned how to play together with five other instruments, was "... like it kind of taught me that keeping quiet is better, than I don't know, they say rather don't play than play too much". He applies this to everyday life by saying "... we have two ears and one mouth ... so it's actually keep quiet and listen, rather than ranting on ...". Again, in comparing this answer to the other participants' answers, one gets the feeling that this is an almost timid life view, a potential arrow pointing towards poor self-esteem and poor self-efficacy.

Another example is the time after matric when Michael endeavoured to learn a trade at Nissan but says he only worked there for a week "... but it wasn't ... I think my hands are too soft". I would like to believe that he had other aspirations but I am inclined to wonder if his poor self-esteem and self-efficacy did not hamper him here. Mastery in this case, would have led to him acquiring valuable skills that he could have put to good use in the future even if he did not want to remain in the trade. The many missed opportunities in Michael's life is saddening. Evidence of the crucial role of R-A as was seen in the other students who saw things through and in the end always found it to be a positive influence in their lives, exists here in the absence of the aforementioned.

Michael's incomplete studies at UP highlights yet another missed opportunity at mastery. He does however wish that he could have finished his degree, even though it is not where his passion lies. Contrary to this answer on the BQ, he is now of the opinion that a degree in the Faculty of Humanities is no longer his first choice neither is it appropriate to him. One of his regrets is also applying for the course in Humanities at UP in 2013 rather than taking a "gap year" and applying for it in 2014. When applying at UP, Michael's plan was to become a psychologist but "... I don't know, the way things on TV and the violence going on everywhere, ... I don't think I would have handled it in the right way. ... I guess I would have struggled ... not to try and influence people's situations and ... I couldn't see myself doing that". As an educational psychologist, I am a keen supporter of career exploration and rather making the decision early on that a specific career is not ideal for you or not what you had expected. That being said, could it perhaps be more proof of his poor self-esteem and inability to believe in himself? Whatever the case may be, I do tend to agree with Michael as he appears to have made a much better informed decision after he took a gap year before starting his new (current) study career. Perhaps he would have arrived at this decision before enrolling at UP had he taken a gap year. It was evident from some of the other participants, that a gap year helps in terms of making up one's mind and arriving at an informed decision.

Michael now sees himself becoming a fashion jeweller. "... just opening up my own business, having expeditions (sic) [exhibitions] and I'd like to do comical jewellery as well. I would probably partner up with one of my friends that I'm studying with. ... start something". It appears that it is the practical approach of his current course that is

appealing to him. Even while studying at UP, he favoured the more practical courses such as Spanish and Sepedi. And currently his favourite subject is jewellery techniques “because it is a practical course”. What strikes me here is the fact that he wishes to start a business with one of his friends who are studying with him. Could this again raise a question about his self-esteem and self-efficacy and autonomy and that he does not believe that he will succeed on his own?

### **G.5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Michael seems to have found his way regardless of the fact that he often did not display R-A. However, the important thing for this study is effective navigation of university studies and especially passing the first year. For that reason, the absence of R-A in Michael’s life, resulted in his inability to play by the rules of the field that is university studies. This supports the hypothesis of this study that the identification of indicators of R-A may indeed make a difference in the selection of students who are most suited for university study. The positive by-product is that students such as Michael may be spared additional feelings of failure and may arrive at their ideal life paths that much sooner and without accompanying emotional scars.

This concludes the presentation of the narratives however it marks but the start of the discussion on them. In the next and final chapter, they will be discussed within the findings of this study and dissected and reassembled under the themes that were identified. This discussion, as well as the questions and subsequent suggestions that transpired from the investigation of the responses to the BQ, will be presented in the following chapter, followed by the overall conclusion of this study.