

**THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN A SOUTH  
AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject

Consulting Psychology

Industrial and Organisational Psychology

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: Prof Michelle S. May

2017

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that 'The social construction of student leadership in a South African university' is my own work that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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**Date: 9 June 2017**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In no way can I be thankful enough to Yahweh, Jehovah God; Jesus my Saviour and Holy Spirit my friend and counsellor - who gives me and has given me the wisdom and the creativity to complete this project. All this that is included in this document will be called greatness but I give all the praise to God because I know that I do not have the means in me to accomplish this all on my own. I give him the honour, God in the Trinity, Three in One.

I am grateful for my parents. I know that they are proud – this is a gift to both of you. I acknowledge my brothers who are always supportive. Your love towards me goes a long way.

The doctoral journey can be a lonely one – as a doctoral student; one needs friends and people who are understanding and can journey with one although the journey does not always make sense to friends. I thank you all for letting me be; and for all the laughs and crazy times that we have shared; all which have helped me to complete this journey. I appreciate you. My gratitude sincerely extended to Marit Greenwood, my spiritual mentor and mother – you are truly a gem.

Furthermore, I express a special acknowledgement to Prof Itumeleng Khumalo appreciating your friendship, your sharing of experience and expertise, your support and never tiring spirit to be there for me. I am obliged to you for being able to keep going and to look forward to the completion of this project. Somethings I would have not had them right; had I not had you by my side.

Prof Michelle May, who has been my promoter on this project. I am blessed to have you as the one who has been my guide and role model. I respect you and I will be always grateful for your contribution in my life.

Prof David Levey, who has been the editor on this project. I appreciate your patience and gracious attitude. I am always amazed at the brilliant work that you always deliver.

Martha Blane, who has helped me with technical issues – this being a weakness for me. I appreciate your support and your readiness, willingness and availability at all times.

G, my sister. Thank you for helping me with graphics. I enjoy your talent and creative spirit.

My colleagues, in the Psychology Department. Thank you for the mental stimulation that you have afforded me and time that you have extended to me as I have been on this journey. Special thanks to Nkateko, Amanda, Benny and Nishola. As well, Prof David Maree who has been a brilliant boss – always offering an open door.

In addition, my colleagues in the Psychological Society of South African. You have trusted me and entrusted me with valuable tasks; having no doubt that I will not achieve while on this journey. You have also support me and offered me encouragement. Many thanks.

To end, I want to thank everyone who will read this work. I do believe that we will have fantastic discussions and deliberations on the content of this work. Your input will make me a better scientist.

I want to say well done to myself. In the end I had only myself to pick up and do the work. Many times, it is our promises that we break when we keep our promises to the rest of the world. I am happy that I have been able to keep my word to myself. This is a pat on the back and an expression of self – care.

He is the Alpha and Omega. The First and the Last. Beginning and End. He was there in the beginning and has taken to the end. I will forever praise HIM.

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## SUMMARY

Student leadership in South African (SA) universities has undergone radical change since the transformation of Higher Education in post-apartheid South Africa and this has consequently resulted in shifts in priorities for student leaders. In addition, this leadership can be viewed as occurring in multiple forms in SA universities and in the literature about student leadership in SA. Furthermore; student leadership comprises different and more diverse demographics now in the post-apartheid era. Thus the concept of student leadership may be constituted differently for different student leaders in SA universities today. This research has been undertaken to explore the latter in a particular SA university with the specific aim of studying the social construction of student leadership in a SA university. A social constructionist lens was adopted as the underpinning worldview to adopt a pluralistic qualitative approach in this psychosocial research. Data were gathered using a social dream drawing technique, accessing information on three levels: conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The findings express the fusion of discourse analysis and a psychodynamic interpretation employed in the data analysis. The major findings suggest a two-way interaction between identity in student leadership and relational dynamics in student leadership: these set up a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics. Therefore the social construction of student leadership in a SA university has been found to be a space for a conversation about the said anxiety. Metaphors employing Mandela and Moses as leadership symbols have been related to psychodynamic themes such as narcissistic injury and stillbirth and grief in terms of the conversation about the given anxiety amongst such leaders in a SA university. The research makes a methodological contribution by recommending pluralism as a favourable research approach in the study of student leadership. In addition, recommendations for practice such as the implementation of student leadership schools and the incorporation of the relevant psychology professionals to intervene from an adjustment perspective are proposed to inform consulting psychologists and other relevant practitioners in terms of fit for purpose interventions that are linked to student leadership in SA universities.

**Keywords:** discourse analysis; diversity dynamics; leadership; narcissistic injury; pluralism; psychosocial; stillborn; social dream drawing; unconscious dynamics





## **CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATIONS**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I orientate the reader to this document as well as to the research. I undertake this by discussing the background, motivation and aim of the research, as well as the problem statement. To give perspective to the mind-set used to approach the data in this research, my research worldview or lens was discussed; later the research methodology is presented. For the rest of the chapter, I begin by discussing how the findings are presented in the thesis, as well as providing an overview on the discussion on the presentation of the findings. Finally, I introduce the chapters in the thesis in the format of their layout.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION**

This section articulates the background to the research and provides its context because from a social constructionist perspective, the observation of historical and cultural contributions to contexts appears to be central, as argued by Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2001) and Parker (2015). This observation is regarded as crucial since it is guided by the premise that meaning is historically and culturally mediated (Burr, 2003). The motivation and justification as to why this research is important is also referred to in this section. While I attempt to separate the two items discussed in this section namely background and motivation for the research), I may also integrate them as I go through the section in that they might at times be intertwined owing to the social constructionism lens which proposes that knowledge and human experience is informed by history and culture (Lock & Strong, 2010). To start off, I have taken the opportunity to bring to the fore my inspirations for studying this topic so as to justify my choice of research. Then, I take the reader through what I consider as major sources that are already available in the body of language in relation to this research, as a means of indicating what led me to take an interest in this field of study. Lastly, I provide the reader with literature that I have personally interacted with, as well as the arguments and debates around that material, leading up to what made the research relevant.

Prior to starting this research, I had benefited from experience as a student leader. I also had previous work experience in the area of leadership which kept me energised about my career and practice as a psychologist. This passion I regard as being based on a keen interest in development that in my view is informed by the need for opportunity in the community from where I come. Having registered in the Doctoral Consulting Psychology Programme I undertook to pursue a study in the area of leadership that incorporates the understanding of the process in terms of meaning making as regards leadership, so that the different perspectives on this activity can be noted and taken into account when working with leaders (Lowman, 2002). While also encountering a need to be relevant by way of performing research that would have research value, I found that it would be more appropriate to focus my research area to student leadership. As to personal motivation, it was encouraging to pursue research in an area with which I could identify, based on my personal experience. As the research project developed, I was employed in a Student Affairs Department in a South African university where my job included student leadership development.

The Doctoral Consulting degree is said to be aimed at enhancing the students' competencies necessary for effective consulting psychology (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Economic-and-Management-Sciences/Schools,-departments,-bureau,-centres-&-institutes/School-of-Management-Sciences/Department-of-Industrial-and-Organisational-Psychology/Masters-and-doctoral-degrees>). According to Lowman (2002); consulting psychology is a particular area of study within the broader discipline of psychology and is focused on using science in research and practice so as to design interventions to assist individuals, groups and organisations. As such, my attraction to this research was increased by the aim of the degree which I am currently pursuing. I sought to undertake research that would equip me to be able to design interventions that would, as expressed above by Lowman (2002), assist the individual student leader, student leaders in a group and the organisation of student leadership in a South African university. Thus in my role as a researcher and even more in my experience of students as a university staff member, I perceived that the understanding of student leadership among different student leaders appeared to be diverse. Moreover, this particular South African university had established such leadership in two ways: student leaders who are elected, as in the SRC and other governance structures, and students who

participate in student leadership by selection into leadership programmes. My observations involved the organisational performance of establishing student leadership in a South African university at an individual, group and organisational level (Lowman, 2002). Pursuing this line of study, therefore, offered the promise of relevance to the field of consulting psychology.

Hence I intended to pursue the enhancement of my competence in terms of acting as a consultant to student leadership, as well as my interest in deepening my already existing methods and techniques to deliver 'fit for purpose' solutions to the student leadership community. My intention here is to do this by inviting an understanding of the different voices and perspectives on how student leadership is constructed in a South Africa university, incorporating historical and cultural relevance contained in the different voices and perspectives. In my view, the understanding of how student leadership is constructed offered me an opportunity to contribute knowledge production to the field of student leadership and consulting psychology.

To legitimise my interest I consulted existing research. During this consultation I found that the existing body of knowledge containing aspects that could furnish a point of departure (or context) for this research seemed to be located predominantly in the fields of politics, education (specifically, higher education) and possibly in the politics that may appear in or are related to higher education in the South African context. Furthermore, high pitches of psycho-social melodies of higher education contexts may also have been heard. It may be that the political sounds stir up these psychological and social melodies. In addition, I consulted literature sources on leadership, student leadership, student perceptions of student leadership as well as student experiences of university as reference for attaining background on the topic of interest. The literature that I consulted focused on research in South Africa as well as from other countries; I did this given the importance of looking at the research in the local South African context (Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 2015; Visser, 2007) and considering that the South African university context also includes adopting the perspective of looking broader than South Africa – from the point of view of internationalisation (Kishun, 2007; Louw & Mayer, 2008; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014).

The literature informed this research about the two ways in which student leadership has been established in a South African university. The two ways are namely elected student leaders in student representative bodies or governance structures and student leaders who are part of the leadership development programmes. The two groups have been perceived as having, or having performed, different functions in the university (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). The difference is that elected students seem to be focused on student politics and politics in higher education in general (higher decision making processes in the university) while those students involved with leadership programmes concentrate more on the professional aspect of leadership linked to the needs of external industry, who are probably being equipped to participate in high level decision making, but do not have the mandate to practice this competence in the immediate context of the university (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). Literature however suggested that support offered to student leadership (both groups) has been largely administrated by student leadership units/ divisions or departments which mainly comprise administrative Student Affairs divisions or Offices of Deans of students in most universities in South Africa (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). The said distinction appears to create a disconnect for me and has led me to wonder about how student leadership is understood.

To attempt to articulate the views of existing research, I discuss the literature from two perspectives that inform the student leadership context. Firstly, the changes in the South African university which brought about the implementation of the Higher Education Act, which requires the South African University to establish an elected representative body as student leadership (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). Secondly, the response to the demands of industry that require such a university to produce graduates who are ready to take on leadership roles when they enter the job market (Mukoza & Suki, 2013).

Firstly, the backdrop of the context of the university community in South Africa is characterised by the considerable changes that have transformed the face of this community (Cross, 2004; Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Jansen, 2004). Following these changes, legislation was put in place to regulate this community in accordance with the mandate of the post-apartheid government (Jansen, 2003; Ruth, 2006). Documents such as the 1997 Higher Education Act; the institutionalisation of the

National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (Bawa, 2012) which resulted in a framework for transformation and the restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa as reflected in the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001) as well as The Incorporation of Colleges of Education into the Higher Education Sector: A Framework for Implementation (DoE, 1998) form the basis of the legislation referred to earlier. South African universities have thus faced changes as an outcome of the implementation of the aforementioned legislation (Bawa, 2012; Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Swartz, Arogundade & Davis, 2014). Some of these include mergers (Cross 2004; Le Grange, 2011) which sought to integrate historically white universities, historically black universities, Afrikaans-medium universities and English-medium institutions as well as urban and rural institutions (Bawa, 2012; Ruth, 2006). It is said that these categories of universities have their own kind of distinct history and institutional culture, as informed by the way in which the institution was organised in the apartheid period, and post-apartheid as a result of the mergers and also of moving away from segregating the South African population in terms of access to enrolment (Ruth, 2006; Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Higham, 2012).

Universities are referred to as social objects that are historically produced (Bawa, 2012; Hall, 2008, Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2014). Specifically, Bawa (2012) explains,

Universities and higher education systems are places where social reproduction and reinvention occur – and where the codification of such occurs. They are social entities that help the societies to shape the way in which they think about themselves and how they relate with the rest of society and how societies relate with other societies (p. 669).

As such, historically black universities and rural universities are currently expected to be better resourced (Govinder, Zondo & Makgoba, 2013; Hall, 2008; Koen, Cele & Libhaber, 2006), these institutions were under-resourced during the apartheid system and have, over time, been considered as having an inferior curriculum (Higham, 2012). Therefore, as a result of the lifting of racial segregation in South Africa, the historically white universities experienced a change in daily operations, given the adjustments in the numbers of admissions of black students, as well as the landscape of student distribution in the university as a whole (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Koen et al., 2006,

Sehoole, 2005). As a result, the integration of the different types of universities through mergers and extending access to all population groups comprised a method to address the equality and equity issues in the South African universities (Leibowitz, Rohleder, Bozalek, Carolissen & Swartz, 2007; Notshulwana, 2011; Sharp & Vally, 2009). Consequently, historically white universities have seen more dramatic changes in the university context than historically black ones (Higham, 2012; Kamper & Steyn, 2011; Koen et al., 2006). Therefore, against the backdrop of the current Higher Education Act that requires student involvement which is representative of the whole student population in university decision making, the roles of student politics and student organisations in universities have altered (Jansen, 2003; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). These changes in the roles of student politics and student organisations in universities have variously manifested in student protests (Dludlu, 2016; Koen et al., 2006) and unrest within student life (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Sehoole, 2005) for diverse reasons, given the universities' historical and cultural contexts and scenarios (Koen et al., 2006).

According to South African research, mergers, democratisation and diversification of universities as well as the outcome of post-apartheid legislation in relation to Higher Education have presented themselves in what may be taken for social tensions (Jansen, 2003; Le Grange, 2011; Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013; Sehoole, 2005; Thaver, 2009; van der Westhuizen, 2011; Woodrooffe, 2011). These social tensions exist in the form of an unsettledness in student groups (Cross & Carpentier, 2009), in the interaction of student groups (Cross, 2004) and between university staff and students (Lumadi & Mampuru, 2008; May, 2012) as well as between university management / leadership and students (and student leadership) (Lumadi & Mampuru, 2008). Moreover, mergers seem to have brought about a change in the character of universities as is witnessed in the distribution and admissions of students, as well as in the changing roles of student politics and organisations (Jansen, 2003; Mouton, et. al, 2013; Sehoole, 2005; Thaver, 2009; van der Westhuizen, 2011; Woodrooffe, 2011). In some institutions, there have been accounts of loss of autonomy (Jansen, 2003) which can be translated as there being pressure on students to wrestle with the changes in order to achieve equality and freedom and/or affiliation in the university (Sehoole, 2005; Cross & Carpentier, 2009).

The admission of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or communities who may not always be prepared for what is required in the university environment or even the standard of performance (Le Grange, 2011; Seabi et al., 2012) may raise frustrations, misunderstandings or discontent, which may result in their having difficulty in affiliating with the university culture (Cross & Carpentier, 2009). This introduces a new challenge for the role of student politics and student leadership, participation and involvement. According to Jansen (2004), there has been a change in the role of student politics as well as that of student organisations. Sehoole (2005) also reports a change in university politics following the changes which have occurred in universities.

According to Cross and Carpentier (2009), student affiliation plays an important role in academic success. This affiliation process may include initiation (Cross & Carpentier, 2009) which is embedded in a cultural context. Those students who fail to affiliate experience what is known as cultural disorientation (Cross, 2004). The manner in which students perceive the multicultural environment feeds into their success in the environment (Chung 2014; Halualani, 2008). At a historically white university, those who are called 'new' students (Cross & Carpentier, 2009) have reported their experiences of the university environment as being non- inclusive while the legislative pressure and institutional policies are in place (Daniels & Damons, 2011; Seabi, et al., 2012). 'New students' are those students from previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa (Cross & Carpentier, 2009). The experience of the said new students in historically white universities has been confirmed by the academics in that the academic staff perceive that new students from previously disadvantaged communities experience the university environment as being non – inclusive (Thaver, 2009). Le Grange (2011) suggests that transformation in higher education may need to be rethought. This view may thus have implications for the social construction of student leadership in a South African university. Others have thought to closely exam and explore the concept of white privilege more deeply when engaging on issues of social transformation in higher education (Swartz et al., 2014).

Thus, firstly, following the changes in the South African university, student involvement in university governance has been formalised to make student participation official university governance business (Koen et al., 2006; Luescher – Mamashela, 2013). Consequently, student leaders were elected to participate in the highest decision

making bodies (Cross, 2004; Koen et al., 2006; Lumadi & Mampuru, 2008). Secondly, student leaders participated in leadership programmes that have been aimed at leadership development as a response to industry for graduates who would be ready to take up leadership roles when they enter the work environment (Mukoza & Suki, 2013). As such, the student leadership focus appeared to me to concern the professional development aspect of leadership. To respond to the need of industry, therefore, universities introduced leadership development programmes or curricula in the university setting. This is evidenced by for example, amongst others, the University of the Free State Leadership for Change Programme, the University of South Africa (UNISA) Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) participation in Common Purpose, Future Health Leaders Programme of the University of Cape Town, Enactus and SAWIP (South Africa-Washington International Program). These examples of leadership programmes have been observed to develop the necessary leadership competences in students which may help them to advance in their career development but also to acquire graduate attributes (Griesel & Parker, 2009). The dilemmas in the overall South African context concerning leadership seemed to be aligned with the effective management of diversity (Getz & Roy, 2013). This was apparently salient in higher education institutions as well (Lumadi & Mampuru, 2008), meaning that student leaders seemed to be expected to be able to work with diversity effectively to be considered to be effective in their leadership role. Recent activities in terms of protests, demonstrations regarding dissatisfaction with transformation as well as responses to inequality and equity in some South African universities can be cited in this regard (Commey, 2015; Dlodlu, 2016; Seabi, et. al, 2012; Sharp & Vally, 2009).

Specifically, when investigating the literature in terms of leadership, South African writing mainly accounts for the organisational context or makes reference to the political environment (Booyesen, 2001; Chathury, 2008; Getz & Roy, 2013; Yudelowitz, 2000). In terms of perception regarding the qualities of a successful leader, South African students seem to have incorporated Western and Afrocentric views of leadership into their definition (Getz & Roy, 2013). Central to the Western leadership notion is a high-performance orientation which highlights individualism, whereas the Afrocentric perspective seems to be related to the Ubuntu concept (Booyesen, 2001). This culture of performativity is also referred to as the accepted culture in the higher



education sector (van Wyk, 2005). Although Ubuntu is not advocated as a leadership style in the literature, it is however perceived to provide people with guidelines or principles for a leadership style by encouraging them to express themselves through the group (Booyesen, 2001; van Wyk, 2005). Definitions on aspects of leadership may also differ across diversity dynamics (Burr, 2003). Therefore it occurred to me that different communities may have varying views on leadership models, the constituents of leadership or effective leadership, appropriate behaviours in specific leadership roles and potentially, the meaning of leadership (Booyesen, 2001; Chathury, 2008; Getz & Roy, 2013; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014; Yudelowitz, 2000). These views may be related to respective contexts and might be defined by the context in which they occur (Burr, 2003; Luescher–Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). Furthermore, the findings of previous research, in terms of leadership development of students, were not necessarily focused on historical and cultural relevance, although there was acknowledgement of the importance thereof (Getz & Roy, 2013; Mukoza & Suki, 2013). Based on the above factors, a design from the social constructionist perspective seemed the most appropriate.

It seems therefore, as a motivation for this research, that there may be a need or gap in the body of knowledge to search for a perspective or acquire an understanding regarding the social construction of student leadership, especially in a South African university. This need or gap could be inspired by the current clear guidelines for representative bodies (for example the Higher Education Act, 2007); while contextualisation could perceivably be limited to those in student leadership development programmes. Consequently, an exploration of the issue of the social construction of student leadership in a South African university may aid a deeper understanding of this issue, particularly in relation to the adjustments connected to the post-apartheid South African university. However, the latter is potentially also the place for student leadership development when taking the cultural and historical setting of the South African university into account. The Higher Education sector could benefit in terms of its interaction with student leadership pertaining to decision-making processes. Moreover, the contribution of this research may inform advances which revolve around the development of student leaders for industry and may provide them with some confidence and deeper insights in terms of their leadership.

Research elsewhere (outside South Africa) has noted that leadership may be a concept which has been understood from the students' perspective, in a limited sense (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). Rather than focusing on research pertaining to student leadership, or student leadership experiences in terms of formal student leadership, South African researchers have been more inclined to capture accounts of students' experience of leadership programmes (Mukoza & Suki, 2013). This is where students would typically be selected to be part of a programme (Koen, et al., 2006; Mukoza & Suki, 2013) rather than elected, for example, into a representative body as in a student representative council (SRC) or a governance structure (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). Moreover, students who are part of a representative body or a governance structure involved in the decision making processes of the university were apparently preoccupied with the interests of the general student population as per the Higher Education Act (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013).

From the current research literature, it seemed that these ideas regarding leadership have been mostly studied from an organisational and adult perspective (Booyesen, 2001; Getz & Roy, 2013); some of these studies attempt to link organisational and adult leadership with the student context by indicating the need amongst organisations to receive graduates who are ready to undertake a leadership role in the workplace (Bialek & Lloyd, 1998; Frost & Roberts, 2011, Getz & Roy, 2013). At the same time, research on student leadership appeared to be understood in a limited sense when compared to adult leadership (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). This was furthermore evidenced through a keyword search that I have undertaken in March 2015 on a search platform engine called EBSCOhost, which yields 1 461 results for 'student leadership' as opposed to 82 021 for 'leadership' during the period 2005 - 2015. Just over a year later, I undertook similar, but wider literature search was undertaken on the EBSCOhost databases. These included: Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Humanities Source, PsycARTICLES, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, PsycINFO and SocINDEX with full text. The period of the search was likewise 2005 – 2016. The results yielded were as follows: 'student leadership' produced 5 147 results and 'leadership' 162 174. In addition, 'student leadership' and 'higher education' generated 128 search results while 'leadership and higher education' produced 2 228. Further on, during early 2017, a similar search to the one in 2016 was carried out. This time, 'student leadership' yielded 5 723 results while 'leadership' yielded 179 181. 'Student leadership and higher

education' generated 1 405 results while 'leadership and higher education' generated 14 296.

While studying student leadership perceptions in a South African - United States of America study, the researcher found that it seemed important to consider aspects that have to do with cultural and developmental contexts (Getz & Roy, 2013). Research in the South African student context captured data that is more, for example, to do with the experiences or responses of students (Costandius & Bitzer 2014; Cross & Carpentier, 2009, Kamper & Steyn, 2011) in university communities regarding post-apartheid legislation than with student leadership itself (Leibowitz et al., 2007; Pillay & Collings, 2008; Seabi, et al., 2012; Sehoole; 2005). Where research has explored students' perspectives, some understanding in the body of knowledge about students' experience, or even their meaning of environments where they demonstrate leadership, has been gained (Jansen, 2003; Koen, et al., 2006, Le Grange, 2011; Sharp & Vally, 2009; Thaver, 2009). This understanding refers to that of the general student population and not necessarily of particular student leaders. The general student population has thus, according to the literature, indicated that integration into historically white universities seems to be difficult as a result of culture shock, taking time to adjust, issues of diversity including race and language differences amongst students, institutional culture and issues that have to do with acculturation (Cross, 2004; Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Jansen, 2003; Koen, et al., 2006; Le Grange, 2011; Thaver, 2009). In addition, students have said that they have felt dissatisfied with universities in terms of transformation (Seabi, et. al, 2012; Sharp & Valley, 2009).

The South African universities has also seemingly undergone similar experiences to that of the broader South African experience (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Jansen, 2003) by way of democratisation (Costandius & Bitzer, 2014; Hall, 2008; Le Grange, 2011; Mncube, 2008; Netshitenzhe, 2015), mergers (Jansen, 2003; Mouton, et al., 2013; Sehoole, 2005; Thaver, 2009; van der Westhuizen, 2011; Woodrooffe, 2011), transformation (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Jansen, 2004; Lumadi & Mampuru, 2008; White Paper 3 (DoE,1997), protests (Koen, et al., 2006), working with diversity, diversity dynamics and/ or issues presented by changing demographics (Cross, 2004; Sharp, 2006; Sharp & Vally, 2009; Walker, 2005), and internationalisation (Kishun, 2007; Louw & Mayer, 2008). In this regard, the findings of this study could provide

some sort of a picture of the way in which the broader South African context has potentially played out through the current status of student leadership. I refer to both the implementation of the Higher Education Act as well as the universities' response to industry, in terms of the student leadership development programmes; particularly in terms of transformation. Given the nuances suggested by this picture, there seemed likely to be complexities that might appear in student leadership, which were potentially present in the larger South African context. Therefore, this study can afford literature to that possibility of insight.

To this end, I explored the social construction of student leadership in a South Africa university. I took this project on to attempt to understand some of what constitutes such leadership, what its meaning is in the context in which it occurs, but predominantly, to gain insight on the way in which leadership of this kind is socially constructed. The importance of this, in my view, is that knowledge concerning leadership in the South African context, particularly in the realm of student leadership, could be made thicker and deeper. It is hoped that this knowledge will add to the thinly described body of knowledge on leadership. Moreover, it is hoped that it will possibly add to the knowledge on leadership by providing perspective on a different population, that is, student leaders. In this instance there is potential to better understand student leadership and probably such leaders themselves.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Students seemed to perceive their leadership to be politically charged, where they participate in key decisions with university management that address student needs and also receive continuous feedback from stakeholders in the higher education institution as suggested in Luescher (2010) and Luescher-Mamashela (2013). According to Jansen (2003) and other researchers (Costandius & Bitzer, 2014; Hall, 2008; Le Grange, 2011; Thaver, 2009; Sharp & Vally, 2009; Walker, 2005), the landscape of student leadership has experienced radical changes and shifting priorities as a result of the post-apartheid era. In this same period, the Higher Education Act 1997 was put in place. The Act has seen the formalisation of student activities including student leadership by providing guidelines and a framework for the university system to use operatively when dealing with students. Furthermore, it is apparent that

universities overall, particularly the Student Affairs Offices or the Offices of the Dean of Students, are extremely concerned about student leadership (Bawa, 2012). As a result, this department or division of Student Affairs or of the Offices of the Dean of Students in a university functions as a support for student leaders and sees to their wellbeing (the Student Service Guide <http://www.chet.org.za/books/guide-student-services-south-africa> refers. This seemed likely to be in agreement with the ideas of Lumadi and Mampuru (2008) who suggest that in order to facilitate effective change in universities, students would need to be involved and engaged for participation. The wide interest of university management and other stakeholders in student leadership regarding students' involvement and participation in university decision making seems to be a response to the post 1994 dispensation, where universities are aiming to introduce a culture of transformation in the country and integration of inter-cultural communities (Le Grange 2011; Thaver, 2009). The role of student leadership therefore seems to be shaped by the social context in which it exists (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2015, 2009; Halualani, 2008).

During a student leadership conference in 2010, one of the student leaders appealed to students rather to enhance their representative role than focus on playing an advocacy role (IEC, Department of Higher Education and Training and the South African Union of Students, Pretoria, August 2010). In a later meeting in 2013, another student leader urged colleagues to take their on-campus political role seriously by recognising this role as a part of the macro politics of the country. Additionally, in the same report it was noted that the radical transformation landscape of Higher Education institutions and the role of student leadership could not be regarded as separate from each other (Simon, 2013).

From another perspective, there seemed to be a response by the same department or division of Student Affairs and probably others in South African university contexts who have responded to the call of industry, mentioned earlier (Getz & Roy, 2013). Therefore, this could imply a need for leadership development while students are at university. Higher Education has referred to graduate attributes to describe this response to the need of leadership development (Griesel & Parker, 2009). In response therefore, programmes such as Common Purpose have been developed to assist universities to produce student leaders who are able to respond to the global

challenges which societies seem to face (Common Purpose, 2010). Additionally, the Leadership for Change programme has been instituted at the University of the Free State (<http://www.ufs.ac.za/leadership-for-change-programme/leadership-for-change-programmes/home-page>). In addition, programmes such as Enactus and the South African Washington Internal programme (SAWIP) are also known to have been put into practice in the South African higher education space (<http://sawip.org/>; <http://enactus.org/>). All of the above appear to be leadership opportunities given to student leaders in various bodies or structures but who are not in the SRC, where students go through a selection process rather than an election. In summary, therefore, there seems to be a demand on student leaders to play a representative role, uplift campus politics as a microstructure of the macro politics in SA as well as respond to national and international marketplace demands and challenges. It further appeared that the diverse demands on student leaders are made through different platforms; that is either through a representative body or governance structure as per the 2007 Higher Education Act or through a student leadership development programme that is not explicit in terms of expectation based on any South African regulation or legislation which could be equated to the Higher Education Act, 2007 or its amendments. Both could represent student leadership, however. I have taken the opportunity to clarify how student leadership has been worked with as a central focus for this research. The definition of such leadership includes the diverse perceptions acquired from my understanding of working in the student leadership space, from the literature, as well as from different stakeholders that are located in the context of student leadership. I thus also make some references and comparisons to international thinking concerning student leadership in universities.

In the context of this research, student leadership at a South African university is characterised by students registered at a university who, through a competitive election process, have been elected by their peers to serve on a representative or governance structure in the university or have gone through some kind of selection process to denote suitability to participate as student leaders (Koen et al., 2006; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). In addition, student leadership has been perceived as a means for universities to listen and interact with student interests while involving them in the internal decision-making processes of the university (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). The student representative bodies in South Africa generally

encompass the SRC and other committees as indicated per university (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). When referring to student leadership in a global context, Klemenčič (2014) has indicated that this group (i.e. elected representative bodies such as the SRC) may be a highly influential and powerful source of agency for representing and defending the interests of the collective student body. As a result and in addition, student leadership takes on the political and social agenda on behalf of students in the higher education environment (Klemenčič, 2014). The findings by Luescher-Mamashela (2013) concur with those of the previous author, in relation to the South African situation. Furthermore, from an African perspective it appears that students have played a significant role in both the developments in higher education as well as in their respective national politics together with international politics, since the beginning of the twentieth century (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). While it might be the norm, the university in which this research was conducted has 'de-politicised' student representative elections and participation so as to bypass party politics in these elections. Nevertheless, there appears to be more evidence than not that most student leaders are part of a political party, which is likely to increase conflict amongst them (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). As a result, I suggest that the focus on politics in student leadership will be structurally minimised, but this may not always be achieved in terms of the student leadership experience.

Generally, there are guidelines which detail the expectations of the university and other relevant stakeholders regarding appropriate performance by the leader (Koen et al., 2006). Over the years, the changed landscape of the university context and the expectations of the system concerning the student leader have resulted in interesting outcomes (Jansen, 2003; Mouton et al., 2013; Thaver, 2009; Woodrooffe, 2011). Those include protests, changes in legislation regarding student leader participation and issues relating to the managing of student engagement as well as their role in the university decision making processes (Cross, 2004; Lumadi & Mampuru, 2008). Having participated in a student leadership role myself, I realise that the challenges facing students in the leadership role may be complex. In my experience, student leaders occupy the role for a period of one year, at a time, usually from August / September of one year to the same period of the following year. This time period may not always be sufficient to fully grasp the concepts and expectations of the role, let alone implement the appropriate actions. It often seems like a trial run or a continuation

of what others have done, before realising one's own vision regarding the role. As a result, one may seem to be reactive and/ or to have stagnated. This scenario may also not be descriptive of the ideal or effective leader given the concept in leadership literature (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). Previously, student leaders may have focused their energy on protests and the issue of honorariums for their role (Jansen, 2003). However, they are currently expected to play a role in decision-making together with university management where they may take part in conversations regarding access criteria or numbers admitted into universities, including the increasing enrolment of those who are colloquially known as 'new students' as well as issues of affiliation or adjusting to the university culture (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Costandius & Bitzer, 2014; Jansen, 2004; Le Grange, 2011; Thaver, 2009; Waghid, 2003). Sources consulted (Hall, 2008; Jansen, 2003; Le Grange, 2011; Mouton, et al., 2013) suggest that students' role, following the 1994 dispensation when the transformation agenda was adopted by higher education, has evolved. This consequently places a dynamic demand on student leaders which is worthy of exploration. Considering the topic as a social construction, student leadership is therefore considered as a relational issue or phenomenon (Gergen 2009; 2015) which is actively pursued to address national and interactional matters in the student community of a South African university.

To this end, I asked the following research question:

- What is the social construction of student leadership in a South African university?

#### **1.4 AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

The aim of this research was consequently to explore the social construction of student leadership in a South African university.

The specific aims of the research were:

- To explore the social construction of student leadership in a South African university.



- To explore literature about different perspectives on student leadership in and out of a South African university as well as literature on South African and South African universities, so as: to inform this research regarding point of departure; context; for historical and cultural relevance; and lastly, to inform the interpretations of the data gathered in this research.
- To make recommendations to relevant practitioners regarding student leadership in a South African university.
- To make recommendations to consulting psychologists in terms of fit for purpose interventions that are linked to student leadership in a South African university.

## **1.5 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AS A WORLDVIEW FOR THIS RESEARCH**

Social construction is regarded as the worldview of this research. According to Creswell (2014); a worldview refers to a set of beliefs that guide one's action for research. These beliefs entail the general philosophical inclinations that position the nature of the research and how it is foregrounded. Therefore, the term worldview would encompass ideas about paradigm, ontology, epistemology and axiology. Others like Burr (2003) have noted the complexity of social constructionism in relation to ontology and epistemology in a sense having difficulty in seeing social constructionism separately in terms of these two points of views; which I also find. Moreover, the accommodation of social construction regarding multiple realities (Gergen, 2009) has allowed this research to embrace a pluralistic stance. Further influenced by my belief that the world is complex; I accommodate multiple realities and a space to hold a experience as multidimensional from a multi-ontological or multi – epistemological perspective like Barnes and colleagues in 2014.

As such, social constructionism studies the meaning making process through an interaction of conversation regarding an issue of interest (Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 2015; Lock & Strong, 2010). Meanings are seen to emerge in constant exchange of constructs where a shared meaning can arise (Burr, 2003). From this, it became clear that this worldview accepts the existence of different realities, or what are said to be multiple realities, and provides a platform for engagement where a construction of

realities can occur together in the same setting (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). According to social constructionism, constructs hold historical and cultural relevance (Dalton et al., 2001; Parker, 2015). In the socially, politically and psychologically diverse environment found in South Africa (Cross, 2004; Jansen, 2003; Parker 2015), this paradigm seemed likely to be context sensitive (Nichols, 2015; Slife & Richardson, 2011). In social interaction, knowledge emerges and develops; this facilitates the group process of the particular community (Burr, 2003, Visser & Moleko, 2003). The approach recognises that most, if not all, aspects of human behaviour and experiences are constructed by the culture in which they exist (Giles, 2006; Slife & Richardson, 2011).

Given its acceptance of multiple realities together with its embedded premise that truth is relative, the integrity of social constructionism as a science could have been on the line if one views the stance of social constructionism which holds that all is acceptable (Peterson, 2012; Slife & Richardson, 2011). As a result, a tension between relativism and realism became apparent (Elder-Vass, 2012; Gergen, 2009; Lock & Strong, 2010; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Parker, 2015). At one extreme, relativism regards many varieties of truths as constructed in different discourses, so that those who support this perspective are open to the notion that more than one position can co-exist (Gergen, 2011; Lock & Strong, 2010; Parker, 2015). At the other end, realism is concerned with objective reality and argues that things can be known outside of how they would be represented (Burr, 2003). My inclination was to adopt a 'grey area' position that tends to maintain the tension in a 'healthy' balance. This is where I agreed with Andrews (2012) that an extreme position of realism and relativism would be problematic for this type of research. This is because I strive for a scenario where matters can be challenged and questioned and do not have the same meaning for everyone. It is my conviction that diverse knowledge keeps things fresh in terms of continuously challenging the status quo and can be valuable for the progression and growth of humanity (Galbin, 2015; Slife & Richardson, 2011). I am inclined towards the relational process or the process of social construction where people who share a space would engage in negotiation about the truths in that space so as to carve out a workable way to exist together. It was thus my interest to learn how student leadership is negotiated (or not) at a South African university and the perspectives that exist within this environment.

Subjectivity thus tended to be foremost at this point of this discussion. This concept deals with how we talk about ourselves and experience ourselves as human beings, while how we talk about ourselves constructs an experience of ourselves as human beings (Burr, 2003). Hence subjectivity in social constructionism is socially, culturally and historically mediated and dependent (Elde-Vass, 2012; Parker, 1997) because people are known by the contexts in which they exist (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007). As such, subjectivity concerns acquiring a position and the experience that comes with this position (Burr, 2003); and is furthermore contained in the discourse, or contextually informed, organised language, used to talk about the experience (Parker, 1997). In this research, the subjectivity of the student leaders was prioritised while the accounts of other students and of management or other university employees have not been considered in terms of their own subjectivity. I want; however, to propose that, more than the subjectivity of a participant in a group, there is something to say about the subjectivity in the collective. Galbin (2014) contends that people are part of shared collective experiences. It has been further suggested that we have relational entanglement with one another which cannot be ignored as it promotes creativity and enables the dynamic of the relational space (Gergen, 2011; Slife & Richardson, 2011). The dynamics of the relational space bring about an interesting dimension in terms of the social construction of meaning or the co-construction of reality, because the voices of those who did not participate in this inquiry could be incorporated. This is following the principle of the shared collective experiences that house the relational entanglement (Gergen, 2015).

This worldview, also, allowed me as the researcher to bring my own ideas into the research space which permitted the questioning of the status quo, given my previous experience in student leadership myself while I was a student at the same university where this research process was undertaken. As a psychologist, I was able to use my relevant expertise and training background to participate in the social interaction of the research process. Social constructionism recognises the issues of power and its influence in the social context. In my view, this position is authentic and eliminates possible masks to be managed by me from a researcher's perspective. In this case, conversations could be facilitated at a deeper level and potentially be richer too. Acknowledging the position of power and expertise that could be assigned to me during the enquiry, I have a platform, according to the currently discussed worldview, to

suspend the power that goes with this position and to become an equal participant. My role therefore became both that of participant in the research process as well as that of acting as primary research instrument (Dalton et al., 2001). As the latter, my personal interest in and assumptions made, pertaining to the research question and topic as well as my reflections on the research process and its outcomes, including the encouragement of group interaction during the facilitation of the research activities and lastly my self-reflectivity, have been recognised as having a role in the research, which was accorded according to the principles of social constructionism (Barbour, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Coyle, 2007; Elliot, 2005). The stance of social constructionism in terms of its acceptance of multiple realities also seemed to allow me to examine the data as having multiple possibilities (Frosh, 2003). In light of this, a pluralism view seemed to be favourable and was adopted for this research.

## **1.6 FUSING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH: A PLURALISTIC POSITION**

This research is framed by a social constructionism worldview which is in tune with, and coloured by psychodynamic inspirations that speak to pluralism. The fusion of one or more approaches or methods to research is known by this term (Frost, 2011; Wertz, 2011). Given the above, methodological and theoretical pluralism (Barnes, Caddick, Clarke, Cromby, McDermott, Willis & Wiltshire, 2014; Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan & Dupius, 2011) as well as binocularity (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008) were adopted in this research which also entertained a methodological pluralism in that psychosocial research perceives the person as both social and psychic (Jefferson & Hollway, 2005). This respects the social constructionist view that reality is negotiated within the social context, thus acknowledging multiple perspectives on reality, but then takes this further to recognise the importance of the subjective in reality construction too (Frosh, 2003). Therefore, this fusion of social constructionism and psychosocial research was brought to life by way of language as a vehicle of the data gathering method, which is social dream drawing. This data gathering method is recognised as a psychosocial technique which allows a group process of tapping into the cultural knowledge and thinking that is occurring in the dreaming of the group members (Long, 2013). As such, the study of the data was undertaken by way of binocularity (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008) where the method of using a multiple lens is employed to study the gathered data while also

embracing theoretical pluralism (Frosh, 2003). In such pluralism, the data is studied using theoretical perspectives of discourse analysis, while thereafter considering the depth of the findings by incorporating the understanding gained from data that can be said to be of a sub-conscious and unconscious nature. This approach to study data has also been employed by Frost and Young in their study published in 2008.

According to Parker (1997) the participant is always enmeshed with the dominant culture and social norms of their specific context. The latter are linked with how the subjectivity is constructed (Parker, 1997). This also relates to the unconscious dynamics in the discursive interaction which display the psychological properties that constitute the cultural components of the sense of self (Parker, 2015; 1997). Informed by Foucault (1981), Parker in 1997 describes the language components of the discursive interaction as occurring on the surface while simultaneously noting that the psychodynamic forms of the experience of the subject (or participant) are deeper than the surface or below the surface. As such, the relational dynamic in the co-construction of reality (that is the social dream drawing activity) was perceived to carry dynamics that play out below the surface and appear to be constituted by a collective subjectivity that could operate above and below the surface and which is facilitated through language (Parker, 1997; Slife & Richardson, 2011).

Language takes the place of acting as a communication or social interaction tool and also as a social process (Freedman & Combs, 1996). As informed by Freedman and Combs (1996) language appeared to take centre stage in the study as it was expected to contain both the above surface and below surface aspects of the co-construction of reality. According to the pluralist stance of this research, mechanisms constructed by a certain social context to socially agree on acceptable behaviours, rules and meanings so as to create a contextual reality operate through language as advised by Foucault (1978) and Parker (2015). Through language, metaphors for conceptualising the production of behaviour within a social context are discussed (Boydell, 2009; Lowe, 1991) where, in this research, the metaphors are constituted in terms of dreams as also reported by Mersky (2013). The use of language to articulate the metaphors represented in dreams in a communicable way may therefore imply that language would be essential to the process of negotiation in order to create a 'code of interaction' (Boydell, 2009; Gergen, 1985, 2015). In the case of this study, language is being used

by people as a central means of social interaction. According to (Hoffman, 1990; Kotze & Kotze, 1997; Willig, 2013), people use this tool, language, to measure, describe and explain constructs. In this way, meanings are constructed and can be attached to experiences (Burr, 2003). The parameters of understanding and experiences are therefore mediated and realities become constructed (Lowe, 1991; Gergen, 2015). It can be said therefore that people exist in language more than it merely being a form of human connection (Kotze & Kotze, 1997; Parker, 2015). Thus, existing in language describes a dynamic, social operation rather than a simple linguistic activity (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Gergen, 2009). Based on the findings by the abovementioned authors, the social process experienced during the research process is therefore expected to suggest a reality that occurs below and above the surface, and is to be reflected upon as shared meaning for the individuals participating in this research process (Boydell, 2009). 'Truth' as it exists for the said participants was therefore expected to be brought to the fore by means of language in the social context.

Furthermore, it appears that by the use of language to construct a meaning in a context, a construct of a particular culture or context can be realised, according to Gergen (2015) and Burr (2003). The construction of a view demands thought processing that occurs while or after the process of language is under way (Hoffman, 1990). This implies that one cannot think about something which people have not yet heard being spoken about (du Preez & Blokland, 2012; Burr, 2003). Mersky (2013) refers to dreaming as thinking. Thus, through dreaming or thinking, human beings use language, create categories and concepts that provide a framework for meaning (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Gergen, 2011; Slife & Richardson, 2011). The use of language between people, or the product of language, is termed 'discourse' (Parker, 2010). Therefore, culture is embedded in discourse. This includes sets of meanings, metaphors, images, stories, statements, etcetera (Lock & Strong, 2010; Parker, 2015). According to Freedman & Combs (1996), the term 'discourse' can be explored in a twofold manner: On the one hand it refers to a process of conversation through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved (Lock & Strong, 2010; Lowe, 1991), while on the other, discourse can also refer to systematic and institutionalised ways of speaking and writing or even meaning / sense-making by means of the use of language (Burr, 2003; Gee, 2011). According to Parker (2015) the twofold references to discourse are underpinned by psychodynamic constituents at play in interaction.

In this research, discourse has been considered psychosocially (Boydell, 2009), referring to the pluralistic nature of the research approach. This involved exploring discourse in the twofold manner indicated above, including the consideration of interaction at three levels: consciously, sub-consciously and unconsciously. Consequently, social dream drawing was used in this research to elicit the discourse surrounding the research question. The dreams were seen as metaphors or images that carry the language or discourse concerning the social construction of student leadership at a South African university. In other words, social dream drawings were utilised to elicit what the groups and its members are thinking. This process was informed by Mersky (2013); where, as noted before, she refers to dreaming as thinking. As such, dreaming as thinking and dreams have also been considered in this study as historical and cultural artefacts as also seen in Stein (2010). Dreaming as thinking and dreams are presented and represented in this study through the drawing and then unpacked as the dream was shared as similarly done by Mersky (2013). Thereafter as also done by Mersky (2008); associations and amplifications are made to eventually hold a conversation about the social construction of student leadership in a South African university in relation to the presented dream. Hence the aim of using social dream drawing was to facilitate a means to access language with reference to the research question as inspired by the text of Boydell (2009).

In the context of this research process, language as a communication tool was nominated as a means to identify the constructed realities of student leadership in the university context. This research text therefore acknowledged that the participants may have had different realities that occur below and above the surface, pertaining to the topic. I expected that the realities with which they came into the research discussion were informed by their upbringing, their experience at university, their experience of the construction of their own individual identity, their own experience of student leadership as well as their previous experiences of being in discussions regarding the said topic. Therefore, it was my desire to identify the shared meaning in the midst of the multiple realities that were expected to be introduced in the research discussion as well as possible positions of relativeness in the midst of the multiple realities.

## **1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The design as advised by de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2002) refers to the manner in which I have approached the research, including the steps I have taken as well as the aspects which were important to these stages, as informed by not only the research methodology but also the research worldview. In other words, the research design pointed to the framework which assisted me to conceptualise the phases of the research project. As advised by the work of Creswell (1998), the design which would be most suitable for this study, in terms of the outcomes, aim, paradigm and research process which are envisaged, is termed a qualitative research design. Having employed a pluralist position in this research has meant that the qualitative research design comprises methodological and theoretical pluralism (Chamberlain et al., 2011; Frost, 2011) as well as binocularity (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008).

The process followed is described in the following section. Firstly, I have provided the reader with an indication of the research approach taken. This flows naturally into a discussion about the research strategy. I subsequently inform the reader about the method used, including the research setting, roles, sampling and strategies to ensure quality as well as issues about reporting. This road map was dependent on and is rooted in a social constructionist perspective.

### **1.7.1 Research approach**

In terms of the working assumptions of the approach to this research, it was proposed that a pluralist qualitative research approach would be appropriate (Barnes et al., 2014; Chamberlain et al., 2011; Frost, 2011). This approach focuses rather on quality than quantity, but also on deriving the best from each method, so as to be able to access the most from the data. In other words, the interest is in social meaning instead of numerical or statistical data that would be acquired via quantitative research (Brewer & Miller, 2003). Qualitative research is advocated when studying areas where limited knowledge exists as well as when the context is sought to be understood from the perspective of the participants (Liamputtong, 2010) so as to acquire a sense of social meaning. Further, the literature consulted indicated that qualitative research would allow for intensive contact with the participants (a necessary component of my



research interest), providing an in-depth account of the experiences of the individuals in the current research process (Creswell, 2014; Dalton, et al., 2001). Since the group I was researching was small (see Flick, 2007); the size of the group facilitates the level of detail needed in terms of information gathering, further made this approach an appropriate one as Dalton, et al. (2001) explained about qualitative studies. The argument by Hollway and Jefferson (2012) and Willig (2013), as well as others, that I would, in some instances, be able to rely on my own experience as a source of information, as accepted in the qualitative research approach, also made this a suitable choice as I was consequently able to become a research instrument as well as participant in the research process (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004).

### **1.7.2 Research strategy**

A research strategy informed the process or way in which I have carried out the study (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). The strategy was therefore a guide for the decisions pertaining to the interest that I have had regarding this research in terms of breadth or depth, interest in either words or quantities as well as the setting in which the research occurred, which is discussed in the next section of this chapter (Flick, 2007). In particular, the focus of this research was placed on language and the use of language, largely to gain some understanding about the social construction of student leadership. In this research process I was interested in the depth of the phenomenon while possibly bringing to the fore some of the premises and observations which could lead to the development of theories about the social construction of student leadership at a South African university. To this end, it was suggested that the research strategy deemed suitable for this study be embedded in the principles of the social constructionist paradigm and situated within a qualitative research approach employing a pluralistic and in particular, a binocularity perspective.

Language as a tool of interaction was thus used to shape a particular reality observed in this research process, as proposed by Burr (2003). In this research, the observed reality was accepted as related to the student leaders' understanding of their leadership through the social dream drawing technique. Discourse analysis offered a method to study the language used in the social interaction to co-construct the observed reality (Burck, 2005). As articulated by McCloskey (2008), through discourse

analysis, it was possible for me to explore the power negotiation, regarding relationships, as well as gain exposure to the contextual meaning of language. In this research, therefore, as informed by the writings of Creswell (2014); Gee (2011); McCloskey (2008) and Mersky (2013), I have investigated the observations and interactions as well as material collected through the research process in order to study the constructed reality, which may shed some light on the answers to the questions asked in this research. As a strategy to study the data, I adopted the approach described by Boydell (2009): that of considering discourse analysis psychosocially. This meant examining the use of language in the way that it refers to the dynamics of the conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious levels of interaction. Thus in the case of this research; discourse analysis referred to learning about how language is being used by student leaders to organise (or arrange) and construct the space of student leadership in a South African.

I employed a strategy to ascertain rigour so as to address the requirement of substantial credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Creswell, 2014). In addition, I employed research ethics as well as ethics of professional conduct as a strategy to ensure no harm to participants and also to ensure that the student leaders acquired some benefit from their participation (Willig, 2013). This is because for me, quality of research is embedded in an integrated approach of ethics and rigour (Valandra, 2012). Therefore this research prioritised both ethics and rigour to ensure quality. The latter was achieved through a continuous process of awareness through reflection (Calyton, 2013; Daley, 2010).

### **1.7.3 Research method**

In this part of the discussion, as suggested by Creswell (2014), I have included details regarding the research setting, entrée and the establishment of roles as proposed by Willig (2013), sampling by Frost (2011), data gathering by Mersky (2013), data analysis and interpretation by McCloskey (2008) and Parker (1997) as well as reporting by Forrester (2010). I have also indicated particular interest in the work of Frost (2011) as the author addresses sampling in relation to discourse analysis. In addition, the research method entailed strategies that ensured quality of the data (Flick, 2007). In this section I briefly discuss how the research method was implemented. I expand on

this topic later in the document in Chapter 3 which addresses the research methodology.

#### *1.7.3.1 Research: initial tasks*

The initial tasks of the research involved determining the research setting and entrée as well as establishing goals and recruitment and sampling. The South African university was the setting of this research. The said university as a setting is considered to be dynamic and fluid on an interactional level while consistent on a structural level, given the Higher Education Act and all other policies and legislative frameworks that are relevant, especially as regards transformation. Consequently, the South African university can also be viewed as a role player in South African advancements (Ndimande, 2013; Notshulwana, 2011; Wangenge-Ouma, 2010; Woodrooffe, 2011). As a setting it can be said to have been a repository of post-apartheid issues, which is important to note. At the university where the study was done, the gatekeepers and culture brokers are specifically located in the Student Affairs Division of the university. In order to gain the necessary permissions to do the study, one had to first approach them. Once a rapport is built with the gatekeepers and the culture brokers, the researcher is able to enter the research environment and her/his role is established (Liamputtong, 2010). The process of recruitment and sampling takes place subsequent to the abovementioned steps (Visser, 2007).

I had initially sought to have 10 – 15 participants engage in the group process. Ultimately, six participants made up the participant group. During the time of the research and writing it up, these participants were student leaders in the same university; those who participated needed to be available on the date scheduled for the group process. Nevertheless, a small sample was appropriate as it allowed for the achievement of the greatest potential in this kind of research, which is to obtain thick, rich and in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon (Dalton et al., 2001; Mersky, 2013). Small groups are also easily manageable, especially for facilitation during the session where research information is gathered through the method that has been chosen as described by Creswell (2007); Flick (2007) and Mersky (2013). I just used the data gathered from the six participants because I had reached data saturation given the extent of the transcription that I had obtained (Willig, 2013).

Participant ownership with regards to their participation in the research was achieved by means of the participants' consideration of the contents of the information letter (Appendix C) that I provided (Dalton et al., 2001; Willig, 2013). Once the letter was considered a consent form (Appendix D) it was signed by them as an acknowledgement of the contents of the letter and as an indication that they had understood all the necessary details about the research and their participation in the latter (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). This letter contained information about the role of the examining university and the university's access to the data. In addition, information was provided about other stakeholders who would have access to the data including my research promoter, the transcriber and the assessors of this project. It was also stated in the letter that a voice recorder would be used (Willig, 2013). This was to help in transcribing the discussion of the data gathering session in order to aid data analysis (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). In this way all the other roles were established.

#### *1.7.3.2 Data gathering method*

In the case of this research, social dream drawing (SDD) was the preferred method. As such, dreaming was considered as thinking, which is presented by the participant in a group process by means of a drawing (Mersky, 2013). Although, in its origins, this method was perceived as a means to study unconscious processes (Lawrence, 1998) which are not necessarily accessible to being recorded in language form, the presentation of the drawing in a group setting provides the language to voice constructions about issues (Mersky, 2008). This was done for my research study by using dream drawings as a vehicle, which has been described as a means of providing a third eye (Mersky, 2015). Therefore, I would like to suggest that SDD provided access to the collective understanding through the understanding of the collective unconscious of the student leadership participant group. The premise (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012; Parker, 2015) on which this was based was that as much as an individual has an unconscious, so does a group. The sharing of the dream drawings invited a collective association in this research group, resulting in a collective meaning making process on the topic under discussion, as explained by Boydell (2009) and Mersky (2013; 2015) and also consistent with the social constructionism worldview where people co – construct reality together

The data was gathered in the form of text and photographs that were captured of the dream drawings (Mersky, 2013). The text was created through talking, which included three levels of sharing. Firstly, each participant had an opportunity to present their drawing of a dream (Mersky, 2015). Then, the rest of the group was given the platform for free association about the presented dream. Free associations could be anything that came to mind when the dream was presented (Armstrong, 1998). The associations could be motivated by the way that the dream was presented; for example, the colours, shape or design on the drawing (Mersky, 2013). As a result of this, amplifications could arise. These are cultural or political elements which emerge when presented with the dreams (Mersky, 2015). I note that this could be a chaotic process but that it might assist in exploring the social unconscious; bringing those issues to a conscious level of thought which could be used to think about the issue which is being explored. As a result, the last level of creating the text was to hold a conversation about the associations, amplifications and reflections that had been made regarding the dreams related to how student leadership is constructed in a South African university.

In this research, therefore, the participants were asked to bring a drawing about 'my dream of student leadership' to the group activity. The photographs of the drawings (Appendix G) recorded the drawings which were presented. In the end the facilitators of the data gathering session arrived at working hypotheses which might suggest the relationships between the free associations and / or reflections and / or amplifications related to the dream. These resulted in potential social themes which could occur that are also acquired through the conversation about the social construction of student leadership in a South African university, elicited by the free associations and / or reflections and / or amplifications (Mersky, 2013). As such, based on these, one could make suggestions regarding the said social construction. To this end, I submit that the free associations and / or reflections and / or amplifications appear to be collective data about this construction; in this way contextualising the dream drawings and the conversation about the given construction.

### *1.7.3.3 Recording of data*

As the dreams, associations/amplifications/reflections, conversation level of data collection and working hypotheses were being shared, the recorded details of the

group processes were captured by using a voice recorder (Gee, 2011). A transcription of the recorded dialogue was made by a transcriber (McCloskey, 2008). The transcription and the voice recorder audio file were valuable for the verification of information at any stage of the process, as well as at a later stage if necessary, following the completion of the study. As indicated above, the participants provided consent for the use of this medium and issues of confidentiality in this regard were also addressed (Frost, 2011).

#### *1.7.3.4 Data analysis*

From a social constructionist point of view, data is not split or reduced but is used to understand and create reality (De Vos, et al., 2002; Lock & Strong, 2010). Social construction analysis tends to focus on discourse and on understanding how reality is constructed in human interactions (Burr, 2003, McCloskey, 2008). In addition, this way of studying data demonstrates an interest in language which is spoken or even written, rather than criticising the interpretations or misinterpretations in the text (Krippendorff, 2013). As a result, the research may explore how emotions are conceptualised, how ideas or beliefs come to be, how certain patterns or dynamics in interaction are manifest, including how people engage in self-understanding (Forrester, 2010). According to the focus of this study, discourse analysis was employed utilising a psychosocial approach.

It has been noted that the psychosocial lens affords the researcher a view of the participants as both social and psychic, meaning that room is provided to access information that is both social and psychological at both the conscious (above the surface), sub – conscious and unconscious levels (below the surface) (Ford, 2010; Parker, 1997). According to Hollway & Jefferson, (2012) it is important to approach the data with the following questions when studying data from a psychosocial perspective:

- What do I notice?
- Why do I notice what I notice?
- How is defendedness played out or what is the anxiety that participants are defending themselves from?

- What is my reflexivity?
- What is the meaning of what I notice in the context of the whole context?

As a result, the discourse is analysed to respond to the questions above as a means of exploring issues of collective subjectivity (Parker, 1997), anxiety (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012) and psychological dimensions in the data (Ford, 2010). I explored these questions throughout the cycle suggested by Clarke (2002) for using discourse analysis to study data. The use of the cycle is further elaborated on in the methodology chapter of this text. It was important to me to 'flow' with the data and respond to what the data was doing (Willig, 2013). I have undertaken a journey of exploration to identify the most appropriate methods to access most of the data that I gathered, and I detail this in Chapter 3. Briefly, I mention there that I initially considered grounded theory as a data gathering approach. The impression that I had of this type of theory was that it would have given me space to generate a theory as a possible answer to my research question. It has been argued that this approach seemed best when aiming to study a contextualised social process (Charmaz, 2006). Assuming that a large amount of complex data might be generated through grounded theory, I had also decided to make use of the data management system, Atlas TI. Gee's (2009) model of discourse analysis had also seemed valuable because of its structured approach. In the end, however, it appeared difficult to use the data management system in terms of the structure of Gee's model. The decision to follow grounded theory also fell away because of certain incompatibilities with my perspectives on social constructionism. Before discarding the use of Atlas TI, though, I first considered Clarke's (2002) suggestion on approaching data analysis. Since I was still interested in studying language, these suggestions, while giving me a place to start, were not enough on their own, so I proceeded to explore other ways of discourse analysis. This included Foucauldian discourse analysis. However, when I came across Boydell's (2009) approach, it was easy for me to settle for it and to begin to build as rigorous a data analysis method as possible. Boydell's (2009) approach focuses more on discourse analysis in a psychosocial manner. Consequently, this approach involves studying language not only with an interest on those aspects above the surface but below the surface too; thus, as Hollway and Jefferson (2012) suggest, looking at the participant from both a psychological and social perspective.

### *1.7.3.5 Strategies employed to ensure quality data*

#### *a. Ethical considerations*

In my discussion on ethical considerations I consider three areas: procedures, researcher's ethical considerations and participants' ethical considerations. Encompassing all three areas, I have always kept in mind the principle of beneficence and maleficence. These two principles primarily address the issue that research needs to be beneficial to participants where the benefit of research is maximised (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). Additionally, participants need to be protected from harm and harm needs to be minimised (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). I observed these two principles and discuss the considerations that I made, below.

In order to launch the study I was ethically bound to submit an application for ethical clearance to the University of South Africa Ethics Committee. This entailed the completion of an ethics application form which is attached in an Appendix A. The committee is tasked with vetting research projects to ascertain that the ethics norms are adhered to (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). At this point I would like to mention that as a psychologist doing research, I had the duty to consider the UNISA institutional ethics committee procedures as well as those of my professional capacity as legislated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa, together with other legislation that governs my conduct in this capacity as a psychologist and researcher (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). The security of the data was also discussed in the ethics application. As I have indicated, the data gathered in this research will be secured for 5 years. The researcher will be able to use it for further research if need be. The data is secured in a facility or device that has a security password available.

As part of the ethical considerations regarding the procedures in the research and as mentioned previously, participants were given an information letter (Appendix C) regarding the research during the recruitment phase of the project. Before the data gathering was implemented, the research participants signed a consent form (Appendix D) to indicate their voluntary participation and to further indicate that they understood the contents of the information letter. The voluntary nature of participation means that the participants were not coerced to participate, particularly considering



the purposive sampling method used in this research. Furthermore, issues of confidentiality and anonymity (Neuman, 2012) were discussed in both the information letter and the consent form.

It was additionally important to establish the roles played by different people in the study (Willig, 2013). These included: the researcher; the participants, the co-facilitator (my promoter) in the data gathering session who is also the research promoter of this study, gatekeepers, culture brokers, external examiner and assessors of the study, the transcriber of the data gathering recording and the editor of this text. Language sensitivity has been exercised and although the research always took place in the English language medium, no translation has been requested for another language. Lastly, methodology considerations were tackled. I discuss specific issues relating to ascertaining rigour when using discourse analysis as a data study method.

In terms of the researcher, ethical considerations were taken into account regarding issues of subjectivity (Parker, 2015) as well as remaining aware of the political traps that could be associated with the study. This demands honesty and transparency with one's professional peers with regards to this text (Demuth, 2013; Leedy & Ormond, 2014). In addition, this ethical consideration is important in relation to protecting the participants from harm (Leedy & Ormond, 2014), based on my own biases and inclinations that I could have held and been attracted to. This ethical consideration could further be important for the sake of grounding the interpretations in the data and literature (Demuth, 2013). In addition I signed a co-facilitators' agreement (Appendix E) with the co-facilitator of the data gathering session. This is also important given the dual role she plays in this study, since she is also my research promoter.

In relation to the participants, confidentiality was an essential ethical feature for their consideration (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). Although this is important in terms of procedure, the ethical consideration of confidentiality was considered as vital for the purpose of building and maintaining a relationship with the participants which was conducive to research. This is on account of the issue that confidentiality in a group setting cannot be taken as absolute. In addition, a confidentiality agreement was signed with the transcriber (Appendix F). To uphold the principle of no harm, a debriefing was carried out at the end of the data gathering session. The debriefing

helps the participants to air any unfinished details that could have been elicited by this session, as a means to preserve their psychological dignity (Willig, 2013).

#### *b. Ensuring rigour of the research*

According to Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014), rigour in research is ensured by means of the researchers' attentiveness to the process of research as well as the transparency of the interpretation suggested. As a means to ensure quality data and research rigour, qualitative research prioritises issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity which all relate to the fact that the trustworthiness of the study was considered. By trustworthiness, I refer to the degree to which the worth of the study can be indicated (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). As the first aspect of trustworthiness to discuss: 'credibility of research' refers to the extent to which the researcher's interpretations of the findings are congruent with the realities constructed by the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Demuth, 2013). Some researchers also refer to credibility as the extent to which the research outcome is consistently found to be a relatively true and reasonable observation or interpretation by the researcher, the participants and the reader respectively (Creswell, 1994). Secondly, dependability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are consistent and are able to be repeated (Tracy, 2013). This was measured by the standard of the research conducted, analysed and presented. The third item, confirmability, which refers to the degree to which the results may be confirmed by others, was important to me (Creswell, 2014). Transferability relates to the extent to which my findings could be applicable in other contexts (Morse, 2015) while authenticity refers to the degree to which the study is authentic (Markle, West & Rich, 2011). This means that all of the study is my work and has been conducted in a credible and genuine manner. Specific details about the strategies employed in this research to ascertain rigour are discussed in the methodology chapter later on in this document.

#### *1.7.3.6 Reporting*

In accordance to the research design and worldview perspective undergirding this research process, a qualitative research writing style was used to report the activities within the process. Putting this differently, the research details have been represented

in the form of words, centred on the use of language. In addition, a psychosocial approach was employed; as a result, photographs were used to represent the data gathered. These have been included in the chapter on the findings (Chapter 4 as well as in Appendix F). In addition; the findings have been reported in the context of literature where the literature has been used to make sense of the findings. This way of reporting the findings shows how the findings have agreed with literature, added or extended literature or how the findings have disputed, differed or disagreed with literature. Furthermore, literature has been used to found the recommendation made in Chapter 6; and also background or birth an emergence of the recommendations made from the findings of this research. Lastly, for the sake of making the document reader friendly, some diagrams were included to represent what might be too complex to represent in words. A list of figures was included at the beginning of this document. This research is reported in the present thesis, submitted as part of the requirements for a doctoral study in the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa. Consequently, plans to report the methods and findings of this research in the form of journal articles are still underway, though the findings have been presented as papers at international and national psychology conferences.

## **1.8 FINDINGS**

Following the information gathering sessions, I acquired data as words consisting of associations / amplifications and reflections as received from the drawings during the group process. The data were analysed by means of discourse analysis through a psychosocial lens as indicated above. In the meaning making process of data analysis, my reflections and possibly those of the co-facilitator may be included and might form part of the social construction. The themes and diagrammatic representations from the data have been included in my reporting. In the thesis the findings are indicated firstly as raw findings (text) and photographs of dream drawings represented as data obtained on the three levels of interaction: conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious. The photographs were not analysed nor formed part of the analysis, but rather were included as illustrations of the text, which contain the items of discourse gathered. The discourse has been identified at each level of interaction and data grouped or accounted for appropriately. Thereafter, the findings were discussed in an integration chapter where the interpretations of those findings were integrated with existing

literature to create a full picture about the findings but also to perform a trustworthiness exercise, as alluded to above. Two figures are included in this discussion; one which represents a model to understand the findings in a simple manner and another that illustrates the dynamics in the findings in more detail.

## **1.9 DISCUSSION**

The preferred style of writing qualitative research is to represent the detail of the research in the form of the use of language expressed in words (Liamputtong, 2010). The discussion, therefore, included the description of the setting as well as the activities of the process. As the story unfolds, the researcher's interpretations have been produced. The working hypotheses as well as the themes generated in the group process are discussed, in the end suggesting inferences, suggestions, preoccupations and so forth to the researcher, which may exist in relation to the research problem, question and even the research topic.

## **1.10 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1.10.1 Conclusion of the thesis**

This study aimed to research the social construction of student leadership at a South African university. This conclusion is necessary so as ascertain whether the research aim had been met. In terms of the kind of study that I have embarked on; it became difficult to say that I had met the aims of the study with certainty (or not). I am able to state that I have become much more insightful and seem to be in a more enlightened place than I was when I began. There are new and interesting learnings that I have come across regarding the aim of the research. It had been my expectation in the beginning of the study that the outcome of this research inquiry could contain a discourse that might be pertinent in South Africa, particularly in the area of student leadership and possibly in the South African higher education sector; although this is more the case in the area of leadership development. It was possible, and I wanted to propose, that this discourse would include some injected nuances from the South African context, particularly regarding how issues of transformation, changes in the higher education sector relating to increasing access, existing in a post-apartheid era

and so forth, as well as matters of diversity, have systematic ripple effects (Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2014) on the social construction of student leadership at a South African university in relation to leadership development. Given the assumptions made by the social construction paradigm, I was comfortable in putting these reflections forward. This could be an exciting opportunity where I and others who would be exposed to this research, might learn about the discourse pertaining to the social construction of student leadership in a South African university, while also learning about higher education in South Africa, South Africa itself and, potentially, how the leadership development of student plays out.

Accordingly, when concluding the thesis, I offer my reflections on the process. This includes the highlights and lowlights of the researcher process (Creswell, 2007). In this way, the benefits and pitfalls of this research process have been put on the table (Flick, 2007). Stemming from this, recommendations for future research were made (De Vos, et al., 2002). Because social constructionism presents an opportunity for continuous conversation (Lock & Strong, 2010), this research does not end with a full stop as traditional writing would expect; the open-ended ending presents a platform to continue the conversation, whether by other writers and researchers, the current researcher and current group, the current researcher and other groups, other researchers and the current group. This conversation is open to individuals who may take a particular interest in the conversation and who may contribute to the construction of realities, which are of interest to this research.

### **1.10.2 Limitations of the study**

In terms of the limitations, I do acknowledge them in Chapter 6. I also note gaps this study could have encountered and make recommendations for future studies. Some of these include issues concerning methodology, especially regarding the use of pluralist and psychosocial research in the South African context.

### **1.10.3 Recommendations of the study**

Recommendations of the study are discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The recommendations are made in terms of recommendations for future research and for

practice. Furthermore regarding recommendations for practice; proposals are brought to the fore regarding intervention for the individual student leader, for the group of student leadership as well as the organisation and systemic level of student leadership.

## **1.11 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

I conclude this current orientation to the text by noting the order in which the chapters have been presented. This is as follows:

### **CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATIONS**

In this chapter an orientation to the rest of the text is provided. It is my hope that the reader will be able to gain a feel of what to expect throughout the whole text as a result of Chapter 1. Even more, it is my hope that the reader is clear on what the study deals with, how it will be carried out and why it is important, including the proposed new contributions to existing literature.

### **CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE WORLDVIEW SCENE**

By means of Chapter 2, I hope to set the worldview scene. Throughout this chapter, therefore, I would like to expose the reader to the worldview in terms of which this study is framed as well as the nuances thereof. It is my hope that this chapter will help to contextualise the study in terms of the theoretical bases and also make my working assumptions plain.

### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH INQUIRY**

The aim of this Chapter is to communicate to the reader the methodology used to pursue this research. I have also included a discussion on my journey in the research process regarding the study of the data. This has been important as the way I handle the data affects the trustworthiness of the study to a great extent, but also addresses important ethical issues regarding acting in the best interest of the participants.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, THE DREAMS

I have used this chapter to report the findings in their raw sense and, therefore, I have detailed each dream together with the description of the biographical significance of each participant. Moreover, I have presented each dream in terms of the associations, amplifications and also the conversation related to the dream, respectively. From a preliminary point of view, it seemed that the thread running through regarding the themes across all the dreams constituted the words: "I am anxious about diversity".

## CHAPTER 5: INTEGRATION, REFLECTING ON STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE GROUP

The integration chapter is composed in order to illustrate the interpretations made to the data including the hypothesis generated, as well as the model that has been suggested as a means to understand the major findings of the study. In addition, existing literature has been used to dispute my arguments, for my findings to add or extend such literature or to demonstrate new contributions to current literature.

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lastly, I have reflected on the study and shared my journey and learnings in relation to this study through Chapter 6. I have utilised one of the main metaphors that the student leaders have used to talk about the social construction of student leadership in a South African university to process and present this reflection. This metaphor is that of the motion picture, *The life of Pi*. I have thus used my life in student leadership in a South African university and the social construction thereof to demonstrate my journey in student leadership and the translation of my life in student leadership as likened to the metaphor of *The life of Pi*. This for me seems to be quite natural, but also something to say about the working of the unconscious in relation to the unravelling of the process of student leadership in this study and in my own experience. I make these remarks based on the fact that I have been in student leadership at a South African university myself.

In Chapter 6, I end off by referring back to Chapter 1 and reflecting on the aims of the research but also reporting on how these aims have been addressed. As a result, I also report on how each chapter has been a part of addressing each aim; general or specific. I thereafter make conclusions regarding the findings and interpretations of the data with regards to the research question. These conclusions help me to make recommendations for future research and for practice. I report on these recommendations in chapter 6. Furthermore, I have stated the contributions that I propose have been added by this study in terms of the research field and in practice. In addition, I have become transparent about the limitations of this study which I have been aware of.

### **1.12 IN A NUTSHELL**

This chapter presented an overview and serves as an orientation to whet the readers' appetite for the content of the thesis. In a nutshell, the chapter introduced the reader to the title of the thesis, '*The social construction of student leadership in a South African university*'. The research associated with this title was studied through a social constructionism worldview using a psychosocial method known as social dream drawing. Thus a pluralist stance was adopted. Additionally, as discussed in this chapter, discourse analysis through a psychosocial approach was employed to study the data that was collected. A psychodynamic interpretation was entertained in understanding the discourse. During the whole process, reflexivity has been an important practice. Thus strategies to ascertain rigour were also employed; these were inclusive of research ethics and HPCSA ethical conduct guidelines. Having laid the foundations for the thesis, this chapter has briefly described the detail of each chapter that follows, which offers specific content on milestones and building blocks of this thesis. These include the worldview, research methodology, findings and integration of them as well as a reflection chapter and references.



## **CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE WORLDVIEW SCENE**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I have set the worldview scene. I have discussed and orientated the reader in terms of the worldview of pluralism that I adopted for this research. In the study I realise a pluralistic stance by fusing a social constructionism lens (in other words, the use of discourse analysis) with a psychosocial perspective as a secondary lens. Since social constructionism is a primary lens for this research, I follow up the discussion with details regarding my journey with social constructionism, indicating why I adopted it as well. I then introduce social constructionism as the foundation pertaining to this research. Thereafter, I have elaborated on aspects of social constructionism such as the tension between relativism and realism and multiple realities in social constructionism. Throughout the section addressing multiple realities, a discussion on the fusion between social constructionism as a primary lens and the secondary lens of psychosocial research is included. Regarding methodology, I have also discussed language in this chapter as a vehicle through which I obtain and study the data. Thereafter, I include a section on the relational process and relational space, which I take to be core elements of the perspectives that I adopt. A discussion on relativism as well as subjectivity and their place in a social constructionist study, particularly considering the methodological stance that I have taken, seems to be rightfully placed in this chapter. Afterwards, I discuss the place of agency in terms of the worldview of this research. To conclude the chapter, I elaborate on my position regarding social constructionism.

### **2.2 WORLDVIEW OF THIS RESEARCH**

By worldview I mean the basic set of beliefs that guide one's action for research, as understood from Creswell (2014). Furthermore, I subscribe to Creswell's (2014) description of a worldview as consisting of general philosophical inclinations that position the nature of the research and how it is foregrounded. As such, the general philosophical inclinations in this research are embedded in social constructionism. Furthermore, according to Creswell (2014), the term worldview in this research incorporates, ontology, epistemology, paradigm and axiology all of which relate to the

methodology of the research. Considered respectively, ontology concerns how we learn about existence and about being (Burr, 2003). Secondly, epistemology refers to a particular way of thinking, which drives the process of how we know and understand the world (Dalton et al., 2001), as such being a focus (Willig, 2013). Barnes and colleagues in 2014 however have observed that because the world is complex, the accommodating of multiple realities and in my words as done in social constructionism; makes experience multidimensional from a multi-ontological or epistemological perspective. In this way, the notion that meaning is fluid, dynamic and relative supports a pluralistic stance (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008). Consequently, I adopted the latter for this research in terms of its ontological and epistemological stance as has also done by these researchers: Chamberlain et al., 2011; Frosh & Saville Young, 2008; Frost, 2011; Ussher, 1999; Wertz, 2011. At the same time it has also been found that experts in social constructionism like Burr (2003) Berger and Luckman (1991) considers the principles of ontology and epistemology as the same. Moreover; Andrews (2012) uses the latter two references to argue that social constructionism can be unconcerned with issues of ontology. In this research; I consider the experiences as complex and multidimensional therefore holding multi-ontological or multi-epistemological aspects hence embracing the paradigm of this research. Willig (2013) suggests that a paradigm represents a conceptual framework which may refer to the stance that the researcher takes to position and apply arguments that are represented in the research process. The conceptual framework of this research is discussed in chapter 3; showing the complex elements to approach this research as a way of studying experiences which are considered to be complex. In terms of axiology Creswell (2014), refers to axiology as values that the researcher brings to the research and also those that have been brought in. From a paradigm and axiology perspective, therefore, the following values were important for this research. Firstly as suggested by Creswell (2007), the concept of the researcher being a participant observer appears to be key. As a second point, but linked to the former, the principle of reflexivity in research is regarded as essential, according to Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014). In addition, an axiological value that I employ in this research includes the use of methodological pluralism.

Pluralism is said to be the blending of more than one approach in research; ultimately fusing them together into an integrated picture about the data and the research process as a whole (Chamberlain et al., 2011; Wertz, 2011). As a result, the pluralistic position

opens an opportunity for me to accommodate multiple realities in a social constructionist study on a theoretical and methodological level. In this way, the language that student leaders use to talk about student leadership in a South African university can be studied on different levels (unconscious, subconscious and conscious) and in different ways (discourse analysis with a psychodynamics interpretation in this research); finally to be integrated as a co-constructed reality in this context. Therefore, I incorporate the recent developments in social psychology which seem to be rooted in social constructionism, i.e. the psychosocial perspective (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2013). As an addition to social constructionism, the said perspective highlights a place for agency instead of merely recognising reality construction as an outcome of social conditions, thus acknowledging the interplay of subjectivity and social context in a two-way stream during the construction of reality (Frosh, 2003; Willig, 2013). Furthermore, the psychosocial perspective views the participant as both psychic and social (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). Therefore in this research; the participant is seen as both psychic and social hence the research tool used in the research considers the construction of the reality of the participant in terms of the conscious parts of experience as well as the unconscious elements.

Having said all of the above, I should note how Burr (2003) advises that there is not one definition per se for social constructionism; thereby making it difficult to define. This perspective is shared by Barnes et al. (2014), Corcoran (2009) and Potter (2010) who also concur with Burr's (2003) view that there are some common characteristics that definitions by researchers and writers share, which offer a description for social constructionism. In the next section, I elaborate on the history of the development of social constructionism, thereby divulging my journey with this theory.

### **2.3 MY JOURNEY WITH SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM**

During honours psychology training I was briefly exposed to the theory of social constructionism where my interest in and knowledge of it was birthed, and was subsequently inspired to read Vivien Burr's (2003) book, *Social Constructionism*. This marked the beginning of my personal journey with this theory. This interest increased as I laboured on a study of social construction towards my Master's degree where I

learned more about the perspective. It has been a natural love affair, given my exposure to a way of being that embraced the methods of social constructionism, which include my upbringing, cultural background, interaction with diverse communities and so forth. On my social constructionist journey I have been greatly influenced by the work of Ian Parker and, secondarily, by that of Kenneth Gergen. My stance in terms of finding new spaces in this field and exploring the relational space was thus to be expected. I discuss some of the work that has influenced me in my choice of research design as well as a few of the historical milestones that I have noted as important in social constructionism. Some aspects are described in detail and others, notwithstanding that they may be regarded important by other researchers, might be described in less detail; thus this may be regarded as my version of the story. No version can be considered as true or false, but the version that I present provides the parameters of my research, in this text.

In the words of Ian Parker: social constructionism occurs as a result of the turn to language which was followed by the turn to discourse in qualitative research (Parker, 2015). These turns in general have both comprised a response to proposing alternative ways of understanding people and social phenomena (Burr, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010; Parker, 1998). In a historical sense, social constructionism is housed in the postmodernist movement which questions the modernist era which preceded it (Galbin, 2015; Gergen, 2009). The perspective embodies the assumptions of the Enlightenment era that had been there since the mid-eighteenth century, but it appears to be difficult to assign a specific point of origin to it (Burr, 2003; Galbin, 2014). One of the biggest influences in this field had been the work of Berger and Luckmann published in 1966 (Galbin, 2014). At this stage, I would like to spend some time highlighting some of the inputs made by different contributors to this field; most of which have left an impact on me. As noted, I start with Ian Parker because this will aid the reader to understand my grounding framework and point of departure that builds on the work of the other contributors to this field.

### **2.3.1 Ian Parker**

Ian Parker has been that voice in the field whose questions have opened up the discussion regarding psychodynamic theory in the social construction space,

particularly in terms of discourse analysis (Parker, 1997; 1998; 2010; 2015). I have thus enjoyed his contributions on discourse analysis and psychoanalysis, particularly his work on psychosocial research (Parker, 2010, 2015). Here, Parker advocates finding a place for language or discourse analysis in psychoanalysis (Parker, 1997). This makes sense to me because if we were to agree that dreaming is thinking (Long, 2013) and that words or a representation of what we experience takes place through a type of thinking (Burr, 2003), then we can learn more about the experience than merely exploring just the words used to describe the experience. In the social constructionist view, the unconscious dynamics and the language would be organised in a cultural, historically and socially mediated, specific manner (Burr, 2003; Parker, 1997). There may be something to learn about how the language helps us to express what would be deemed psychodynamic and what we can learn from that (Parker, 2015). I have also appreciated his work for deeper discussions about subjectivity (Parker, 1997). Another aspect on which Parker (2015) has elaborated, concerns the conversations around the realism/relativism tension. By means of the above, he assists the social constructionist researcher to reflect critically about the study of language and has also aided me to think more widely, beyond face value discourse, in terms of understanding the social construction process.

### **2.3.2 Berger and Luckmann**

Berger and Luckmann made their contribution to the field of social constructionism through their book, *The social construction of reality* (1966). In this they focused on symbolic interactionism. Central to this concept is that people construct their own identities and their perception of the identities of each other, as well as sustain social knowledge through social practice and interaction (Galbin, 2015). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the latter occurs when people arrive at a notion about something and express it in a social context; this notion then becomes part of the social context as other people talk about it. Later the concept is internalised or institutionalised to become an acceptable one in the particular social context (Andrews, 2012). The accepted idea may be a practice, the name of an object or a way of being. It is interesting to me that these authors have indicated that future generations embrace the idea as part of their consciousness, as expressed by Galbin (2014). For me, this

implies that there is something to say about how and where the idea exists prior to it being embraced in the consciousness.

### **2.3.3 Michel Foucault**

Michel Foucault is said to believe that language is an instrument of power as testified by Freedman & Combs (1996) and Elder-Vass (2012). According to Foucault (1978), people easily tend to internalise socially acceptable behaviour, rules, and so forth specific to a particular context since they take these as the truth of their contextual identity. These rules and so forth are generally formed by those who have the ability to participate in an interaction through language, giving these persons power to persuade one of the truth of a belief in a particular context. Mechanisms constructed by a particular social context to agree on socially acceptable behaviour, such as rules, for example, with regard to the particular context or to creating contextual reality, may be called scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). After 1978 Foucault went further, suggesting that the construction of the scripts is mediated by and / or dependent on language (Lowe, 1991). Foucault (1990) furthermore argued that language facilitates the process of defining concepts by means of interaction between people who have an interest in what is regulated through the language (Elder-Vass, 2012).

### **2.3.4 Vivien Burr**

I noted that Vivien Burr is a popular writer in the area of social constructionist publications. She has been recognised for her publication of 1995 called *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Parker, 1998), while a second edition of the book was published in 2003. My observation of her contribution to the field concerns the articulation and explanation of social constructionism and its components. I have enjoyed her writing on the extra-discursive aspects of social constructionism. The term extra-discursive addresses the construction of reality that can occur beyond discourse as spoken words but in which the body could become a voice in the construction of reality (Burr, 2003). In this, she has proposed that there has been a limited exploration of reality when discourse is considered to be solely spoken words; more could be harvested about understanding phenomena if we opened ourselves to more than just discursive material.

### 2.3.5 Kenneth Gergen

Kenneth Gergen's work is of interest to me given his contribution to literature on the relational process. His book *Relational Being* (2009) has become the central point in terms of the contribution on relatedness. He indicates that his intention was to awaken ideas about people being inherently relational; from this perspective he develops the premise that all psychological processes, including the construction of reality, occur as a relational process (Gergen, 2011). While there has been a robust challenge to this writing (Slife & Richardson, 2011), what I understand and appreciate from his work is that the relational space is negotiated. Thus, his contributions on collectivism and collective agency are welcome. Like Vivien Burr, he has also contributed texts to explain social constructionism and its ideas, mainly through his book *An Invitation to Social Construction*, with its second edition published in 2009 and the third in 2015. In addition, it appears that in the 1970's, Gergen argued for a more open psychology that considered the historical and cultural context. This endeavour is among those in the timeline that has led up to the psychology revolution which accommodated the pluralistic approaches (Wertz, 2011).

Consequently, the ideas that I hold on social constructionism are framed against the backdrop elaborated on above. According to Losantos, Montoya, Exeni, Santa Cruz and Loots (2016) social constructionism has been promoted in psychology by some of the authors I have just referred to, particularly Gergen and Berger and Luckmann. The work of Burr (1998) is respected in terms of proposing some principles of research in psychology, particularly those concerning social constructionism. A literature search that I undertook on EbscoHost using the keywords: social constructionism, psychology, research, South Africa, yielded 41 results, mainly in the Counselling, Clinical, Research and Educational categories of practice in psychology. I am currently enrolled for a degree in Consulting Psychology. According to Lowman (2002), Consulting Psychology is a field of intersection between all fields of psychology. As such, the programme for which I am registered at UNISA is administrated by the Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) department in conjunction with the Psychology department. Considering the ready use of social constructionism in the practice categories aligned to the Psychology department, to which I also belong as a Counselling Psychologist, I have been preoccupied about the place for social

constructionism in the IOP field. In an effort to resolve my preoccupation I have discovered that Geldenhuys (2015) recognised social constructionism for its potential appropriateness in the consideration of relational processes in the IOP field. Therefore, it appeared to me that some value could potentially be gained from the use of social constructionism as a study lens towards a qualification in Consulting Psychology that is partially owned by the IOP department at UNISA. The incorporation of the psychosocial research in the social constructionism study further enriches the value proposition in that the psychosocial approach has been widely used in research, particularly in the IOP department of UNISA.

## **2.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AS A FOUNDATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

As stated above, social constructionism is utilised as a primary lens for this research and thus contains the foundations for the research. Social constructionism is housed within the concepts of postmodernism, which represents understanding of human life being socially mediated as contextualised by culture and history (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2015; Willig, 2013). In other words, the move towards social constructionism prioritised a social focus rather than focussing on an individual (Andrews, 2012); knowledge is constructed in a social space so that it occurs through interaction and relationally (Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 2011). The individual has, however, not been disregarded because the interaction necessitates that participants, who are individuals, take part in the interaction or relational process where they can construct knowledge together (Elder-Vass, 2012, Gergen, 2011). In my understanding, the latter appears to set up a dynamic by default; thus, issues of power, such as agency for example, may appear as obvious in this scenario, although it also presents itself as a meaning making process.

Social constructionism studies the meaning making process in the interaction or conversation regarding an issue of interest (Lock & Strong, 2010). Meanings are seen to emerge in constant exchange of constructs where a shared meaning can arise (Burr, 2003). From this, it becomes clear that this perspective accepts the existence of different realities or what are said to be multiple realities (Parker, 2015). If all of the latter is so, then social constructionism provides a platform for engagement where the construction of realities can occur in the process of interaction when people are in the



same setting (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). According to social constructionism, constructs hold historical and cultural relevance (Dalton et al., 2001). In the socially, politically and psychologically diverse environment found in South Africa (Cross, 2004, Jansen, 2003), this perspective appears to be sensitive to the said context. The latter thus highlights the consideration to accommodate the proposed pluralist position considering the multicultural setting of this research. Favourable to my stance, Wertz (2011) advocates that pluralism appears to address multicultural concerns in research.

Social constructionism invites questioning of the traditional perceptions of the world and of psychology by allowing the critical evaluation of ideas that are widely accepted (Burr, 2003). It therefore challenges the status quo directly head-on, as experienced by those living in them (Lock & Strong, 2010). Social constructionism grants the possibility of the non-existence of absolutes (du Preez & Blokland, 2012). Congruent with its own perspectives, social constructionism offers an open space in which to facilitate social interactions (Lowe, 1991). In that breath, it does not present itself as the truth but facilitates the process of getting to the truth as enabled by the social interaction (Lock & Strong, 2010). According to Andrews (2012) in social constructionism knowledge exists in both objective and subjective reality. The latter is of such a nature that the process of construction remains fluid and dynamic (Galbin, 2014). The subjective reality consists of the meanings we assign to things while the objective world concerns those beyond our minds or outside ourselves (Burr, 2003; Parker, 2015, Slife & Richardson, 2011). Objective and subjective reality introduce concepts relating to realism and relativity, which I discuss in the next section.

## **2.5 RELATIVISM AND REALISM TENSION**

According to Chamberlain et al. (2011) and Chamberlain (2012) as well as Frost and Nolas (2011), it appears that the tension between relativism and realism stems from issues regarding the integrity of psychology as a science and of adopting an approach that would warrant qualitative psychology research being considered as a legitimate scientific approach. This critique has not escaped social constructionist research given the multiple versions of the truth that it is able to accept (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009; Lock & Strong 2010). Since its inception, social constructionism has rejected single answer solutions and explanations from modernism and positivistic approaches

(Galbin, 2014; Parker 2015; Willig, 2013), preferring multiplicity (Gergen, 2009, 2011). Some of those who have been involved in this conversation have poured energy into arguing for a realist lens in social constructionism (Elder-Vass, 2012; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). This perspective might be challenged as an attempt to fit this perspective into the positivistic status quo of the research world (Parker, 2015). Nevertheless, some have cautioned that the multiple realities approach denies the discipline's grasp of the actual state of knowledge on a specific topic of interest (Peterson, 2012). At the same time, others have advocated for an openness to acknowledging that the same matter may have different meanings depending on the context of those who are constructing the knowledge while developing, exploring or seeing causal powers or connections in the discursive interactions (Elder-Vass, 2012). As such, on the one hand, relativism allows many varieties of truths as constructed in various discourse (Lock & Strong, 2010). Those who support this perspective are open to the notion that more than one position can exist at the same time (Gergen, 2011; Parker, 2015). On the other hand, realism is concerned with objective reality and with the argument that issues can be known outside of how we would represent them (Burr, 2003). Consequently, pure or extreme relativism might suggest a pluralist stance while pure or extreme realism demands absolutes (Parker, 1998).

Authors such as Nightingale and Cromby (1999) and Nissen (2015) have seen the extreme relativist position of social constructionism as being difficult to apply to matters that are political and moral. I would, however, have a difficulty with extreme realism because of its absolute nature. I am thus more inclined towards relativism, especially regarding the relational process where people who share a space would engage in negotiation about the truths in the space so as to carve out a workable way to exist together. It is thus my intention to learn how student leadership is negotiated (or not) at a South African university and to grasp the perspectives that exist in this environment. In line with Parker (1998), we cannot know matters with certainty and there is always more to an issue than might appear on the surface, although Burr (2003) has argued that the constructed reality serves as a source of certainty until the conversation progresses further. I am therefore of the opinion that there is a place for a realist motion in my findings which may be accepted as the constructed reality that could be legitimate in this context; while a progressed version of relativistic notions might be possible so that the same context could move towards a grey area that would

maintain the tension between relativism and realism in a 'healthy' balance. Therefore, I agree with Andrews (2012) that the extreme positions of realism and relativism would be problematic for the kind of research that I have undertaken. This is because I support a scenario where views and ideas can be challenged and questioned and do not have to mean the same for all people. It is my conviction that diverse knowledge keeps existence fresh and will be valuable for the progression and growth of humanity (Galbin, 2015; Slife & Richardson, 2011).

In addition, studying discourse on its own, as spoken words, would have been a limitation in this study as I suspect that the depth of the perspective about how reality is created, would have been missed; in other words, that the subconscious and unconscious aspects of the reality construction would be left out. I would lastly like to favour the pluralist position towards qualitative research, and as such utilise methodological pluralism and binocularity in terms of approaching the study. Methodological pluralism is described as using one or more perspectives to undertake research (Barnes et al., 2014; Frosh, 2003) while binocularity has been referred to as the incorporation of one or more methods to study the same data to yield various or differing aspects that propose an integrated understanding of this data (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008; Saville Young & Frosh, 2009). The decision to take this route was inspired by the work of Boydell (2009) who studied discourse psychosocially.

The next section addresses the concept of multiple realities in the realm of social constructionism.

## **2.6 MULTIPLE REALITIES IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM**

While there is a meeting point for all social constructionism practice, some aspects of which have been discussed above, its multiplicity warrants that there will be a variety of ways of approach within the practice (Burr, 2003, Galbin, 2014; Lock & Strong, 2010; Parker, 2015). Slife and Richardson (2011) caution that there may be a danger in interpreting that the acceptance of multiplicity and that truth is relative might mean that 'anything goes'. This assertion would be erroneous; I would rather say that social constructionism in its relativist stance affords the opportunity for differing views about the same issue to occur, which would be context specific. As I have observed, the

variety occurs in terms of the degrees of intensity to which different people feel about essentialism, how much context is taken into account during the construction of social meaning, how far positivistic, laboratory-experimental approaches have been rejected and how pure one would like to be in terms of adopting a relativistic approach. This is an important discussion for me to host here, as it provides me an opportunity to further declare my frame of reference regarding this research. I will provide this to the reader in terms of what I have understood to be some of the variety of practice in social constructionism, thereafter consolidating this point of discussion by disclosing where I stand.

I noted five perspectives as I was reading up on this approach: Realist, radical, moderate, strict and contextual constructionism.

Firstly, a realist constructionism is concerned with seeing causal accounts in language, discourse and social interaction whilst also regarding these as exerting causal forces themselves (Elder-Vass, 2012). In this sense we are able to understand how social norms work or how scripts are developed and in effect learn about the dynamics of power from noting what is regulated in language or the set-up of the social interaction (Foucault, 1990; Simon & Gagnon, 2003).

Radical constructionism is concerned with what discourse serves at a point in time, in other words with identifying discourse that is localised and context-specific (Sismondo, 1993; Willig, 2013). Moreover, radical constructionism is concerned with particular constructions for the purpose of a specific conversation (Willig, 2013). Others have spoken of radical and strict constructionism in the same breath (Burningham & Cooper, 1999; Sismondo, 1993). The strict approach to social constructionism is said to be closely focused on language (Nichols, 2015). Furthermore, in the strict constructionist approach, the language used by the participants is taken at face value and no assumptions are made by the researcher at any point in the process (Burningham & Cooper, 1999).

The focus of moderate constructionism is a social context wider than a specific conversation and the way in which this context shapes and constrains reality in the social context (Willig, 2013). When using this approach, links are made between

discursive constructions of a specific conversation and the wider context in which they occur, implying that the reality that is sought after is one which is outside the transcriptions (Willig, 2013). Moderate constructionists note the dominant discourses grounding them into the macro-structures and institutions (Willig, 2013).

Contextual constructionism prioritises context and contextual factors in reality construction (Sismondo, 1993). In this instance, Nichols (2015) describes context as being systematic and also as the set of facts or circumstances that surround a situation or event. In using this approach, one would want to understand the context and acquire knowledge about the contextual factors as separate from the discursive interaction, so as to make the connections between the two (Burningham & Cooper, 1999). This is to say that views and ideas cannot be understood outside of their context as the latter is a necessary element in understanding the meaning of something (Slife & Richardson, 2011). Thus, both context and contextual factors need to be understood in order to find the sense in the link.

Since my approach to this research is pluralistic, I thus subscribe to aspects of realist constructionism and contextual constructionism as well as radical constructionism. My interest is in how student leaders at South African university talk about student leadership. This being so, I focused on their interaction in their co-construction of reality and highlighted the context, as well as placed value on the purpose served by what was said in terms of the unconscious, subconscious and conscious dynamics. In so doing, I attempted to understand how the dynamics of co-construction function, potentially as informed by the context, at all levels of interaction in terms of the data gathered. To this end, I discuss the worldview of this research in the next section where I begin to describe the fusion of the perspectives that I have employed in this research.

## **2.7 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH**

Quoting the following from Saville Young and Frosh (2009; pp.1 – 2):

There are significant continuities between psychoanalysis and discursive psychology which has [sic] seen researchers successfully drawing on both frameworks (for example, Billig, 1997; Day Sclater, 1999; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000a, 2000b; Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002). On the face of it,

psychoanalysis and discursive psychology are equally concerned with interpreting the meaning of experience (Henwood & Coughlan, 1993). As such both are interested in accounts for what they say about subjective realities rather than for how closely they represent the “truth”.

In this research I have attempted to fuse social constructionism with a psychosocial perspective by considering reality construction as contained in the subjectivity of the participants and as informed by the historical and cultural context, including the biographical-demographic significance of the student leaders. The advice of Saville Young and Frosh (2009) indicates that both perspectives make an assumption about the co--construction of meaning as mediated and relative. As mentioned above, according to Frost and Nolas (2011), experience is multi-dimensional and the worlds in which the experiences occur are multi-ontological. Drawing from Frost and Nolas (2011) therefore, the axiological point of view that I adopt for this research is to incorporate multiplicity in data collection and analysis so as to ‘access’ the multiple levels that contribute to the construction of reality regarding student leadership at a South African university. While I advocate for the shared interests of the discourse analysis and the psychodynamic approach for use in this research, I do not neglect the differences between them; which might present the difficulty of holding both positions as did Saville Young and Frosh (2009). To resolve such a challenge, I relied on previous research and literature by researchers such as Brown and Locke (2011), Frosh and Saville Young (2008), Frosh (2003) and Saville Young and Frosh (2009). In addition, insights from the debate between Wetherell (2005) with Jefferson and Hollway (2005) regarding the consideration of the psychological and social in the construction of reality have been useful. Wetherell (2005) argued that the consideration of the social aspect of the construction of reality is salient. Jefferson and Hollway (2005) asserted their point of view regarding unconscious aspects that contribute to the construction of reality that are missed when considering just the social aspects. They have also argued that disregarding the unconscious is the same as overlooking an important aspect of the co-construction of reality. My consultation of Barnes et al. (2014), Chamberlain et al. (2011), Frost (2011) and Frost and Nolas (2011) regarding pluralism fortunately offered a way forward in terms of securing the appropriate assumptions for this research.

Social constructionism, as well as discourse analysis, seems to be interested in social artefacts (Burr, 2003; Parker 2015). Metaphors are understood to exist in language as a method to represent a certain discourse about what is being spoken about or what is represented (Lock & Strong, 2010; Lowe, 1991). This includes symbols, stories, cultural and historical images as well as context specific statements (Lock & Strong, 2010). From the psychosocial perspective, metaphors seem to represent our thoughts and carry meaning about our experience (Mersky, 2008). As such, it can be said that metaphors use another concept to describe the understanding and experience relating to the concept and, moreover, can be referred to as a way of thinking about something (Boydell, 2009). Mersky (2013), in line with the work of Lawrence (1998), describes dreams as thinking and seems to consider dreams as the thinking of the group. I am minded to deduce, then, that dreams are able to contain metaphors that carry a representation to describe an understanding or experience of something that it seems safe to term the collective unconscious, as articulated by Lawrence (1998) and Long (2013). Mersky (2008) alludes to the collective unconscious when she makes the assumption that dreams are its expression as they can be used to explore the underlying issues of a social system. As a result, she also presents the notion that the tasks in psychosocial research are to integrate the visible, objective reality with the unseen, subjective and thus unconscious, reality as a means to understanding reality construction (Mersky, 2015). Thus, dreams can be taken as metaphors (a demonstration of language) which can be considered to be social artefacts that represent something about the unconscious dynamics in the social occurrence (Boydell, 2009; Mersky, 2013). Ultimately, I arrived at the interpretation that social constructionism and psychosocial research share the common perspective of using metaphors and symbols as vehicles for meaning making, which is attained through interaction.

Frosh and Young make the point that the interest in studying metaphors and regarding them as social artefacts therefore demonstrates the place where social constructionism and psychosocial research meet, through the analysis of data (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008). I have in this research thus drawn on metaphors to reveal the social interaction that has occurred in this student leaders' conversation at seen and unseen levels of interaction. Boydell (2009) continues to motivate the theory that a research lens in a psychodynamic approach could be more identified in terms of the

studying language used to express the unconscious aspects. In other words, what occurs below the surface can be studied by understanding how language is used to talk about and refer to them. In this research dreams are presented through the technique of social dream drawing. These dreams are understood to hold the metaphors that represent the eventual talk about the research topic as in Boydell (2009) and Mersky (2013). This method is discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter to explain how it was used in this research as a data gathering tool.

From a theoretical viewpoint, however, researchers in the psychosocial research area make the following theoretical assumptions in terms of sharing dreams socially as a means to gain access to subjective and collective learning and experience:

Dreams can expose the collection unconscious (Mersky, 2013). Carl Jung (1875-1961) was the first to talk about the concept of the collective unconscious. According to Jung (1936); the collective unconscious is themes that are inherited, appear across different people and show basic patterns of being. Bion (1988) refers to the collective unconscious as the mind of the group that can infer a psychological connection that occurs at the group level. Premised by Lawrence (1998) the collective unconscious is a source of thinking that happens in the unconscious and represents the social context. Later on; Mersky (2008); incorporates both the ideas of Lawrence (1998) and Bion (1988) by suggesting that the collective unconscious represents collective thinking of the unconscious thoughts that can be revealed by use of a stimulus.

In other words and for the purpose of this research, thinking is regarded as occurring not just in the individual but also in the group; collectively. In addition, an individual does not only have 'an unconscious' by her- or himself but collectively therefore so does the group. Through this I gathered that a social construction process could occur where the dreams presented no longer belong to the individual presenting the dream alone, but to the group too. Thus, knowledge is generated collectively through dreams (Mersky, 2015). This view holds that knowledge grows relationally or in interaction. This is also in agreement with social constructionist notions and I furthermore drew on Gergen's (2009) ideas of the relational being. Therefore, subjective experience that stems from different interactions in the context where one exists generates knowledge



and insights (Boydell, 2009). This seems to tap into the idea that truth is relative and becomes known as it is spoken about (Gergen, 2015).

I propose that the manner in which to access the constructed reality represented in metaphors is through language. Parker (1997) suggests that language comprises discursive interaction that occurs above the surface, which is simultaneously intertwined with psychodynamic forms of the experience. Therefore, I consider language to be a code of interaction, as I gathered from reading Boydell (2009) and Gergen (1985; 2015); hence I discuss this concept in the following section.

## **2.8 LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM**

In this research language was considered as a communication or social interaction tool and also as a social process (Boydell, 2009; Freedman & Combs, 1996). As such, mechanisms constructed by a certain social context to socially agree in terms of acceptable behaviours, rules and meanings to create a contextual reality happen through language (Gergen, 2015; Foucault, 1978; Parker, 2015; Slife & Richardson, 2011). Through language, metaphors seem to represent the conceptualising of the production of behaviour within a social context (Lock & Strong, 2010; Lowe, 1991; Mersky, 2013). It was in the incorporation of psychosocial research that I have proposed that these metaphors represented the co-construction of reality above and below the surface. By above the surface I mean, elements that are involved in reality construction that involve understanding about the world that is constructed together based on shared assumptions (Burr, 2003). In terms of below the surface I refers to those aspects of reality construction that are hidden and repressed in such a way that the participants are not consciously aware of; and these can be taken to operate in the unconscious of the individual or the group (Long, 2016). This could therefore imply that language would be essential to the process of negotiation in order to create a 'code of interaction' as mentioned above (Gergen, 1985). In this case, language was used by student leaders as the focal point of social interaction or as the facilitator of the relational process or discursive interaction (Boydell, 2009; Burr, 2003; Gergen 2009).

People use language to measure, describe and explain constructs (Galbin, 2014; Hoffman, 1990, Kotze & Kotze, 1997). In this way, meanings are constructed and can

be attached to experiences (Burr, 2003) while certain meanings can never come into being until they are spoken about (Michailakis & Schirmer, 2014; Nissen, 2015). As a result, parameters of understanding and experiences are therefore mediated and realities become constructed (Lowe, 1991; Parker, 2015). Hence one may argue that people exist in language, more than it's merely being a form of human connection (Kotze & Kotze, 1997). Thus, existing in language describes a dynamic, social operation rather than a simple linguistic activity (Parker, 2015). With reference to this study, the dynamic, social operation represented the way in which the student leaders talked about the research question. It was expected that there would be terms that they had used which became the discourse used to interact about this question. 'Truth' as it existed for the participants of this research process was therefore anticipated to be brought to the fore by means of language in the social context.

As mentioned above, people use language to measure, describe and explain constructs (Galbin, 2014; Hoffman, 1990; Kotze & Kotze, 1997). In the context of this research, the sharing of dreams through drawings in a social context was used as in Mersky (2015), to represent and to describe and explain student leadership in a South African university. This method therefore affords a glimpse into the invention of a particular culture or context (Elder-Vass, 2012) in the said situation. The construction of a view demands thought processing that occurs during or after the process of language (Hoffman, 1991; Lawrence, 1998). This implies that one cannot think about something which people have not yet heard being spoken about (Beyer et al., 2007). Therefore, student leaders are asked to present dreams that they have dreamt previously to the study (Mersky, 2013) to solicit language that they would use to co-construct reality about student leadership in a South African university.

As student leaders use language to present and talk about their dream drawings, they create categories and concepts that provide a framework for meaning (Freedman & Combs, 1996, Long, 2013). The use of language or the product of language is termed 'discourse'. This includes sets of meanings, metaphors, images, stories and statements, for example (Lock & Strong, 2010) to which the student leaders refer. The term discourse can be explored in a twofold manner (Freedman & Combs, 1996). In one sense it refers to a process of conversation through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved (Lowe, 1991). These conversations would

imply public interactions such as the everyday conversations of student leaders with all the people with whom they interact (Kotze & Kotze, 1997). On the other hand, discourse could also refer to systematic and institutionalised ways of speaking and writing or even meaning / sense-making by means of the use of language (Burr, 2003; Parker, 2015). The discourse in this research was considered in terms of what has been said but also in terms of the psychodynamic aspects intertwined in the discourse, as being along the lines of what Frosh and Young had carried out in 2008.

As a primary lens, I considered social constructionism to be a social process of continuous negotiation whereby people engage in a process of knowledge interchange to approve the knowledge as reality for the community concerned (Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 1985). Thus a communal interchange, which is discourse, occurs in a negotiation of people in relationship (Gergen, 2009; Lock & Strong, 2010). Within the relationship or interaction, norms come to the fore and predict what would be acceptable in the particular environment if approved (Burr, 2003). Elder-Vass (2012) proposes this is how social structures are formed (Elder-Vass, 2012). Thus, social structures produce the distribution of power in the process of interaction or in the relational process (Elder-Vass, 2012; Galbin, 2014). My proposal is that in this meaning making through language, a jointly constructed reality or relational process, student leaders constructed social norms (Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 2015) which gave them elements of organisation, which could imply power positioning (Elder-Vass, 2014). In the context of this research, this may have meant that student leadership as an organisation accords student leaders power (Long, 2016) in being part of creating a social structure through the discourses in which they take part. This is power that they would not possess as random individuals on campus, so that other students who are not in student leadership are not assigned this power. Additionally, this is power assigned by a social process, not as an elected individual but attained in the collective of the student leadership organisation. The power was spoken about in a certain way; its conditions are reliant on historical and cultural factors and the negotiation involved as well as other dynamics that are at play in the organisation, including the unconscious and subconscious dynamics as suggested by Long (2016).

Furthermore, in the context of this research process, language as a communication tool was intended to be employed as a means to identify the constructed realities of

student leaders in the university context. This research text therefore acknowledges that the student leaders may have experienced different realities pertaining to the topic that can be spoken about in terms of the social structure and the dynamics of the relational process within student leadership in a South African university. I anticipated that the realities with which they came into the research discussion would be informed by their upbringing, their experience of university and of the construction of their own individual identity and their own experience of student leadership, as well as their previous experiences of being in discussions regarding the said topic, while not excluding the unconscious dynamics at play at all these levels in the collective space (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009, 2011; Parker, 1997; 2015).

I expected dialogue to allow for a process in which the meanings of interest can be constructed. It was my desire as the researcher to participate in a social context in order to experience the social construction of the realities jointly constructed in the research conversation, as I would be exposed to the dreams/metaphors that the student leaders would present. Although my reflection(s) concerning what the student leaders presented do not count as the absolute truth, they do represent some knowledge of the social context of concern and may inform other contexts. The latter is acknowledged since conversations seem to be continuous and realities also possess the ability to co-exist (Beyer et al., 2007). It was a possibility that group-specific language could arise to describe the constructs of the topic of interest during the research process; which I did find to have happened.

## **2.9 THE RELATIONAL PROCESS AND THE RELATIONAL SPACE**

In line with Gergen's (2009) argument in the Relational Being, constructed reality can be understood to be a relational process which, I suggest, occurs in what I would like to call a relational space (or a co-construction space). This is one where social construction occurs and where the discursive interaction is contained (Gergen, 2011) but also where the psychodynamic sphere of interaction exists (Parker, 2015). The legitimacy of this statement relies on the principle that social constructionism studies the development of the understanding of the world that is jointly constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; Elder-Vass, 2012; Galbin, 2014) which Parker (2015), together with Hollway and Jefferson (2013), considers as containing a psychodynamic

dimension. It is important for me to state this and for the reader to be alerted to this as my frame of reference for the research. The work of Gergen (2009) has been a particular influence on me in terms of framing the relational process as a primary term in this research and enabling me to propose the concept of the relational space. In this research, I would like to notice what happens in the relational space and how the relational process works. According to Gergen (2009, 2011), our identity and sense of self and the potential thereof is an outcome of preceding relationships that are lived or dreamt experiences. Based on this, my premises are that the unconscious exists in the relational space and that discourse helps to organise our expression of our repressed (Parker, 1997) or defended self (Hollway & Jefferson, 2010). In other words, discourse contains information about what happens above and below the surface in the interaction (Parker, 2015).

My attraction to the perspectives that I hold stemmed partly from the desire to gain knowledge on student leadership from the perspective of the student in the context in which such leadership occurs, but also not to take for granted what seemed to be obvious as motivated by Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009; Parker, 2015. Thus my inclination towards this perspective is furthermore linked to the relational space or process in terms of the dynamics at play both below and above the surface. Regarding the relational space or process I have an interest in what happens in this space so as to acquire the knowing, meaning-making or sense-making, to understand how the relational space provides room for a conversation or negotiation to develop the realities that are created and to discover how this is facilitated above and below the surface. Moreover, it is believed that context provides the rules for having things the way that they are, which provides limits to how people act, are or become or even perform (Nichols, 2015; Peterson, 2012; Slife & Richardson, 2011). It was consequently important to me to articulate the parameters of the ideas that I hold and that I have followed in order to carry out this research process as well as to report on the rules that encompass the context of student leadership in a South African university.

## **2.10 RELATIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY**

It is clear that subjectivity has the potential to inform research into the lived experience, which appears to be common sense knowledge for those who are having the

experience (Nissen, 2015). According to Nissen (2015) the value of coming to understand the subjectivity of the student leaders in research is that the meaning and sense-making experiences are more fully grasped since they are being lived in the context. Therefore, research learnings and post-research actions could be more valuable to those in that context. The value of relativity is that when the subjectivity of the student leaders is taken into account, the research learnings and post research actions may be appropriate to the participants who have expressed their subjectivity to the researcher who will have gained perspective on them; all the aforementioned should be aware of the existence of other versions of the 'truth' that have not been heard. If the latter were to be voiced, they would in turn impart a greater richness. In this research, though, to maintain focus, the subjectivity of the student leaders is prioritised while the accounts of other students and of management or other university employees have not been considered in terms of their own subjectivity.

Nonetheless, I want to propose that apart from the subjectivity of a participant in a group, one could say something about the subjectivity in the collective. Galbin (2014) argues that people are part of shared collective experiences. It is further suggested that we have relational entanglements with one another which cannot be ignored as these promote creativity and enable the dynamics of the relational space (Gergen, 2011; Slife & Richardson, 2011). Thus, the said dynamics that occurs above and below the surface that refers to the collective unconscious lead to an interesting dimension in terms of the social construction of meaning or the co-construction of reality, in that the voice of those who did not participate in this inquiry could be incorporated. This follows the principle of the shared collective experiences that house the relational entanglement. According to Parker (1997) the participant is always enmeshed with the dominant culture and social norms of their specific context, which is related to how the subjectivity is constructed (Parker, 1997). The construction also picks up on the unconscious dynamics in the discursive interaction that display the psychological properties constituting the cultural components of the sense of self (Parker, 1997; 2015). Informed by Foucault (1981), Parker describes the language components of the discursive interaction as occurring on the surface, while simultaneously noting the psychodynamic forms of the experience of the subject (or participant) to be deeper than the surface or below the surface (Parker, 1997; Slife & Richardson, 2011). The

prospect and concept of relativism allows social constructionism to explore the various angles that can be used to understand the construction of reality in its many facets.

Thus, conversations about the study of discourse or language have questioned whether discursive data are sufficient to articulate about subjectivity, in this way querying whether discursive descriptions are sufficient to inform research about the latter (Parker, 1997; 2015). Given this view, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) have proposed the idea of a defended subject, which implies that there is more to the story of discourse. Parker in 1997 had already proposed that there may be a necessity to find a place for psychodynamic theory in language in case it would be helpful to expand the study of discourse by way of going beyond the text to a deeper understanding of subjectivity or the construction of reality. The above understanding of subjectivity contextualises the use of the psychosocial approach folded into a social constructionism perspective in a pluralist stance. This method of carrying out research has been found to be sound by Frosh and Saville Young (2008).

## **2.11 THE PLACE OF AGENCY IN A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST STUDY**

In terms of agency, I proposed that the subjective can be taken to concern just the participant as the social context in the construction of reality as opposed to only concerning a single individual. It is my assumption that the subjective reality of people might differ although they are in the same social context. Moreover, differing aspects of the social context would have various meanings for the people in the context as mediated by history and culture. The South African university, encompassing students from differing historical and cultural backgrounds, serves as an example of what I am referring to. As a result, I arrive at the interpretation that it constitutes a place for agency. Based on the work of Frosh and Young (2008), if it can be accepted that psychosocial research has its roots in social constructionism then I would like to concur with the argument advanced by Frosh (2003). In other words, building on the ideas of social constructionism, psychosocial research makes room to recognise subjective (individual) agency in the construction of reality in such a way that the said construction is contributed to by both the subjective and the social context. To this end, the suggestion that I accept for this research is that the subjective (individual) is a product of the social context (society) but also that the social context (society) is simultaneously

a product of a participating subjective (individual) (Frosh, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2012; Jefferson & Hollway, 2005).

However conscious or unconscious the taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world may be, the historical and cultural context appears to inform the ability to act (Slife & Richardson, 2011). This ability affords one the power of reflection and choice and also authorises one to make decisions and to be perceived one who is authorised (Elder-Vass, 2012). Given the social norms, one can be recognised as being authorised or agentic, which is the capacity to move and to choose, or can be denied those facets according to the meaning of the concept in the negotiated social construction process, the relational process or the relational space. The social constructionist debate on the legitimacy of agency in its context deals with whether a participant in a group can be free to exercise individual subjectivity or whether actions are always informed by the context and the constructions in the context (Elder-Vass, 2012; Parker, 2015; Slife & Richardson, 2011).

As a result, I would like to motivate for a constructed self (Elder-Vass, 2012) in relation to agency in the space of social constructionism. The realism/relativism debate which also encompasses the individual/socially mediated action debate leads to the premise underlying my approach (Burr, 2003; Galbin, 2015; Gergen, Josselson & Freeman, 2015). On the one hand, I am fully convinced that according to the social constructionist position, people become dependent on the social structure and social processes, including meaning construction, that take place surrounding them (Andrews, 2012; Gergen, 2009; Parker, 1997). However, because the conversation is fluid and dynamic (Galbin, 2014) especially because of the interplay between below and above the surface dynamics (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012) a single individual happens to be involved in more than one social circle (Gergen, 2011) which complicates and makes the construction of this individual complex (Parker, 1997). In another way, if we consider social interaction from a holistic perspective, the construction of social reality happens to be complex given the diversity of meanings contained in the various contexts (Galbin, 2015; Parker, 2015). As a result, the construction of self may give rise to conflict or defense in the sense of acting in accordance with the social structure or norm at a specific time (Elder-Vass, 2012; Gergen, 2011; Hollway & Jefferson, 2005). As a result, the dynamism of the relational space and the opportunity for



questioning the status quo results in multiple realities (Gergen, 2011). In addition, the desire of the individual and the way in which the social structure and discourse operate are implicated in terms of the different aspects of subjectivity (individual or collective) (Elder-Vass, 2012; Parker, 1997).

Having said this, I would like to clarify that I do also believe that the reflections that we make of ourselves remain ongoing integrations of ourselves within the relational process (Gergen, 2011) or space, so that when we act we tend to understand ourselves and acquire our sense of being, identity or subjectivity (Parker, 1997; Sugarman & Martin, 2011). When we act we are practicing agency because agency is defined as the capacity to act (Ganesh, 2015). As such, agency contributes to the formation of subjectivity as well as that of social structure. Ganesh (2015) recognised agency as a communal and participative, socially constructed concept. Therefore I understand that the capacity to act impels the construction of reality as informed by the distribution of power in a social structure similar to the proposal by Ganesh (2015). This scenario thus implicates a collective subjectivity which organises and offers a means of representation for the discursive interaction that is dynamic (Elder-Vass, 2012; Parker, 1997). I propose that where agency is lacking, the diversity of existence which promotes creativity and progression diminishes (Slife & Richardson, 2011) and the dynamic, continuous conversation becomes stunted (Galbin, 2014).

## **2.12 THE POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION RESEARCH (AS A PRIMARY LENS)**

The social constructionist perspective allows me as the researcher to bring my own ideas into the research space, allowing for my questioning of the status quo given my previous experience in the role of student leader. As a psychologist, I am able to use my relevant knowledge to participate in the social interaction of the research process. Social constructionism recognises the issues of power and the role of subjectivity. This position, in my view, is authentic and eliminates possible masks that I would have worn from a researcher's perspective. In this case, conversations can be facilitated at a deeper level and are potentially richer as well. Acknowledging the position of power and expertise that might be assigned to me during the enquiry, I have a platform, in terms of the currently discussed perspective, to refuse this position and to become an

equal participant or to position myself as such. My role therefore becomes both participant in the research process as well as one of acting as the primary research instrument (Dalton et al., 2001). As the latter, my personal interest in and assumptions made pertaining to the research questions and topic, as well as my reflections on the research process and its outcomes, including my encouragement of the group interaction during the facilitation of the research activities as well as my self-reflectivity, are recognised (Barbour, 2007; Coyle, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Elliot, 2005).

As the researcher, I declare my point of departure and frame of reference in terms of conducting the research and communicating about the research while also remaining transparent about my biases and value judgements (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). To set the worldview scene is to disclose a position, so that from the outset, the context of the research is provided. In this regard, I am open about having been a student and a student leader at the same university where I am gathering data for this research. Furthermore, at the time of gathering the data I was employed in the Department of Student Affairs and worked with student leaders. I also come from a previously disadvantaged background, while also having attended a multiracial school until completing Matric. All these contribute to the interpretations that I make of the data and to how I communicate the findings to the reader (Creswell, 2014). In addition, the above allows me to be a co-constructor of the reality that emerged through the findings of this research.

In my own mind, and probably because of how I have been influenced, I am of the opinion that one subscribes to a worldview based on one's personality, interest, training, background, life experiences for example. This seems to be like a natural gravitation, a situation where the researcher discovers a chemistry between herself and the positional value of the worldview. As a result, I have gravitated towards social constructionism as I am aiming for an understanding that is open to various perspectives on the same matter which could ultimately result in theory generation (Creswell, 2014).

I come from a familial and cultural background which prioritises the community view over the individual perspective. My attention is therefore drawn to focus on the communal interpretations of life and also to believe that knowledge is an outcome of

social interaction. This already begins to sound like the premise of social constructionism but also challenges me into adopting a pluralistic mode regarding this research. The latter could be because of my schooling where, as mentioned, I was in a multicultural and multiracial context. In addition, my psychology training could have also made a contribution. Both my schooling and university training seemed to have convinced me that aspects such as personal responsibility and independence or individual choice and accountability are important in what one experiences and in creating meaning. As a result, I have come to hold that the communal perspective can occupy a place in co-existence with the individually orientated perspective in the co-construction of reality. I have not merely established how this could occur.

### **2.13 IN A NUTSHELL**

The worldview employed for this research process is that of a form of social constructionism combined with a pluralistic stance, given the incorporation of the psychosocial perspective. This worldview advocates for the existence of multiplicity and focuses its attention on the legitimacy of truth based on context (Barnes et al., 2014; Chamberlain et al., 2011). From a social constructionist perspective, one's sense of self is constructed as a socially, historically and culturally mediated phenomenon (Parker, 1997; 2015). Having said this while taking note of the argument that meaning is shared in a context (Galbin, 2015), a collective subjectivity appears to be viable (Parker, 1997) when incorporating a psychosocial lens (Boydell, 2009). The latter includes the relational process (Gergen 2009; 2011) or relational space that I have proposed. I have also elaborated on the contribution of agency in the social construction process and the dynamic of the relational process or space. Furthermore, I have proposed that, consistent with Burr (2003), an extra-discursive dimension may be relevant. Moreover I have acknowledged reality as both objective and subjective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, Galbin, 2014), including its being constructed consciously or unconsciously (Hollway & Jefferson, 2005; Parker 1997, 2015; Slife & Richardson, 2011). As such, a collective subjectivity is noted above and below the surface.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH INQUIRY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I have detailed how reality in the context of the current research process has been created through the sharing of dreams about student leadership in a South African university. This action was facilitated by the use of a social dream drawing technique. Once the dreams had been shared in a social context, the process of creating a reality' around this issue was studied by way of discursive psychology through a psychosocial lens. Such a psychology is defined as an umbrella term that refers to social constructionist or critical psychology approaches, focused on the analysis of language and discourse (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). The landmarks in this chapter include the details of the research process such as the research approach, strategy and method as well as the strategies employed to ensure quality, research ethics and reporting.

### **3.2 POSITIONING THE INQUIRY**

To reach a decision on the research methodology, design and the methods, it was very important to consider the best fit research approach, including the data analysis method, the nature of the data and its components as well as the best way possible to report the data while prioritising the ways to ascertain rigour in order to articulate the findings regarding the research question. As such, aligned to the pluralism stance of this thesis, a methodological pluralism was adopted. This also means that a binocularity position was taken in data analysis. Below, in Figure 3.1, a diagram depicts the approach taken in the methodology used, in an integrated manner.

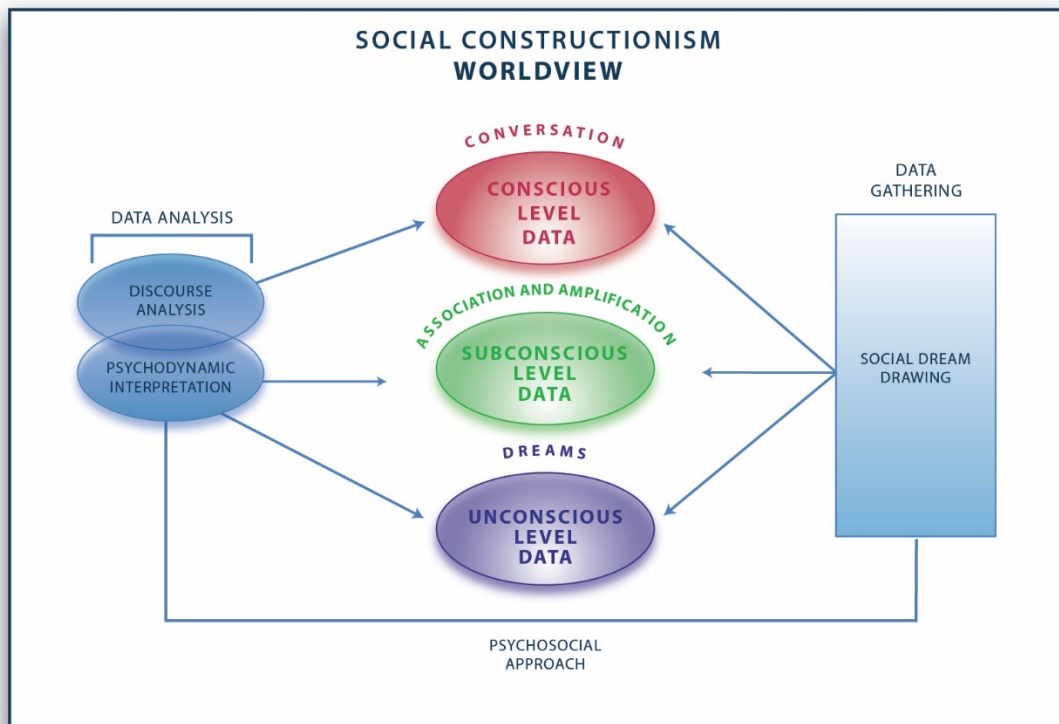


Figure 3.1 The conceptual framework of the methodology

The investigation was positioned within pluralism, as indicated, providing for the adoption of methodological pluralism as inspired by Barnes, Caddick, Clarke, Cromby, McDermott, Willis and Wiltshire (2014) and binocularity similar to Frosh and Young (2008). Hence more than one approach or method (Frost, 2011; Ussher, 1999) was used for data analysis. It is said that this way of doing research creates a platform to study complex social questions using multiple methods (Chamberlain et al., 2011). The approach seemed to promote innovation and creativity, extending the scope of the research as well as appearing to deepen the scope of the data (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008; Werzt, 2011). As a result, pluralism afforded me the opportunity to examine different levels of the data in various ways that could be integrated (Chamberlain et al., 2011).

### 3.3 POSITIONING THE INQUIRY CONTEXT

The current research was set in a South African university context. These universities are described as higher education institutions composed of public and private universities (Higher Education Act 101, 1997). Other universities in South Africa include those that are small campuses of foreign universities, which would mostly fall in the category of private universities (Le Grange, 2011). The university of interest in this study is a public one (Universities in South Africa <http://www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/UniversityEducation.aspx>). When conducting this research, embedded in social constructionism, it was important to understand this setting. In social constructionist research, the research data is informed by context and culture within the setting. This demanded my having insight concerning these constructions in which the data are embedded as advised by the ideas of Burr, (2003); Hoggett, Beedell, Jimenez, Mayo and Miller, (2010); Jefferson and Hollway, (2005); and Willig, (2013). My insights allowed the credibility of the research to be strengthened (Creswell, 2014). I thus took this opportunity to express these insights in the following manner. In my time as a student at the same university where this thesis was researched, I had also spent time as a student leader. At the time of data gathering, I had been employed by the said university from which the data was gathered; more particularly, I was employed in the Department of Student Affairs where the central focus of my job focus was to work with student leaders. I am thus very familiar with the ins and outs of student leadership at this specific university. While I have noticed that there have been some changes, the nature of student leadership at this university has remained relatively unchanged from the time when I was actively involved.

The university where the research was conducted is situated in a relatively affluent area of the city. Students from a variety of backgrounds, including diversity of race, religion, communities, social class and social economic status, belief systems, political affiliations and convictions as well as their philosophy on life and the status of the country and current affairs are attracted to this university. With its origins in the previously predominant Afrikaans language, culture and societal positioning and with the biases that this kind of social category imposes, the turn-about in the political landscape of South Africa as well as the transformation that has been given as a task to institutions of higher learning seems to have brought about heterogeneous diversity

into the university in terms of culture, race, social class, language, societal position and so forth (Sharp, 2006; Sharp & Vally, 2009). As such, the student population has altered over time, which in turn has resulted in the needs of the students changing.

Nevertheless, South African universities have carried over the culture of having Student Representative Councils (SRCs) over the years. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, SRC's display a history of occupying a political role which has resulted in the view that their role is to assist to administrate politics in the university context. As the student populations have undergone changes, the role of student leadership in university has also been challenged to evolve (Jansen, 2003; Luescher, 2010). According to my desktop research into university websites and in line with the work of Lumadi and Mampuru (2008) the student support departments in universities, where student affairs is the core business, are described as platforms wherein universities launch activities such as development initiatives, which may include leadership opportunities and /or development. These activities include the management of the SRC, which is a common leadership structure in South African universities, although not an exclusive one. Various universities have introduced other types of leadership structures, which either work with or diverge from the SRC. Most of these activities, however, seem to be managed within the student affairs related departments. This is the case in the context of this research, where the SRC and other student leadership structures are managed in the Student Affairs department. The Department of Student Affairs is headed by a Director of Student Affairs at the same university.

### **3.4 ARTICULATING THE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

The purpose of a research strategy is to provide guidelines in terms of the manner in which the research will be conducted (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). This may include deciding who would the participants be and why; how the question was answered, which relates to the data gathering methodology; what the appropriate framework to contextualise the data would be; what the data would represent when it has been transcribed and whether there is an appropriate resource to process the data in order to answer the research question and so on. As may be obvious from a reflexivity point of view (Jefferson & Hollway, 2005; Parker, 1997) the strategy might change, adjust or adapt during the research process, suggesting the iterative nature

of qualitative research (Barbour, 2007). This required the researcher to be 'in tune' with the process (Willig, 2013). Moreover, when data is participant driven, the data provided by the participants could provide opportunities for the researcher to apply an open mind to the research process, which may play out in the reflections that are made on the data (Barbour, 2007; Parker, 2010).

### **3.4.1 Taking a pluralism stance**

As indicated above, the principles of qualitative research in the context of social construction perspectives where a pluralism stance is taken, guided the strategy of this study. This strategy was deemed appropriate for a research approach that would incorporate social and psychological elements, given my interest in studying student leadership from a social constructionist perspective while simultaneously listening for the social dynamics, which contain emotional content (Clarke, 2002; Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). A psychosocial research approach was thus indicated as fit for purpose in that it examines both the social and psychological content of the data while maintaining interest in the discourse (Clarke & Hoggert, 2009; Parker, 2015). Furthermore, according to Clarke (2002), addressing unconscious forces and motivations adds another level of analysis to research that is social in nature and which gives us a deeper understanding of both individual experiences and social psychodynamics that operate in the construction of a research environment.

### **3.4.2 The procedures**

The student leaders who participated in this research were engaged with in their natural context. The natural context for student leaders has been accepted to be that of a university in South Africa. The procedures necessary to reach and involve them were as follows:

The appropriate gatekeepers were approached. Once the gatekeepers had been contacted and I had been welcomed into the environment, student leaders were invited to participate in the research process. Judgement (purposive) and volunteer sampling was used. During the group facilitation session, these leaders participated in a process of data gathering through the social dream drawing technique. This technique was



chosen given its non-threatening nature, which created a conducive climate for deep and 'close to home' discussion to take place as taken from the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2012). It is also a method that is situated within psychosocial research (Long, 2013). The discussions were recorded and transcribed for the purpose of studying the conversation. In this case, it was studied by means of discourse analysis using a psychosocial lens (Boydell, 2009). Rigour, as underlying the procedures for this research, was an essential consideration. For me, this was of paramount importance, given the pluralistic perspective of this research. Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014) have asserted that in terms of rigour, it is key to remain consistent and cognisant of the worldview and philosophical underpinning of the research, throughout the process. I thus focused on implementing the convictions of these authors of 2014, especially since I used discourse analysis (DA). Upholding research ethics and ethical conduct, according to the guidelines of the HPCSA, was also essential to me in terms of procedure.

### **3.4.3 Reflection and reflexivity**

It is my view that in any research project, reflection is an important activity to engage in as a researcher (Valandra; 2012). According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000), reflection is the continuous assessment of the relationship between the researcher and the participants and of how this relationship impacts on the findings of the data. In addition, reflection is also the continuous assessment of the researcher's openness to exposing their work to critical review, which Freshman, Cahill, Walsh and Muncney (2010) advocate as criteria for rigour. Furthermore, self-reflexivity is also essential. This includes my awareness of self within the process, including the influence I might exert on the process and on the research outcomes (Charmaz, 2006). I therefore engaged both in reflection and self-reflexivity by keeping a research diary where I wrote down all my experiences, emotions and thoughts regarding the research process. In addition, I collected newspaper articles that relate to the title of the research and I participated in close supervision as well as presenting my research at conferences (one international and one national); in this way exposing my work to debate, critical feedback, questioning and suggestions. Coming from a social constructionist worldview with a pluralistic stance, I was open to differences, while also being candid

about how and why things were done (Chamberlain et al., 2011; Drummond, 2010; Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014).

Moreover, it is also important to note that in some sections of this document I do share my reflections with the reader (Clayton, 2013; Daley, 2010). At times, I share about the journey that I have been on to arrive at the decisions that I made and which I regarded as necessary in my approach to this project regarding methodology and methods. In the context of this research therefore, reflection as well as self-reflexivity allowed me in my researcher role to think through the strategy, over and over again as well as to allow for feedback where others, such as my research supervisor, were able to deepen and challenge my thinking regarding the research strategy. In particular I was able to thoroughly reflect on the use of a psychosocial research method alongside a social constructionism perspective. As a result, I enquired through literature searches, consulted with my research supervisor and explored the topic with colleagues. Another purpose for which I have used the avenues mentioned, occurred when I sorted out the logic in the flow between the chapters and within the chapters. Something I further think significant to mention is that at the beginning of the process, I had thought that I would include a separate literature review chapter in the thesis. This ambition was adjusted, given the iterative nature of the process. The final decision was to use literature in the integration chapter in a deductive manner, so as to weave it into the findings and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014; Demuth, 2013). This made the discussion of the latter fuller and thicker for me, by having to put everything in one place in an integrated manner. By this, I mean that my findings have been used to confirm what has already been established in literature. Furthermore, looking at my findings simultaneously with existing literature; it has also been possible to say what existing literature disputes in terms of my findings but also what seems to be different between my findings and the existing literature. Lastly, literature was relevant to provide evidence that my findings extend into the existing literature. I found this to be an efficient way of working and presenting my work. As a result, engaging in reflection and reflexivity, I pursued a more ethical and rigorous research process which I believe to be more transparent, a quality which has been noted to be important in qualitative research as alluded to by (Demuth (2013), Freshman et al. (2010) as well as Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014).

Remaining flexible and 'in tune' with the flow of the data were particularly central and beneficial in this research process when considering the data studying method used. Additionally, these attitudes seemed important given my interest in how student leadership is socially constructed in a South African university as guided by the work of Burck (2005). This could at times result in an abstract outcome or even a complex and complicated one, which in turn, could pose questions about the methods used to establish trustworthiness (Barbour, 2007). On the other hand, the same question raises points of interest regarding issues of psychological processes related to the construction of reality concerning student leadership in a South African university: what is happening, how it is happening and why (Ford 2010; Parker, 1997). A detailed description regarding the research methodology journey that I undertook has been documented in this chapter. In essence, I would like to communicate the point that quite intentionally, I have prioritised reflection as a very important aspect of my research strategy.

#### **3.4.4 Upholding good ethical conduct**

Throughout the above discussion, the point was made that it was central to this strategy to uphold good ethical conduct. This conduct was guided by the Health Professions Act, 1974; the ethical rules of the HPCSA Psychology Board, the generally accepted guidelines for research in the psychology field as well as the code of conduct signed with UNISA and the Faculty of Economic Management Sciences, the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, including relevant documents and policies in the university where the student leaders were sampled. A further, in-depth discussion on ethical considerations is provided later on in this chapter.

#### **3.4.5 Rigour**

Ensuring rigour has also been important as part of the research strategy, particularly in terms of using discourse analysis. This is because, as Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014) suggest, the process of maintaining a process of discourse analysis that can be verified by objective means remains challenging. Discourse interpretation is subjective and the study of language is dependent on the interpretive lens used to study the language as well as the means that reality is being constructed (Parker,

2015). In this research furthermore, the discourse was studied with a psychodynamic lens which amplifies the volume of the subjectivity in the text that was interpreted to respond to the research question. Transparency, as suggested by Demuth (2013) and Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014), has thus been an important principle to work with towards the credibility and the trustworthiness of the methods followed. Strategies used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in this research are further discussed in section 3.6.11 in this chapter.

### **3.4.6 Considering an appropriate reporting style**

In accordance with the research design and paradigm perspective undergirding this research process, a qualitative research writing style was used to report the activities within the process. Expressing this differently, the research details were represented in the form of words, centred on the use of language and the psychodynamics at play. According to Liamputtong (2010), this might include short data, poetry and the like, depending upon the cultural sensitivities that may need to be considered. Essentially, the report of this research is represented in this thesis. I do, however, plan to publish articles in academic and non-academic journals on the various aspects of this study. It is important to mention that the preliminary findings were reported on at the International Congress of Psychology (ICP), 2016, in Japan during July of 2016 as well as at the Psychological Society of South Africa congress (PsySSA) in September 2016.

## **3.5 RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the path that research takes is influenced by the researcher's own beliefs, emotions and views of the world, including how these or the world are understood. In my view I concur with this notion as I bring myself into the research and own a participant–observer position. I therefore undertake this study employing an approach that would facilitate my natural inclinations, which allowed me to be fully present throughout the entire process, believing that this would benefit the research rather than not.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) discuss qualitative research as an approach where the point of departure rests in the actions of research inquiry rather than the ideas of the

research about the subject of interest. Based on the research problem therefore, the qualitative research approach provides suitable boundaries which facilitate an open and interactive approach to the understanding of the research interest. With regard to the latter, I have proposed that research of this type prioritises the study of social meaning or even the meaning that can be acquired from social interaction. Therefore, this approach focuses on words and the study of words. Taking this further, such research has as its focus learning about the meaning of words in interaction and the meaning that can be attached to those words (Parker, 2010). Furthermore, qualitative research allows for the consideration of cultural nuances, historical factors, interplays in gender and race dynamics, components of behaviour including emotions, thoughts and actions as well as a means for constructing a reality as known by the participants in the research and also as co-constructed in the research process (Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004).

It is agreed that qualitative researchers are concerned with meaning attributed by research participants, resulting in findings that describe the quality and texture of experience as opposed to causal-effect relationships (Barbour, 2007). In addition as previously mentioned, qualitative researchers study people in their own natural contexts, an activity which is also evident in this research project. Willig (2013) indicates that qualitative researchers within the social constructionist paradigm study how people construct their versions of reality; this view prioritising the acceptance of multiple realities. As a result and as has been consistently mentioned, a pluralist approach to qualitative research has been used in this research process (Frost, 2011; Wertz, 2011). This meant that in this instance, more than one qualitative method was used to access different aspects of the data in an integrated manner (Barnes et al., 2014; Chamberlain et al., 2011).

### **3.6 RESEARCH METHODS**

The current section focuses on a discussion regarding the techniques, methods and procedures that were undertaken and facilitated answering the research question. I have discussed the research setting, entrée and establishment of roles, the research question, sampling of participants, data gathering and the data study method as well as strategies to ascertain quality in the way that I work with the data – ensuring rigour.

### **3.6.1 Entrée and establishing roles**

The aspects regarding entrée and establishing of roles encompass issues that have to do with entering the research setting. The manner in which the latter is done can set the tone for a successful project or disruptions in the process. My desire was to enter the environment, and familiarise myself with it in a way that would facilitate access to and reciprocity with the research participants specifically. Moreover, I also wanted to establish a trust relationship with all relevant and appropriate role players. As such, it was beneficial to establish their roles so that the benefit of the research project could be maximised. In effect, the various role players needed to be identified prior to entering the setting so that the respective roles could be determined and therefore negotiated in the entrée step of the research process.

#### *3.6.1.1 Gatekeepers and culture brokers*

One of the essential role players to identify prior to the entrée step consisted of the culture broker(s) or gatekeeper(s). Culture brokers serve as potential recruiters of participants and may possess some inside knowledge regarding the values and culture of the potential participants (Liamputtong, 2010). In my case, a key culture broker was the student leader who has helped me with the recruitment of participants. In addition, gatekeepers are people in the community where the potential participants live and potentially hold the 'keys' to enter that community (Visser & Moleko, 2003). For this research, this role was held by one person - the Director: Student Affairs. I submitted the proposal to the Director the proposal of the research, a copy of the consent form, information letter as well as proof of registration at the University where I am registered as a student, not forgetting a copy of the ethical clearance granted by the same university to conduct this research.

In the case of this study; it appeared to me that the above activities were facilitated by the fact that at the time of data sampling and gathering, I had been employed in the same Department. The culture broking and efforts in terms of creating rapport and trust with the relevant role players were facilitated by my position as an insider.

### 3.6.1.2 *Researcher's role*

As previously mentioned, my role as the researcher was informed by my individual stance and the research approach selected as well as the theoretical framework undergirding the research process (Creswell, 2007; Dalton et. al, 2001). In this case therefore, my role consisted of both a participatory one and acting as primary research instrument (Dalton et al., 2001). In terms of having played a participatory role I was part of the research situation as a participant equal to all those involved in the data gathering session; I did not necessarily hold an expert role which might have been perceived as a kind of 'power stance' (Hiles & Čermák, 2008). My role as a primary research instrument incorporated my personal interest in and assumptions made pertaining to the research questions and topic, as congruent to the suggestions of Creswell, 2007. According to the advice of Creswell (2014) this role furthermore included my reflections on the research process and its outcomes; the encouragement of group interaction during the facilitation of the activities as well as of my self-reflectivity. Finally, the role also included the introduction of the co-facilitator to the group, who held the role of ensuring appropriate handling of information collected as well as the appropriate use of the inquiry tool, during the data gathering session.

At the same time that I was in a participatory role and a primary research instrument, I was employed by the Department responsible for managing student leadership affairs. As a result, I knew and interacted with all the participants in my role as an employee of the university and have worked closely with some of them in my said capacity. For me, this then introduced an added dynamic in terms of data gathering. While I introduced myself at the beginning of the session as the researcher of this current project, I was sensitive to the boundaries that might be crossed in terms of interactional dynamics pertaining to my interaction with the student leaders outside the data gathering context. Furthermore, purposive and judgment sampling was easily managed by having the assistance of the culture broker. I, so-to-speak, disempowered myself as a university employee holding that specific role by asking a student leader to recruit a group on my behalf who would participate in the data gathering session. I believe that this contributed to positioning me more as a researcher who had an equal role in the data gathering session than as one who would have approached the group from a position of power, which would have compromised the rigour of the research.

Moreover, during the data gathering session I asked for an external co-facilitator from outside of the university. She was given the role of leading the data gathering session by communicating the task of the data gathering session to the participants. This could have played a role in neutralising any possible power dynamics, although I am always cognisant of the effect of my role as a university employee.

The issue of subjectivity comes into focus at this stage. There was a risk for me, for the sake of remaining in my comfort zone, to simply use my own interpretations, convictions and notions for them to be presented as a credible, trustworthy report of the study. I recognised that this was a strong possibility in my case, given the title of the research and how close to it home was to me and could have been for me during the research. I have therefore remained sensitive about it throughout the process; through reflection and self-reflexivity, member checks and supervision. In Nightingale and Cromby (1999) it is suggested that subjectivity be viewed as a relational issue. On one hand, I understood that it would be important for me to be aware of the power and the dynamic that I brought to the research environment (Parker, 2010). There have been suggestions for example in the work Nightingale and Cromby (1999) that the meaning that I would read from the research text is the meaning that has been left by others (participants and co-facilitator in the data collection) in the research text. In addition, though, the position I have taken as motivated by Parker (1997) points this meaning in a certain direction that channels the stance of the research report. In this sense therefore, subjectivity (in particular here – my subjectivity) becomes a resource for the research report as further inspired by Parker (1997). It has indeed been the case in this research process. My experience in the student leadership environment has provided me some insight to be able to understand and explore issues more deeply than I would have had I not been exposed to this environment.

### *3.6.1.3 Research participants' role*

The role of the participants was embedded in their knowledge and understanding of the details contained in the information letter and consent form (Appendix C and D). Participants were free to request further details in cases where the letter did not satisfactorily offer them sufficient information. In addition, their role included their participation in the group process by providing drawings of their dreams as well as



associations/amplifications pertaining to these drawings. The participants were also asked to participate in a process of member checks where the interpretations of the findings were made transparent to them so as to facilitate congruency between myself and the group in terms of the said interpretations that I made, as suggested by Leavy (2014). In the next section, I discuss how the participants were recruited.

### **3.6.2 Recruitment of participants / Sampling**

Participant ownership was important in this research as it provides the participant with the willingness to share experiences as a result of self-motivation. Participants were recruited using volunteer and judgement (purposive) sampling. On the one hand volunteer sampling means that participants signed up to participate in the research process on their own accord without any kind of motivation from anyone other than themselves (Neuman, 2012). These participants were approached to consider participation in the research process. Acknowledging the potential sensitivity of the topic under discussion in this research process, it appeared to be fitting to consider the volunteer sampling method as a primary method to gather the group of participants. This method also seemed to be best since, as mentioned, I was an employee of the Department of Student Affairs from where I would be drawing the sample. The volunteer sampling method was used to facilitate the process of participants who wanted to be part of the research as a matter of interest and their own choice. This method had an added benefit as volunteering participants are thought to accelerate the process by having a keen interest in the topic without needing the motivation of others (De Vos, et. al, 2002). It also appeared that it would be easy for volunteers to gain ownership of the research process as noted to be the case in Dalton, et al. (2001). On the other hand, judgement or purposive sampling means that participants were identified as knowledgeable about the research question or as having potential to be able to contribute appropriately in terms of adding certain elements that are essential to have a representative sample of the population under study (Leedy & Ormod, 2014). Thus where purposive sampling was used; more participants were approached after allowing those who were recruited through volunteer sampling to sign up. As a means to continue to promote the principle of participant ownership, participants who were recruited through purposive sampling were given an opportunity to decline to the invitation. As a result; gatekeepers and culture brokers as suggested by Liamputtong

(2010) and Marshall (1996) were used as those having insight into 'the researched' which helped to approach potential participants and thus helpful to assist where purposive sampling was used. In addition, I utilised purposive sampling by asking student leaders with whom I had contact to identify and help me to recruit participants based on how the potential participants would be able to contribute to the data gathering process. The said participants were referred to the research by contacting the research assistant. All in all, I remained uninvolved in the recruitment process in terms of approaching such participants myself. It is important for me to mention this as my direct involvement in the recruitment of participants could have played a role in the data gathering considering issues of coercion or participants pleasing the researcher or using the research platform to settle some agenda, given my involvement in the Student Affairs Department at that time.

### **3.6.3 The biographical-demographic position of the participants**

Both in discursive psychology, or discourse analysis, and in the psychosocial approach, the biographical-demographic position of the participants is important to note and understand. In their research, Hoggett, et al. (2010) have noted that they could not understand their participants' perspectives without considering their unique life stories in relation to power, discourse and so forth, which they studied psychosocially. In their coining of the Free Association Narrative Interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), the researchers prioritised biography as an important information aspect for the interpretation and understanding of the dynamics at play. Furthermore, Parker (2015) encourages researchers to note this attribute in research as it provides context for what is being said and what the discourse informs. As a result, embedded in the research methodology, particularly in the study of the data, the biographical-demographic position of the participants is prioritised. This approach consequently helped me to understand how the anxiety is being worked with and also how others are positioned in context. In the chapter in which I describe the findings I first detail the biographical-demographic position of the participants to provide a context for the meanings that I understood to be emerging out of the data gathered.

Ford (2010) and Gergen (2009) are of the view that biographical-demographic information helps us to contextualise the worlds and lives of those that are involved in

this co-construction space or relational process. The aim of using it here was to move closer to the information regarding what could be facilitating the positions that each dreamer took in an effort to either protect themselves from anxiety or use language to defend themselves from what seems to be a threat (Ford, 2010). As such, it was anticipated that the biographical significance of each participant could shed light on and bring understanding to some of the contributing factors of each student leader's defendedness, as suggested by Jefferson and Hollway (2005). These would be revealed through different levels such as social, discursive or psychic. Suggestions found in the literature, by for example Parker (2015), which I have also adopted to the South African context, address the point that the demographic information appears to be important given the history (in this context) of apartheid and the transformation efforts that are undertaken. This demographic information positions one on the basis of race, gender, economic and social class amongst others (Speckman & Mandew, 2014).

#### **3.6.4 Research participants' description and participation inclusion guidelines**

The depth of the method and level of detail one goes into when studying the data have consequences for ethical considerations in terms of the amount of data to be collected. To this end, smaller samples have been more favourable (Willig, 2013). In addition, small groups are also easily manageable, especially when facilitating the session where research information is qualitatively gathered (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2007), in this case, through social dream drawing. Hence, I initially sought 10 - 15 participants to engage in the group process as suggested by Leavy (2014). These were student leaders at the same university who were available on the date scheduled for the group process. Ultimately the end differed from my initially envisaged strategy and I was just able to find six student leaders to be participants in this research. This was a matter of convenience in terms of being able to find student leaders who were available on the day of the data gathering session, but also consistent with what other researchers are doing, for example, Mersky (2013). I noted that there were more student leaders who were interested to participate but went ahead with those who were available on the day. The data gathered from these qualified as having reached data saturation, given the depth of the transcription (Willig, 2013). As a result, I did not continue appealing for more (as initially intended -10 – 15 participants) nor did I wait for those who

indicated their interest but who in the end did not participate. Thus, the sampling criteria were really simplistic. The participant would have needed to have occupied (no more than two years before the date of the data gathering session) a student leadership position at this particular university, at the time of data gathering. Secondly as mentioned, the student leader would need to be available for the full session of the data gathering. Additionally, fluency in English was preferred as a way of ensuring a shared spoken language which all participants could understand to a similar degree. The sample profile thus consisted of student leaders who were more mature ones, in their third year of studies and older. The table 3.1 below is a description of the group of leaders who were participants in this research at the time of data gathering:

*Table 3.1* Description of the group participants

Dream	Participant biographical- demographic significance	Participant student leadership description
Dream 1	White female	Student leader in a cultural committee
Dream 2	White male	Previous student leader in an academic student structure and currently volunteering where needed in student leadership activities
Dream 3	Black female	Current member of a council that focuses on academic activities and also ran for the SRC elections
Dream 4	Black female	Currently in a student judiciary role
Dream 5	Black female	Currently serving on the SRC and has held other roles including an executive position on a committee that dealt with cultural activities

Dream 6

Black male

Has served in various student leadership positions over the years and also at the time of data gathering. He has also participated in an overseas exchange leadership programme

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### **3.6.5 Research question**

This researcher was interested in the social construction of student leadership at a South African university. While the question being asked was inspired by this interest, I offered a working hypothesis that the social construction of student in a South African university would occur on both the conscious and unconscious level as consistent to the assumptions regarding the data gathering tool. The working hypothesis was then progressed to become more specific in terms of answering the research question in accordance with the methodology behind the data gathering tool I used as also done by for example Mersky (2013). I chose this position to allow the descriptions that contributed to satisfying the question to emerge from the data. This was also congruent with the worldview to which I have ascribed this research process. To this end, this research posed the following question:

- What is the social construction of student leadership at a South African university?

As a data gathering technique, social dream drawing was used to put data together about the research question. The technique is described below. This description of the data gathering process was important for the sake of maintaining the transparency of the research process so as to move towards strategies to ascertain rigour (Demuth, 2013; Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014) and also uphold a sound ethical approach to research (Leavy, 2014).

### **3.6.6 Data gathering: Social dream drawing's theoretical background and motivations**

Social constructionism examines the development of diverse understandings of the world that are jointly constructed (Gergen, 2009; Parker, 2015): in this case, student

leadership at a South African university. As such, I studied the research question by using a method that could potentially provide three kinds of scenarios: that is data on a conscious level, preconscious (or sub-conscious) as well as the unconscious level. The different levels of data collected would ultimately become integrated as these have helped to create the understanding of the reality at a global analysis level (Boydell, 2009; Trevithick, 2012).

The tool that was used in this research process to gather data is known as social dream drawing: a technique which allows a group process of tapping into the cultural knowledge and thinking that is occurring in the dreaming of the group members (Mersky, 2008). It is related to the methodology of social dreaming which was coined by Gordon Lawrence (1998). In line with social constructionism, it was proposed that underlying the use of social dreaming is the premise that the experience of the individual and their behaviour mirrors the conscious and unconscious constructs of the group (Armstrong, 1998). Lawrence (1998) argues that dreams have a social dimension; thus, according to Mersky, (2015) and Bion (1992) dreams represent the collective unconscious thinking, knowledge and insight creation of the group that is socially constructed. Social dreaming or social dream drawing are methods characterised as a psychosocial instrument embedded in the psychosocial approach (Long, 2013). Such methods are used to study human social phenomena from a perspective combining systems theory, to which social constructionism is affiliated (Michailakis & Schirmer, 2014), and psychoanalysis (Long, 2013). The two represent different processes or levels of construction of reality in social interaction (Burr, 2003). Dreaming can be seen as thinking which is presented by a participant in a group process by means of a drawing (Mersky, 2013). In my understanding the dream drawing was regarded as creating a pre-conscious (or sub-conscious) representation of the material. This representation provided a means for the group to interact and construct a reality about the topic of interest in the group setting, which opened up a space for the unconscious dynamics to come into play (Clarke & Hoggert, 2009). In this research, I used social dream drawing as a result of my exposure to it during coursework for my postgraduate studies (PhD Consulting Psychology). I found that it was important for me to be well equipped with the methods used to secure the credibility of the research as well as to safeguard the participants from harm.

Consequently, I invited a researcher who was better equipped in the application of this method to be a co-facilitator in the data gathering part of the research process.

From a reflective perspective and in the language of the psychodynamic paradigm, the question of whether I had been seduced into the approach taken by psychosocial research appeared to be appropriate. My response and reaction to this question stemmed from my own subjectivity and preoccupations with aspects of social construction. I was consistent throughout my growth and development as a researcher, particularly as an outcome of my psychology training, background and practice with a concern for aspects beneath the surface which are unconscious constructs. I have generally seemed to be looking for more than what meets the eye. The psychosocial approach has provided me with the tools, assumptions and theoretical standings to pursue research into understanding what has been accepted to be below the surface (Clarke, 2002; Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). In addition, I tend to think in terms of metaphors and find comfort in dabbling with abstractness. The social dream drawing technique in particular has afforded me the chance to bring the metaphors and abstract representations into the research space and to embrace imagery in a research technique. While I pursued a Master's degree, I undertook a similar exercise where I asked the participants to participate in an abstract representation of the construction of their female identity. This could have been in the form of a poem, a song or a drawing. The feedback I received from the academic world was sceptical in that method of including drawings in research appeared not to be scientific. To my relief, the social dream drawing technique offered me a scholarly approach to embracing abstractness in research and helped me to talk about what might otherwise not have been spoken about in the research context. My certainty was that I have been exposed to a tool that has helped me to bring my intuitiveness into the research space and to explore aspects of social construction that may appear to be below the surface.

I suggest that the three kinds of scenarios (or levels of data) that it was possible to create through the SDD method aimed to facilitate a social constructionist process. The three levels of data consisted of the level of the dream sharing, the level of making associations with and amplifications of the dream as well as the level of the conversation regarding the co-construction of student leadership in a South African

university (which I regarded as an intentional focus that is cognitive in nature, in the topic of interest on a conscious level).

### **3.6.7 Data gathering: Social dream drawing administration of the tool**

In terms of the administration of the tool, the participants were asked to present the group with a recent dream related to the primer included in Addendum C – Information letter that was given prior to the group session. The participants were asked to bring a drawing to the group activity about ‘my dream of student leadership’. The data gathering session was started by this researcher who introduced herself as the investigator of this particular data gathering session. She also introduced the co-facilitator. The introduction included the clarification of roles of all present. Thereafter, the researcher thanked the participants for making themselves available for the session. Chairs were then arranged in a circle and all present occupied their seats. The co-facilitator explained the process of the session and articulated the strategy of the data gathering process. Each participant was invited to share a dream drawing that they had brought to the session, one at a time. Once this was done, group members were allowed to make free associations and/or amplifications and/or reflections based on the dream (Lawrence, 1998). ‘Free associations’ in the context of SDD refers to the groups’ associative unconscious (Barnard, May, Van Niekerk & Mnguni, 2015). In addition, the amplifications can be viewed as the cultural and political elements which come to mind during the group process (Mersky, 2013). In this process the facilitators also provide their free associations/amplification/reflections as appropriate. Ultimately, the facilitators propose hypotheses which may suggest the relationships between the free associations and/ or reflections and/or amplifications as regards the dream with the potential social themes which may occur (Lawrence, 1998). Based on this approach, it was possible to surmise what the experience of student leaders is in relation to their student leadership at a South African university. To this end, free associations and other aspects as data were obtained about the collective experience of these leaders, which provided an understanding of social construction of the reality about such a role (Barnard et al., 2015). Following the formulating of associations and amplification, a conversation about the social construction of student leadership in a South African university, based on the above, was held. The conversation was guided by implication, meaning that it was directed each time by the associations with and



amplifications of each dream, one at a time. This could be a chaotic process but it may well assist in exploring the social unconscious bringing those issues to a conscious level of thought (Mersky, 2013). This way of working appears to resonate with Clarke & Hoggert (2009) and could be used to examine the issue that is of interest to this research.

The data was collected in the form of text and photographs that were taken of the dream drawings as based on the work done by Mersky (2013). The photographs represent the recording of the drawings presented. These can be found in Appendix F; and as support to the reporting about the findings in Chapter 4. Secondly, the text in the data gathered at the level of the conversation about student leadership in a South African university was at a conscious level, as mentioned. This took place when the group made meaning of the amplifications, associations and/or reflections in specific relation to the said social construction. The extract below from the transcription provides the introduction and expectations regarding the data gathering activity. The following words were used to introduce the activity and communicate expectations. As is the convention, italics denote verbatim quotes:

*F2:*

*... for student leadership, dreams about the actual dream that you had and that you think is related to leadership in some way – whether it has been a dream that you had recently or a dream that you had some time ago, but somehow this dream...*

*Or a dream that you had recently or some time ago about, I mean, you don't dream about leadership right, but maybe this dream made you think about student leadership. And then we wanted you to bring a drawing and how we're going to work is that you are going to present this drawing to us, but you will also tell us about your dream. And then we will spend some time asking you questions about your dream after you've told it to us, and then we are going to have a middle part which we call free association and amplification. I'm sure some of you have heard about free association maybe? Not really. Okay. What this means is that you look at something and it makes you think something, feel something, you react in a particular kind of way and then you say whatever comes to mind and then we say you free associate with the drawing. So,*

*whatever the drawing makes you feel you can react to it in that way. And what is very important and I think a little bit difficult is for the person, the dreamer who brought the dream, it is not about that person then anymore it's really just about the dream and we are asking the person that we can use the dream to react to free associate to.*

*The other thing that I use is amplification. I like amplification very much because what we do there is, you bring things like, maybe the drawing or the dream reminds you of a movie or of a song or of any social artefact that it makes you think of and then you bring that to the group as well – and that we call amplification. So, it's all about what does the drawing of the dream make you think and feel about? And that is what we then speak about in the middle part.*

*And in the last part what we will speak about is, now that we have finished that exercise, what do you now think about student leadership in South African universities? I think what is also important to say is that although Neo and I are here to facilitate we are also part, so when it comes to you telling your dream we will ask you questions as well like everybody else. When it comes to the free association and amplification, we will also free associate and amplify to the dream and when it comes to the third part when it's about thinking about student leadership, then we may add there as well.*

*Now how we envisaged this to work was that each person will have about 30 minutes, so we will divide it 10-10-10 and after that we will move to the next person. So we will work an hour, we will have a comfort break, an hour, a comfort break, an hour, a comfort break. What I want to ask you is maybe that we can just make a list of who's going to go first, second and third – that we have that and that nobody needs to feel anxious about, when must I go, can I jump in now? So, can we maybe just decide? Who wants to go first? I think that's the question.*

The following sorts of questions were therefore asked to prime the participants during the data gathering activity:

1. What is the dream that you can share with the group regarding student leadership in a South African university?

2. What are the amplifications to and associations with the dream that the group makes, that are shared regarding student leadership in a South African university?
3. Given the amplifications to and associations made with the dream, what can we say about the social construction of student leadership in a South African university or what do we learn about the social construction of student leadership in a South African university?

This technique is safe for the participant as it is not a direct or confrontational manner of investigating what may be a potentially contentious or sensitive issue (Clarke & Hoggert, 2009). The technique therefore provided a channel to voice opinions which might not necessarily be shared if asked for in a more direct manner such as in a question, a focus group and the like. Social dream drawing provided a platform to talk openly about issues which might have been occurring in the unconscious, which are therefore deeper than the superficial. In this way, I surmise that I was potentially provided with deeper and thicker descriptions of the issue without necessarily making the participant uncomfortable. The technique was used in this research as a tool to create interaction and, while interacting, create reality together.

In this research, once SDD had been facilitated, a transcription was carried out from a recording that was made during the social dream drawing session. According to Gee (2009, 2011), the trustworthiness of the analysis does not depend as much on how detailed the transcription is, as on when the transcript functions together with the other elements of analysis. These elements could include context, the judgements made about what goes into the transcription and what does not, the analyst and probably the extent to which they have been exposed to the aspects of the research question and so forth. (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). The transcription used in this analysis was more narrow than broad, where these terms are used to describe the amount of detail in the transcription (Pouria, 2010). The more narrow transcription means that the transcription has been made in much detail (Pouria, 2010). Thus, when it came to my research, this allowed for a detailed data analysis. Realistically speaking though I propose that, any discourse analysis providing an understanding about the creation of reality, is but a part of the reality, given the elements involved in the analysis.

### **3.6.8 Data gathering: The value of free association and amplifications**

One of the attributes of this research process that distinguishes it as psychosocial research is the incorporation of free association (Clarke & Hoggert, 2009). While I am interested in the social construction of student leadership at a South African university, which implies interest in language, I was also aware that this social construction constituted below the surface material that potentially placed the participants in a defended position. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) coined the term 'defended subjects' to refer to participants who have adopted a defended position. The authors expand, noting that a 'defended subject' position in discourse is the product of an attempt to ward off anxiety (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). They have suggested the use of psychoanalytic concepts in order to unlock discursive positions (Jefferson & Hollway, 2005; Willig, 2013). In my approach, I welcomed this idea and sought to understand how anxiety has contributed to the discussion and why the discourse looks the way it does, as contributed to by the anxiety. As a result, the dreams offer the opportunity to access some of this understanding (Mersky, 2015).

My understanding therefore is that a social construction process is discursive, which means that issues of power, power dynamics and one's own position as well as the positioning of others come into play (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Parker, 2010). As a result, threat is assumed (Clarke & Hoggert, 2009). According to Jefferson and Hollway (2005), the threat that is experienced towards one's self creates anxiety; in turn the self tries to ward this off or master it in a defended position. This threat, or the warding off or mastering of anxiety largely seems to be an unconscious experience (Willig, 2013). Free association therefore affords the opportunity to tap into unconscious material in this research project as suggested in the work of Clarke & Hoggert (2009) and Hollway and Jefferson (2012). Free association makes certain assumptions about the unconscious that apparently add to the richness of the conversation and the understanding of the social construction (Ford, 2010). When looking at data with a psychosocial lens, the interest moves further than the study of the language itself (Parker, 2010) to interest in the unconscious dynamics that are used to avoid anxiety or to master it (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). Free association helps to hear this voice and to expose the researcher to this material (Parker, 2015). According to Jefferson and Hollway (2005), using another metaphor, free association makes visible what may

have been otherwise invisible. The amplification thus helps us to contextualise the cultural basis of the associations made. In addition, the amplification assists the researcher in arriving at interpretations and hypotheses on and about the data, in context.

### **3.6.9 The study of the data: Reflecting on the journey**

I have here included this reflection of the methodology to describe the journey that I went on to decide on the strategy to analyse the data. This is important because reflexivity appears to be an important value in qualitative research. In addition, reflexivity is regarded as a key principle regarding transparency in terms of ensuring rigour.

Initially, I had been clear that I wanted to understand how students negotiate and construct student leadership together. The language use and the social interaction/context were important to me. As such, it would appear that it would have been always clear to me that I would study the data using discourse analysis, given the natural or obvious assumption in terms of the use of this technique in social constructionist studies (Burr, 2003; Forrester, 2010; Parker, 2015; Willig, 2013). Needless to say, though, inspired by the position that I have taken regarding this research, I was motivated to respond to what the data is doing. As a result, my search for the most appropriate methods started, beginning with grounded theory and exploring Gee's model of discourse analysis.

#### *3.6.9.1 Grounded theory and Gee's model of discourse analysis*

Seeing that it was a topic that has not been widely researched in South Africa, I had initially opted to follow the principles and strategies of grounded theory (GT) to facilitate a research process for new learning about the topic of interest (Willig, 2013). As I understand it, GT was developed to provide researchers with a method that could move them from data to theory; in other words, the data collected would help them to build a new theory about their topic of interest, thereby providing a space for new contextualised theory (Willig, 2013). Given my social constructionist interest, the inclination towards GT made sense as I would be able to explain student leadership at a South African university in a contextualised manner.

My attraction to grounded theory was motivated by the work of Charmaz (2006) in terms of positioning GT within a social construction perspective. Here, the GT itself becomes the socially constructed reality, instead of employing the outcome of the research as a means to capture the social reality. Her stance is that the understanding gained through research does not emerge from the data but is constructed by the researcher through interaction with the data (Charmaz, 2014).

The proposed steps that I would have adopted had I continued with the constructivist grounded theory were taken from the work of Charmaz (2006). These steps demonstrate how a researcher would identify and explicate contextualised social processes. In effect, external sources, including the position of the researcher, would not be considered to be part of the social construction (Charmaz, 2006). This is said whilst acknowledging that Charmaz (2014) promotes the view that the researcher is the one who is actively constructing social reality while interacting with the data, although the focus is not necessarily on discourse (Willig, 2013).

The steps that are related to studying the data comprise initial coding, focused coding and categorisation as well as theory building, which may be succeeded by theoretical sampling. Overarching these steps, however, I would have incorporated the principle of comparative analysis. According to Charmaz (2006) comparative analysis is used in GT practice regardless of the type of sub-principles in GT that the researcher may be inclined to apply. In comparative analysis, a researcher would compare incidents to each other, data to data or even statements to incidents (Charmaz, 2014). The task in comparative analysis is to make analytical sense of the data, which is an advantage in challenging different ideas that are brought forward in the data that has been gathered (Charmaz, 2006).

With this said my role as a participant-observer of discourse has motivated me to ascribe elsewhere. In addition, I have sought to be interested in the discourse, with a much more focussed and clearer intention. While considering the abovementioned, together with my desire to hear the voice of the participants in terms of how reality is co-constructed in student leadership with particular focus on discourse, I was left with a gap. This consisted of my dissatisfaction in terms of the aspect of taking an intentional look at language and language use when using GT. I thus sought after a

methodology that would help me to look into language in a way that gave me the ability to generate or hypotheses but also to acquire a feel for the nuances and dynamics in the language which was used. In addition, I felt that the gap concerned how I would be able to work with the unconscious dynamics and bring them into the discussion, more especially from a theoretical perspective. In response I was persuaded to eventually opt out of GT in the direction of discourse analysis and methods to study the unconscious.

I started to search for discourse analysis and began with Gee's (2009) work. This literature source states that discourse analysis is concerned with how language provides a platform for social and cultural perspective and identities (Gee, 2011). In other words, apart from the themes that one could learn about from a conversation during a data gathering process, a political perspective on the interaction could be brought to the fore (Gergen, 2009). Gergen and Gergen (2008) make the point that this political perspective concerns the power and authority dynamics that play a role in the social construction of the area of interest. While the social constructionist perspective is concerned with power and its meaning in a context, Forrester (2010) maintains that discourse analysis appears to be appropriate for describing the reality in the same context. Phillips and Hardy (2002) position discourse analysis within the scope of social construction in their book, *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. As such, discourse analysis might comprise a tool to explore the production of social practices, and their maintenance in the social context, including their development in becoming tradition or culture.

For the sake of maintaining a structured modus to realise the data analysis while ascertaining the integrity of the data and searching for a framework that would assist me in studying how language has been used to learn about the constructed reality, I sought for a model. This search led me to Gee's (2009) model of discourse analysis. In my search I had come across an example of a research analysis done by Wheeler (2010) that had been undertaken using Gee's model (2009). Had I continued to follow Gee's (2009) model, the research of Wheeler (2010) would have offered me support on the use of this model. According to his *How to do Discourse Analysis* toolkit book, Gee (2011) advises that there are six tools of inquiry which can be used to ask questions about seven building tasks respectively, in order to attain an 'ideal' discourse

analysis. A tool of inquiry provides information about how people build identities and practices as well as become aware of the identities and practices that others create around them (Gee, 2011). These tools are known as social languages, discourses, conversations, intertextuality, situated meanings and figured worlds (Gee, 2005). The seven building tasks encompass significance, practices (activities), identities, relationships, politics, connections as well as sign systems and knowledge (Gee, 2009). Based on this, for example, the question could be asked: How are social languages, discourses, conversations, intertextuality, situated meanings and figured worlds being used to build significance, practices (activities), identities, relationships, politics, connections and sign systems and knowledge (Gee, 2011) in the social construction of student leadership at a South African university?

### *3.6.9.2 The adoption of a data management system (Atlas TI)*

Working with GT and using Gee's model of discourse analysis seemed as if it could give rise to a large amount of data, which could be complex to deal with. To this end, a data management system was introduced to the data analysis. This was to further secure the integrity of the data and acquire a more organised way of working with it as well as enhancing the richness of the data. I considered Atlas TI an appropriate data management system. According to Susan Friese (2014), using this system makes it easier to analyse data systematically, which allows more time for the technical aspects of research, while the Atlas TI system handles the data complexity (Friese, 2014). The Atlas TI was thus used to register the codes and modify the coding; integrating the material in one place, attaching notes, counting the number of coded incidents as well as retrieving data based on various words during the time when I was working with the data (Contreras, 2014; Friese, 2014). Using this platform, the building tasks via the inquiry tools of Gee's model would have been used to create codes and produce the theory by integrating the codes that could be linked and finally considered in terms of discourses that could be found, on a larger scale.

The approaches to implementing discourse analysis are vast and various. The key for me, in agreement with Willig (2013), was to respond to what the data was doing and not just to read for meaning (which is - what was the data saying?). The combination of Gee's model of data analysis and Atlas TI was difficult for me to use because I have



experienced the combination as being rigid, based on its structured nature in the light of the kind of data that I had. In addition, the data seemed to be fluid and integrated on the three levels of the conscious, sub – conscious and unconscious; as such the latter was difficult to place in the structure of the model. Gee's model (2011) explores questions regarding which one would deductively search for answers in the transcription. The data that I had collected had something more to offer than just answers to these questions. It has always remained important to me to listen to the participants. As such, I have responded to the 'more' that I have seen in the text and explored other approaches in discourse analysis in order to continue with studying the use of language during the construction of reality about the said student leadership and still remain true to my need to listen to the participants. The voice of the psychodynamic dimension in the data was loud, to the extent that if it had been left out, the report of the findings would have been robbed of the depth and richness that describes the research topic. For discourse analysis, it may not always be a priority to focus on other aspects of data except for language, while I argue that omitting the psychodynamic dimension was by default ignoring an important aspect that contributes to the sought understanding about the use of language in the co-construction of student leadership at a South African university. The data, as mentioned above, did not fit so neatly into Gee's model since I had observed more in the data than just the answers to the questions suggested by Gee's model. My interest in listening to the participants and responding to what the data is doing seems to have allowed for other realisations to emerge.

My decision not to use Atlas TI was further strengthened by my commitment to the assumptions of the psychosocial approach. Using Atlas TI would require breaking down data to study it, while the aim of psychosocial research is to keep the data descriptive and to let it build itself (Clarke, 2002; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). In this regard I could have used Atlas TI to work solely with the conversation level as this could have fitted the style of analysis. On the other hand, this could have compromised the global analysis. In terms of the value of the dream and associations/amplifications levels, this would not fit so well. Therefore, the pursuit of maintaining the wholeness of the data conflicted with the aim of clustering and fragmenting the data using Atlas TI. The pull to undertake the latter has been real in this research process, hence the exploration of a data management system, but also a natural inclination in relation to

traditional qualitative research methods as referenced to by Clarke (2002) and Friese (2014).

I did have the intention of attempting to communicate my discomfort at forcing the data and the data analysis methods to conform to the software by adapting to the prescriptions of using the software and fitting the data and its analysis into the skeleton provided by it. The dilemmas that I faced and certain research ethical dilemmas pointed to issues of rigour, which included letting the data speak for itself and also accepting Atlas-Ti as a source of co-construction in this study. I say this about Atlas-Ti because as software system it has been designed based on certain assumptions about research premises, with certain epistemological standings and worldviews, and as a result being eligible to be a co-constructor of reality (Creswell, 2014; Demuth, 2013; Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014; Friese, 2014, Willig, 2013). I consequently decided to steer away from this position because of potential mismatches in theoretical stance and instead adapted a way of analysis which I could confidently say would be fitting for the theoretical positions taken in this research process. I did of course note the benefit of the data management aspect of Atlas-Ti as a well-ordered way of managing data, which I have not enjoyed. I did also note that not using a data management system could be a limitation of the study. At the same time, I wished to promote the exploration of emerging methods or alternative methods that are not or that have not been widely used. This presented the opportunity to advance research methodology science by experimenting with the feasibility of such.

### *3.6.9.3 Thematic versus discourse analysis*

Thematic analysis utilises descriptive codes that are clustered into themes to produce knowledge (Willig, 2013). These capture and make sense of the meanings that characterise the phenomena being studied. One can therefore argue that this was what I did. The focus of thematic analysis is mainly on the study of meaning and why things are the way they are, an attempt at explaining why participants may have shared what they did share and understanding the meaning of that (Willig, 2013). The benefit of positioning my analysis in discourse analysis rather than thematic analysis was that of locating the analysis theoretically and epistemologically. This was in response to the identified factor of thematic analysis in that there appears to be no definitive theoretical

basis for the method as well as an undefined conceptual framework to position the method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as the epistemological and ontological assumptions would depend on the research question (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, I was interested in more than just meanings, wishing to study the use of language together with the power dynamics, nuances and historical and cultural positions that can be explained within a defined paradigm, too.

#### *3.6.9.4 Foucauldian discourse analysis*

I am in agreement with discursive psychology analysts regarding the importance of studying how psychological phenomena are constituted in conversation as a social action (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Parker, 1997; Wetherell, 2005), in that data is read with an action orientation (Willig, 2013). In this approach, discursive psychology takes a social constructionist angle (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Like Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) which is also social constructionist orientated, the position that particular versions of psychological phenomena are constructed through language, is maintained (Parker, 1997, 2015). The FDA takes it further, though, and I concurred in my approach, arguing that there is more than just the verbal expressions represented by the social, psychological and physical effects of discourse (Willig, 2013). According to Willig (2013), FDA claims to say something about the relationship between the symbolic systems, human subjectivity and social relations, which takes it further than simply a concern with the use of language in interpersonal communication. My convictions however come close to those of Jefferson and Hollway (2005). In this way, I used psychodynamic approaches to reach deep into the potentially untapped knowledge about the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university. My premise was that the psychosocial approach could allow for the discovery of data that is not obvious and which widens our insight on the topic (Boydell, 2009). Wetherell (2005) however asserts that the incorporation of the psychodynamic angle into discourse analysis or data analysis need not be considered as a science on its own but needs to be brought into the existing science to further our understanding of phenomena.

### **3.6.10 The study of the data: Discourse analysis in a psychosocial approach – employing binocularity**

Language has been seen to construct versions of social reality; consequently per se, this became a study about the collective moving away from the individual-only focus (Willig, 2013). The collective, in my view, offers us more learning about how we live, our culture, power and politics, and also provides a fuller understanding and more depth in terms of knowledge about our relationships and how we interact. This is important as it widens our grasp of the meaning about our existence, which was important to me. As a result, studying the data from a discourse analysis perspective, i.e. psychosocially (Boydell, 2009), seemed attractive to me and was advantageous for this study.

The pluralistic consideration of discourse analysis together with the depth psychology inspiration for data analysis (or data study as I prefer) seems to have allowed for a global analysis which in my view created an opportunity to listen to the collective. Binocularity modelled by Frosh and Young (2008) was constructed by using different methods to study the same data so as to yield differing or various perspectives about the data. In a manner similar to what I have done, Frosh and Young (2008) previously undertook data analysis on a set of data and, thereafter, investigated the possibility of using psychodynamically inspired principles to study the same data. On the one hand, discourse analysis apparently created a platform to focus on language while on the other, the psychodynamically inspired approach helped to deepen the study of language as the subconscious and unconscious elements of the latter were also incorporated into the study of the data.

The study of the data in this research was inspired by Boydell (2009). She has proposed an engagement in discourse analysis using a psychosocial approach (Boydell, 2009). Metaphors seem to remain central to her approach as she appears to have used metaphors to link language with the defended participant (Boydell, 2009). The concept is that metaphors seem to represent our thoughts and thus appear to carry representations of meaning that have been constructed in a particular context (Lock & Strong, 2010). Furthermore, the metaphor in context may also contain the subconscious and unconscious elements at play (Parker, 2015). Accordingly, I have

reported and presented the raw data that pertains to the metaphors gathered in this research. This is detailed in Chapter 4 in the table titled 'associations and amplifications'. Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014) encourage researchers to be transparent about the process of interpretation: all the way from presenting raw data, then articulating the whole process, finally resulting in the connections and links made about the data presented as the findings of the research. According to them this is important to enhance the rigour of the study. In terms of studying the data in this research therefore, the metaphors have been interpreted using the psychodynamic theory of defence mechanisms as well as integration with the response to the third question that was posed during the data gathering activity (Boydell, 2009; Mersky, 2013). All the responses and metaphors (once interpreted) are themed and integrated to create a theory that identifies links and ideas about the topic of interest. A diagram illustrating these links and ideas is to be found in Chapter 5 (Figure 12). For a detailed explanation on the data study, I refer to the discussion that follows here.

Firstly, the guidelines that I have used to look into discourse analysis are based on the following assumptions that have been made by Clarke (2002), McCloskey, (2008) and Parker, 2015) and that I have integrated as:

- Discourse analysis involves a conceptualisation of language as a construction and as functional tool in interaction
- Discourse analysis requires the researcher to ask questions about language in the data – that is, rather than simply reading for meaning. I thus peruse the text to harvest what the data is doing. This is reading for social action in order for the researcher to experience the text as a reader to gain a sense of the discursive effects of the text. For example, one of these in my study is that the data is an experiential glimpse of the South African diversity dilemma, even though the aim of the research is not focused on diversity in South Africa.
- The text is read to answer the question as to what the text is doing while the analysis is performed to arrive at how the text manages to do what it is doing. Thus, throughout the process of studying the data, I always read the text in relation to the research question.

- The coding, or what I would like to call ‘meaning making of what is in the text’, is carried out in the light of the research question, rather than allowing any code to emerge that is unrelated to the research question. In this way, the coding becomes specific, with a particular focus on what to look for in the data. However, the voice that seems unrelated to the research question has not been completely shut out. According to Clarke (2002), due to the nature of qualitative data, researchers may be tempted to cluster, categorise or organise the data so that it can make sense and seem to be manageable. However, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) advocate for qualitative analysis to remain descriptive, in this way focusing on the wholeness of the data. In this regard, Clarke (2002) suggests the following process and steps as depicted in Figure 3.2:



*Figure 3.2* Representing suggestions of Clarke (2002) on using discourse analysis to study data

I therefore as represented in Figure 3.2; read the transcription with the aim of immersing myself in the data. This occurred by reading each level of data, noting keywords on each dream and each level. Secondly, I noted the themes and issues that emerged while at the dream level I noted what the dream was about. At the association and amplification level I observed symbols relating to anxiety, defense/ defended positioning as well as coping behaviour in terms of student leadership at a South African university. At the conversation level I identified themes. Thereafter, I reached some form of theoretical understanding of the participants by identifying key themes and experiences in conjunction with theoretical observations of their psychological mechanisms. I did this with particular reference to literature on defence mechanisms, which are in the psychodynamic field, as well as literature on student leadership, politics in South Africa and literature that was relevant in relation to the themes that have emerged, such as Mandela and Moses, the grief process and the like. This third step helped me to attain integrated levels of global analysis. Furthermore and lastly, I made links and looked for similar experiences across the data, which solidified the global analysis by cross referencing dreams, associations/amplification and conversation themes, and merged similar themes. This was also checked against the literature leading to more refined observations and to grounding the interpretation in these sources (Demuth, 2013). The cycle was performed several times where the transcription was re-read to look for more and more evidence on the themes and issues that were found.

During all the steps in the diagram above it was important to ask the following questions (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013):

- What do I notice?
- Why do I notice what I notice?
- How is defendedness played out or what is the anxiety that participants are defending themselves from?
- What is my reflexivity?
- What is the meaning of what I notice in the context of the whole setting?

I have consciously adopted a preference towards what has been described above. I have read the text to 'hear' the positioning of the conversation. In this, I have seen that the data has been represented on three levels: the level of sharing the dreams, the level of the free associations and amplifications and lastly, the level of the conversation about the co-construction of student leadership at a South African university. At these various levels, there have been particular stances taken, in such a manner that the voices on the respective levels have sounded differently, requiring diverse ways of engaging with the data according to the level. The themes and issues that have emerged have been described on a global scale with the aim of integrating the findings regarding the three levels of data gathered, rather than tearing the data apart. Initially when exploring the data, the conversation was read on the different levels respectively. Naturally, given that the story is the whole of its parts and part of its whole, the integration of the conversation as a whole picture seemed to be inevitable (Clarke, 2002; Hoggett et al., 2010).

### **3.6.11 Strategies to ascertain quality**

This is a discussion of the strategies that I used to ensure ethical considerations when conducting this study as well as those that I used to ascertain rigour as I consider quality to be both rigour and ethics (Valandra, 2012). These were essential in order to make sure of the high quality of the scientific value of the study as well as ensure sound methodological approaches (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). This stance of exposing the reader to the strategies to ascertain quality appears to be good practice for the sake of professional transparency and peer cross-checking, so to speak (Demuth, 2013). Based on the decisions that I have made in this regard, all of them were guided and rooted in the two principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. In terms of ethical considerations, three areas: procedures, ethical considerations relating to the researcher and also relating to the participants are addressed, followed by strategies to ensure rigour where I write about the trustworthiness of the work that has been done. This discussion is split into five sub-divisions: credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability and authenticity, and is important for the sake of transparency, which refers to the degree to which a researcher is open and honest about the work they have done in order for others to identify areas in the study to commend or to challenge,



in the interest of maintaining high quality work in psychology research (Demuth, 2013; Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014; Howitt & Cramer, 2014).

#### 3.6.11.1 *Beneficence and non-maleficence*

By and large, approaches that have been put in place to ensure a quality inquiry are born from ethical and moral perspectives. When undertaking research which has a particular interest in the construction of reality, it was beneficial to reflect on whether this research would benefit the participants or whether the research process would perpetuate the marginalisation of the group of interest. The interest of this research, it will be recalled, lies in hearing the voices of those in student leadership in order to inform their leadership lives. In a culturally and historically embedded issue, such as the one under discussion, I propose that entertaining discussion about issues related to the focus of the research may be of benefit as this may result in a deeper revelation of understanding in the social construction of student leadership role participation and involvement.

At the same time, while looking at doing good on behalf of the participants and maximising benefit for them through this research, it is also equally important to conduct the research in such a manner that harm is minimised (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). I achieved this by making sure that I would avoid anything that I could expect to cause harm to the participants or not be good for them. One of these was to hold a debriefing session at the end of the data gathering session. Debriefing seems to have helped and was aimed at assisting the participants to air any unfinished business that they might have had in relation to the discussion held during the data gathering session. In addition, I considered that debriefing could preserve the psychological dignity of the participants.

#### 3.6.11.2 *Ethical considerations*

As mentioned above, in this section on ethical considerations I discuss procedures during research; such considerations in relation to the researcher as well as those in relation to the participants.

### *a. Procedures*

- Application for ethics

Prior to launching this study, I had been required to submit an application for ethics approval to the Research Ethics Review Committee in the College of Economic and Management Science at UNISA. This is procedural and standard practice across the board in many universities and institutions to verify that ethics norms are upheld (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). The ethics clearance form that I submitted is attached to this document as Appendix B. The review committee was tasked by UNISA to read through my research proposal and to approve the points that the study was feasible and ethically sound. The application was approved on its first sitting and no concerns were raised.

- Security of the data

The data gathered in this research will be secured for 5 years. The researcher will be able to use it for further research if needs be. The data will be secured in a facility or device that has a security password available.

- Information letter and consent form

The information pertaining to the aims, goals and content of the study was made available to the participants by means of an information letter (Appendix C). They received the document before participating in the data gathering process so that their ownership could be facilitated (Dalton, et al., 2001). My suggestions concerning how participant ownership was achieved include the participants' consideration of the letter's contents and the individual decision to participate in the inquiry. The letter also included information regarding the participants' roles in the research process so that they would be aware of the expectations that would be placed on them. In addition, the letter disclosed the role of the examining university, particularly as regards its access to the research data. The research promoter specifically was as intimately involved with the data as myself and the participants. Other individuals, such as the external examiners, a transcriber and assessors would also have possible access to the data. The details about the extent to which each stakeholder would have access were stated in the information letter. In addition, each stakeholder was obligated to sign a contract

with the primary researcher in order to be compliant with the ethical requirements. Together with the said letter, a consent letter (Appendix D) was made available where the participants indicated their voluntary participation (Dalton, et. al 2001) and their understanding of, and agreement with, the information letter including their willingness to share information in the suggested manner (Creswell, 2007). To facilitate a high quality data collection, a voice recorder was used to ensure that transcriptions were as accurate as possible. This was included in the information letter and participants were asked to indicate agreement with the use of this device in the consent letter. Considering the administrative tasks that were involved in making the research project a success, a research administration assistant was hired. This person had no access to any of the research data. Their role was to communicate with the participants and other role players such as the transcriber together with the co-facilitator so as to expedite the smooth running of logistics in the research process. The assistant also played a role in implementing administrative tasks that had to do with organising the data gathering session.

In terms of my working at Student Affairs, questions about the valid nature of informed consent on the part of the student leaders could be posed. Because I was familiar with all the student leaders who participated in the study, I wanted to make sure that the opportunity presented by working with a research participant concerning data gathering was a free choice on the part of the student leaders. I did appreciate that my work position at Student Affairs by default might have presented a power dynamic that could have influenced the student leaders to participate. I took comfort in knowing that not all the student leaders who were approached agreed to participate. Those who did, indicated to me that the element of freedom to choose was entertained in the decision to participate. As previously mentioned, I was confident however that the said power dynamic had been managed by way of removing myself from the recruitment process in terms of interacting with student leaders who were potential participants. Thus voluntary participation was an important consideration.

- Informed consent and voluntary nature of participation

The subject of informed consent is an important one. Qualitative researchers have vouched for the cultural sensitivity (Liamputtong, 2010) of presenting informed consent (Flick, 2007). From these findings, therefore, informed consent was addressed in the

local language of the participants as well as with reference to and understanding of their world view or value system (Dalton, et. al 2001). Acknowledging that the participants are in a university context where English is the common language of use, this language was treated as the primary language of the research. However, being culturally sensitive to the South African context, other languages were given space to manifest; appropriate translation would be sought when required. In terms of the latter, no translation was in fact needed and the student leaders remained comfortable in using English throughout the process.

- Anonymity and confidentiality

While this is a procedural issue, I prioritised it as an ethical consideration regarding the participants. This was because it was important for me that the participants experienced an open research environment (Demuth, 2013); as such, I used this ethical consideration as part of building the relationship with participants and assured them of safety in terms of their participation. Therefore, the names of the participants are not mentioned anywhere in this research report while strict parameters have been set in terms of persons who would have access to the material developed in this research process. As far as I could I contracted in terms of confidentiality with the participants. I did realise the limits of this confidentiality given that I would not be able to control what the participants would do with the events of the data gathering session or the material that I sent them for the purpose of member checks. The agreement that I have made with the participants is to keep the content of the research as confidential.

- Establishing of roles of research stakeholders

In an earlier section 3.6.1, I discussed the issue of establishing roles. It is fitting that I highlight this here without necessarily rehearsing the previously mentioned details. As part of the ethical considerations a contract with the co-facilitator (Appendix D) as well as the transcriber (Appendix E) was signed. This was to ascertain and clarify their roles as well as to indicate that the same understanding existed between myself and the different stakeholders and to ensure considerations of confidentiality.

*b. Ethical considerations pertaining to the researcher*

It was also important for me as the researcher to be aware of the political traps and harm to which this research could expose me and others if I did not maintain awareness of these issues. In so far as the issue of interest as well as the research paradigm used are of a deeply political nature, paying attention to this issue was of critical importance (Burr, 2003). Therefore, it was considered necessary in terms of my convictions about research that my own views and political stance were be made known to the participants of this research and the readers of this report, whether or not they were playing a role in the inquiry. Fortunately, the social dream drawing method seems to have allowed space to air any associations made with my own conversations, while appropriate management of this is paramount as advised by Mersky, (2013). To achieve this, the co-facilitator, who is an experienced researcher, also in terms of previously been part of and facilitating social dream drawing sessions; was present in the research inquiry to provide feedback to me about the process, my facilitation of the session and so forth. The management of my own views and political stance in relation to the data represents a concern for rigour and ethics. Demuth (2013) contends that this ethical consideration is important for the sake of grounding the interpretations in the data and in literature.

*c. Ethical considerations pertaining to the participants*

According to all the guiding principles of ethical conduct relevant to my study, confidentiality was an important consideration. This refers to protecting the privacy of the participants in such a way that their human right to dignity is not compromised by their participation in the study (Leedy & Ormond, 2015). The limits of confidentiality were apparent as mentioned in the section above (3.6.15.2.1a). While anonymity cannot be and was not guaranteed, the names of the participants were not used. The participants have been referred to according to the order that they had shared their dream in the data gathering session (for example: Dreamer 1). Amongst the group members, though, in the event that they are able to remember the identities of their fellow group members, they may be able to work out who I have referred to in a quotation, etcetera. This has been discussed with the participants and permission has been granted by the participants for me to continue as I have. Another consideration

in relation to the participants that was taken account of and is discussed above was their debriefing which was done at the end of the data gathering activity. This included participants talking about the activity and any details of the activity that may have been left unresolved for them, disturbed them or left them upset. The participants did speak about what they had learnt and further elaborated on the frustrations that they experience in student leadership. This section of the discussion was not included in the data analysis but was mainly conducted to help the participants to achieve some type of closure in relation to the activity of data gathering.

### *3.6.11.3 Credibility and trustworthiness of the research*

In terms of ensuring the rigour of the study, issues of credibility and trustworthiness are essential (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). 'Credibility of research' refers to the extent to which the researcher's interpretations of the data obtained are congruent with the realities constructed by the participants (Tracy, 2013). Some researchers also refer to credibility as the extent to which the research outcome is consistently found to be a relatively true and reasonable observation or interpretation by the researcher, the participants and the reader respectively (Creswell, 2014). I therefore attempted to ascertain the above mentioned by keeping the following in mind: Firstly, during the activities that involved sharing of experiences, I actively listened to the participants. I allowed the group process to take place and facilitated an open environment where associations and amplifications were made, as well as beginning and closing the conversations as appropriate, according to the guidelines for social dream drawing activity. Once the conversation was transcribed and interpretations were made, these were sent to participants to ascertain congruency. Moreover, as the primary research instrument, as a co-constructor of the reality in this setting and considering my history in the university where data has been gathered, in student leadership in the same university, as well as my employment in Student Affairs, these roles positioned me quite strategically to be able to benefit from an added advantage in terms of insight into the topic under discussion. Moreover, I seem to have been positioned well to engage critically with the material generated in this research. Through reflection and self-reflexivity and particularly through member checks and supervision, I propose that I have been able to ascertain the credibility of my own contributions to the process.

Three strategies have been highlighted in this research to ensure quality data in terms of the global trustworthiness of the study. Firstly, as noted, an experienced researcher on the facilitation of social dream drawing acted as a co-facilitator as a way to ensure quality data collection. This was achieved by providing me with feedback throughout the process as well as assisting me to facilitate the session. Thus, the data collection could be depended on as having been facilitated in a competent manner which adds to the study's credibility. Depending upon the experience of the co-facilitator, the data collection could also be said to have been undertaken in a manner that could be repeated by another researcher, to yield a similar outcome to the original. This is only when assuming that the unconscious dynamics of the facilitators had minimal input in the interaction during the data collection session. Secondly, the literature and literature review were essential. While the literature was used to confirm and validate, dispute or differ from my study, it also extended and added to it. I thus used the sources to aid credibility, confirmability and transferability, specifically. Thirdly, I was open to the idea of hosting a follow-up session with participants. This would allow them to confirm that the data was generated by them, which would not only ascertain confirmability but also credibility. While the findings of the study are complex, I decided to avoid this strategy and use the literature instead as indicated above. However, if the participants made a request, a simplified version could be provided to them – but no such request was made. Authenticity refers to whether the research is conducted in a genuine and credible manner. As mentioned, a co-facilitator who is more experienced in social dream drawing was present in the group and assisted with the conducting of the session. In addition, the discussed literature review was conducted to ensure alignment of the ideas of this research with political and social implications of the research. As such, I can be confident that the interpretations made are grounded in the literature (Demuth, 2013). Also, this assisted in checking that the topic was relevant to the environment of the participants who were part of the research process. In addition, the research strategy of reflection and self-reflexivity that I employed contributed towards the authenticity of the research. The latter facilitates continuous refinement of methodology and methods as well as keeping the process of ascertaining quality in the approach to data fresh and relevant.

In terms of using discourse analysis as a data study method, some authors have noted specific issues of rigour in relation to this method. These include these four points that I could identify:

1. In principle, data analysis needs to be systematic (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). In relation to discourse analysis, the analysis is not always systematic. In my research, it was certainly not always systematic; therefore this makes it difficult to be transparent to persons other than myself in terms of how I have been able to reach the conclusions that I have. To address this, I have attempted to include as much evidence as possible for each claim that I make. I have also had an opportunity to receive feedback from my research promoter who would reflect back to me about what she has observed regarding where I have been congruent with the methods that I have intended or where I have made errors. From this I have noted points which I needed to make clearer.
2. Data analysis in qualitative research also needs to be adequately informed by theoretical and epistemological underpinnings (Demuth, 2013; Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). In the case of this study, I believe that I have dealt adequately with this. I have shared my journey of choosing a data study method in this chapter. I believe that through this kind of reflection I ensured that I was adequately been informed by such underpinnings in terms of choosing a method that would sufficiently satisfy this concern.
3. Remaining transparent about methods and methodology is necessary (Demuth, 2013). While not always feasible, as I have mentioned when discussing the first point, I have offered my reflections at as many points as possible to indicate to the reader what I have been doing throughout the process. I have also included a reflection chapter in this document as well as reflection sections within chapters where necessary.
4. Another concern worth mentioning when using discourse analysis is the one pertaining to representing data and its analysis in ways that substantiate the findings (Drummond, 2010; Freshman et al., 2010). I addressed this by making quotations available as evidence to back up the claims that I have made.



Sometimes, it was necessary to provide more than one quotation as well as from different dreams in order to provide evidence.

In this instance, rigour was achieved by being attentive to the process (Freshman et al., 2010; Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). Hence, I have also mentioned keeping a reflection journal as well as making notes that I included in the reflection chapter or sections within chapters to indicate my attention. It is also because of my attentiveness that I have been sensitive to what the data has been doing, thus adjusting methods as I have done as a way to respond. I believe that I ultimately used the appropriate methods for the nature of the data in this research. I additionally noted how the discourse was organised by presenting the different levels of data and the diagram that depicted the major themes in the findings as well as a graphic representation of the findings in Chapter 5.

*a. Dependability of the research*

Dependability of the work done in this project was vital (Tracy, 2013); for this study it included a literature survey that was carried out to claim, defend and compare my view to others (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). The literature survey was moreover used to develop an argument to indicate the existing knowledge gap, which motivated the research question of the current study. Since the study was birthed in the form of an observation, the literature review created a reliable source to conceptualise the study. A guideline provided by the Department of Industrial Psychology at UNISA was also consulted to make sure that the ideas were appropriately assembled. As previously mentioned, during the data gathering process; a co-facilitator (the promoter of my research) who is more experienced as regards the social dream drawing technique than myself, assisted in ensuring the appropriate use of the data gathering technique.

After having interpreted and reflected on the data, the chapter containing these aspects was sent to the participants. This was an additional check that the interpretations and reflections were consistent with the participants' intended sharing. It should be noted that the detailed material sent to the participants included the meanings that were captured in the data analysis process instead of the discourses, as the latter would be too abstract for the purpose of determining dependability (McCloskey, 2008). Thus, the

feedback from the participants was included in the integration chapter where I reported on the interpretations of the findings. Of the six participants, three (two black females and one black male) gave feedback regarding member checking. At the time of member checking, one black female had been on treatment as a result of depression which was said by those treating her to be attributed to her involvement in student leadership. Thus, although she read the chapter, she reported not being in a position to comment as she would have wanted to distance herself from all forms of interaction with student leadership while she was in hospital. She stayed in the hospital for three weeks; the chapter was given to her in the first week of admission. The other two participants indicated that the information contained in the integration chapter seemed to reflect the data gathering session. The two student leaders seemed to be satisfied with the chapter, indicating that no additions needed to be made to the chapter or omissions rectified. These two student leaders also indicated that they had gained more insight into the social construction of student leadership at a South African university, presented in the way that the researcher had written the integration chapter and interpreted the data. It seemed that Figure 5.2 in the said chapter was very useful to them.

*b. Issues of confirmability*

Confirmability is taken as the degree to which the results could be confirmed by others (Creswell, 2014). The understanding acquired from the data, was checked against the current literature so that I could ascertain that the readers of my research would be able to identify with my findings and make reference to what others have found (Demuth, 2013). In DA, the source of the quality of the research is embedded in the feedback contributions provided for by the collective. This allowed for multiple realities to be fed into the analysis to enhance the view through the 'only' lens of my own observations. Therefore, the debriefing session at the end of the social dream drawing session assisted in facilitating feedback about the session and the learnings that took place during the session. Once the data analysis was completed, it was read against this debriefing session as well as against prior literature on this topic.

### *c. Transferability*

To allow readers to be able to draw similar conclusions between my research as well as their own environment, otherwise termed as transferability (Willig, 2013), a detailed description of research proceedings and methods was supplied. In this way, the reader is enabled to make an informed decision regarding the degree of alignment between this research and their own environment. Furthermore, an adequate amount of current literature on the topic was read. This was to ensure appropriate contextualisation. Moreover, the information gained from the literature was used to make the appropriate comparisons between this research and the reader's potential environment. As such, deviations or similarities found in this research were compared to current literature and emphasised. In addition, a literature review was conducted to ensure alignment of the ideas of this research with the political and social implications of the research; this assisted in checking that the topic was relevant to the environment of the participants who were part of the research process.

### *d. Authenticity*

To ensure that the research was conducted in a genuine and credible manner; firstly, reflection and self-reflexivity were important to ascertain authenticity. Moreover, a co-facilitator who is more experienced social dream drawing was present in the group. Furthermore, member checks (Thomas, 2017) have also played a role in this research. In addition, a literature review was conducted to ensure alignment the ideas of this research with political and social implications of the research. Also, this assisted to check that the topic is relevant to the environment of the participants who were part of the research process.

## **3.7 REPORTING**

It is essential to highlight reporting issues. These have been mentioned in this section under the discussion on articulating strategy. I have left this detailed in this particular section for the purpose of providing a reader friendly approach as well as making sure of writing the details of the methodology in an integrated manner.

### **3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY CONSIDERED**

The study of the social and psychic aspects of student leadership was considered through the lens of the psychosocial approach where there is major interest in the contribution of the unconscious dimension to that of social construction. This was about considering the elements 'below the surface'. I noted the limitation in considering just the three levels of data as I have done in my research. This was because there may be other elements involved in this social construction that are beyond and not only below, but also potentially outside and different from my view. These aspects could additionally be considered to transcend the obvious and those below the surface; they could refer to something outside the conversation - something about the spirit of the social construction.

### **3.9 IN A NUTSHELL**

The methodology followed in conducting this study was rooted in the qualitative approach. I was interested in finding out how student leaders make sense of and understand their student leadership role at a South African university and was interested in learning this through words and interaction, which warranted the qualitative approach with discourse analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). In addition, my interest was in the way in which the reality of a student leadership role is created in an interactive environment where the unconscious dynamics come into play (Boydell, 2009). As such, the social constructionist view provided me with tools on how reality is created together (Burr, 2003), both socially and psychologically (Clarke, 2002). While there was little previous research found on this approach, my interest in understanding how reality is created, together with using discourse analysis effected by means of a psychosocial lens within a social construction perspective, afforded me the opportunity to explore the research topic in a dynamic manner. Frosh, in 2003, indicated how the development of the psychosocial approach, even if pertaining to psychology, expanded outside of psychology. Nevertheless, he undertook psychology research using the psychosocial approach with another researcher (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008). In 2009, Boydell explored the approach integrating discourse analysis in the analysis method. Mersky (2013) has been prominent in the development of the social dream drawing technique which has been employed in this research.

From an ethical perspective, ethical clearance (Appendix B) was acquired from the university at which I am registered to pursue a doctoral degree. The approval for research proposal is also attached (Appendix A). An information letter (Appendix C) and a consent form (Appendix D) was provided to the participant with relevant ethical considerations mentioned. This included details about the research study, the data gathering sessions as well as persons who would have access to the data. In addition, a contract with the co-facilitator of the data gathering session (Appendix E) as well as a confidentiality agreement was signed with the transcriber (Appendix F). The latter was done to establish and clarify roles.

In terms of ascertaining quality, the roles of different role players were clarified. This includes myself as a researcher, the co-facilitator, culture broker(s), gatekeeper(s), participants, transcriber and administration assistant. I also made provision for ascertaining the rigour of the study. Beneficence and non-maleficence were considered in both making sure of quality in the study but also in respect of the ethical boundary.

The report of this research study appears in a thesis document that is being submitted towards a doctoral qualification. In addition, papers and articles will be published in this regard. Having said this, the preliminary findings of this research were presented at the previously mentioned international and national conferences, in 2016. The discussions following these presentations have added to rigour as questions that address credibility, authenticity, confirmability and dependability were addressed and implemented in the reporting of the research.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS - THE DREAMS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I describe the findings in terms of the dreams themselves. I therefore avoided making any interpretation at this point, but discuss the findings in their raw sense. As indicated in this chapter, the findings are reported in the order that the dreamers presented their dreams. This was done by introducing the dreamer, including their position and potential stance in their biological significance (otherwise referred to as biological-demographic position). I then wrote out the paraphrased description of their dream as is recorded in the transcription. Following this, the drawing of the dream is presented. Thereafter I communicated the themes that I have picked up regarding the associations and amplifications in the form of a table. The table are divided into two columns to show the reference to the dream and the association and amplification made to it. These are in the form of words, phrases or quotation from the transcription to illustrate the association and amplification made. Direct quotations from the transcription are indicated in italics, in the tables. Lastly, I have taken the reader through the co – construction of the student leadership conversation that was held with regard to each dream. The data gathered from this conversation is also represented in a table format with two columns. One columns shows a main theme that is substantiated in the second column. The second column is labelled notes to the main theme to indicate the elaboration related to the main theme. In addition, the second column is also labelled emerging sub - theme to show that sub – themes could have been emerging from the notes of the main theme. The findings have been dynamic and complex. This feature of the findings is seen to be evident in the way that the discussion chapter (chapter 5) has been presented. Therefore; in this chapter I have been comfortable to leave loose ends untied as the further development of the picture has been demonstrated in chapter 5; thus this is how I have avoided to make any interpretations on the findings as mentioned above. The format that was used to report on the data was desirable to compliment the process followed in the data gathering phase of the research as referred to in the methodology chapter. The participants shared their dreams, then associations and amplifications were made and subsequently a conversation on the co-construction of student leadership was entertained. These represented the subconscious, unconscious and conscious levels

of the co-construction of student leadership, according to the premise of this research. It is my understanding that the dream drawing could represent what happens in the unconscious, the associations may be taken to be referring to what happens in the subconscious (pre-conscious) and the conversation to represent what happens in the conscious (Boydell, 2009; Mersky, 2015).

At the end of the chapter I discuss my overall observations followed by discourse and reflection on the themes and the learnings from the process, thereafter proceeding to the following chapter where I was further involved with the interpretation of the data and integration with literature.

## **4.2 THE SIX DREAMS OF THE SIX STUDENT LEADERS**

### **4.2.1 Dream 1: White female, Student leader in a cultural committee**

The student who has shared dream 1 is a white female student who served on the executive committee of a cultural committee. This was her second year of service, which could imply her familiarity with the student leadership environment. She is Afrikaans speaking and facilitates Afrikaans focused activities in the committee. These include debating, singing activities (intra and inter-varsity competitions) and art expressions. In terms of the political – societal – cultural position, a white female is positioned as previously advantaged because of race, having enjoyed white privilege and currently advantaged in terms of BEE regulations on the score of gender (Chiloane - Tsoka, 2012, 2013; Hills, 2015). This may at times present a conflict of privilege on the basis of enjoying it owing to gender, though not race in the current dispensation.

#### *4.2.1.1 The dream*

This dream was about having a huge goal. The goal was represented by the action of climbing a mountain, while according to her description – ‘*other times it’s just to get to a certain place if it’s across the road or across a river*’. The dreamer described how the journey was smooth at the beginning, such that she felt like she was in a comfortable place. However, it seemed that along the way, almost as if suddenly, little obstacles would appear. Eventually the destination was reached although the obstacles in the dream became bigger and bigger. This was characterised initially by an obstacle that

could be symbolised by a bump in the road, eventually becoming a whole road that was sinking into a manhole. The obstacles were also described as potholes. There were also snakes in the path, which other people could handle, except for the dreamer. The snake was handled by using a snake handler or a cane. Another person had a bag to put the snake in the bag once it was caught.



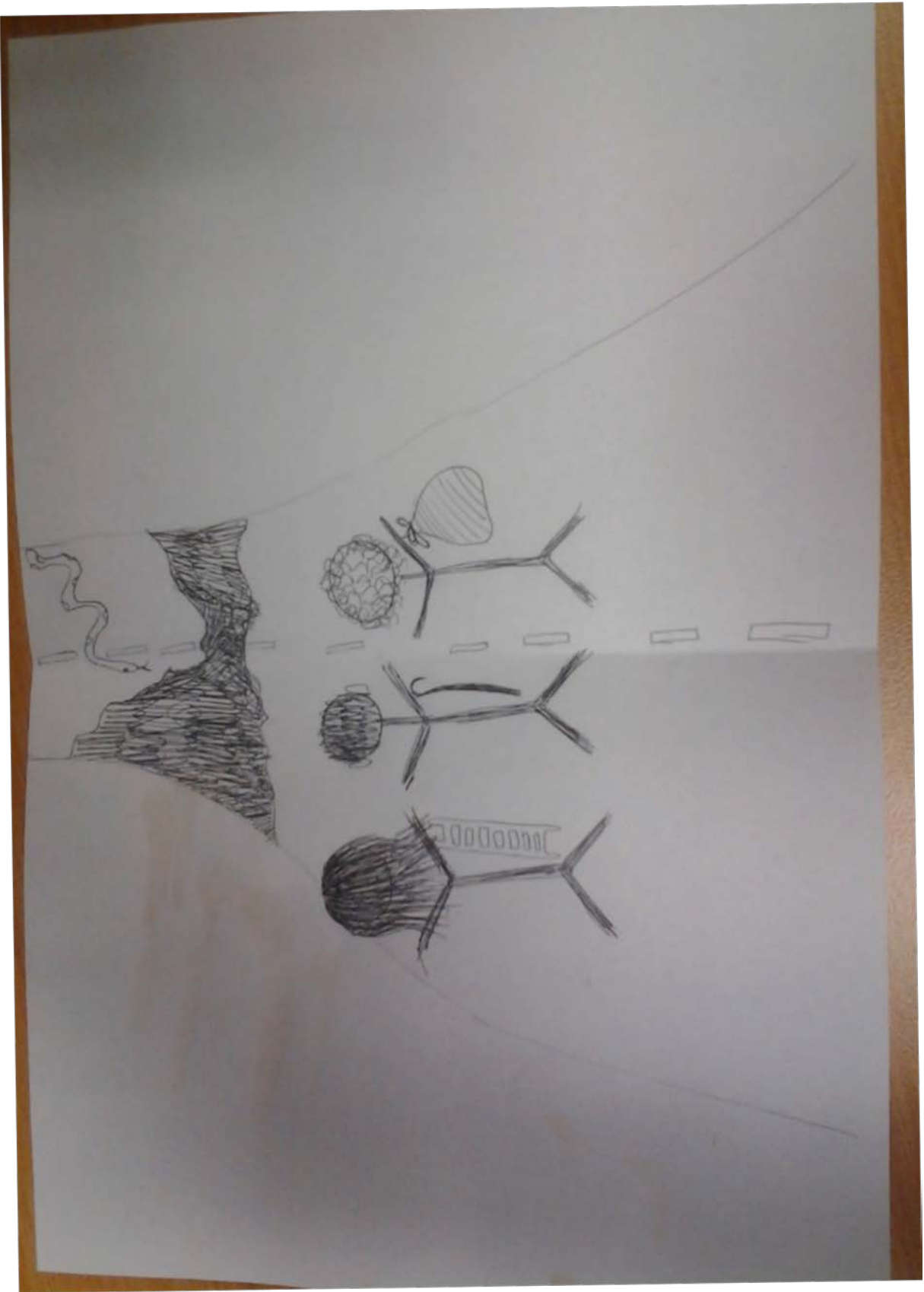


Figure 4.1 Dream drawing of Dreamer 1

#### 4.2.1.2 Free association

Free associations by participants to dream 1 are represented in Table 4.1 below.

*Table 4.1* Description of free associations in Dream 1

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
The dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety about falling</li> <li>• Violent anxiety experienced by the dreamer</li> <li>• Acknowledging the obstacles</li> <li>• Snakes and ladders</li> <li>• Three blind mice</li> <li>• A problem that has a solution</li> <li>• <i>“Like I have a burglar in my house and then I’ll have a weapon next to me and then it’s like just, ‘what are you going to do?’”</i> (Laughter)</li> <li>• Tools to kill the snake</li> <li>• Getting away</li> <li>• The hole is associated with a bow tie</li> <li>• Mountain of obstacles</li> <li>• The black part is associated with Batman logo or bat flying away</li> <li>• Transformation of a snake to a bat that flies away</li> <li>• Childhood experience</li> <li>• Narrow to a broader space</li> <li>• A star that denotes a destination. Thus a further association to Moses was made. Moses was leading the Israelites home. The association also included the snake that turns into a staff.</li> </ul>
Snakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chills</li> <li>• Obstacles</li> </ul>

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
The hole in the road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scared of falling</li> </ul>
Cane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singing in the rain</li> </ul>
The people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scarecrow</li> </ul>
The road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrowness</li> <li>• Uphill</li> <li>• <i>'it's like if you drive a long distance, right, and you get where it's like a hill and then the road goes in the hill, so it looks like you're on top of the hill now and then the hole is at the bottom – usually there's like a river or small fountain that causes the potholes and then as soon as you're through it goes up again and it looks like... it has that effect like you're going down.'</i></li> </ul>
Serenade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound of music</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.1.3 The conversation level

The themes and notes of conversation by participants to Dream 1 are represented in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Themes and notes of the conversation on Dream 1

Main theme	Notes on the theme or emerging subtheme
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal challenges</li> <li>• Support from peers (referring to other student leaders and other students who are not student leaders)</li> <li>• Conflict in the group (challenge)</li> </ul>

Main theme	Notes on the theme or emerging subtheme
Reality in vs. reality out of student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rivalry between fellow student leaders (especially in terms of same race or same gender)</li> <li>• Egocentric approach</li> <li>• Trust or mistrust amongst student leaders and other students who are not student leaders</li> <li>• Differences in approach to conflict management and finding support</li> <li>• Language used to build relationships or separation</li> <li>• Misplaced ambition</li> <li>• Understanding the student leadership role as being beyond the function of the allocated portfolio.</li> <li>• Getting stuck – in the prescriptions of the allocated portfolio, also in the curve balls that come with student leadership</li> </ul>
Psychological responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fantasy about the magnitude of the role</li> <li>• Negative schemas</li> <li>• The role of schemas on the success in the role</li> <li>• Fear of being easily forgotten</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> </ul>
The role in student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared vision</li> <li>• Individual contribution</li> <li>• Pressure of limited time (leadership burden)</li> <li>• Identity – reputation</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequacy</li> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Male/ female dynamic</li> <li>• The SA story</li> </ul>

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Main theme	Notes on the theme or emerging subtheme
Diversity and diversity dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliciting anxiety</li> </ul>
Structures/institutions that influence beliefs and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University institutional culture</li> </ul>

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**4.2.2 Dream 2: *White male, previous student leader in an academic student structure and currently volunteering where needed in student leadership activities***

The second dreamer was a white male who is also Afrikaans speaking. His experience in student leadership has been acquired in student structures that have an academic focus. He is an International Relations and Political Science student who has indicated that he is passionate about the political status of our country as well as enthusiastic about a career in diplomacy. In the South African context, Afrikaans males who are white have enjoyed exceptional privilege during apartheid, occupying the highest position in the hierarchy of opportunity. The tables have turned on them as they appear at the bottom of this hierarchy in the post-apartheid era in terms of the BEE legislation. Having said this, as a result of their being previously privileged, this position may have been internalised (Bazile & Boughey, 2010; Johnson, 2001).

**4.2.2.1 *The dream***

The dream was about a lion which was a leader. The dreamer explained that this idea was inspired by his religion, where the first principle of being a leader is love. The lion was therefore selfless and accommodating of others. The lion then turned into a fox. This fox had the ability to adapt to any kind of situation. It was strategic in this regard. It occupies a house under a tree in the heart. This dream concerned three characteristics that referred to developing as a leader. These were said to be religion, family and quality over quantity. The three aspects are described as being in the heart of a leader as well as her/his roots. The roots signify the basis of one's identity

regarding leadership. There was also a Nike sign, which signified the importance of thinking about quality over quantity.

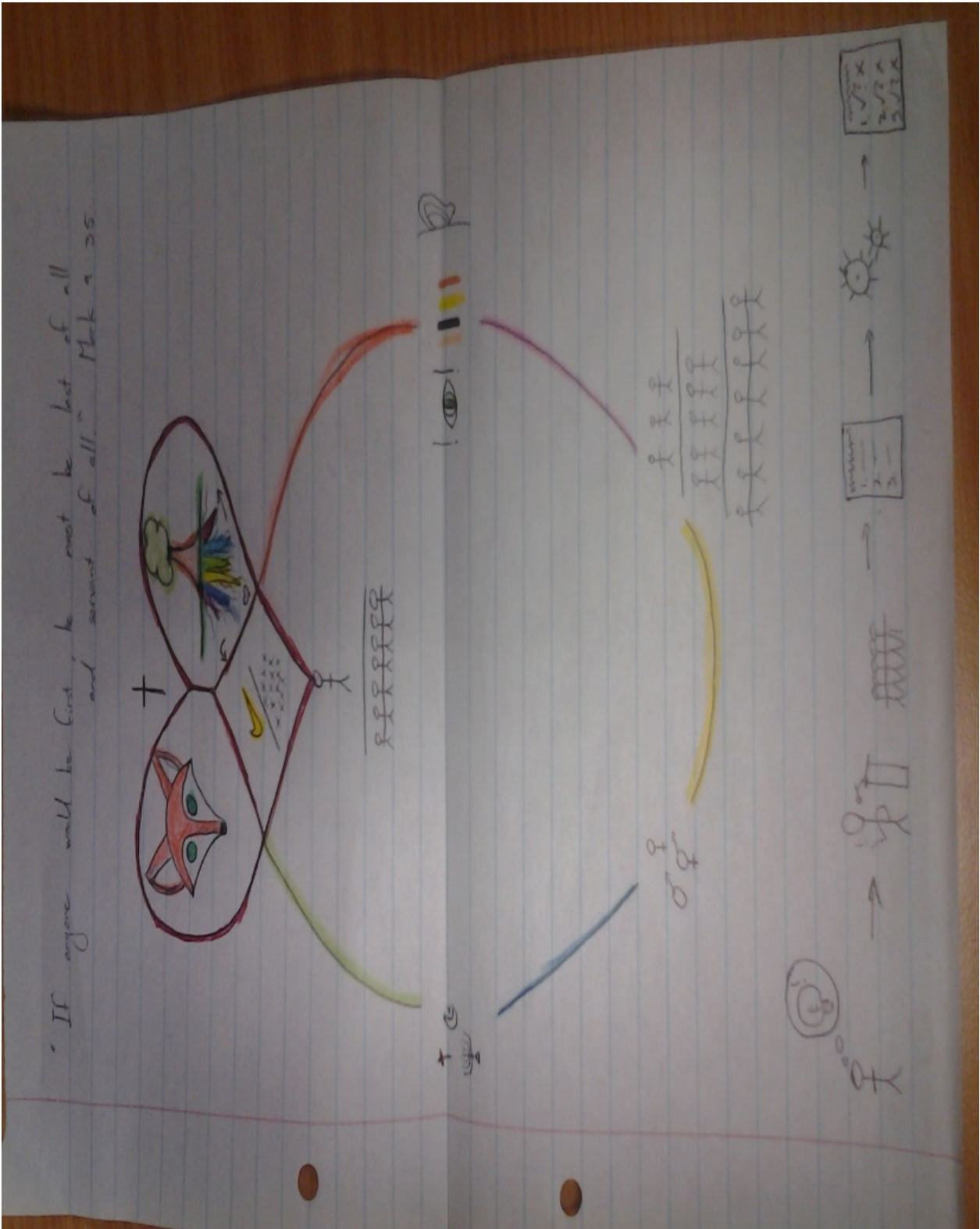


Figure 4.2 Dream drawing of Dreamer 2

#### 4.2.2.2 Free association

Free associations by participants to dream 2 are represented in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Description of free associations in Dream 2

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
The dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anxiety about performance</li><li>• Anxiety about diversity (especially having to do with carrying out student leadership in an interracial and multiracial context)</li><li>• Movie where pictures flash very quickly</li><li>• Roots of different colours</li><li>• Upside down fireworks</li><li>• Colours – fingers stuck in too many jellies</li></ul>
Fox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creepy, cunning</li></ul>
The heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sense of self</li><li>• Fun of student leadership</li><li>• Champagne glass</li></ul>
Cross	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Religion is the centre</li></ul>
Tick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nike (just do it)</li><li>• Promise ring</li></ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many people who are different</li></ul>

#### 4.2.2.3 The conversation level

The themes and notes of conversation by participants to Dream 2 are represented in Table 4.4 below.

*Table 4.4* Themes and notes of the conversation on Dream 2

Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Interpersonal dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiation (in-group)</li> </ul>
Reality in vs. reality out of student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student leadership is an aspiration for others</li> <li>• Martyrdom</li> </ul>
Psychological responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking for security or feeling safe amongst student leadership community</li> <li>• Need for structure</li> </ul>
The role in student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mould to fit into</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequacy</li> </ul>
Diversity and diversity dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Comfort/discomfort)</li> </ul>
Structures/institutions that influence beliefs and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Christianity as the standard</li> <li>• Global political view</li> </ul> <p><i>A leader is someone to look up to – want to be this leader</i></p> <p><i>Values guide what you do and the meaning you attach to it</i></p>

#### **4.2.3 Dream 3: *Black female, current member of a council that focuses on academic activities and also in the run for SRC elections***

The third dreamer was a black female. She described herself as having been active in student leadership. Apart from her participation in the current university where she was



registered, she reported that she had been in student leadership in a previous university. At the point of the data gathering process, the student leader was part of an academic society committee in the Faculty to which she was registered. Later on, the student leader became part of the SRC. She was the first to speak of all the black students in the room, females and males. This student leader has grown up in one of the largest townships in Gauteng, although it seemed all her exposure to education has always been in multi-cultural contexts. In South Africa, this phenomenon seems to be quite popular while others have debated the effects of acculturation on gender identity processes as well as cultural identity and the outcome thereof (Maqoma, 2011; Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002; Spencer, 2009). Acculturation is described as a process incorporating the interaction of different cultures as they are in contact with each other (Naidoo & Mahabeer, 2006). The dreamer seemed to be so positioned; somehow representing the phenomenon of acculturation in the group.

#### 4.2.3.1 *The dream*

The dream referred to experiences while the dreamer was at two different institutions; Scenario A and Scenario B. Both scenarios are centred around appearing on a huge stage during a serenade competition: all on stage were dressed in long white dresses and do not have ears, eyes or mouths, yet they are singing. Comparatively, the distance between the back-up singers and the solo artist was two steps in Scenario A and about 10 to 15 steps of distance in Scenario B.

In Scenario A, the routine was going well and the singing was 'great' up until a particular point where people started coughing and the dreamer was about to perform a solo of *American Boy*. There was a time of uncertainty at that point. While the soloist knew what to sing, she did not know what to do when the back-up singer started to cough. The room was full of silence during this time with coughing as the only sound in the venue. But then luckily, somehow at the end of the dream people were celebrating.

Scenario B took place from the point where people start coughing in Scenario A as described above. When this occurred the dreamer was in the same situation as in Scenario A – about to start with a solo – and was puzzled, as in Scenario A, when the

coughing began. Differently, at the end of Scenario B, instead of the celebration at the end, everybody looked kind of dead. There was darkness and the dreamer felt that there was something pressing her down. As the dream continued the events turned out to be more positive: the group won the competition and celebrated. There was a video of these events, uploaded on YouTube, replayed over and over in the dream.

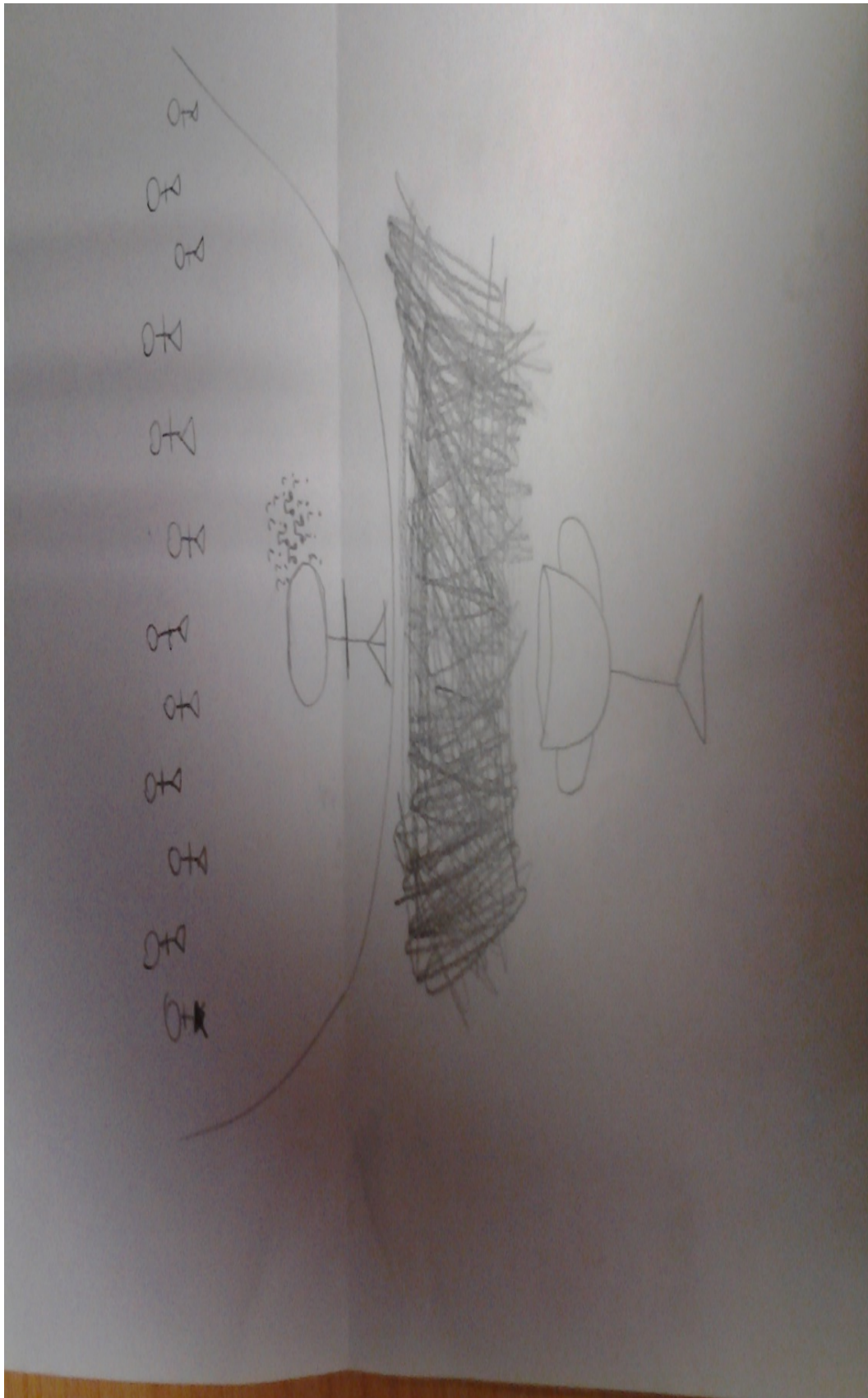


Figure 4.3 Dream drawing of Dreamer 3

#### 4.2.3.2 Free association

Free associations by participants to Dream 3 are represented in Table 4.5 below.

*Table 4.5* Description of free associations in Dream 3

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The singing of ‘Shall we get down’ from Pitch Perfect</li> <li>• Watching a horror movie</li> <li>• Being blindfolded</li> <li>• The Cross of Christianity</li> <li>• Too much on a plate and it’s about to fall over</li> <li>• Drowning in water</li> </ul>
Coughing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ebola</li> <li>• TB multi drug resistance deterioration (people dying from not taking their medication)</li> <li>• Phlegm</li> <li>• Mom who is a nurse</li> <li>• Pressure (to do everything but pressed for time – quality over quantity)</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helpless</li> <li>• Hopeless</li> <li>• Dying</li> </ul>
Darkness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The black part or scratch part - Covering up or Tippex (there is something underneath)</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.3.3 The conversation level

The themes and notes of conversation by participants to Dream 3 are represented in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 Themes and notes of the conversation on Dream 3

Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Interpersonal dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Pleaser – style of interaction</li> <li>• Interpersonal challenges</li> </ul>
Reality in vs. reality out of student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling alone</li> <li>• Disappointment regarding unmet expectations</li> <li>• Feeling unseen and looking for recognition</li> <li>• Fantasies about student leadership</li> </ul>
Psychological responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Darkness</li> <li>• Safe spaces</li> </ul>
The role in student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding support</li> <li>• Situational analysis</li> <li>• Focused on vision</li> <li>• Self-knowledge essential to succeed</li> <li>• Obstacles</li> <li>• Leadership burden</li> <li>• Student leadership constructed within the number of years in university (within experience)</li> <li>• Student leadership constructed in how the leader is treating the constituency</li> <li>• If you want to be a leader – can't fail</li> <li>• Student leadership constructed within readiness to lead against all odds, being possessive about the role</li> <li>• Reputation</li> <li>• Competition</li> </ul>

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Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agency</li> <li>• Comfort with questioning the status quo; readiness to do so</li> <li>• Apologetic for questioning the status quo</li> <li>• Recognising inadequacy (areas of)</li> </ul>
Diversity and diversity dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues not dealt with</li> <li>• Elicits issues of trust</li> <li>• Conforming to the status quo</li> </ul>
Structures/institutions that influence beliefs and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University institutional culture</li> </ul>

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#### 4.2.4 Dream 4: *Black female, currently in a student judiciary role*

Dream 4 was shared by a black female. At the time of data collection she was serving on a student leadership team that acted as the student court. She was second in charge to the chief justice. On that score, she appeared to hold quite a powerful role in the student leadership context. She was also a final year law student. Subsequent to national policies such as the Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality as well as the Black Economic Empowerment Programme, gender quotas and gender equality have been significant areas to address (Hills, 2015). Traditionally, women have seemed to be rare in executive bodies or positions, while this black female occupies such a powerful role in the student community.

##### 4.2.4.1 *The dream*

In the dream there was something like a light. This was not similar to an actual figure but like a light that kept on coming, but the dreamer couldn't hear what the person was saying yet he kept on coming. And then this person just started running away and the dreamer couldn't see the light anymore. There was also a light in the same place where there were bones everywhere and her cousin was telling her that he was

leaving. In the same dream, the dreamer described a scene at a hospital where she had seen her grandmother in the dream. The grandmother was sitting casually and holding a drink. Thereafter, the dreamer saw herself being pregnant. It was very blurry. All she could see was the swollen and bigger tummy. And then immediately she felt the baby grow. She then started crying and crying because of shock as she could not imagine how the conception could have happened seeing that she had never engaged in sexual relations. There was subsequently a blur. She was thereafter faced with a decision making task: whether she would finish the term of pregnancy or have an abortion.

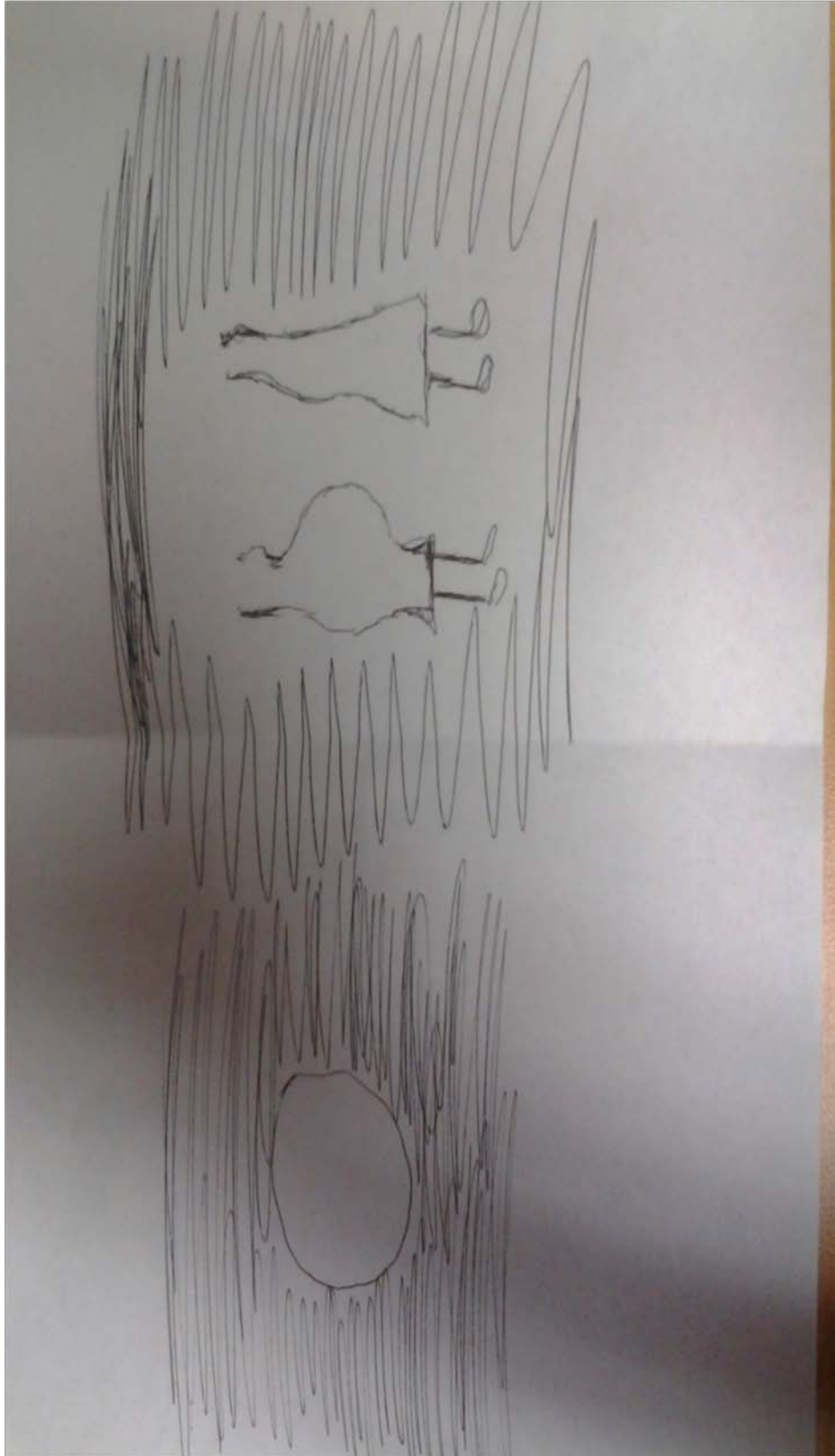


Figure 4.4 Dream drawing of Dreamer 4



#### 4.2.4.2 Free association

Free associations by participants to Dream 4 are represented in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7 Description of free associations in Dream 4

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The story in the Bible where Mary visits the mother of John the Baptist. During this visit the babies become excited because they are in each other's presence</li> <li>• Sunset on the one side, on the other side it is blurred</li> <li>• Conversation – two people talking to each other</li> <li>• The movie <i>Twilight Zone</i></li> <li>• Rejuvenation from a negative experience</li> <li>• A pipe that has something stuck in it</li> <li>• Spending individual time</li> <li>• Choosing whether to keep it or leave it</li> <li>• Fingers in many pies</li> <li>• Feeling of being overwhelmed</li> <li>• Awkward moment before you have to make a difficult decision</li> <li>• Chaos</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pregnant. At the end of pregnancy term – a stillborn. <i>“when time comes, it’s as if you have lost the baby”</i></li> <li>• Golf stick, golf clubs (sticking out of a bag)</li> <li>• Two awkward aliens</li> <li>• Sharing an experience while being different, there’s still something in common about them</li> </ul>

<b>Reference to the dream</b>	<b>Association, amplification</b>
Round shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Golf</li> <li>• Clear spot, full moon (representing an enjoyable time of self – reflection on something abstract to find clarity)</li> </ul>
The colouring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion about making a choice between two options and not having clear direction</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.4.3 *The conversation level*

The themes and notes of conversation by participants to Dream 4 are represented in Table 4.8 below.

*Table 4.8* Themes and notes of the conversation on Dream 4

<b>Main theme</b>	<b>Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme</b>
Interpersonal dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking time to build relationships</li> <li>• The relationships and conversations amongst people are blurred</li> <li>• Sharing experiences</li> </ul>
Reality in vs. reality out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fantasy and reality shock</li> <li>• Scared of new opportunities</li> </ul>
Psychological responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety in existing structures</li> <li>• Fear and anxiety</li> <li>• Anxiety about meaning in life</li> <li>• Failure</li> </ul>

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Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-authorisation/ agency</li> <li>• SA story</li> <li>• Success in student leadership is related to the SA story</li> </ul>
Diversity and diversity dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding things and aspects that are common amongst people</li> <li>• Acknowledge difference</li> </ul>
Structures/institutions that influence beliefs and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christianity</li> <li>• Leadership met with barriers, and inadequacy</li> <li>• University institutional culture specifically in student leadership</li> </ul>

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**4.2.5 Dream 5: *Black female, currently serving on the SRC and has held other roles including an executive position on a committee that dealt with cultural activities***

The fifth dreamer was the last black female speaker in the room. At the time of data collection she was a current SRC member. She was involved in a portfolio related to transformation and diversity that had been recently introduced. It appeared that she had played quite a significant pioneering role regarding this portfolio. She had previously occupied a role that dealt with cultural activities on the campus. This student leader was looked up to by many students. She had also experienced opposition towards her efforts related to her current SRC role. In terms of what the black female may represent in the South African context, it seemed interesting that the portfolio has been allocated to such a person.

**4.2.5.1 *The dream***

The dream concerned an incident where people would *jump off a cliff and swim*. The dreamer indicated her reluctance to jump as she was scared of heights. But on that day however, she sort of buckled under peer pressure and somehow the people (“few

*mates, people or friends that I work with*") that she was with him in the dream convinced her to jump off the cliff into the water and she did it, which was traumatising for her. During the dream as well she jumped off and landed in the water; then there was someone who piggy-backed her out of the water. When she jumped, she did so with two people who thereafter disappeared once she was at the landing and she swam, against the current.

She was putting in a lot of work but she felt that she wasn't really getting anywhere. While she was swimming, she could see that there were bigger waves; as she realised that somehow, she wasn't in that little stream anymore but it was like an ocean. And there were much, much bigger waves. But just before she got to the bigger waves she found a different group of people and it seemed like they all went together. The people disappeared too while she was in big waves by herself again. After the big waves; there appeared a feature that looked like an island. The island was pleasant and the people were smiling and they were all happy. Some of the people on the island were standing on a cliff and were the same people who were with her in the beginning that motivated her to jump. She arrived at the shore of the beach where she found something that looked like glass which prevented her to get through to the island. The people on the island were happy and smiling; and dancing. There were trees that were green in colour almost looking perfect, sort of a tropical island.

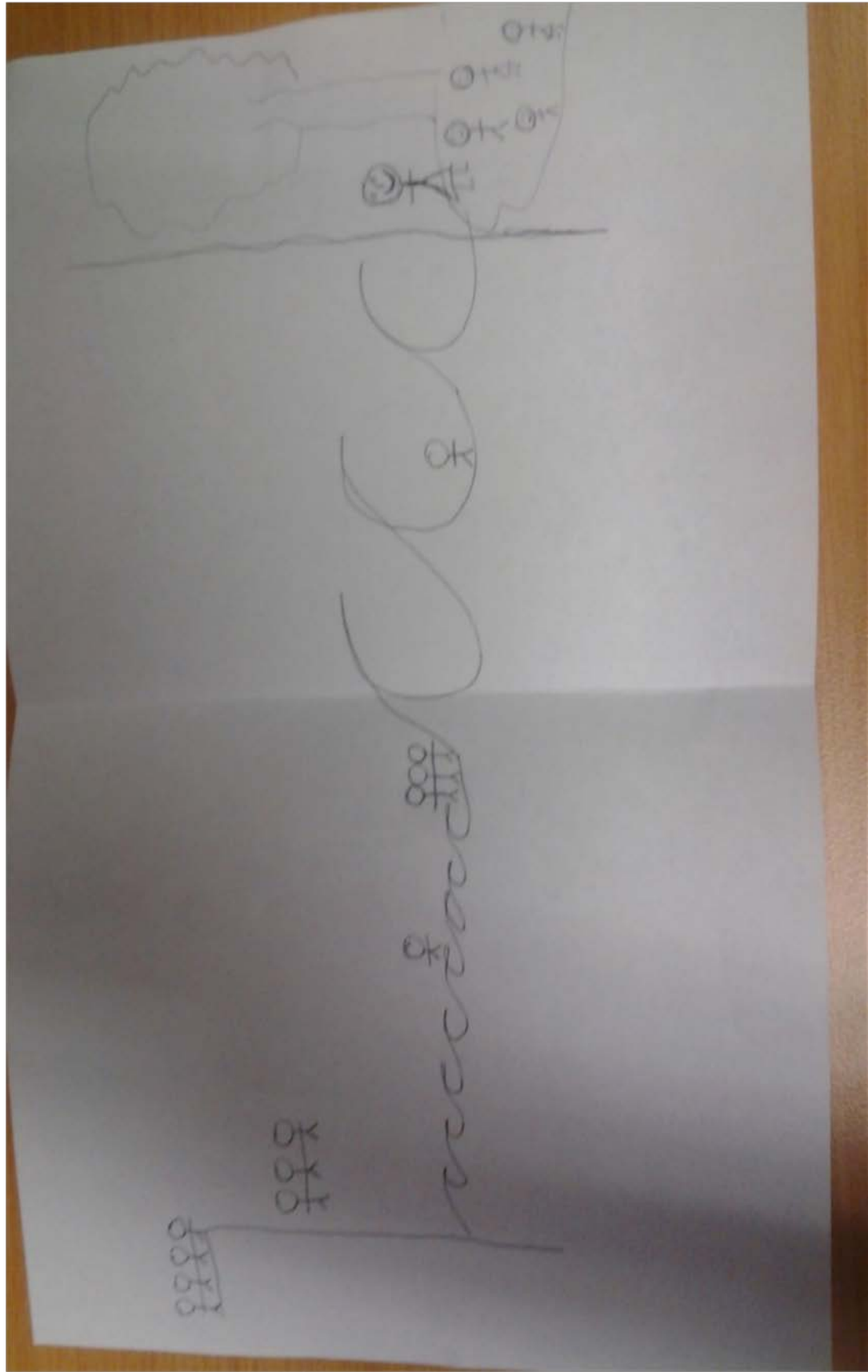


Figure 4.5 Dream drawing of Dreamer 5

#### 4.2.5.2 Free association

Free associations by participants to dream 5 are represented in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9 Description of free associations in Dream 5

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life of Pi <i>‘This feels like Life of Pi. What a masterpiece. Anyway, this is the start when he was with his family and they just vanished, the whole ship... they just vanished and then these people are the tiger now. So you’re posting... but then he dies along the way...’</i></li> <li>• Islands full of meerkats</li> <li>• Island (a place just to catch your breath)</li> <li>• Skate park</li> <li>• The sea <i>I was in Durban in the past few days and so I totally associate that with the sea and the top part where people are standing is with the little bridge or what they call it, where people stand to overlook the sea and then we went down that, obviously down the stairs and then that’s where we can be on the same level – the sand and the sea and the big waves coming to us. And then there’s just this far away kind of... almost like the sky was touching the water and then you don’t know what’s...’</i></li> <li>• Happy place</li> </ul>

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**Reference to the dream****Association, amplification**

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- Cool place to be
  - Social democracy
  - The movie *Limitless*
  - *'...what's the name of that movie... Limitless, before you get to the sea everything was like sort of dull-ish and there was a sky that was like grey because there were waves and stuff, but on this side it was all like bright, nice colours and the sun was shining and all of that stuff. I think that was like the paradise.'*
  - Midmar mile
  - *'As a swimmer I associate this with Midmar. Swimming the Midmar mile you get to a point where it's either you have people going over you or you have people swimming under you or you have people everywhere, especially at the start; because at the start it's like, okay let's all go. That's the first part. They are all getting into the water and then there are people just at every angle. And then it comes to a point where you are like, wait, where's everyone? And then you come back to a point closer to the end where, oh, here are people. But then it's tougher then because you're tired. You have swum a mile, close to a mile and you just want to reach the end and many, many of the swimmers that swim that mile, especially the first-timers, don't make it to the end. It's like,*
-

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
	<p><i>'ugh, someone come take me out now'.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boat in the Midmar mile</li> <li>• The opening up of the Red Sea</li> <li>• Moses (who never made it to the Promised Land)</li> <li>• Cliff in Uvongo (being challenged to jump off the cliff)</li> <li>• Swimming upstream</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No faces</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.5.3 *The conversation level*

The themes and notes of conversation by participants to Dream 5 are represented in Table 4.10 below.

*Table 4.10* Themes and notes of the conversation on Dream 5

Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Interpersonal dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling unappreciated</li> <li>• Rejection by teammates and by student community</li> <li>• Loss</li> </ul>
Reality in vs. reality out of student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unmet expectation about the camaraderie in student leadership</li> <li>• 'Us and them' dynamics between student leaders and students who are not in student leadership</li> </ul>



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Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Psychological responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling rejection</li> </ul>
The role in student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for mentorship</li> <li>• Martyrdom</li> <li>• Mastery overtime</li> <li>• Making a mark (leadership burden)</li> <li>• Leadership burden</li> <li>• Short vs. long term vision</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Us and them (students leader vs. students)</li> <li>• Safety in status quo</li> <li>• My agenda vs. system (others') agenda</li> <li>• Reputation</li> </ul>
Diversity and diversity dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different kinds of students (privileged, not privileged, poor etc.)</li> <li>• Racism is the issue of the day (matter of focus).</li> <li>• Though the leadership challenge is multifaceted.</li> <li>• Circumstance of the system</li> </ul>
Structures/institutions that influence beliefs and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking to Christian principles for principles for leadership</li> </ul>

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**4.2.6 Dream 6: *Black male, has served in various student leadership positions over the years and currently. He has also participated in an overseas exchange leadership program***

Lastly, dream 6 was shared by a black male. He has held various student leadership positions some of them as chairperson. He has also participated in an overseas

exchange leadership programme. He has close relationships with people of different races. Ratele (2003) suggests that there could be identity issues relating to masculinity regarding black males. Consequently, to focus on black women on the basis of women's empowerment and gender equality (Hills, 2015) the notion suggested by Ratele (2003) could be considerably significant. As such, this black male could have been potentially positioned with identity questions in this conversation, particularly when faced with more than one black female in the group.

#### *4.2.6.1 The dream*

The introduction of this dream was set in the context of overlooking a huge field. The dream has been recurring with the theme setting of being in the car; the dreamer had been a passenger and the dreamer's mom was one of the passengers too. While in the car, the passengers could hear gun shots. Subsequently, a male figure forcefully removed them from the car while the gun shots persisted. Seeing that the dream was recurring on consecutive days on after another, the dreamer could direct the driver in the dream using knowledge that he had gained on the prior dream. This knowledge helped the dreamer to direct the driver to a further and further destination at each occurrence of the dream. On the third encounter, the dreamer reached his destination; a field which was characterised by identifying with the Mormon religion. There were big barns and things were quieter than before. At the same time, there were two male figures whose faces could not be seen who had forced the dreamer to take the gun, which the dreamer had refused. At this refusal, the dreamer ran away to the barn. While running to the barn, the dreamer saw his mom in a picture or form of when she was 26 years old. His mother picked up the gun while he continued to run for safety. People had been shooting, and his mom was shot in the hip. As she was shot, the dreamer heard his mother screaming and he turned around. Others shouted at him to run, but he refuses.

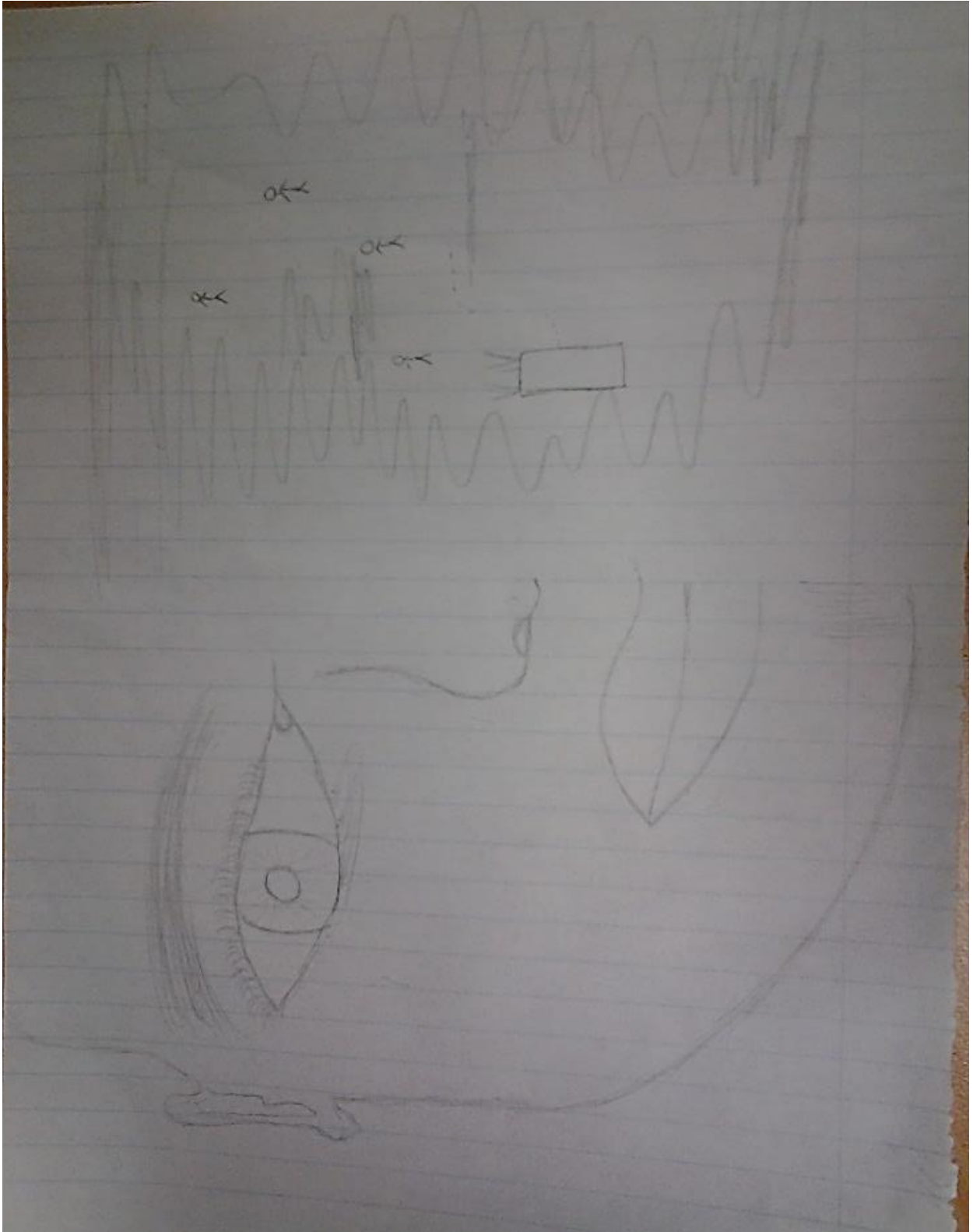


Figure 4.6 Dream drawing of Dreamer 6

#### 4.2.6.2 Free association

Free associations by participants to dream 6 are represented in Table 4.11 below.

Table 4.11 Description of free associations in Dream 6

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Old school gangster</i></li> <li>• EFF rocking up in Parliament in red overalls and how they were chased away. It was a drama and a <i>hoo-hah</i></li> <li>• Old school leadership (not fighting with guns like Gandhi, Mandela)</li> <li>• Mandela analogy <i>'...but this commotion is there of something that is... you know, bad that's happening. The fact that they're defending you or they're willing to die, it sounds like the whole Mandela analogy, like they're willing to die for you but you must go forward and you must still do what you have to do. You still need to do what you have to do.'</i></li> <li><i>'I'm getting the vibe that these people, also the Mandela thing again, but you've been freed, you fought for them, so now they're saying, 'we're fighting for you now, this is the time that you have to go forward' something like that.'</i></li> <li>• Mandela legacy</li> <li>• Rebels without causes</li> </ul>

Reference to the dream	Association, amplification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming a people's champion</li> <li>• The movie <i>Catch Me If You Can</i> (the mafia boss is always protected)</li> <li>• Nothing black and white, still very fake</li> <li>• Hunting (me and mentor hunting)</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Yeah, I do want you know, I wanted a gun in victory but I don't believe in guns. Like, we go hunting and this is how me and my (mentor are hunting. We see the buck and the cross-hairs, I just click but there's no bullet, I just go click. It's there. Like to me, I can't, I don't want to. I can't, I can't. But in the dream, weirdly, I wanted to. I was like, okay, give me... also, you know what I mean, but then I felt like the conscious, like the me, not the me in the dream, said 'no, you don't believe in this' – which is me.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History repeats itself. Doing same thing over and over again</li> <li>• Protected by mom</li> <li>• Buddha</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.6.3 *The conversation level*

The themes and notes of conversation by participants to Dream 6 are represented in Table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12 Themes and notes of the conversation on Dream 6

Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Interpersonal dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently: egocentric, solo agendas, not transparent</li> <li>• Languages are used to separate student leaders (from being part of having an identity as a student, and as leaders separated from other students (form in-group student leadership group). Other students do the same.</li> </ul>
Reality in vs. reality out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shock regarding the kind of challenges or issues that student leaders face</li> </ul>
Psychological responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for recognition</li> </ul>
The role in student leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity as students</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hierarchical structures – perceiving student leadership as different from other contexts: student leaders are equal to their constituencies, because they are students; in other contexts there is a hierarchy of benefits for example financial gain etc.</li> </ul>

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Main theme	Notes on main theme or emerging subtheme
Diversity and diversity dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likening student leadership to the events of SA apartheid</li> <li>• Referring to SA as an SA that can have optimistic opportunities but currently in a sad place</li> <li>• The post-apartheid society/outcome that was supposed to be good is now bad</li> <li>• Associating student leadership with disappointment</li> <li>• Aspiration, fantasy about student leadership – the ideal: people who are approachable, talking to the ‘lowest’, being looked up to, establishing peer- relationships, realising identity as students, need for the collective and a shared vision</li> <li>• Almost seeing self as one of those not to look up to</li> </ul>
Structures/institutions that influence beliefs and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christianity</li> </ul>

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#### 4.3 A SUMMARY AND BRIEF INTEGRATION OF THE FINDINGS

At this point, as I propose a summative comprehension of what is shown above, I would also like to reflect on the way in which the sharing of the dreams played out to demonstrate the warding off and mastering of anxiety that the group had been busy with during the data gathering time. Initially when I interacted with the data, I was more drawn to and found it easy to relate to the conversation level. This was the reflection that I arrived at; I proposed that when student leaders interact with others they may prefer to interact with others from the perspective of or present cognitive/ conscious information to get stuck with or become fixated on . Others may also be fixated on what

the student leaders are saying, with less consideration for the other layers or levels that are part of the interaction. When others focus only on what the student leaders are expressing on the conscious level they may miss out on the rest of the social construction process and remain with a 'limited' version of the story that is most probably not explored. On the other hand, the student leaders may also want to provide the 'limited' version and eliminate talk about what might be, what is represented by associations and dream drawings. The 'game' they play is to leave others with the easily perceivable, rather than going into the crux of the matter or the real conversation that may be hidden, represented by the pre-conscious (or subconscious) and unconscious levels of the conversation. Various reasons could explain this. This however has not formed part of this research. It was important to note that while the conscious information may become the focus of the interaction, this would not mean that the unconscious dynamics are not part of the interaction. This would be indicative of the warding off or mastering of anxiety which the students may be demonstrating. I have thus noted where the students are preoccupied, as this may be indicative of what they are busy and preoccupied with at an unconscious level when they exercise student leadership at a South African university. The same tactic could be what the students are using to keep others preoccupied in 'avoiding' the real issues that they are working with in student leadership.

The student leaders have used defense mechanisms (Boydell, 2009; Harris, 2010, Son, 2015; St Clair & Wigren, 2004) to play out their defended positions and to present dynamics throughout the data gathering process. As such, self-preservation, escapism, acting out and introjection have been some techniques that have been more noticeable. Dream 1 thus appeared to be shared from a guarded perspective. The association part of the process appeared to be controlled as well. My reflection is that the message which the students have been sending is that they are anxious about this conversation or what it implies; and that trust is not part of the conversation yet. As a result, they were more comfortable to expose themselves just at a cognitive level initially, until trust had been gained. In effect, this was the way that the student leaders were warding off or mastering their anxiety – by engaging cognitively and being comfortable with others interacting with them cognitively, becoming fixated on or not going beyond their conscious level of interaction while busy with such intense unconscious dynamics of mistrust. It also appeared significant to me that an intense



focus on talk about challenges and barriers in student leadership was created here. This was right at the start of the conversation, as if another message that was being communicated was that student leaders are rejecting the conversation about the co-construction of student leadership. After realising that the conversation was about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics, trust issues and the blurriness associated with the conversation, it was understandable that the conversation could have been rejected. In dream 2, we learned from their accounts that the student leaders agreed to pursue talk about the issues of diversity dynamics and begin to negotiate appropriate ways to hold the conversation about diversity and transformation, while also exploring identity issues in student leadership, indicating the tensions that they associate with the clarifying of identity. It is significant from a power dynamic perspective that a white male was leading this part of the conversation, as if he was giving permission to move into conversation about diversity dynamics. This is also congruent with the study of Beverley Thaver in 2009, who indicated that white males seem to hold authority in higher education. The foreground was then occupied by black females. Initially, they contributed to the conversation that the concept which overwhelms them is the experience that diversity brings. They moved on to advocate self-preservation. In dream 5, we were introduced at a more intense level to how black females have dealt with diversity and transformation. One of the themes that were echoed here included escapism. The build-up to dream 5 raised the issue of a tug of war or a tension between self-preservation and working with diversity actively and intentionally, resulting in the group as a whole trying to attain a respite in the here and now of the group discussion while anxiety or a preoccupation about diversity continued to take over. Up until this point other ways of working with the anxiety about diversity dynamics had been demonstrated. The associations and amplifications regarding dream 6 however revealed a different approach which included seeming to be intentionally and actively dealing with diversity. This however might indicate possible acting out at this point of the conversation, given the possible level of frustration or, presumably, an introjection response linked to the idolisation of Mandela or a stance that seems more aggressive. It may be worth noting that this position in the discussion was taken by a black male.

#### **4.4 IN A NUTSHELL**

In this chapter, I have presented the data in a raw form that was collected during the data gathering process. The six dreams of the six student leaders have been elaborated on in terms of what the dream is about, the amplifications and associations concerning the dreams and finally, the discussion that could have been held based on the prior steps. As such, in my attempt to organise the findings, I have indicated that the main themes of the dream are composed of:

- Interpersonal dynamics
- Reality in vs. reality out of student leadership
- Psychological responses
- The role in student leadership
- Power
- Diversity and diversity dynamics
- Structures/ institutions that influence beliefs and behaviours

The following chapter contains my discussion of the themes obtained from the interpretations made of the findings discussed in this chapter. The discussion in the next chapter is thus a representation of the global analysis which contains the co-constructed meanings that connect the dreams.

## **CHAPTER 5: INTEGRATION – FINDINGS AND LITERATURE**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The intention of this chapter is to pull together the different strands of working with the data. Up to this point, I have discussed the worldview in which the data was viewed the research methodology and the findings. In this chapter I bring the various aspects of the research process to a point of integration and finally, I propose a working hypothesis that links to the research question. I present the working hypothesis graphically in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. In Figure 5.1, I discuss the major aspects of the working hypothesis while at the end of the chapter I elaborate on these aspects by using Figure 5.2. This chapter contains a discussion of the integration of the findings, undertaken by always keeping the theoretical and worldview lens and underpinnings in mind while at the same time referring to the research methodology that has been followed, as advised by the work of Willig (2013). The discussion starts with the laying of the foundation in the next section.

### **5.2 LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

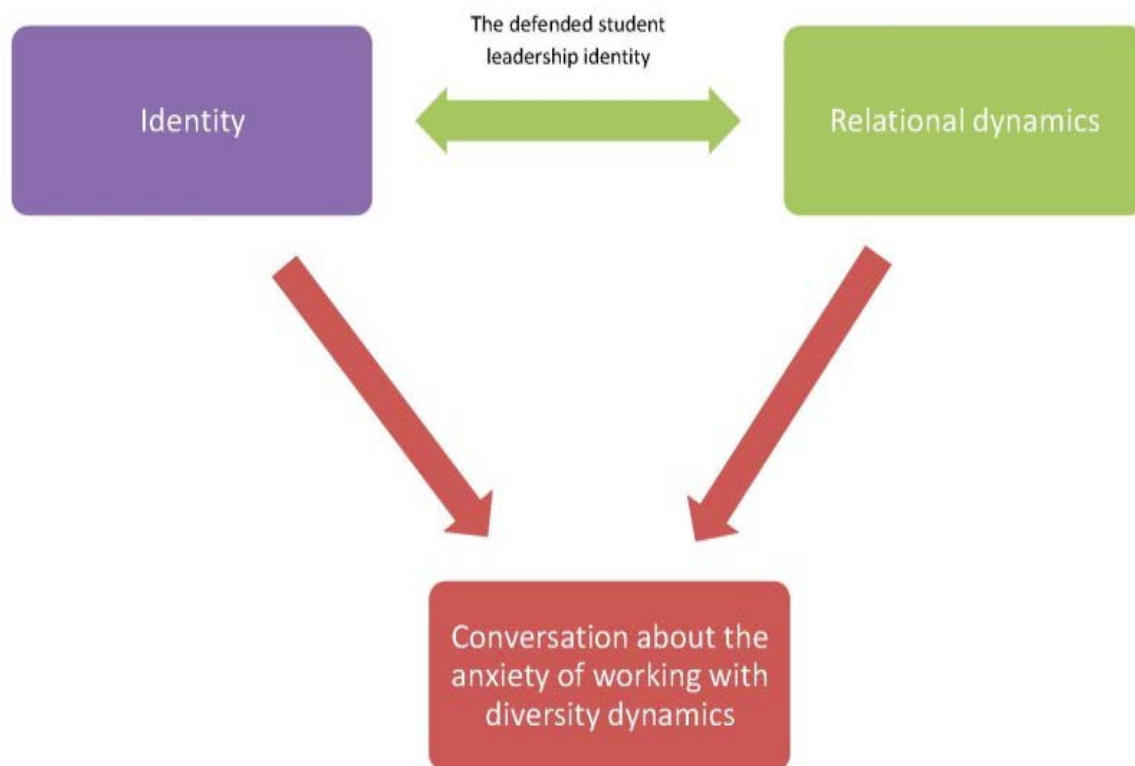
In this chapter, I integrate the original themes that emerged from the data as well as offering interpretations of the themes that emerged after a deeper and deeper interpretation. In terms of giving evidence relating to each theme, I refer to the biographical-demographical significance as discussed in Chapter 3. From the perspective of having been influenced by the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and Jefferson and Hollway (2005), a psychodynamic interpretation is used to unlock the discursive positions in the data as would be informed by various contextual credentials, particularly those of biographical-demographical significance. Owing to the differing discursive positions in the data, some dreams may contain more of the themes more than others or may represent some positions more than others. This is made evident when quotations from some dreams are more often used to illustrate certain themes than other dreams. Moreover, something interesting occurred in the data in that its flow frequently occurred in a rhythm of opposites: tensions and paradoxes, two sides of the same coin and the like. This might have captured the anxiety in the conversation being investigated but was then also a stimulating method of showing

how it had manifested. In another sense, this might have been expected because of the nature of the data. I thus entertain issues of power, power dynamics and positions or how the positioning of others comes into play (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Parker, 2010). I do so by using the discourse analysis lens as well as offering a psychodynamic interpretation of what I observed when employing this lens. Metaphors are thus central to this discussion. In my view, metaphors seem to provide a connecting language with the psychodynamic elements in the interaction (Boydell, 2009; Mersky, 2008).

The themes are therefore represented in an integrated manner in that the outcome of the discourse analysis is interwoven into the psychodynamic interpretation. It may seem more traditional to present the said analysis separately from the given interpretation (Friese, 2014); however, while interacting with the data and writing up the findings it appeared more congruent within the psychosocial approach to flow with the rhythm of the data (Willig, 2013). In my experience of the data collected here, the psychological or psychic elements would have seemed to have been disjointed from the rest of the script if reported separately (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). The themes that have emerged from the data are therefore described in an integrated manner, in particular to demonstrate the links and nuances that substantiate the credibility of the themes and the research method employed in this research.

In addition, I use existing literature to substantiate the arguments that are advanced in the text so that I provide the reader with scholastically sound ideas (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). Furthermore, I use the said literature to reflect on views that are different from my findings and I also look at this literature in terms of what my findings add or extend into the current literature.

The major themes of the findings are organised in Figure 5.1 and elaborated on in Figure 5.2 where the complexities of the emerging themes are illustrated, indicating the relationships and processes contained in the findings. This chapter therefore contains a discussion that is represented by Figure 5.1 to demonstrate how I arrived at Figure 5.2, included at the end of the chapter. Figure 5.1 illustrates the working hypothesis that is represented in the findings, while Figure 5.2 expands on the working hypothesis in detail. Figure 5.1 follows here:



*Figure 5.1* The major themes in the findings

The working hypothesis on the social construction of student leadership at a South African university therefore occurs on the three levels noted: the conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious ones, in an integrated manner. This hypothesis is integrated and kept fluid by a defended student leadership identity; it is constituted by identity in student leadership as well as relational dynamics (that are characterised by interactional splitting dynamics) which facilitate each other so that a conversation can occur. This hypothesis has been studied on all three levels of data collection, while I have also considered three attributes of the social construction of student leadership at a South African university: identity and relational dynamics as well as the conversation, so as to understand what has been manifested in the group on all three levels.

While studying an issue relating to diversity dynamics at the same university setting as this one, in this research, Walker (2005) found that in the conversation on aspects of

diversity dynamics, students negotiate their identities so as to make sense of them as a means of relating to others. In my findings, I agree with this and extend this finding by arguing that students in leadership in particular, negotiate the relational dynamics as well. In addition, my findings point to how relational dynamics inform identity and how these two components are key to holding the conversation about diversity dynamics, particularly the conversation about the anxiety of working with the latter dynamics.

At this point, I indulge in taking the discussion further in this chapter by demonstrating the hypothesis as providing evidence that has helped me to arrive at the said hypothesis. When offering an interpretation or showing the emergence of a theme; quotations from the transcription are used to support the argumentations and ideas that I put forward. Symbols are used to refer to the speaker being quoted when referring to the transcription. These symbols are as follows:

*Table 5.1 Symbols indicating information from the transcription*

Symbols indicating speakers	Symbols indicating detail in the quotation
F1: Facilitator 1	....(dots) may indicate a pause or speech
F2: Facilitator 2	said later in the same quotation or
	... (dots) may connect two parts of the same quotation
Rbm: Respondent black male	
Rwm: Respondent white male	
Rbf: Respondent black female	
Rwf: Respondent white female	
P1: white female leader	
P2: white male leader	

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Symbols indicating speakers

Symbols indicating detail in the quotation

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P3: black female leader

P4: black female leader

P5: black female leader

P6: black male leader

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To assist the above mentioned discussion I provide the context in which to make the discussion appropriate. As such, I write about context as a reflective tool and the importance of context as congruent with the worldview in which this research is framed. This means that the themes that I have proposed make sense in context – which I will detail below. Following this, I present the reader to the working definition of student leadership that student leaders have provided. This is important so that such leadership is understood in the context of this text and of the research participants who have constructed the definition.

### **5.2.1 Context as a reflective tool**

I echo the conviction expressed in the literature that context is a reflective tool (Gee, 2011; Parker, 1997, 2015). The context contains a base in terms of which language is informed (Parker, 2015). As a result, what is said in the group, how people interact, the ideas that the group members hold and on which the group agrees or disagrees on and so forth, are supported by the context in which the language is being used. Gee (2011) defines context as ‘all that has been previously said and done by those involved in the communication; any shared knowledge those involved have, including cultural knowledge, that is, knowledge of their own shared culture and any other cultures that may be relevant in their context’ (p. 84). In the same breath, however, what has been said and how it is said appears to build the context as well (Ford, 2010; Parker 1997; 2015). Therefore, it seems that student leaders communicate to fit into a context that

already exists but that also communicate to contribute to creating it – which is how student leadership actively rebuilds activities, identities and institutions within an existing background of history and culture (Gee, 2011), in this instance, at a South African university.

As mentioned before, in the literature and in this research, such leadership at the given university is characterised by students who have been elected through a competitive election process by other students to serve on a representative or governance structure in the university (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). In addition, student leadership has been seen as a means for universities to listen and interact with student interests while also involving them in the internal decision-making processes of the university (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). The representative bodies in South Africa generally encompass the SRC which comprises the student representative councils and other committees as indicated per university (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). Referring to student leadership in a global context, Klemenčič (2014) has indicated that this group might be a highly influential and powerful source of agency for representing and defending the interests of the collective student body. As a result and in addition, student leadership takes on the political and social agenda on behalf of students in the Higher Education environment (Klemenčič, 2014). The findings by Luescher-Mamashela (2013) and Klemenčič (2014) are in accord on the above point with regard to the SA context university context. Furthermore, from an African perspective it appears that students have played a significant role in both the developments in higher education as well as in their respective national politics together with international politics, since the beginning of the twentieth century (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). While it could be the norm, the university in which this research was conducted has ‘de-politicised’ student representative elections and participation so as to bypass the party politics in the student representative elections although there appears to be evidence that more student leaders are part of a political party than not and that this is likely to increase conflict amongst student leaders (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). As a result, I predict that the focus on politics in student leadership is structurally minimised, but this may not always be achieved in terms of the student leadership experience or lived experience. Furthermore; because of the ‘depoliticised’ attitude towards student leadership; this also means that students who participate in student leadership also include those who



have been selected for leadership programmes that do not fall under the Higher Education Act but seem to contribute to the leadership development of students. These seem to be more affiliated with the greater contribution to graduate attributes.

The South African university scene is currently characterised by the ripple effect of the changes implemented by the government in its effort to advance the post-apartheid legacy in South Africa (Costandius & Bitzer, 2014; Hall, 2008; Le Grange, 2011; Mouton et al., 2013; Thaver, 2009; Waghid, 2003). The post-apartheid period in South Africa is marked by the first democratically elected government, which took office in 1994 (Pretorius et al., 2012). Before then, higher education and South Africa at large were seen to perpetrate injustices that created inequalities and differences in opportunities for the different races, social classes, genders and the like (Beckmann, 2008; Hall, 2008; Thaver, 2009, Waghid, 2003). As a result, with the premise of redress being a national agenda (Oxlund, 2010), higher education sought to open doors to all people in the country and pursue the aim of levelling the playing field (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; Costandius & Bitzer, 2014; Hall, 2008; Le Grange, 2011; Mncube, 2008; Netshitenzhe, 2015). This is also true of the case in the university setting in which this research has occurred. As mentioned, the university has been characterised as a historically white university with an Afrikaans culture heritage, now engaging in its own transformation process (Sharp, 2006; Sharp & Vally, 2009; Walker, 2005). Initially, this project for the transformation of universities entailed the reports of the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996 followed by the National Plan for Higher Education (Hall, 2008). These were followed by the Higher Education Act (1997) and more specifically two policies that contain the transformation agenda, i.e. the White Paper 3 (EWP) entitled A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education and the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (Hall, 2008; Seabi et al., 2014; Van Wyk, 2005; Waghid, 2003; 2nd National Higher Education Summit, 2015). These are also supported by the Soudien Report in 2008 derived from the Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in the Public Higher Education Institutions (Le Grange, 2011; Seabi et al., 2012). Recently, there has been the establishment of The Ministerial Oversight Committee on the Transformation in [the] South African Public Universities (TOC) in 2013 (2nd National Higher Education Summit, 2015). All of these evidence the intense drive for transformation in South African universities. Students at some

such universities have been reported to be dissatisfied with transformation (Sharp & Vally, 2009; Seabi et al., 2012; Walker, 2005). It has been found that in the transformation process, universities in South Africa engage with diversity, diversity issues and diversification (Cross, 2004). The latter is demonstrated by, for example, the institutional mergers that have been part of this process where historically black universities were merged with historically white universities and where historically white universities were enrolling more black students than formerly (Jansen, 2003; Mouton et al., 2013; Thaver, 2009; Woodrooffe, 2011). Recent studies indicate that the said envisioned Higher Education system has not been realised (Higham, 2012; Long, 2011; Louw, 2013; Mngomezulu, 2012; Swartz et al., 2014; Woodrooffe, 2011). While student leadership is recognised as the entity with which to interact in terms of representation of the interests of students, the literature that I have come across does not appear to report student leaders' current standing in terms of the transformation in Higher Education. Nonetheless, other studies have reported on experiences of students in a general sense without separating students in student leadership from those who are not in it (Costanduis & Bitzer, 2014; Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Kamper & Steyn, 2011; Leibowitz, et al., 2007; Seabi et al., 2012; Sehoole; 2005).

At this point, I would like to explain the working definition of student leadership that the student leaders have contributed to the discussion as their understanding of the concept. I take this as a guiding point of departure when I refer to student leadership in the text. This is important from a social construction perspective in order for the reader of the text to be aligned with the frame of reference of the participants in the research (Willig, 2013). Moreover, from the perspective of social construction, meanings of words are important, enabling the reader to relate to the data in a manner closest to that intended by the participants.

### **5.2.2 The working definition of student leadership in this conversation**

Constructions about student leadership refer to discourses that student leaders have used to describe their understanding of it, such as, for instance, how they define it and the meanings that they attach to the term. As a starting point, it appears to be defined in terms of formal and informal student leadership. Formal student leadership is described in terms of the power attributed to student leadership/ student leaders

according to the various or respective legislated or contracted guidelines (Speckman & Mandew, 2014). Informal student leadership refers to the extent to which the student leaders are appreciated by others or valued by their colleagues as well as supported by them or other (non-leader) students, inclusive of any other people with whom they may interact while they occupy positions of leadership (Walker, 2005). The student leaders in this research appear to talk about this concept as something beyond the portfolio that they hold, as if it comprises more than the functional activity that is associated with student leadership, as illustrated in the quotation below from Dream 4.

*Dream 4 (Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*As I was saying, you know, as a leader there are the things that you can do, the functions, you can put up the posters, you can organise the people, you can organise an extra person to be the one who is MC'ing it, you can organise this sport event or whatever, but that is your role and your function, that's what you're supposed to do and that is doesn't necessarily make you a leader.*

Student leadership has further been spoken of as being complex. This description seems to be based on both the formal and informal forms of student leadership. The quotation below, from Dream 5, could shed some light on this complexity.

*Dream 5(Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*Sometimes when we go back to... because there's something that he said about how you go from a little cliff and the next thing it's an ocean and it's that, I think I sort of can use that with how I've experienced, like being active in res and then moving into a (one committee) and then coming to the SRC. Because you know, in res we all want to win so we all do it and then in (a committee) it was also very easy because in my time we did a lot of like res people stuff and they would come. They will definitely come. And the fights are not always that big because you're only concentrating on one aspect. One thing that got very, very challenging on the SRC is that, now you guys have to do everything and sometimes you can't even get your colleagues to agree on something as, how do we deal with a racism incident on campus and some people are like, 'let's not deal' and then we're like, 'we can't not deal'. That's also what gets really frustrating.*

*It's not just the person who doesn't want to sign or the person who gives you the word 'no' or the person who says, 'no you can't have your peaceful walk to the admin building for this'. It's also then the people that you are working with as well and if your guys are like in synergy – and it's almost impossible for you guys to all be on the same page so you will fight. And then when you do fight it's like, okay...*

The multi-faceted nature of the student leadership is dependent upon the formal types of such leadership assigned, which in turn indicate the complexity of the informal. Consequently this also suggests that the more multifaceted the nature of student leadership, the more complex it will be. Based on the quotation above from Dream 5, leaders in the SRC seem to experience a more complex dynamic of student leadership than those in other committees. Its multifaceted nature is said to incorporate conflicts in the group as well as responding to issues occurring in the student environment, ranging from issues of racism to deciding whether to participate in a protest, as described in the quotation above.

This brings me to presenting the themes that emerged and are discussed under the premise of the working definition of student leadership as considered above, which describes it as having formal and informal dimensions. This aspect of the two dimensions introduces the complexities and 'messiness' of the concept, which in fact underlie the rest of this chapter. The formal and informal aspects of student leadership could also refer to the issues of identity and relational dynamics as well as the interplay between these issues. The discussion that follows aims to reveal the social construction of student leadership at a South African university, against this backdrop.

### **5.3 DEFENDED STUDENT LEADERSHIP IDENTITY**

From the perspective of the research methodology employed in this text, it appears that identity is found on all three levels of data collection. In addition, I have noted in my generated hypothesis that identity in student leadership appears to be assumed in relational dynamics (Gergen, 2009; Walker, 2005). As the two feed into each other (i.e. identity in student leadership and relationship dynamics), a grasp of relational dynamics in student leadership would be important to create space for assuming an identity in the latter (Gergen, 2009; Walker, 2005). This is because for the purpose of

this research I have accepted the assumption that people understand themselves (identity) in terms of their relation to others (relational dynamics) (Gergen, 2015). Thus a defended student leadership identity incorporates the tension between identity and relational dynamics as indicated in Figure 11. As such, this type of identity appears to encourage the maintenance of a harmonious environment by sustaining a balance between identity and relational dynamics. Moreover, such an identity could characterise the postponement of embracing the working with the anxiety that is currently being experienced, by becoming distracted by other behaviours, as will be noted in the evidence referred to in this chapter.

A defended student leadership identity therefore appears to mediate between identity in student leadership in a South African university and relational dynamics. In this section of the discussion I will elaborate on the topic of this type of identity. First I explore the concept of defendedness so as to acclimatise the reader regarding what I mean when I use this word. I subsequently take the discussion further and detail the concept of defendedness in literature. Finally, I write about the constructions of defense as evident in the data.

### **5.3.1 Defendedness**

By virtue of having looked at the discourse through a psychosocial lens, it would be expected of the researcher to weave in concepts about participants being defended (Boydell, 2009; Lemma, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Mersky, 2013). This is because psychosocial analysis makes use of psychodynamic ideas to expose core issues within the social context (Clarke & Hoggert, 2009). As mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter my inspiration for and confidence in using this notion is influenced by Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) work. They have proposed that discourse appears to be the product of participants warding off anxiety (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Willig, 2013): a concept which stems from psychodynamic bases. Furthermore, congruent with Boydell (2009) and Mersky (2013), the psychodynamic nature of the data in this research is explicated by psychodynamic literature. I will discuss this literature below to orientate the reader and attempt to create some context for some of the proposals that I have made in terms of interpreting and integrating the findings. To

start off this discussion, I will be precise about what I refer to when I write about defendedness.

This is a term that I use to express that a position of being defended has been taken. In this sense the ideas of Hollway and Jefferson (2013) become evident in that I view the participant as warding off anxiety. I take it that the participant does so by making use of defenses manifesting as words and actions that are verbal or non-verbal, thereby contributing the data gathered for this research. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) have been outspoken in acknowledging that they have borrowed the concept of the unconscious defense from psychoanalysis, the only theoretical perspective which could accommodate their ideas. In the realm of psychodynamic theory, these can also be referred to as defense mechanisms; a discussion follows. Consequently, the words or actions (whether verbal or non-verbal) that are in the transcription are interpreted as defense mechanisms, making it possible to speak about the unconscious dynamics at play in the conversation. Thus when I refer to a defended student leadership identity, I am writing about the nuances that contribute to student leadership identity that are unconscious in nature, made up of defenses or defense mechanisms used to ward off anxiety during the conversation. This is what Hollway and Jefferson (2013) do when they consider the subjectivity of the participant, looking at the meaning of what is being said (being discourse) by incorporating the emotional meaning attached (being the psychodynamic aspect) (Willig, 2013).

According to Lemma (2003) a common similarity across various perspectives in the psychodynamic paradigm is the desire to understand the nature of anxiety and how human beings cope with it; which speaks of defense. Thus my reference to defendedness has to do with the anxiety portrayed in the discourse and how language is used to manage it. Given the latter, anxiety seems to be managed relationally using a defended position or defense mechanisms, which is also congruent with relational models on defenses (Lemma, 2003). I discuss this concept in the following section.

#### *5.3.1.1 Defendedness in literature*

Initially the concept of defenses was advocated by Freud (Esman, 2015). The conversation about defense mechanisms included some of the defenses that are

discussed in this chapter: splitting, denial, omnipotence, sublimation, acting out, escapism, introjection and rationalisation. In consequence, defendedness in this text refers to the use of all the listed defense mechanisms. Furthermore: bringing this point close to home, (May, 2012) suggests that defense mechanisms underpin diversity dynamics. The most prominent theme in the discussion in this text is evident in a sense of omnipotence relating to narcissistic injury and how the defended identity is occupied though this narcissistic defense (St Clair & Wigren, 2004).

Briefly I discuss the defense mechanisms referred to above; then move into the intended discussion about the integration of the findings. The table below contains the different defense mechanisms that are referred to in the text and my preliminary definitions.

*Table 5.2* Presentation of the working definitions regarding defense mechanisms

Defense mechanism	Working definition
Omnipotence  (most prominent in the text)	An illusion of power that is limitless, while having no awareness that others possess independent capacity to perform (Lemma, 2003).
Defense mechanism	Working definition
Splitting (which seems to be second most prominent in the discussion)	Assigning two polar positions to a point or a view (May, 2012).

Denial	Refusing the apparent, evidence-based, reality because of its threatening nature (St Clair & Wigren, 2004)
Sublimation	Using socially acceptable behaviour to channel a forbidden impulse into healthy actions (Lemma, 2003).
Acting out	Actions that are usually impulsive in nature, resulting in outcomes that are destructive to the one performing the action and others surrounding the person (Corey, 2016).
Escapism	Especially in this text, takes the form of creating a fantasy to replace or divert an unpleasant situation/ experience into an imagined pleasant one (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick, Hastall & Rossmann, 2009).
Introjection	Taking in and taking on the position and stance of another, absorbing these into oneself (Corey, 2016).

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Defense mechanism	Working definition
Rationalisation	Use of rational explanations and justifications to respond to uncomfortable input (Lemma, 2003).

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Given the above discussion, I now show how the student leaders' display constructed defendedness. Later on, I discuss how this defendedness, seeing that it has been



incorporated into student leadership identity; has played out in the rest of the conversation on the social construction of student leadership in a South African university. I should at this point insert a disclaimer regarding my awareness of the inclusion of defense mechanisms in the discussion, as seeming to accord quite a deterministic flavour to a text affiliated with a paradigm which advocates more relativism. Consequently, I remind the reader of the 'somewhere in between' position that I have adopted in terms of realism and relative social constructionism; thus appreciating a pluralist approach. As a result, I use these terms referring to defense mechanisms as language to describe the defendedness that I propose is contained in the discourse because these are congruent with the psychosocial approach of employing psychodynamic principles to expose the social context (Clarke & Hoggert, 2009).

#### *5.3.1.2 Constructions of defense*

The data has shown that student leaders seem to defend themselves or use language to talk about defense in two ways. Firstly, they refer to tools that they might need to defend themselves or even the need that they have to defend themselves. Secondly, they seem to use language to point to using others to defend themselves. The discourse of defense appears to be underpinned by ideas that student leaders fantasise about in terms of student leadership but also appear to be constructed in terms of what seems to be perceived performance related to student leadership. Both the fantasy and the perceived performance could concern the construction of true leadership, issues of competition or expected rules of engagement; these are issues that are elaborated on in sections to come. Below I show, from the transcription, how language has been used to refer to the two scenarios of the discourse of defense. However, this following discussion will act as a foundation for the subsequent sections on identity, relational dynamics and the conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics. This could be the case, as intimated, because the defended student leadership identity seems to hold the balance between identity and relational dynamics.

a. *Constructions of defense: tools and the need to defend the self in student leadership*

The student leaders have used language to acknowledge that they are defended or need to defend themselves during their experience of student leadership in a South African university. In the quote below the student talks about a cane, indicating a tool to defend oneself from a snake.

*Dreamer in Dream 1 (Rwf, dream, P1): That would be my strong-suit like getting us over the hole, but the snake handler, like the cane thing, you handle the snake with that*

In this image, the snakes have been identified as the experience of student leadership. The student has said, *'The only thing I can tell you about the obstacles is the big hole in the ground blocking the way completely and then the snakes.'* (Dreamer in Dream 1, Rwf, dream, P1) Seemingly then, student leadership is associated with snakes, thus appearing to be something life threatening, anxiety provoking and from which one needs to defend oneself. Hence the necessity for the cane. A cane seems to be a socially acceptable tool for defense. According to psychodynamic perspectives, socially acceptable behaviour can be used to ward off anxiety and cope with it in a way that seems pleasing to others in order to minimise conflict pertaining to a situation (Corey, 2016; Lemma, 2003). This scenario accordingly contributes an interpretation that student leaders could be seeking socially acceptable resources and means in order to work with the anxiety of working with being a student leader in a South African university. This may also be culturally and/or institutionally motivated (Thaver, 2009); therefore it could be regarded as a healthy action evidencing the defense mechanism that alludes to sublimation. An institution of higher education is hierarchical and requires its members to follow protocol and prescriptions which are mainly concerned with respecting authority profiles as well as attaining favour as a result of following instructions (Klemenčič, 2014; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Hence, the use of socially acceptable means to handle experiences appears to be contextually advocated, but these means also serve the purpose of assisting the student leaders to look after themselves (their own interest) or advance themselves (their own interests) (Konrath, Bushmann & Campbell, 2006). In another sense, the continuing search for socially

acceptable means of defense could become ineffective when these means are not perceived to be useful in containing anxiety: this may manifest in emotional outbursts; in the form of retaliation; rebellion and the like; and or reactions that resemble acting out (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009). Evidence for this is, I suggest, located in P6. In earlier dream discussions, particularly in Dream 2, he welcomes camaraderie with P2 while in the conversation about the lion and the fox there is an association with symbolism about leadership identity. The lion would be protective of its followers at all costs; whereas the fox would employ strategy as a leader and become adaptable according to the scenario at hand. It is almost as if in Dream 6, P6 divulges that at an unconscious level he is busy with impulsive methods of student leadership that involve guns and shooting – this I infer as being busy with acting out behaviour when socially acceptable methods such as being adaptable would be ineffective. The quotations which refer to the above now follow.

Extract from Dream 2

*Dreamer, (Rwm, dream, P2): I always thought of myself as a lion. Just to give you perspective, the first... how can I say, the first principle for me as a leader, and that comes from my religion, is love. So it's being a selfless leader, not thinking about yourself, putting yourself in any kind of position to, how can I say, to accommodate others. So I always thought (of) myself as a lion. Like, I was a lion, leader. And this was just before I realised I had the potential to actually become, to fulfil various leadership positions. And I come from an Afrikaans school and I've been exposed to black people in my family and wherever, but I mean, when it came to university it was a really real thing. I mean, now there's more than just one or two black people in your school. I mean, there's a lot more issues, like for instance disability and what-not. I prayed about it and I asked and I said to God, 'listen, how can I be a lion if I'm looking at a disabled person and how can I inspire someone if I'm a lion?'*

*Dreamer, (Rwm, dream, P2):*

*So then I had this dream of me becoming a fox, right. (Laughter) So P6 and I had a lot of discussions, so he really knows me pretty well. The reason why I think he showed me to become a fox was that to adapt to any kind of situation. I can't speak the same*

*to F1 as I speak to P6 as I speak to yourself or whomever on campus. So, I think as a student leader it takes in my dream it will be like... well, I saw that I became a fox – just to be strategic about things as well.*

Quotation from the talk of the dreamer in *Dream 6 (Rbm, dream, P6)*

*where the first one, we were driving, I wasn't driving, but (we were driving); but there were shot like 'pah-pah-pah' and then this guy just got out of the car and said, 'Listen, you've got to get out'. So I ran. And then they were shot and I woke up.*

*Same people on the farm but defending me as well. So I'm running to safety. People are like, I don't know who is shooting. People are shooting. My mom picks up the gun. This is the only person I knew from the dream because she was shot on the hip in the dream as well.*

*I don't believe in guns anyway, I'll tell you that. So again I don't take the gun, I run towards the barn. I'm running*

*b. Constructions of defense: I use others to defend the self*

As demonstrated in the quotations below, student leaders also use others to defend themselves. This strong need for others, expressed in terms of comfort, safety and support, also points to a deep disappointment when support from others or a sense of camaraderie is not present and appears to be an important attribute of success in student leadership.

*Dream 1 (Rwf, conversation, P1):*

*I mean, if I didn't have people there with the cane or whatever, I wouldn't have been able to move on and I think in leadership there will always be that one fight that you are really uncomfortable with and sometimes you just need someone else with other qualities to assist you in that.....*

*Dream 1 (Rwf, the dream, P1):*

*there's chaos, because I know my deadline is soon and I need to get to my destination and I know on my own it's not happening. And then I have like these people – and this is very significant to me about the dream – I can never see their faces. It's like I know it's a figure of a person but I can never see the face, so what happens is, every one of them, they have something to get me across. Every one of them, even myself sometimes I don't literally have something but I have an idea in my head and we all like... I don't know, some of them might have a ladder to go across the bridge.*

The discomfort experienced in student leadership in a South African context (Seabi et al., 2012) appears to impel a need for commonality and bonding amongst the student leaders. Consequently, this need to bond and or successful bonding can be regarded as relational dynamics to work with the discomfort in student leadership in a South African university. In other words, the students use each other in terms of relational dynamics to defend themselves from the discomfort by seeking some sense of commonality. The desperate need for a common vision (Leibowitz et. al, 2007) may predispose members to prioritise agreement at the cost of not confronting issues to the desired degree. In addition, student leaders may be encouraged to process the discomfort of working with the diversity of race, gender, social class and religion amongst others by using avoidance (Beiling, Israeli & Antony, 2004) as a mechanism: I suggest by manipulating others into thinking that they (student leaders) are *true* student leaders. Manipulation appears to create a connection amongst them and offers them an opportunity to act as a united front against others who are not in student leadership (Konrath, et. al, 2006). This could be potentially to find solace in the solidarity of sharing the common attribute of being a student leader. As a result, the initial premise advanced by the group is that diversity and transformation magnify the complexity of student leadership, on which all seem to agree. They refer to barriers, challenges and burdens that are bigger than themselves. Elsewhere in research, it has been found that the culture of higher education tends to prioritise performance by default, placing a focus on structural and hard issues of change or transformation more than on relating and finding soft ways of working with diversity (van Wyk, 2005). The challenges and barriers that have been referred to by the student leaders seem to relate to the performativity of higher education, as the literature suggests. At the same

time the findings of this research have shown that while student leaders seem to have a desire to play with the relational aspects of diversity, they may devote limited energy to this as this appears to divide them. Hence, the drive for a common purpose would be a way to keep in check the already observed aggression that happens in the group (Konrath et al., 2006). As a result, it is convenient for the student leaders to focus on the challenges and barriers to performance so as to avoid relating, because there appears to be a limitation amongst them, in terms of mechanisms to relate and to work with diversity. These challenges and barriers could be in addition objects outside themselves which they can seemingly control (Neuman, 2012). While the social construction of student leadership in this research has taken the form of a conversation about aspects of relating, the student leaders have decided to bond and to work with the situation by focusing on aspects of student leadership that have indirect implications for relating. In this way, they still 'relate' and share a common purpose but benefit from not directly working with the actual, core issues of difference; which require a different kind of relating. This approach could come across as a more reconciliatory interaction on the part of the student leaders. If so, this kind of interaction (i.e. the reconciliatory approach) would be in line with the transformational agenda of higher education as indicated elsewhere in the text; and thus congruent with the expectation of higher education participants.

The identity taken in student leadership which I have presented as a defended one contributes to the conversation in terms of the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university. Next, I expand the discussion by discussing the theme of identity further.

#### **5.4 IDENTITY IN STUDENT LEADERSHIP**

Identity in student leadership has been shown in the data in terms of certain scripts, namely religion in general and the Christian script in particular which appear to situate the defended student leadership identity. I make this observation because student leaders have framed student leadership in terms of the concept of 'true leader', according to the data.

*Dreamer in Dream 2 (Rmw, dream, P2):*

..... *I had to discover before I became like a true leader was that I had to be rooted in certain things in my life and for me the most important was obviously my religion, secondly it was family.*

Thus *true leader* suggests an absolute destination for which a student leadership can strive. To attain true leadership the student leader, speaking in terms of Dream 2, suggests that he has to be rooted in 'certain things', including religion; particularly Christianity. This implies that if such a leader is not rooted in anything or in what is suggested then she or he cannot be named a true student leader. In consequence my assumption, mentioned earlier, is that the pursuit of true leadership could be anxiety provoking at times, which could foster a defendedness in student leadership as its members seek to attain the 'pinnacle' (as they understand it) of their leadership. The latter refers to a fear of failing and of falling as spoken about in Dream 1. The result is that when true leadership is not attained, feelings that seem like those of inadequacy are elicited. The quotation below could refer to this:

*Dreamer in Dream 1 (Rwf, association, P1):*

*That hole in that road, I'm scared of falling besides anything like, falling is the worst thing for me and it's so bad that it's come to a point where I never fall these days. I will trip, I will land on my feet and I'll move on because I'm terrified of falling. I'm not sure if it's because I'm terrified of the impact or getting hurt or whatever, but I'm terrified of falling. So, when she said 'hole' – that big hole... (Sighs) yeah.*

This idea is elaborated on in a later section of the text. For the moment, I suggest that at times leaders may not know what the said pinnacle of student leadership is; accordingly they keep searching for an unknown destination, which also creates an anxiety. Thus the pursuit of true leadership could have been used to create a known entity that provided some security in the light of the unknown that creates anxiety in student leadership or that is created by anxiety concerning such leadership (Brelsford, Raldiris & Ramirez, 2015; Hogg, 2014; Pargament, 2011). Nonetheless in the quotation below the student leader indicates the highlighted focus of identity in student leadership.

*Dream 2 (Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*You need to, as a leader, firstly know yourself because once you know yourself you'll know exactly. Even sometimes when you don't have all the tools with you, you'll know exactly where to fetch them and say, okay, I'm a person who's afraid of snakes or I'm a person who doesn't like this, let me fetch the thing because I don't have this tool with me. It's only when you realise that I can't do 1-2 and 3 that you're like*

According to this quotation, when a student leader firstly knows her- or himself, she or he will be sure, and assured, in student leadership, even when this person does not possess all the tools to exercise formal student leadership. For this reason, the resolution of identity in student leadership is spoken of as an important task to engage with while carrying out such leadership. I understand the task of knowing oneself as an informal leadership task in this scenario.

Below I discuss the scripts that student leaders have referred to when talking about identity in student leadership.

#### *5.4.1.1 Religion*

Student leadership seems to be occupied with the exploration of religion. The latter generally provides guidelines for life; hence such leaders may look to religion for guidelines on their leadership (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015; Hogg, 2014; Ross, Handal, Clark & Wal, 2009). Other research has indicated similar results, sharing the experience of a university staff member who was familiar with reports of students on the contribution of religion to their identity; I refer particularly to the contribution of the church (Le Grange, 2011). The student leaders' exploration of religion is to be observed in the next set of quotations.

*Dreamer in Dream 6 (Rbm, dream, P6):*

*So we went further, but the same thing again. And I told my mom, the same thing I told my church. I never once used a fire-arm or hit anyone myself. People were always defending me. Then the third day, this time we got even further, then we got to a field and like a Mormon type feel. Not that we are Mormons but you know, (laughter)*



*Dream 2 (Rbf, association, P4):*

*...because as you say also... I mean, from what you're saying already you didn't... I mean, you just mentioned that you want to understand other people, because I'm also a fan in terms of I want to read Rastafarian book whatever, but I'm still very much in my, you know, Christianity...*

*Dream 2 (Rwm, association, P2):*

*I can associate myself with Muslims, I went to a Buddhist conference, I saw a Tariq Ramadan who's a very liberal Muslim and I was the only there... (laughter) I was sitting and looking at the whole... so to me it's, my religion is, it's first. I'm not going to these things to look for another religion, I'm going to these things to understand others better so I know how to deal with them. Because for instance, you can talk with a Christian in a certain way, you can talk with a Muslim in a certain way, you can talk with a Buddhist in a certain way.*

As in the metaphor of *The Life of Pi* that the student leaders have used in the data gathering process, they seem to have pursued the goal of clarifying their identity in the context of religion, as in for example the quotation below:

*Dreamer in Dream 2 (Rwm, dream, P2):*

*..... I had to discover before I became like a true leader was that I had to be rooted in certain things in my life and for me the most important was obviously my religion, secondly it was family.*

It is however interesting that the metaphor of *The Life of Pi* was used in Dream 5 to refer to another aspect of the data; while it was also applicable in Dream 2. This suggests to me something about the collective unconscious and the unconscious dynamics in play during the gathering of the data – as if everything is intertwined and referring to everything else. Here is the extract below referring to *The Life of Pi* taken from the transcription of dream 5:

*F2:*

*Okay, shall we move to the free associations and can we start with P6?*

*Rbf, P3:*

*Life of Pi*

*Rbm, P6:*

*This feels like life of Pi. What a masterpiece. Anyway, this is the start when he was with his family and they just vanished, the whole ship... they just vanished and then these people are the tiger now. So you're posting... but then he dies along the way...*

*Rbf, P3:*

*Such a good movie*

As in this film, its most important aspect, which is to centre life around God and explore religion (<http://www.lifeofpimovie.com/>), seems to be relevant to the data of this research. In the movie, the main character goes through a similar process of seeking to clarify his identity and explores three religions. According to the student leaders they have explored Christianity, Mormonism, Rastafarianism and Islam. In the first quotation of the four above, the speaker appears to use language to assert that he is not a Mormon. This clarification might imply that the environment may become resistant to any other religion that is not Christian, as indicated in the quotations below for example when the student leader explains to others that even though he has explored the Rastafarian way he is still very much a Christian. In addition another student leader explains that even if he has been to a Buddhist conference or associated with Muslims he has not lost his Christianity. In the last quotation the student leader refers to how, even if she has done the most un-Christian things, she holds Christianity as a reference point.

Having said this, student leaders have acknowledged the diversity of religion in their context. While this is true, at times such diversity is perceived to complicate what they expect in student leadership as they may not always know how to respond to this type

of diversity. The fear seems to exist that they would be destabilised if they opened up to the diversity without restraint. The quotation following indicates this:

*Dream 2 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*But I think what I see in the picture is sort of like the complexity that a person has to deal with when you're in a position of leadership, because I think it's almost going to be the same as P4's comment previously that you always have to see some things beyond your role, and as a leader you have to learn about people of other religions, you have to look around you and see what's happening, you have to listen to people. But in the same sense, like the fact that there's the heart on top, there's still like you and your sense of self and the reason why you even bother to do that in the first place. So when I see this, I see an acknowledgement of the complexity of the people that we are serving and I actually think that's pretty awesome because sometimes people have very simplistic ideas of the people that are around you and we don't even take time to learn about the people that are different from you, because there's an idea that, okay I'm a representative and when I stood I said this is what I stood for, therefore that's all I'm going to focus on; whereas when you get on you're not only just serving those people that voted for you and agreed with you, but everybody else that is involved, so yeah.*

*Dream 2 (Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*What I get from it is, as a leader you mustn't get lost in anything. You must always have something, someone that you are accountable to because at the top it's the Cross. As much as you're going to get stressed and at times you're going to feel like saying the most un-Christian things or doing the most un-Christian things, but you still go and every day you are there reading your Bible. You are there saying, 'yes I did this, I'm sorry God, let's move on' you know, 'please forgive me' and then you start again. You don't change who you are as a leader because what happens is, things may hit you from different directions and you might feel like, okay, they seem stronger, let's just go with them; whereas you know that what the goal was, was to go in a certain direction but because someone has come seeming as if they've got stronger... they*

*are the stronger side, you go with them. So yeah, that's what I think, like there's always a reference point.*

Nonetheless, it appears that a student leader, who takes a different position from a Christian one, may be seen as a lesser leader or outside the scope of *true leader* – as in the quotation below – and hence I suggest this might be related to the idea of a scripted identity (Simon & Gagnon, 2003) in student leadership. The essence of such an identity would refer to certain rules of engagement (Gergen, 2015; Foucault, 1978; Slife & Richardson, 2011) which might end up as rules of survival in the environment (Konrath et al., 2006). This may create difficulty for those who do not subscribe to Christian principles in terms of finding a place in student leadership as well as meaning and belonging – potentially as indicated in the quotation of Dream 2, P5 above. Thus, seeing that developing student leadership identity is shown to be an important task to settle matters in the social construction of student leadership in a South African university, those who do not take up Christian principles may never resolve this task and may find themselves perpetually trapped in the quest to retain connections with their peers. As a result, student leaders may assume Christian ideas (or identity) as a means to be accepted and be taken seriously in this environment.

*Dream 2(Rbf, conversation, P3):*

*As much as you're going to get stressed and at times you're going to feel like saying the most un-Christian things or doing the most un-Christian things, but you still go and every day you are there reading your Bible.*

#### *5.4.1.2 The Christian script*

The discussion above concerning the exploration of religion points to how student leaders find their identity within the religion discourse. Although they are exploring religion, it appears that Christianity appears to be a benchmark or a 'go to' reference point when doing so. In context, this scenario may be expected, given the widespread practice or affiliation with Christianity in South Africa (Jenkins, 2006, 2014) as well as the dominant involvement of the church regarding the political status of the country (Joseph, 2013; Kuperus, 2011; Lotter, 1992). The phenomenon of the extensive practice of Christianity in South Africa could thus describe aspects of the collective

unconscious, not only of the student leaders but also of their South African context; thus affording insight into their collective unconscious in terms of this thesis. The Christian script or Christianity is therefore apparently integral and necessary to the resolution of identity in student leadership. I specifically elevate the said script regarding identity and religion as in the data it does appear to claim power over other religions.

The given script appears to be brought to the centre of the talk about religion by means of symbolism and metaphors as well as specific references to the Bible and Bible verses in the data gathering process. The following quotations serve as examples:

*Dream 2 (Rwm, dream, P2):*

*And I should say, what happened this morning – very, very amazing but very scary as well – is when I read my Bible it said in Mark 9 verse 35, and I don't actually read the English Bible, but this day I did. (Laughter) And it said, if anyone would be first he must be last of all and servant of all – and I was just a bit shocked, that's why I had to put it there.*

*Dream 4 (Rbm, association, P6):*

*She obviously made the association to Mary, well not actually, but I think there was a point where Mary came with John the Baptist's mother and then the stomachs were like, what I'm saying – the babies actually got excited because they were in each other's presence so I just think that's an interesting analogy to bring a baby... that liveliness, that growing phase. I think it can be associated with that.*

*Dream 4 (Rbf, dream, P3):*

*It reminded me of a time when my mom used to say her aunt used to tell her about nightmares and about how sometimes you'd feel like this, something pushing you down. So, all I was saying at that time was, 'in the Name of Jesus, in the Name of Jesus' because I just needed to wake up. And when I was awake I was like (sighs) 'thank you'. And then...*

The next quotation, where reference to the Cross is made, serves as an example of a symbol from Christianity that is used in the talk about student leadership. This is the same quotation used in the previous section to show how student leaders have decided to retain Christianity as their reference point and compass.

*Dream 2(Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*What I get from it is, as a leader you mustn't get lost in anything. You must always have something, someone that you are accountable to because at the top it's the Cross. As much as you're going to get stressed and at times you're going to feel like saying the most un-Christian things or doing the most un-Christian things, but you still go and every day you are there reading your Bible. You are there saying, 'yes I did this, I'm sorry God, let's move on' you know, 'please forgive me' and then you start again..... So yeah, that's what I think, like there's always a reference point.*

In the literature Boys (1994), Cones (2000) and Maher (2000) have indicated that the Cross (or the Holy Cross) conveys the importance of the central tenets of Christianity and has remained an identification symbol for Christianity over millennia. Having heard that students refer to the church in seeking identity in leadership (Le Grange, 2011), I would like to assume that this is what they will be aware of and possibly identify with. The above quotation allows me to think that while religion as a theme or a field might be a source of identity as regards student leadership, Christianity is regarded as the main source of instruction. The latter is also evident in the following quotation:

*Dream 2 (Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*...not my black neighbour, but my neighbour, it makes it almost easy to explain things like, oh but you're a Christian, how do you hang out with these people at the Square that are doing this and they've got tattoos and your body is a temple of Christ and all these things, and you're having to refer back to... no matter, even if you make a mistake as a leader, having to refer back to what your main point is, I think that gives you comfort, knowing that I can refer back to a central point that's my foundation that, yeah I do all these things, I get what you're saying, telling me about this book and that book*

*and this book and the Bible and what's happening, but I still remember what Mark 12, my love for my neighbour and that's it...*

In addition, it seems clear that the student leaders refer to Christianity for examples of leadership, potentially as another way of resolving the issues of identity in student leadership. The students have alluded to the Christian attitude of being selfless, but also to leadership symbols such as Moses, which I discuss later in the text. An illustration of adopting a selfless attitude in leadership of this type is found in the quotation below. I note that this quotation is taken from a dream (Dream 2) that has dominated and introduced the talk about religion and Christianity in the data.

*Dreamer in Dream 2(Rwm, dream, P2):*

*How can I say, the first principle for me as a leader, and that comes from my religion, is love. So it's being a selfless leader, not thinking about yourself, putting yourself in any kind of position to, how can I say, to accommodate others*

The dreamer continues talking about this assumption of a selfless leader's attitude on two other occasions during the same discussion of Dream 2; these quotations follow:

*This is why I'm giving just some... and from that, it went from myself to being a selfless leader and especially being exposed to on campus, for instance you should look different and listen differently to people of various races, various backgrounds, social classes, gender and religion.*

*The thing, it's inter-linked. Before I go to bed at night, especially wanting to be a selfless leader, I see all the faces that I had seen throughout the day and I know if you guys have ever seen like in a movie whereby the pictures flash so quickly, and then I have this picture in my mind of every person that I saw that day – sad, happy, excited, astonished, anxious – I just think about it and that's as I fall asleep and I just think how can I use that person that was happy to make the others that were sad...*

Thus religion, the Christian script in particular, seems to be valuable in terms of how student leaders come to understand themselves as leaders, how they begin to understand their role and moreover how their informal role appears to inform their

formal one. It appears that identity in student leadership is understood in the context of religion – particularly Christianity. Thus, the diversity dynamics at play or even the defended student leadership identity would be expected to be informed by religion, especially Christianity.

## 5.5 RELATIONAL DYNAMICS

Relational dynamics refers to the way in which members of student leadership demonstrate interaction with each other and others who are not in such leadership. As has been observed already, the relational dynamics appear to be facilitated by a defended student leadership identity, sourced from the pursuit of the true leadership which constituted student leadership identity. This true leadership may not always constitute the point of agreement amongst student leadership. Lack of agreement thus seems to be the base for interactional dynamics because student leaders aim to find a shared or common vision as a way to co-exist harmoniously. Hence the potential assumption of a defended student leadership identity as an outcome. This has been indicated as inducing anxiety, thereby manifesting in splits in the interaction which I have termed interactional splitting dynamics. The extract below from Dream 6 illustrates a conversation from the transcription to show the student leaders' sense of seeking a shared or common vision:

*Dream 6 (Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*But I think that we don't stand with each other for the major issues, you know, and I think when that happens, like she says, there's obviously a whole lot of shots fired and I think that's the image I get is that the student leaders who need some form of common vision from SRC to faculty houses to service providers, and we know what the key issues are and that's what we're going for in our very different ways. And I mean, we don't have that. We definitely don't have it.*

*Dream 6 (Rwf, conversation, P3):*

*It's what I wanted to say.*

*Dream 6 (Rwm, conversation, P2):*



*I think what I see right in the face is a very concerned leader. So it's someone who's thinking and wondering and it actually links very good to the story, well, the dream that you told us whereby you know in a team everyone's got your back; until that moment where your mother got shot. The thing is, as a leader you need to be concerned about everyone in your team because you know everyone has got their back. You know that guy, the other people that shot the guns, you know they have the skill, they can do this; but as soon as your mother got shot then you turned around and you like said, okay, now it's my time to help. I think you have to be conscious about the feelings of people in your team, so as soon as you can identify that there's something wrong with someone physically, emotionally, I don't know at what level, but then to identify them as soon as possible, because it also looks to me like that face when someone is talking to you and you're not really taking it in because you're thinking about someone else of this person and their face and then just, what can I do to change their lives.*

#### *5.5.1.1 Relational splitting dynamics*

The term 'interactional splitting dynamics' refers to the different ways in which splits happen in the conversation as well as to the conflicts that are contained within the latter or that are implicated by it. The concept of relational splitting can be demonstrated in the quotations below:

##### *Extracts from Dream 3, in all three levels*

Extracts from dream level

*Dream 3, (Rbf, dream, P4):*

*Let me be specific because I know if I say, how big is big? Like the distance between your background singers and you as a solo artist, how far is it?*

*Dream 3 (Rbf, dream, P3):*

*Okay, the two different dreams – in dream 1 it was like two steps. Last week it was like 10, 15, like I couldn't see them. I could see their figures because they were dressed in white.*

*Dream 3 (Rbm, dream, P2):*

*It's basically, she's supposed to sing a solo with everyone in the background – that's her team. And then she's got like backup singers and they started coughing and there's no time to sing.*

*Dream 3 (Rbf, dream, P5):*

*Yoh!*

Extracts from association level

*Dream 3 (Rbm, association, P6):*

*Yeah no, I'm not that deep. (All laughing) The association for me is that scene from Pitch Perfect when she sings, (sings) 'Shall we get down' and everyone's like... 'wa-wa' that one there. So, it really feels like maybe you're about to sing your own tune, a very different tune and people are just on, 'I don't know the song, what is she saying? What?' That for me.*

*Dream 3 (Rwm, association P2):*

*Can I just add to what you were saying, it's like they see what she should do but it's kind of obvious. It's like watching a horror movie, you just don't go there. (All laughing)*

*Dream 3 (Rbf, association, P4 and chorus):*

*Don't go there yeah.*

*Dream 3 (Rm, association, P2):*

*And you yourself can actually see it but it's just in the moment, it's making you blind.*

Extract from conversation level

*Dream 3 (Rwm, conversation P2):*

*If I can say, and it's removing myself from the dream. What I see is like the individual, as a leader, and these are the followers of the leader but the leader is doing something gross, like something that they aren't liking and they're moving back. And that's why we as leaders should be wary about how are we offending people, doing certain things that are gross to them. It might not be spitting or whatever on them, but I mean, it might be through words or actions because that's going to push people away.*

Relational splitting, as generally represented in the extracts above, takes the form of 'us and them' groups in various ways in the rest of the data. The following quotation appears to indicate interactional splitting, in student leadership specifically.

*Dream 6 (Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*One thing that I pick up about this is that there's a common critique I think sometimes that student leaders don't stand together often enough and I think we don't fight for each other often. I'm not saying it's us against the students, because we are the other half of the face, you know what I mean, we are them. But I think that we don't stand with each other for the major issues, you know, and I think when that happens, like she says, there's obviously a whole lot of shots fired and I think that's the image I get is that the student leaders who need some form of common vision,..... and we know what the key issues are and that's what we're going for in our very different ways. And I mean, we don't have that. We definitely don't have it*

The quotation above might represent evidence to show that interactional splitting dynamics could occur. However, some of the evidence is not included in direct quotations; rather, it is found in the interaction of the participants in terms of who speaks when, who holds which position on a particular issue, who holds a dominant discourse on a certain theme and so forth. Thus, the opposing or diverse positions presented as occurring in student leadership seem to leave its members open to employing different approaches and agendas for the same issues. It also appears there may be a level of frustration that is indicated in the quotation above, expressing the view that as student leaders they do not stand together sufficiently. This frustration

could also be the resistance to the splits that happen in the group as well as potentially the denial that the splits exist; maybe sometimes without exploring the purpose that the splits might serve with respect to working with diversity dynamics. The existence of the splits is referred to in the literature as well, mostly as racial splits, as was indicated above.

While the splitting that takes place in this instance seems to include splitting based on religion, race, gender; class, role in student leadership or not, language of preference (between English and Afrikaans) as well as the perceived appropriate choice in approach when confronted with issues of contention, I mainly discuss the interactional splitting dynamics based on race and gender (Le Grange, 2011; Shefer, 2010; Thaver, 2009) as they are the most salient, with the racial splitting constituting the major part of the interactional splitting dynamics (Higham, 2012; Kamper & Steyn, 2011; Rothberg, 2012; Walker & Mkwanazi, 2015) in the social construction of student leadership in a South African university. The quotation below shows how this concept is introduced into the conversation.

*Dream 2 (Rwm, conversation, P2):*

*It's like, me as a leader, all of these qualities should be equally viewed. You can't... it's not... I don't judge you by your religion, I don't judge you by your gender, what class you are or what colour you are, so everything needs... And it's all in your heart. You see someone for what they are in their heart*

I expand on the following issues and evidence them in the sections that ensue: the containment of diversity, the conversation about it as well as the anxiety about diversity dynamics and the conversation regarding these, including the management of inter-male dynamics, the female vs. male dynamics and other diversity dynamics. These have been demonstrated and organised in racial splits. I propose that this could be the purpose that race has served in this conversation. The way in which race has filled space in this conversation goes beyond its role to contain gender splits but also presents itself in discussions about power and agency, issues of connecting and disconnecting as well as the trade-off between violence and peace.

*a. Racial and gender splitting dynamics*

Although racial splitting seems to be the dominant discourse in the conversation; it appears that racial and gender splitting co-occur in this conversation. The reflection that I would like to introduce at this point is to pay attention to the suggestion made by Soudien (2010): that race fills every space which is vacant in Le Grange (2011), pp. 6. While student leaders appear to be attempting to find a method to work with the dynamics of diversity in the interaction, while in the process of the social construction of student leadership in a South African university, the space which would represent what could be called the solution is currently vacant. As a result, during the process, race seems to fill the apparently empty space. This suggests to me that race could be used to manage the anxiety that appears to be experienced in student leadership.

According to the data gathered for this research, the P1 (white female student leader) shared dream 1, making her the first to share a dream drawing. This may be indicative of the foremost position or role that this leader takes on behalf of the environment in relation to trust. This is important to note as trust has been identified by the group as a key component in terms of holding the current conversation. Also, this could represent an assertion in terms of the pecking order according to race that may be unconsciously suggested by the group. Moreover, looking at this from another perspective and also being informed by the traditional patriarchal ideas of male vs. female dynamics (Marschall, 2004; Shever, 2010), it may be the case that white females are unconsciously placed in the forefront by white males to present a bargaining position in the diversity dynamic. There seems to be no support in the literature for this statement that I am making; thus I present it merely as a possible interpretation of the dynamic. As such, it is as if white male student leaders seem to place white female student leaders in the forefront, perhaps to confront the black male student leaders on their behalf. The female student leaders, white and black, may be seen to embody this attitude given the patriarchal and traditionally presumed concepts of women (Bierra, 2014; Hogg, 2015): that they are soft, gentle and harmless. These presumptions could form the basis of a bargaining position to hold a conversation as might be preferred by the male student leader. This position may be presented as a necessary measure to set the tone about the conditions of the conversation, given that it happens in an anxious climate.

Consequently, I noted that black student leaders began to take part in the conversation after all the white student leaders in the group had used their opportunity to present their dream drawings as a task for the data gathering. This may have something to do with the assertion of the pecking order or a submission to the pecking order; in terms of race but then actually placed in gender. While the white race group no longer enjoys its previous privilege, such a position may have been internalised (Johnson, 2001; Thaver, 2009, Swartz, et al., 2014). Unconsciously, the black female student leaders may be conveying a message regarding their current 'top' position in the pecking order by clustering their talk directly after the clustered talk of white student leaders – this idea inspired by my interaction with Neuman (2012). The dynamic of the black male having the final say continues to play out here as well (Johnson, 2001). In black culture it has been widely accepted that the man's voice is the dominant one over the female (Rudwick & Shange, 2006). This I have also experienced subjectively; even more convinced by the Setswana saying in translation that 'he who is last is king'. An intriguing characteristic of the black females in this group is that they have adopted what seems to be a feminist position (Bierra, 2014), which in my understanding would advocate for equal opportunities across genders, but they contract the dominance of the male voice over the female voice. Spencer (2009) could help us to understand this, though, as she suggests that black female student leaders in the post-apartheid period may find themselves in between cultural perspectives, as regards the position that they take in interaction. The black male asserts himself in the conversation by using the words: *"That's just from a male perspective"* (dream 6, P6).

The black female voice appears to lament the situation in Dream 5 by articulating a glass ceiling that cannot be broken through. This is evidenced in the quotation below:

*Dreamer in dream 5 (Rbf, dream, P5):*

*After the big waves was like sort of like an island and it was all nice and stuff and the people were smiling and they were all happy and some of them were the same people that was standing there at the cliff with me in the beginning, that motivated me to jump. But when I got to the shore of the beach there was like... and you could see through it, but it was a glass, so I couldn't get in. I couldn't get onto the island. Yeah, that's basically it. I was standing there... on the last part of the shore it was while I was*

*standing now in the water on the beach and there were all these happy people and I was just like standing there and I couldn't get through. Yeah, definitely.*

Possibly, the burden is described through the quotation from Dream 3 below where a leader may have a specific vision but the people whom she or he expects to follow this vision seem to be passive or even resistant.

*Rwm, P2 in the dream:*

*It's basically, she's supposed to sing a solo with everyone in the background – that's her team. And then she's got like backup singers and they started coughing and there's no time to sing.*

*(Dreamer in dream 3, Rbf, conversation, P3):*

*May I say why I linked these two dreams to leadership is that the coughing did start and we did carry on performing and we won. So in the first one, associating that it means that there will be times where your team will come and be with you but there are times where you need to go and find something beyond your team, whether it's management, whether it's your team leader, whatever, but sometimes you need to go beyond your team in order to achieve your goals set for your team.*

I further notice that the black student leader voice has been most vocal about the imbalances in the greater South African system which in the end impact student leadership or the issues it discusses in this context. The latter particularly seems to affect females; moreover, abled ones. I have not found much literature that investigates this in its particular sense. What is known however, in terms of the South African system, is that the higher education sector has been preoccupied with making the playing field level since the end of apartheid (Higham, 2012; Woodrooffe, 2011). In addition, the Black Economic Empowerment system, which has had an effect on leadership ranks, has prioritised black females (Chiloane-Tsoka, 2012, 2013; Hills, 2015). Potentially this has been collectively internalised at an unconscious level and has resulted in delegating the transformation conversation as a point of focus for higher education in South Africa to black students, particularly females and abled students. It

is further interesting for me in the light of this study in terms of the positioning of females by themselves and by males; to learn that some studies (Daniels & Damons, 2011) on the topic of Higher Education transformation have only involved females

The black male student leaders seem to adopt a type of 'mafia stance' as referred to in the transcription and quotation below. In this stance, the black male student leader is able to be influential but should remain untouched and do as little work as possible: rather as if remaining invincible.

*Dream 6, association, F2:*

*It also feels a little bit like that, you know, where the Mafia boss is always protected, doesn't matter what, you know. So it also feels a little bit like that. It's not only the champion that's protected it's the Mafia boss as well. So that's my one thought.*

The words he (Rbm) uses, such as 'I want to be cool with everyone' and 'I think we as a generation have the mandate to be people's champions' (Dream 6, association, P6), seem to refer to this. The full quotation is reproduced below. While some sources have been found (Edward, 1984; Ratele, 2003), the literature seems to have been rather silent regarding the black male student; all the more so in student leadership, in this kind of setting especially.

Extracts from Dream 6, evidence for the position or positioning of the black male student leader, firstly as observed by others then in the words of the dreamer, follow:

*Rbf, association, P3:*

*I got something different on that because he just said 'boer' and touch a kid and she said 'gangsterism' and he's going to a farm and there are people fighting for him, there are people fighting against him and yeah. And there's just chaos. So for me it's like all these things that you'd want to achieve as in I want to chill on my farm and have fudge (laughter) and then but also, eish, there's that child there that doesn't have much and then there's that one who doesn't have much but is killing this one because they don't have much, you know. That's what all of that...*



Rbm, association, P6:

*That's just from a male perspective..... I want to be cool with everyone, I mean, like I want to... you know? But then after this I think it reinforced that whole thing that I think we as a generation have the mandate to be people's champions. Like I need to be able to hang out on a farm and speak to a 'boer' and hear his fears, the same way that I can hear the fears of a kid in a township. I think that's what being a people's champion all is about.*

This 'mafia stance' that has been adopted by the black males seems similar to the position that the white males have taken towards white females. Ratele (2003) points out that the construction of black males should be in the light of seeing them simply as males rather than black males, as the data has suggested in this research. Somewhat like white males, therefore, it is as if black males in the group are sending black females to confront white males on their behalf. In effect, the females seem to be set up against each other, or play into the role of being opposed to each other on behalf of the males, in their respective racial groupings. Their submissive behaviour in taking up this role could be displayed in the representation of the metaphor of Mary, mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, used in the transcription; who both demonstrated submission and support for one another in living out this submissive nature. On the other hand, the opposite of the position adopted by the males might imply that the males are invisible as opposed to invincible.

To demonstrate the racialised gender split, therefore, the issues brought up by the males in student leadership have appeared to be dominantly discussed and in addition facilitated by females of the black racial group, presumably unconsciously on the former's behalf. In terms of the literature on the way women take up roles in interaction, the latter may be related to what Gilligan (1982) has called the crisis of identity vs. the crisis of moral belief. This is when a female experiences conflict in separating her voice from the voice of others. Given the anxiety that the student leaders have indicated in the foregoing research, the observation made above could comprise the female student leaders' way to perpetuate the expectation of their contextual credentials, which creates a means of coping with the situation. This leads me to the next section,

on connections and disconnections, as contained in racialised gender splitting dynamics.

*b. Connections and disconnections as contained in racialised gender splitting dynamics*

The role of connecting in terms of the data of this research can be said to have been delegated to females in student leadership. This delegation could be the agency of males in student leadership, most probably at an unconscious level of interaction. The females' agency, at potentially the same level of interaction as the males, can be observed in their taking up of the delegated task as well as in accepting the task as theirs to engage with.

Those in this study who have talked about the interpersonal connections and disconnections are females. Culturally and historically, females have been identified as those in society who are relational and who are concerned with issues of relationships (Hogg, 2015). This may therefore be used to infer that, unconsciously, the females in the group have been tasked by the collective to be concerned with this matter of relationships; hence the collective may have contained this matter within females. The females in this conversation might consequently have lived out this role and constructed the female position in student leadership in a South African university as one that is concerned with matters of connecting. In a study concerned with women leaders' discursive constructions of leadership, it has been found that females in leadership are concerned with making a positive contribution to the world as well as behaving ethically (Fine, 2009). According to Gilligan (1982), females could tend to take up a position of the ethic of care, which refers to deciding on right and / or wrong actions based on a responsibility and loyalty towards individuals with whom close, solid and meaningful relationships exist (Gilligan, 1982). This principle prioritises the sustaining relationships where the individual acquires identity in being connected (Kroeger-Mappes, 1994). Gilligan suggests that women have a tendency to think of their identity in terms of relationships (Gilligan, 1982). Therefore, the ethic of care is central to helping one understand the concern of female student leaders with the responsibility for relationships, as well as the nurturing of these; hence the maintaining of connections and disconnections (Buckler & Adams, 2005). This notion is also

supported by other sources such as Butler (1999) whose work has been informed by Foucault; as well as Kigozi (2006) and Maxwell (2006).

The extract below (associations) from dream 3 could illustrate the concern for care and nurturance:

*Rbf, P3:*

*I'm associating what you were saying with a lot of things (Laughing) because mom is a nurse. To be specific, she's a TB nurse.*

*F1 and chorus:*

*Wow! (All laughing, talking.)*

*Rbf, P3:*

*She will always complain about how her MDR and her XDR patients are not taking their medications but they feel like they're going to die. And right now I feel like that's where they die, or they're in that person, they control...*

*Rbm, P6:*

*So it's like you're on that medication.*

*Rbf, P3:*

*(Half laughs) No, it's like the darkness right now to me, after she said that, is that it's either one of two. It's either you make it over or you fall into the darkness. So, it's either you die or you stop taking your medication.*

The quotations above help to evidence the inference made that female student leaders are concerned with issues of connections, as would be expected (Gilligan, 1982). Since the assumption of the ethic of care is a socially constructed notion (Burr, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010), matters of connecting seem to be playing out differently in terms

of the different racial groups, according to this data. As observed, the voices of white female student leaders take the position of interpersonal relating, while the black female student leaders' voices adopt that of interpersonal disconnecting. The split is evidenced by the white female student leaders' voices being preoccupied with issues of trust, being concerned for ways to connect, while the black student leaders' voices present dreams about loss, disappointment and struggle as a result of these factors that imply withdrawal and isolation from being connected. The expectation would be that the black females would be the ones concerned with interpersonal connecting, on the basis of the history of South Africa, where black females occupied jobs that focused on care and serving such as nursing (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010; Joyner, Shefer & Smit, 2014; Marais, 2016), as also in the quotation above. This data however, suggests something different, which may therefore imply that the black female could be currently dealing with the notion of not having to be concerned with interpersonal connecting, or concluding that it may not be necessary any longer. Moreover, the concern for interpersonal disconnecting evidenced by black female student leaders may also suggest that black females might be beginning to entertain interpersonal disconnecting as a possibility for them in terms of the position that they take in the group.

While this was a new learning for me, it has been identified elsewhere in the literature (Kgantsi, Fontein & Temane, 2015). This may consequently allude to the notion that it is easier for white females to create connections (Thaver, 2009); thus being comfortable with performing the foremost role in relation to trust as mentioned earlier. As a result, the opposite may be potentially true in that it could be difficult for black females in the context of higher education to create connections (Higham, 2012; Sharp & Vally, 2009; Thaver, 2009). As a result they function in the conversation, whether from a social, discursive or psychic perspective, in a way that encourages or suggests disconnections. This may be the case, given that white females may feel more welcome in a South African university than black ones owing to the history of South Africa and the higher education sector (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Higham, 2012; Seabi et al., 2012). Furthermore, this may also offer the perspective that white females feel more connected to others than black females. This has not become clear since the focus of this study was not necessarily placed on who or what the two groups of females are speaking for.

### *c. Issues of power and agency*

Another issue that is presented as in a racial split is that of the appropriate approach to conflict resolution and the way forward in terms of working with diversity. Against the backdrop of student leadership being defined in terms of formal and informal student leadership, the dynamics of power and agency come into play in the interaction. I understand these dynamics to concern the working assumption that student leadership may have the power to act in a certain manner. In the dynamic, the power would be handed to student leadership as an enabler to act in terms of how formal student leadership is understood, while agency takes the form of the action of student leadership that is mediated socially by the dynamics in the collective unconscious. Regarding how the action (in power or agency) of student leadership is perceived by those within student leadership itself or others who are not in student leadership; student leaders will tend to act in such a way as to induce favour (Bierria, 2014). This means that student leaders tend to take on the position of power or agency to conveniently seek favour from others within or outside student leadership depending on the desired outcome that they seek which mostly involves making others happy.

The above described ideas is evident in *people around can be happy* (dream 1) as well as from dream 5, (the conversation); *then eventually the goal will be achieved and people will be happy*. Inferring from these previous references from dream 1 and 5, it appears that a student leader's being able to act or socially perform in a certain manner – exercising agency (Sugarman & Martin, 2011) – is understood in the same way by the participants in this research. This shared understanding seems to refer to the ability to act to cause or assist 'people' to be happy. I recognise the 'people' to be fellow student leaders and the general student population. However, it appears that the student leaders act out this shared understanding in a racial split. For example, from the data gathering session it became clear that different racial groups may be exercising agency regarding various issues in the interests of varying student groups. This response might then position the student leaders to use power to advance these causes. I make sense of this therefore as an issue that speaks to the dynamics of power and agency: the power to realise that as a group, student leadership is powerful or able to achieve certain goals (Sercombe, 2010), while on the other hand it must serve the interests of the group represented (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014).

Consequently the display of racial splits gives me the impression that student leadership appears to be a voice for the respective represented racial groups in the university, also given the assumptions regarding student leadership previously noted in the literature (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). The following quotations point to the difference in racial splitting in terms of power and agency:

*Dream 5 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*Let's say we have a goal and you have a different idea of how to pursue the goal, there will be times when your entire committee drops you and you're literally alone. Like now I'm like that (participant says her name that is in Sesotho) the radical girl in the SRC. That's who I am because I will pursue something even if everyone else doesn't agree – it's not my problem – because you know, sometimes I just feel like my team mates don't get it and that's the parts where I'm alone in the waves*

In their article, Holloway and Jefferson (2005) have emphasised that agency is contained in an unconscious conflict of socially mediated discourse as well as psychic aspects. In consequence, agency is assumed also to be related to addressing the position of being dominated, suggesting power on the part of the one taking action (Holloway & Jefferson, 2005). In other sources agency is perceived as resistance to the status quo or offering support for practices that are structurally organised in the social system (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014).

As a result, the dynamics of power and agency are implicated by the student leaders' identity as students, as in the quotations below.

*Dream 6(Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*I'm not saying it's us against the students, because we are the other half of the face, you know what I mean, we are them.*

Extracts from utterances by the black participants in Dream 6, conversation

*Rbf, P3:*

*Another thing I think of is as student leaders, most of the time we forget that we are students.*

*Rbm, P6:*

*We are definitely [students].*

*Rbf, P3:*

*You know, we forget that as much as we are student leaders, the first thing is, we are also students and that half face means I forgot that, hey, I also am a student and it also manifested in the way we speak, you know? It's like, 'yeah, N, you know you and I, but the students are...' – that's how it happens and we keep forgetting that even you, you are the students that are doing whatever.*

*Rbf, P4:*

*Sure.*

*Rbf, P5:*

*In the same way that when you regard yourself separate from the student body*

Thus, the student leadership decision to adopt a position of power or of agency is indicated in a racial split that seems to be informed by identity as a student leader or identity as a student. The student leaders' concern based on the dynamic between formal and informal student leadership could serve as motivation regarding the student leaders' need to respond based on what is important as informed by the dynamics in the racial splitting. I then propose that the racial splitting latter would naturally affect the relational dynamics. The next discussion focuses further on this proposal.

*d. Connections and disconnections in the Trade off: Peace vs. Violence*

The observation made from the data is that the dynamics of power and agency are evident in the way members of student leadership trade off the approach of violence

vs. peace so as to make connections and disconnections. I am noting in the previous sentence that I intentionally do not refer to connections or disconnections; or even connections *and/or* disconnections because from the data it appears that the making of connections and disconnections occurs simultaneously.

*Dream 1 (Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*To me it's more of how she kept saying there's always someone there, there's always someone there. And when I relate it to leadership it's basically that, and regardless of whichever institution you are at, there will always be someone there. They might not always be on your side, but you might have the same goal at the end of the day. You might not work about it in the same way, but there will always be someone who wants to reach where you want to go.*

As such, it seems that a connection is not made without creating a disconnection, and vice versa. In the instance of the approach of violence vs. peace, black student leaders (male and female) seem to utter the discourse of violence while white student leaders (male and female) apparently support peaceful discourse; these being the primary, dominant discourses of each group. The quotation below demonstrates how the white student voice brings the discourse of trust to the fore while simultaneously talking about appearing to be selfless and accommodating to others:

*In Dream 1(Rwf, dream, P1):*

*I also see it like really now with all the trust now, because I was thinking of actually catching this thing, like a staff, what it would be like, bring the bag, and you must trust that I've got the snake and you must bring the bag, you know what I mean. And I must put it in and you're holding the bag so you must trust that whoever throws the ladder will throw it right, you know what I mean. You can't be like, I'm going to do it all, stuff and... You know what I mean. So I think it also alludes to exactly what she's saying, trusting people which is also important in student leadership.*

*White Female in Dream 4:*



*I'll also say I can see trust again here. Sometimes a team doesn't believe in a person, or believes a person is able to do something. Like here it looks like they're actually stressing about her doing something, but if you sometimes just give someone a little bit more space and just believing that they will at the end succeed in it, so definitely trust in there.*

*White Male in Dream 2:*

*So it's being a selfless leader, not thinking about yourself, putting yourself in any kind of position to, how can I say, to accommodate others*

The black student voice is, at the same time, occupied (in the subconscious) with a discourse that suggests violence: the association below and discussion with another participant involve shooting and represent a commotion of sorts: a particularly upsetting or traumatic scenario and waking up to having miscarried.

Extract from Dream 6

*Black Male in Dream 6, (association):*

*we were driving, I wasn't driving, but (we were driving); but there were shot like 'pah-pah-pah' and then this guy just got out of the car and said, 'Listen, you've got to get out'. So I ran. And then they were shot and I woke up.*

*Black Female in Dream 6:*

*Who was your mom shooting at?*

Quotation from Dream 4

*Dreamer in dream 4 (Rbf, dream, P4):*

*Then at the end of it I felt my stomach and there was nothing and I woke up crying.*

At the same time, though, either group seems to carry the discourses for the other group as they tend to pick these discourses up as they become convenient. These discourses refer to the approaches that are employed to resolve the anxiety within the interpersonal dynamics in this conversation; thus embodying a means of connecting and disconnecting. The discourse of violence appears to be congruent with the apartheid period while the peaceful discourse could be congruent with the idealised, rainbow nation, post-apartheid discourse (Thaver, 2009). This might imply that the black student leaders may be preoccupied with the themes associated with the apartheid setting, whereas white student leaders might be preoccupied with themes that have to do with the post-apartheid era (Leibowitz, et. al, 2007; Swartz et al., 2014). In both instances, violent or peaceful, the respective preoccupations may represent what each group perceives as a threat, hence experiencing anxiety in that regard (Boydell, 2009; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

It is interesting how passive aggression is potentially used to frame the talk that is used to facilitate the dynamics of power and agency in relation to the trade-off between violence and peace. The white student leader voice talks about South Africans who need to move on by saying, *'but you've been freed,.....this is the time that you have to go forward'* (Dream 6, association, P1); impressionistically referring to the black student leaders in the group. Leibowitz et al. (2007) found similar defenses from white students in their study being used to deny the impact of the South African past. In response the black student leader voice talks about *'everyone keeps saying, keep Mandela legacy'* (Dream 6, association, P3); seemingly addressing the white student leader group. In both instances it could be the case that passive aggression is a socially acceptable tool used to contain the anxiety in the conversation while the appropriate conflict resolution approach is being negotiated amongst the different sides of the split. I make this point because I recognise that in both instances neither of the two representatives directly addressed anyone specifically but instead spoke in general terms; nevertheless, they could be using language to deliver a message to either side of the racial split (Daniels & Damons, 2011). In another way, it seems that passive aggression could be employed to demonstrate violence in a not so obvious manner. For example, I am referring to any situation when white student leaders seem to advocate for a peaceful approach. It could look and sound like peace as known to others – as in 'not violent' – whilst in fact it may be a way to play out passive aggression

which is actually violence or violent in nature (Thomson, 2014). Furthermore, according to the literature, passive aggression may be perceived to be less harmful than physical aggression when its intention is to harm the self-regard of the other, while it is also found to be linked to guilt (Williams, Richardson, Hammock & Janit, 2012). Black student leaders could be using passive aggression to cover up or camouflage their inclination towards what is perceived as the violent stance by embracing the Mandela style and continuing to see value in it. In both cases there seem to be stakes that are sought after. While student leaders can be considered to act as individuals (Yeh, Bedford & Yang, 2009), I am more concerned with their actions as influenced by unconscious and socially mediated motivation (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014). Therefore my premise is that it appears that student leadership gains the ability to act as a result of being 'bullied' by the dynamics in the collective unconscious that is embedded in shared meaning (Durrill, 2000; Elliker, Kotze & Coetzee, 2017).

*BF Dream 5 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*...let's say we have a goal and you have a different idea of how to pursue the goal, there will be times when your entire committee drops you and you're literally alone.*

*BF Dream 6 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*In the same way that when you regard yourself separate from the student body, they do the same thing as well. They never look at you as someone who is like them and sometimes I think when we're doing stuff it feels like, if someone let's say at forum, sort of gives the suggestion of what the SRC should be doing and you're just then thinking, does this person think I don't go to class at all?*

In the two quotations above, it appears to be demonstrated that language has been used to indicate and perhaps facilitate disconnections. At the same time, in the quotation from dream 6, it also appears to have been demonstrated how a trade-off between violence vs. peace can be used to create connections amongst student leaders themselves but disconnections from students not in leadership. Thus the play of the said trade-off could be adopted by the student leaders collectively as a tactic to connect with and disconnect from those who are not in student leadership, depending

on how the 'student leadership' organisation has organised itself or positioned itself at a particular point in time. This is supported in addition by the fact that there were times when a black student leader identified with Mandela as a role model, regarding him as similar to Gandhi.

*Dream 6 (Rwm, association, P2):*

*I also get this feeling of like old-school leadership, like non-fighting with the guns like Ghandi, you know, kind of stuff, Mandela*

The quotation below could help to demonstrate this further.

*Dreamer in Dream 2 (Rwm, dream, P2):*

*For me to know what is important I had to discover myself. I always thought of myself as a lion..... So then I had this dream of me becoming a fox, right. (Laughter) So P6 and I had a lot of discussions, so he really knows me pretty well. The reason why I think he showed me to become a fox was that to adapt to any kind of situation.*

The quotation above illustrates the influence of a black male student leader on a white male one. This affords an example of when the groups in a racial split employ discourses as they become convenient. The white male mentions how he used to see himself as a lion: a symbol of protection and the king of the jungle who will protect its territory. This may mean that in a student leadership situation, the student leader might feel the responsibility to take care of things at all costs. While a lion has been identified as a symbol to be feared, which could be linked to violence, the student leader will be doing this by implementing a selfless attitude, which alludes to the peaceful approach that the white male student is talking about.

The black male has influenced him to consider being a fox, which implies the ability to adapt to any kind of situation. The same black student has used these words in another place in the conversation;

*Dreamer in Dream 6 (Rbm, dream, P6):*

*And then at the beginning of the year I started having weird dreams where the first one, we were driving, I wasn't driving, but (we were driving); but there were shot like 'pah-pah-pah' and then this guy just got out of the car and said, 'Listen, you've got to get out'. So I ran. And then they were shot and I woke up. .... I'm looking at the oaks, there's a guy driving, there are two guys next to me, I can't see their faces at all but then shots are fired again....*

The discourse of violence has been identified in the dream that he has shared. This is not to say that he has influenced the white male student to consider another approach because he (the black male) is a violent person; but he appears to use language to indicate that violence could be a construct within student leadership. This is the inference I make given that the black male seems to express the discourse of violence in Dream 6 where he also talks about the ability to adapt to different situations. In the previously mentioned quotation of Dream 2, the black male is being reported by the white male as having influenced him to consider ways of dealing with situations other than the selfless, accommodating manner he seems to advocate for. If so, then there is a need for being able to adapt to any kind of situation; because it is not always as peaceful as the white male has mentioned in terms of the context or even as he has believed himself. As a result, student leadership can be characterised as a game that is played and a dance of exchange where various kinds of gain can be acquired. In the next section of the discussion I discuss the game and the dance: whose gain?

*e. The game and the dance: Whose: gain?*

*Dream 4 (Rm, association, chorus):*

*Just play the game.*

This discourse of the game and the dance appears to show up in a dynamic of tension that has to do with answering the question: whose gain?

This tension has at times brought about situations of competition amongst the student leaders (Luescher-Mamashela, 2014); also as a result of how much time is spent on which side of the tension. In addition such situations have seemed to be concerned

with a power struggle in terms of formal or informal student leadership. Quotations below are reported in an attempt to demonstrate this theme.

Quotations showing the game and the dance

*Dream 5 (Rwf, conversation, P1):*

*That's also what gets really frustrating. It's not just the person who doesn't want to sign or the person who gives you the word 'no' or the person who says, 'no you can't have your peaceful walk to the admin building for this'. It's also then the people that you are working with as well and if your guys are like in synergy – and it's almost impossible for you guys to all be on the same page so you will fight. And then when you do fight it's like, okay...*

Extract from Dream 6, conversation

*Rbm, P6:*

*I'm not saying it's us against the students, because we are the other half of the face, you know what I mean, we are them.*

*Rbf, P3:*

*Another thing I think of is as student leaders, most of the time we forget that we are students.*

*Rbm, P6:*

*We are definitely [students].*

*Rbf, P3:*

*You know, we forget that as much as we are student leaders, the first thing is, we are also students and that half face means I forgot that, hey, I also am a student and it also manifested in the way we speak, you know? It's like, 'yeah, P6, you know you and I,*

*but the students are...’ – that’s how it happens and we keep forgetting that even you, you are the students that are doing whatever.*

There appears to be an issue of trust between the student leaders implied here. If this supposition is legitimate, I want to put forward the notion that student leaders play the game based on assumptions that are potentially meant to protect areas of identity which may be functions of a distorted view of others (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Across the splits, either side of the split could have made assumptions about the other without having been transparent about the assumption (Long, 2011). Because the higher education sector has been identified as predominantly presenting with racial splits (Higham, 2012; Le Grange, 2011; Walker & Mkwanazi, 2015) and since there is the same playing field or dance floor called ‘student leadership’, the two racial groupings could be playing a different game on this same field, ending up with stepping on each other’s toes during the dance on the same dance floor. The following quotations are intended to demonstrate the game and the dance discourse:

*Dream 5 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*That’s also what gets really frustrating. It’s not just the person who doesn’t want to sign or the person who gives you the word ‘no’ or the person who says, ‘no you can’t have your peaceful walk to the admin building for this’. It’s also then the people that you are working with as well and if your guys are like in synergy – and it’s almost impossible for you guys to all be on the same page so you will fight. And then when you do fight it’s like, okay...*

*Dream 3 (Rwf, conversation, P1):*

*If I can add to that, definitely also as a leader you must be able to take the responsibility for your group, even if it’s not always your fault. That’s not what matters. You need to get the trophy, so although they coughed, she’s singing the solo; the people see she’s singing but nothing’s coming out, so that’s the thing I would say definitely you need to take responsibility no matter if it’s your fault or not – you’re the leader.*

In addition, student leadership seems to be like a musical, in which the appropriate dress code is that of 'dressing up'. This appears to come through in the transcription by means of the use of the metaphor of *The Sound of Music*. This is a musical drama film – as a result, implying a performance. As a result I deduce that student leaders may find themselves playing a role according to a script 'in the film' of *The Sound of Music*, which would represent the rules of the game, while in the performance they do a dance which represents finding methods to swiftly move around what they encounter in student leadership. In another way, it could be said that student leadership is a staged performance which is aimed at gaining some kind of glory. The reference to *The Sound of Music* is evident below:

*Dream1 (association, F2):*

*I think what is interesting for me now in terms of, I mean, going back to the context that is where my connection is, so to keep on speaking about serenade and this thing about the mountains and so on and the valleys, it makes you think of the musical The Sound of Music. (Laughs). It makes me think of that. (Laughs)*

*Rbm, P6:*

*(Sings) The sound of music.*

*F2:*

*(Laughs) It make think Climb every mountain, ford every stream. (Laughs)*

*F1:*

*Shoh!*

*Rbm, P6:*

*It's a good association. Classic.*



Thus following the above discussion, it appears that student leadership in a South African university is constructed in terms of the performance of a game and dance with certain rules; potentially rules of engagement. However, different race groups or even race and gender groups may understand these rules of engagement differently, thus constructing the relational dynamics that are at play. In the previous section where the trade-off is discussed I also referred to the game and the dance. By this I mean that in the process of the game and the dance certain trade off decisions could be made in order either to manage the anxiety in the construction of student leadership or as a means to maintain the relational dynamic (either the connection or the disconnection). The next section deals with the conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics. These issues discussed above relating to relational dynamics, as well as those that have to do with identity, appear to contribute to the conversation.

## **5.6 CONVERSATION ABOUT THE ANXIETY OF WORKING WITH DIVERSITY DYNAMICS**

Identity in student leadership and relational dynamics, while held in balance by a defended student leadership identity, seem to facilitate a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics. To my mind the following quotations appear to refer to the conversation about diversity dynamics in the context of talking about the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university:

Quotations from Dream 2

*Dream 2 (Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*I really like the whole circle thing and it feels like... and the whole time I'm thinking how we construct student leadership because I don't think sometimes we're aware of the global context and so, the way that I think, in the place that I'm at. I'm thinking we all know in the 1980's that the Reagan administration of America did nothing to fight apartheid – it was the students in America who were on the campuses campaigning for boycotts. And I'm thinking of Palestine, Israel. But I'm thinking of just the broader context and being aware of what's happening, you know what I mean. The students should be the ones who are there – what's happening in Uganda and fighting for human*

*rights; and I think, you know, in student leadership I think that should be the key because you're part of the global society of students who will lead the world in 20, 30 years. That for me, that whole circle thing, it makes it feel like universal, you know what I mean, in the same way that the 80's... and we are here because of students in America who fought. And I think in the same way, you know, we might try and free Palestine or... In the 1940's an Israeli state was inevitable, so I think a Palestinian state is inevitable. I think it needs to happen. So, I feel like we are part of a global leading students.*

In addition, an extract from Dream 2 reads as follows:

*Rbm, P6:*

*Allie (student language for friend), I see the roots are different colours. Is that like...?*

*Rwm, P2:*

*That's just like different kinds of things that's rooted in – it's your family life, it's your religion, it is your friends and it's.*

*Rbm, P6:*

*It says diversity.*

*Rwm, P2:*

*Exactly.*

*Ruff, P4:*

*Is there any reason why you... because I see the heart and there's a circle right back to...*

*Rbm, P6:*

*It's like, me as a leader, all of these qualities should be equally viewed. You can't... it's not... I don't judge you by your religion, I don't judge you by your gender, what class you are or what colour you are, so everything needs... And it's all in your heart. You see someone for what they are in their heart.*

Further quotation from Dream 2

*Dream 2(Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*I really like the colour now, because as everyone's talking and making these associations I think for me it's basically saying that the complexity is what brings the colour out, so I think the idea that, you know, you have to be one big... I hate the idea that you can't be cultural and be a feminist at the same time. You can be both.*

*Rf (chorus):*

*Exactly yeah.*

*Dream 2(Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*I love my cultural but I believe... (all laughing) I believe in gender all at the same time, so for me I love that – it's the complexity of being a human-being, Afrikaans and two extremes are coming from different narratives that's what brings to life this leadership and this approach and this love for people, so I think that was great.*

The quotations below, however, seem to indicate that the conversation about diversity or diversity dynamics is associated with anxiety. This notion is introduced in Dream 1 as evidenced in the quotation below; but a threat seems to be maintained because the conversation moves on to diversity of religion in Dream 2; then Dreams 3, 4 and 5 bring to the fore themes of loss, the stillborn and relational splits concluding with Dream 6, which brings the other side of the story to the peace script and emphasises the violence vs. the peace script.

Here is the extract from Dream 1:

*Dreamer in Dream 1, (Rwf, dream, P1):*

*I would definitely say the first night it was more like... when I think back I think, okay there was a couple of obstacles but the obstacles were so mild or whatever, it wasn't even like I felt I needed people to help me get across the obstacles. And then, I think Tuesday night was the worst, I think, that's when... well, obviously when the snake appeared I was so really thrown. So yeah, definitely, the obstacles got worse. It's actually scary, like this is very real-life now. (Laughs)*

*F2, association:*

*For me when I'm listening to P1 speaking and what has been shared now, it just confirms mostly that I associate in the dream which is an anxiety, quite a violent anxiety that I associate the dream with.*

*Dreamer (Rwf, dream, P1):*

*I can say that's the feeling of my dream, is anxiety one side and one side I realise or acknowledge the obstacles.*

*Dream 1 (Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*For me, I see the progression in terms of, you know, you moving forward. So for example, the link to the anxiety, the fact that there are more obstacles and as you said, they're getting bigger... or not bigger, but they are more serious obstacles, for example a snake that you know for sure you're very scared of but you are sure it will be handled. For me, that kind of leadership because yes, you start out and you're a social portfolio, all you need to do is make a social right and you get in the car – when am I going to get the drinks, when am I going to get this? Then you realise, no but there's a problem in our res with senior and junior, you know, interaction and that's another obstacle and it seems more. And then you're like, no there's this racial problem; the social has to happen – you not only have to have good booze. So my problem is not just the supplier, but it's growing more and more and more and there might be something like, oh my word, this race thing I do not understand it. I might have come from a place where there's nothing; so it's this snake that gives you the anxiety, but someone might*

*handle it, someone from your committee or somebody who could actually make it their... for me that's leadership - understanding beyond your function as put in your portfolio mandate somewhere, realising what's deeper than just what your function is and (it's deeper than your social portfolio).*

Diversity in this discussion refers to simultaneously comprising the following elements: co-existence of people in one social system; the playing out of similarities and differences based on subjective identities, both conscious and unconscious (May, 2012; Pretorius, 2003). On the one hand, such diversity can be examined by identifying static factors such as age, race, and gender, among others (Pretorius, 2009). On the other it could include intrapersonal accounts and interpersonal culturally located phenomena, as well as those issues embedded in the macro-environment such as religious beliefs, life values, ideology, socioeconomic status and socio-political context (Pretorius et al., 2012). Diversity dynamics on the other hand concerns interactional complexities based on the assumption of subjective identities which emerge from similarities and differences among people (May, 2012). Thus, student leaders have tended to recognise the diversity and diversity dynamics in student leadership and this has been paramount in the social construction of student leadership in a South African university.

As I have learned, therefore, when student leaders have attempted to engage with the research topic, they seemed to be preoccupied with the South African story. I have understood that the main concept appears to be a sense of 'I am anxious about diversity'. This appears to be the major anxiety in student leadership. On the one hand this may be a genuine pursuit of students, to be relevant to their environment by seeking ways to work with this anxiety and be in the forefront of transformation talks on behalf of the student population. In another way, this may be a trap for them. The preoccupation with this may blindfold them in such a way that they have used the words 'it's blurry' to describe their experience of working with diversity. The blindfold seems to cause them to employ tunnel vision in two ways. Firstly, they could be focusing on diversity dynamics and transformation as the only issue of concern in student leadership; thus their vision is becoming clouded and they are missing the opportunity to explore the wide range of potential influence of which they could be part: which could include their contribution to the transformation agenda itself. Secondly, the student

leaders could exercise tunnel vision in assuming that there is only one way of approaching the work in diversity dynamics. The tunnel vision or blindfold could thus contextualise the defendendness of the student leaders. As a potential outcome, this approach presents a limitation for the student leaders to challenge the status quo of their environment in the university and in the student leadership sphere as a way to work with the issues at play in diversity dynamics; as a result, anxiety is observed because the issues seem to be unresolved. It is known in psychology that unresolved issues may evoke anxiety (Corey, 2016; Lemma, 2003). In addition, anxiety is observed as the student leaders seem to be unsettled with respect to the status quo. This study is not really interested in reasons why they may be unsettled; rather, the researcher observes that the space in which the social construction of student leadership in a South African university occurs is characterised by a sense of being unsettled. Consequently, student leaders take a position of being defended.

During this conversation, trust has been important in discussing the social construction of student leadership in a South African university – this conversation that has been centred around diversity dynamics. In addition, though, the conversation has proven to be complex; therefore labelled as blurry and issues related to diversity dynamics also described as blurry, potentially because of the complexity thereof. I discuss trust and the concept of ‘blurry’ in the upcoming sections.

## **5.7 TRUST: THE KEY TO HOSTING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT DIVERSITY DYNAMICS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

In the psychodynamic literature, it has been said that trust has to do with the extent to which defense mechanisms are used to work with aspects of identity as well as with interactional dynamics that pose a threat or make one feel that she or he does not have support (Cilliers & May, 2010). In this respect and in the quotations below, trust, the feeling of safety and having support are demonstrated to be important in the social construction of student leadership in a South African university.

*Dreamer 1 in dream 1*(Rwf, conversation, P1):

*I also see it like really now with all the trust now, because I was thinking of actually catching this thing, like a staff, what it would be like, bring the bag, and you must trust that I've got the snake and you must bring the bag, you know what I mean. And I must put it in and you're holding the bag so you must trust that whoever throws the ladder will throw it right, you know what I mean. You can't be like, I'm going to do it all, petty stuff and... you know what I mean. So I think it also alludes to exactly what she's saying (someone coughing), trusting people which is also important in student leadership.*

*Dreamer 2 in Dream 2 (Rwm, dream, P2):*

*And it's not that I'm religious on campus or press my religion on anyone else, but I felt this is a safe space that I can share it with.*

Further, according to Cilliers and May (2010), trust in an organisation is needed and necessary for the organisation to function. It comes across quite clearly in Thaver's work (2009) that threat is perceived regarding the changes in higher education, particularly in terms of who owns the culture and how the 'new' entrants are incorporated into the environment. As a result, when threat is perceived, it appears that anxiety is evoked and students may be left feeling unsafe (Seabi et al., 2012; Thaver, 2009), resulting in defended student leadership identity (Cilliers & May, 2010). As a method to encourage holding the conversation being researched the student leaders have referred to needing safe spaces, suggesting an environment of trust that could be a valuable component in the conversation about anxiety regarding working with diversity dynamics. According to the quotation above, it is apparently not always easy to trust others. Against the background of the South African story, this could make sense (Thaver, 2009). The quotation above also evidences that when students feel safe they do express views that are challenging the status quo and that open up conversations that would otherwise not be heard.

Trust, as is referred above, appears to be used to manage some of the dynamics in the conversation. These include how trust forms part of negotiating the interactional dynamics as well as how it helps to facilitate the conversation about diversity dynamics. At this point, therefore, it is quite significant for me that white student leaders, both

male and female voices, are presenting the trust discussion. This in addition happens at the onset of the transcription of the engagement with the social construction of student leadership in a South African university activity. As those who are perceived to be the 'welcomers' of the others (Thaver, 2009; Sharp, 2006), it is interesting how the white student leaders may perceive threat during the conversation considering that white student leaders as those who present the issue of trust and negotiate relationships through the use of trust. Apart from these two quotations above, trust has not been referred to so explicitly throughout the transcription. As it is, trust is spoken about in Dream 1, and then briefly brought up again by the white female voice in Dream 4. Hence there seems to be no direct response as to whether trust is granted or not although the conversation continues nonetheless. The attribute of trust in the conversation appears to have a further part to play in the defended identity position that the student leaders take up; in this case, responses to the question of trust could have been provided through the defenses that student leaders have used to engage with one another. Moreover the negotiation of trust may also have occurred in the same manner. Trust also appears to be affected in terms of the extent to which a student leader feels secure in the conversation. As I have elaborated later in this document, trust also facilitates the interplay between reality shock and the fantasy attached to student leadership, or in other words the issues of hope and motivation. Thus the conversation has been described as blurry; a term which integrates issues of trust as well and points to a defendedness in interaction.

## **5.8 BLURRY**

The anxiety seeming to be associated with issues of trust also seems to contribute to the conversation being blurry. This anxiety may position the students as guarded or defended in interaction, thereby having to navigate themselves to safety; consequently implying that the conversation is blurry (or unclear). The quotations below seem to make reference to the conversation being blurry.

Quotation from Dream 4, dream

*Dreamer (Rbf, dream, P4):*



*This is the dream. I couldn't see anything in the beginning. It was very blurry. All I could see was the swollen... it's not swollen, but like bigger... (Laughter)*

Extract from dream 4, dream

*Rbm, P6:*

*She understands what you mean.*

*Rbf, P4:*

*I understand what you mean... it's not like racist?*

*Rwf, P1:*

*Can I just say, the scratching or whatever, is that blackness or is that just...?*

*Rbf, P3:*

*That's just blurry.*

*Rbf, P4:*

*That's just what I saw, what I remember from the dream.*

'Blurry' as used in the transcription could refer to a situation that is unclear or one where one cannot see clearly: objects are misty. The use of the word may help to infer that constructions about diversity are potentially blurry. This might cause matters to be confused or unclear, resulting in anxiety. In another place in the transcription the student leaders have referred to the same discourse of items being blurry as follows:

*Dreamer in Dream 1(Rwf, dream, P1):*

*Yeah, it's very abstract. It's very dark at certain times, it's very... broad daylight.*

*Dream 3(Rbf, dream, P4):*

*I thought the in-between, I guess the darkness or... because that wasn't in the dream but that's what you felt.*

The student leaders therefore seem to be confronted with a *juggle of fingers stuck in way too many jellies* (dream 2, association, P3), *having fingers in many pies* (dream 3, association, P4), and *fingers being in many pies and those people saying wait, but it's too much, but it's too much* (dream 4, association, P3). This could allude to being on a search for safety or clarity. I make sense of this by understanding that having fingers stuck in many jellies and in many pies could mean that the student leaders are busy with many issues at the same time while attempting to search for a focus or a resolution to what seems to preoccupy them. On the other hand, having fingers stuck in many jellies and in many pies may even concern playing the game to receive some gain. The gain may be related to them appearing to be busy, therefore implying performance. In this way, playing the game may refer to constructions of defense which have been spoken about earlier; in terms of creating connections and seeming to be agentic. In addition, though, the search for safety or clarity may refer to the reality shock that student leaders speak about: this seems to take place when they encounter a lived experience of student leadership that is very different from their fantasy; or when they think about holding a student leadership position before actually being elected or selected for such a leadership position— which I explore in the next section. Moreover, I will look along these same lines at how student leaders have sought to conclude their search for safety and clarity by regarding Mandela and Moses as leadership symbols.

### **5.8.1 Fantasy/ Reality shock**

The observation that I make about this theme is that as a result of issues being blurry, the dynamics in the conversation oscillate between fantasy and reality shock. Firstly, fantasy might be represented by the use of the metaphor of the movie *Twilight Zone*. This is an American fantasy movie; hence the association.

Fantasy is potentially demonstrated in this quotation as well:

*Dream 1*(Rwm, association, P2):

*But now that you mention the bow tie thing, I see like the Batman logo... (laughter) and it's like a bat who's flying away, so maybe the snake is going into the hole and then the hole turns into a bat and flies away.*

Another example of fantasy can be observed in an association made with the 'Three Blind Mice' in dream 1.

*Dream 1 (Rwf, association, P1):*

*I'm actually seeing Three Blind Mice now. (Laughter)*

'Three Blind Mice' is well known to be a nursery rhyme which in this case could be used as a form of escapism from the reality shock that is present in the student leaders' lived experience – this consequently informs the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university.

Consequently, I propose that the fantasy potentially represents a wish for things to be different from what they are as experienced in the conscious (Long, 2011) per se; student leaders may use unconscious mechanisms to create fantasies that help them cope with their conscious experiences (Greenwald & Harder, 1997, 2003; Matsui & Kodama, 2007). This could potentially create confusion (between the submerged and the conscious level experience), resulting in matters being blurry – going so far as to say that the conversation about the co- construction of student leadership in a South African university is blurry. The quotations below appear to offer some evidence of this fantasy/ reality shock, from the conversation over student leadership.

Quotations from Dream 4:

*(Rbf, conversation, P3):*

*To me it links to the leadership election process. (Laughter) You find someone who sees vision in you and tells you that, I will nominate you. And then you start getting your own little dreams about, yes, if I get elected this is what I'll do or I will do this, I will check or whatever. And then you get there. You are elected and then you are like, oh*

*but there's this and there's this, so I can't do this, but never mind, let's just do what she did last year*

(Rbf, conversation, P5):

*That is actually exactly what I was thinking that when you become aware of the fact that okay you want to run for a certain position and you have all these visions about all of the stuff that you want to achieve one day in your capacity, so you nominate yourself and it's all great. Then there is a time when you now go to the person who is currently in office to go and understand what actually has to happen and when that person explains the 'well actually' part of the process then that sort of like scares you a bit. So now you are like, okay you know there is a probability of you getting elected, you know that you might get it, you know that you have all of these goals, but then you realise that eish... no I really actually can't get this done and then you sort of like start stressing. Some people actually withdraw and do nothing at all and they just like, 'ag, I'll just leave it. So that is what happens. People get shocked by what actually happens when they're in office, when it's so different to what they envision of what the position should have been.*

Quotation from Dream 3, Rbf, conversation, P5:

*Oh no, I chilled out because I missed the explanation, but like I'm thinking right now that what would have happened is that the leader being the person in the front seemed like... because this is... from the way I see it, the upper part where everybody is standing is a bit wide and then sort of like where the person stands, and I think the person was... they were with everyone else, then they got elected to lead, so they were walking towards the trophy and then that's when they saw the mess that was there; and when the leader recognised that there's a gigantic mess going on they turned around and then they were asking questions about how to put the mess in order to get the trophy. That's what I see and that's basically how I think it should sort of work*

*because like I said, leaders have very fine ideas and yet they know how to get to where they need to go. Then you realise it's not as simple as you think.*

The three quotes above indicate a difference or mismatch between experience when a student leader is in student leadership and when she or he is not; or is hearing about student leadership from someone else. The latter somehow points to their own subjectivity – collectively or individually (Long, 2011; Mersky, 2012). In addition, it appears that there may be more of a shock (a reality shock) when superimposing the student leader's ideals on the real lived experience; which gives the impression that the ideals created with respect to student leadership can be equated with a fantasy.

*Dream 6(Rbf, conversation, P3):*

*I associate the face, I think he's already said it, with the one side of leadership that everyone else sees, that 'oh my god, our SRC is so together' until you step into that boardroom. (Laughter) So as student you just look and say, 'oh no, they're so good, I want to be there'. Or from a faculty house, I would stand there... I remember last year when I walked in during my audition I was like, 'I want to be you' and I think it was <sup>1</sup>TD, she was like 'nah, you couldn't be me'. But finally, when I went for that interview and when I got into the structure it was like 'ugh... so, what now?' Whereas what I had seen as people who were composed, who knew what they were doing, there were sessions, there was everything happening and now when you are there, which is the other side of the fence it's like, okay, this is what they did, what do I do now? Or, this is what's happening, how do I do it?*

According to Winnicott (1971) in Long (2011), fantasy seems to be a container of tension or an in between space, regarding what is internal reality, which is different to what is external reality. Hence, trust seems to be impacted because what you see appears to be not what you get. In another way it can be said that perhaps mistrust is impacted, considering the anxiety that accompanies this dynamic. As a result, student leaders appear to be paralysed when in student leadership, to the extent that they preserve the status quo as a result. The maintenance of the status quo therefore might

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<sup>1</sup> TD is a pseudonym

cause them to give up their student leadership aspirations and plans to change, influence and impact the situation that, before they were elected, they might have hoped to implement. In another sense, this could also mean that they may become stuck in the same traps as those previously as a result of the paralysis; hence the retaining of business as usual. Part of the paralysis as potentially described by the student leaders seems to be concerned with the fear of failure, from which they may protect themselves by creating defenses.

*Dreamer in Dream 1 (association):*

*That hole in that road, I'm scared of falling besides anything like, falling is the worst thing for me and it's so bad that it's come to a point where I never fall these days. I will trip, I will land on my feet and I'll move on because I'm terrified of falling. I'm not sure if it's because I'm terrified of the impact or getting hurt or whatever, but I'm terrified of falling. So, when she said 'hole' – that big hole... (sighs) yeah.*

In the quotation above, falling has been associated with failure. As a result, the anxiety about failure when in student leadership is mastered and warded off by leaders engaging in activity which will ensure that they do not fall. This may suggest that they avoid taking risks when in student leadership; that they learn the rules of the game and play by these, which at this stage seem to be preservation of the status quo or a delay in embracing diversity/transformation in higher education. This causes me to consider and to say that the conversation is blurry; possibly a method of putting off the conversation about the anxiety of working with the diversity dynamics of student leadership in a South African university, thereby continuing with the way things are. I put this forward because I wonder about what could be said to be surprising to student leaders when they arrive in this role; I would suggest that student leaders might be surprised that the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university is a space to hold a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics. In a sense, therefore, the fantasy is presented as a method to represent what appears to allow for the apparent embrace of difference or diversity, the embrace of the other.

In addition; this may be a means of saying that members of student leadership do not know who to blame for what seems blurry to them as regards the discourse (s) about

the diversity dynamics. According to Long (2011) it appears that the difficulty in such settings as higher education in South Africa, described in this text, is that the past happens to be an intrusion into today. I therefore propose that this could be what the student leaders are confronted with, causing issues to be blurry for them. Long (2011) also points out that while there appears to be this discomfort, there is an opportunity that fantasy could offer an opportunity to dream new dreams. I say this also considering that I have the impression that apart from members of student leadership wishing that situations could be different in their roles, they may also wish for a South African university that is in a different place in terms of diversity dynamics.

### **5.8.2 Mandela and Moses as leadership symbols**

Mandela and Moses have been cited as leadership symbols during the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university. Seeing that the conversation has been labelled as blurry, student leadership could be looking outside of itself to discover examples in terms of true leadership. The script of Mandela and Moses has also included the discourse of the stillborn that has been attributed to unmet expectations and disappointment.

Given the preoccupation of the student leaders with the South African discourse, it could be self-explanatory that Mandela has been referred to as a leadership symbol as a consequence of the leadership role that he has played in South Africa in terms of transitioning to the current dispensation (Pretorius et al., 2012). The role has seemingly earned him world class accolades and respect in this regard.

In the case of student leadership such symbols as wearing a blazer, as in the quotations below, appear to signify leadership as an accolade. This appears to warrant the prestige that encourages student leadership to attain something towards the achievements of their role models such as Mandela.

*Dream 1 (Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*..It's all about you having the blazer and being a HK or whatever the case maybe. (A few giggle.)*

*Dream 5 (Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*....student leadership is about participation and development as opposed to... swag.  
I'm saying this now because I am a swag type. (Laughter)*

*Dream 5 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*.....I have the blazer type.*

Assigning an accolade to student leadership could begin to help in understanding such leadership as becoming separate from other students. The blazer may signify a position of importance and might represent a recognition of the power that comes with student leadership or that is inherent in it.

Van Wyk (2005) has suggested that the way forward for South African universities post-apartheid is to embrace the principles of Ubuntu. These have been perceivably embodied by Mandela, according to the data as well as in the literature (Boyd, 2013). As a result, this approach may be idolised by student leadership as the pinnacle of enactment of leadership. While this might be true, the students appear to remain conflicted in terms of identity in leadership. The conflict stems from recognising Mandela's example as having attained a new South African dispensation – which is now more than 20 years after the fact – while on the other hand, student leaders are observing the current scenario in South African universities (Costandius & Bitzer, 2014; Higham, 2012; Mouton et al., 2013; Woodrooffe, 2011). Accordingly, they seem to be searching for ways in which they can continue along the same path that Mandela has trod; yet they appear to hold an unclear position in terms of an appropriate approach to do so in addressing the current scenario. In a sense they idolise the Mandela approach but consider a different one to be a possible currently relevant one. Hence, they feel loyalty towards Mandela, possibly out of sentiment, while the anxiety regarding the current experiential conflicts encourages them to seek other approaches to resolve the undone, that which can be said to be unfinished business.



The quotation below shows how white student leaders necessarily advocate for the Mandela style. Their position as evident in their voices is that Mandela achieved freedom for South Africa and South Africans need now to move on.

*In Dream 6 (Rwf, association, P1):*

*I'm getting the vibe that these people, also the Mandela thing again, but you've been freed, you fought for them, so now they're saying, 'we're fighting for you now, this is the time that you have to go forward' something like that.*

The black female students in particular – while the males have not necessarily been opposed to this – seem to find favour with what is apparently a different approach. This appears to call for combativeness and asserting themselves. Two different quotations indicate this below.

*Black Female in Dream 6(Rbm, association, P6):*

*It actually brings back why everyone keeps saying, 'keep Mandela's legacy, keep Mandela's legacy' because now...*

*Black Female in Dream 6(Rbm, association, P6):*

*Mandela is gone but now we need to find something. We need to keep fighting as you were saying, as the youth we are just fighting and we don't know what we are fighting for, but we are fighting.*

During the association part of Dream 6, the following associations were made:

*F1:*

*What this makes me think about or at least the scene of the commotion and the guns and I think about it, the EFF rocked up in Parliament in red overalls and how they were chased away and how it was like such a drama and hoo-hah for them to get out of there and how it actually continued to be this hoo-hah and they even wanted to fight certain things but they were told to go. I think about that.*

*Rwf, P1:*

*Yeah, because I also associate it with... it's almost as if it's something in the future, you know, because I know you also shared the whole... something needs to happen and obviously it's not a thing that you can recognise, but this commotion is there of something that is... you know, bad that's happening. The fact that they're defending you or they're willing to die, it sounds like the whole Mandela analogy, like they're willing to die for you but you must go forward and you must still do what you have to do. You still need to do what you have to do. It just gets a bit confusing with the parts with your mother, for me, but until your mother part for me it was like okay, you need to do what you need to do, but in the future, so therefore nothing black and white, so still very fake as you say.*

*Rbm, P6:*

*Yeah, I do want you know, I wanted a gun in victory but I don't believe in guns. Like, we go hunting and this is how me and my mentor are hunting. We see the buck and the cross-hairs, I just click but there's no bullet, I just go click. It's there. Like to me, I can't, I don't want to. I can't, I can't. But in the dream, weirdly, I wanted to. I was like, okay, give me... also, you know what I mean, but then I felt like the conscious, like the me, not the me in the dream, said 'no, you don't believe in this' – which is me.*

Later on in the same dream the following evidence arose:

*Rbf, P3:*

*Mandela is gone but now we need to find something. We need to keep fighting as you were saying, as the youth we are just fighting and we don't know what we are fighting for, but we are fighting.*

*Rbf, P4:*

*Rebels without causes.*

The above two associations from dream 6 assist one in inferring that the approach of the EFF might be considered as a possible alternative for student leadership; one which the student leaders may be processing sub-consciously. In other words, in some way below the surface, student leadership may be busy with the EFF approach and might be identifying with it in some way. There are nuances of aggression in the quotation which could be related to the fighting discourse that the student leaders have displayed in other places in the text. Given that the EFF example in parliament, which has been indicated in the quotation above and also in McGroarty (2015), has been the only reference to social symbols in terms of aggression that has been made by the group, I am tempted to assume that this is the alternative stance that they could be looking at and referring to throughout the text, when alluding to a different approach from that of Mandela and when referring to a combative or aggressive approach. In some places, the leader of the EFF has been called the new Mandela and has been compared to him as well (Findlay, 2015).

On the other hand, Moses has been referred to on the sub-conscious level of the conversation as evident in the quotation below:

*Dream 1(Rbm, association, P6):*

*I saw the roses lying in the centre. And then I initially thought you saw yourself as Moses because I saw (laughter)... I saw bags of food in there for the people and then the snake, there was a time when you had to actually pick up a snake...*

The reference to Moses is then brought into the conversation (at the conscious level) and spoken about as a solution, example or reference for leadership, as in the two quotations below:

*Dream 1, F1:*

*What I took from our discussion, now the association that P6 made about the Moses and the staff and the snake turning into a tool for more resource actually than it being something that you need to work is that it may depend on how you see the obstacle.*

*Now the obstacle being the snake, but the snake can be perceived as the snake that's going to eat you up or it's going to be the thing that's going to turn into a tool that you can use to get ahead. So that's what I take.*

*Dream 6 (Rbf, conversation, P4):*

*As you were saying, participation and sustainable development because yes, everyone was shocked how a man of God does not get... the people, the children of Israel to Canaan, which was Moses,*

Thus I propose that the reference to Moses could be found relevant, given that he is a biblical character, which is a character sourced from the Bible which a Christianity religious book. As such, Moses being associated with Christianity the student leaders would have been expected to look to religion as they have indicated they consult it, especially Christianity, in determining their student leadership identity. It is quite interesting that Moses could have been considered to be a role model in the context of this research, while Mandela would have been an obvious choice. According to Herskovitz (1999) Moses serves as a worthwhile leadership example when there is interest in issues of organisational change and in confronting challenges. It is also quite fitting to consider Moses in this way because he has been described as displaying qualities of being caring, selfless, accommodating others and putting others before himself (Zivotofsky, 1994). The students have suggested that these are important in their understanding of a true leader, as indicated below in the quotation from Dream 2.

*Dreamer in Dream 2 (Rwm, dream, P2):*

*Just to give you perspective, the first... how can I say, the first principle for me as a leader, and that comes from my religion, is love. So it's being a selfless leader, not thinking about yourself, putting yourself in any kind of position to, how can I say, to accommodate others.*

Moses has been celebrated as the great leader who eventually led people who had been in captivity out of this situation to an envisioned Promised Land (Barro, 2015). He is similar to Mandela who has represented the change in dispensation in South

Africa after apartheid (Pretorius et al., 2012). According to the Bible story, Moses was chosen amongst many others to fulfil this role (Zivotofsky, 1994) while in the view of some, Moses could have been the greatest, or one of the greatest, leaders in the Old Testament (Barro, 2015; Son, 2015). However, he is not permitted to enter the Promised Land because he did not trust God along the way there (Herskovitz, 1999). In relation to Moses the student leaders seem to refer to failure in not doing what they perceive they are meant to do (Barro, 2015), regarding dealing with diversity. This creates the impression that while they feel that they are leaders in an idealistic sense; they might battle to accept themselves in terms of struggling to be exemplary as regards working with issues of diversity. Furthermore, I gain the sense that the task of dealing with diversity dynamics or the related anxiety appears to be too immense for them and that perhaps they even set goals for themselves which are too idealistic. Towards the end of their term of office, they potentially feel as if they have not delivered on their leadership task in that they have not been able to deliver on the promises that they made when they were canvassing for elections, so that they end up with stillborn babies.

Extract from Dream 4 about the stillborn, conversation

*F2:*

*You know, I find this very important because what I've been thinking about, it's almost a little bit as if something is still-born, because you used the word 'abortion', but for me it feels like it's still-born in the sense that sometimes people have too great an idea of what they need to do and then they do nothing. Then their idea is still-born because they made it too big. Sometimes ideas are still-born. It just dies within – and can you live with that? Can you as a... I don't know, I feel like that.*

*Rbf, P5:*

*You can't. You can't live with that. And I think as well, what's crippling about the realisation that you can't get everything done is the idea that this big plan that you had, you probably had it because you noticed that something was the matter and it's not only the fact that you couldn't get it done, but it's that you couldn't even solve the*

*problem if you planned it to solve a problem in the first place. So when your ideas are still-born, no matter how big it is, just the realisation that I may not even have half the impact I planned to have with this. And that really gets to people. I know it's gotten to me.*

In addition, a quotation from dream 5

*Dreamer in Dream 5 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*Also, like what I think is that even if, when you start something and it was like a little goal for everyone, let's say we have a goal and you have a different idea of how to pursue the goal, there will be times when your entire committee drops you and you're literally alone. .... Like now I'm like that (person) the radical girl in the SRC. That's who I am because I will pursue something even if everyone else doesn't agree – it's not my problem – because you know, sometimes I just feel like my team mates don't get it and that's the parts where I'm alone in the waves and (pause) then I think the reason why there would be a sea in order to get to the Promised Land is that even when you're alone in this big ocean then eventually the goal will be achieved and people will be happy.*

In consequence, the students may be preoccupied with Moses, thinking that they are being punished for something that they are not doing – in effect, that they are being 'disobedient' as Moses was (Barro, 2015), as well as that they are not entering their Promised Land due to a self-created fault and have instead killed the baby. The metaphor of the stillborn appears to be a strong symbol for me that represents expectation and promise which has been attained but cannot be enjoyed, or that has been expected yet not attained. However, the student leaders could fear something that they would rather not know about, potentially because they may feel that they would not be able to deliver. In addition, while the females are concerned with issues of life and birth, the male student leaders may feel helpless (Bonnette & Broom, 2012; McGreal, Evans & Burrows, 1997). These authors write about how males appear to be emotionally disengaged during grief. Black female student leaders furthermore appear to position themselves as those who contain the emotional space and responses in the current conversation. In addition, they position themselves as those who would be

concerned with issues about life, preservation (of self in terms of the individual, social and cultural group, race and the like) and wellbeing. These sound like life instincts and perhaps issues of life and death as coined by Freud in the 1900s (Esman, 2015; Napal & Francos, 2015; Refabert, 2014). Black female student leaders would potentially display these traits because the tasks of nurturing life are biologically delegated to females. They may, seemingly naturally, play this out in the dynamic (Napal & Francos, 2015), which possibly reveals their perception of threat and need to facilitate survival on behalf of the black students, female students, black student leaders or black female student leaders. This might make sense given the scenario in which black females and generally all females find themselves in post-apartheid South African (Chiloane-Tsoka, 2012, 2013; Hills, 2015) and post-apartheid higher education (Costandius & Bitzer, 2014; Higham, 2012; Thaver, 2009).

### **5.8.3 Implications of the Mandela and Moses in the stillborn discourse**

According to the data, both Mandela and Moses as symbols of leadership evoke emotions related to grief and loss (Herskovitz, 1999, Long, 2011) in relation to the stillborn discourse. As mentioned, Moses is referred to in such a way since he never entered the Promised Land and Mandela is mentioned as having been an icon of hope that has now been contrasted with dreams that have not been fulfilled. Grief and loss seem to be particularly relevant emotional responses to reflect on, in terms of the reference to the stillborn. In grief therapy it is accepted that identity issues are highlighted in the face of loss (Lichtenthal & Breitbart, 2016). This could explain the centrality of identity in this conversation. The loss is represented by a sense of an unmet expectation as described above. Congruent with the literature, religious people, with which student leaders have identified themselves, are encouraged to respond with hope to the current situation in South Africa (Dreyer, 2015). This could be likened to the defense mechanism of rationalisation on the part of the student leaders.

#### *5.8.3.1 Narcissistic injury: dynamics of shame and rage/fight and flight/white privilege and black disadvantage*

Other findings have indicated that death or loss may be associated with narcissistic injury; a concept initially based on the work of Kohut in 1971 but expanded on by Miller

in 1981 (Harris, 2010; Mann, 2004). As mentioned, the death or loss that the students refer to could be linked to the failure of their student leadership as potentially identified with Mandela and Moses. Narcissistic injury refers to deep wounds that occur in the core of the self which shred, weaken, splinter and drain the self in a way that lowers self-esteem or the security that a person finds in her or his identity, thereby inducing rage, shame and humiliation (Levin, 1993). The student leaders allude to talk about their narcissistic framing of their student leadership by referring to the preoccupations of their egos, as in the following quotation:

*Dream 1*(Rwm, conversation, P2):

*We oftentimes make the one huge mistake of... almost a very ego-centric approach*

As a result, I observe that language has been used to show that student leaders utilise narcissism to gratify themselves in terms of student leadership by means of an egocentric and self-advancing attitude (Konrath, et al., 2006).

Son (2015) refers to narcissistic injury as the loss of self to the extent that self-preservation can be threatened. In the same breath, he draws a relationship between self-preservation and the loss of self (Son, 2015). In this he refers to self-preservation as one's ability to maintain or keep one's substance intact, and to cohesive and narcissistic injury as failure to do what one had expected to have had the capacity to do (Son, 2015). Self-preservation in this data has been represented by a black female student leaders' voice. The response to narcissistic injury has been demonstrated by the student leaders in the form of shame, equated with flight, which is evident in the preference for the peaceful stance, as well as in rage, equated with fight, that is observable in the preference for the violent stance (Son, 2015). The peaceful stance is advocated for in this data as following the Mandela example; while the violent stance is spoken about in the same data as adopting a different approach which alludes to fighting.

According to Son (2015) Moses seems to have embodied both rage and shame which negatively affected his performance; this result has also been noticed to have occurred with student leadership in this data. Kauffman (2010) affords insight into this matter by



noting that shame tends to go unrecognised as a result of the reluctance to acknowledge it and confront it. Furthermore, according to Harris (2010) who has explored narcissistic injury in Western society during the experience of loss; it appears that the display of narcissistic injury in this society is shown through shame). In terms of this research, such embodiment becomes significant as shame was displayed by white students. As a result, white student leaders might also be perceived by others as seeming to be unaffected by the current status quo (Swartz et al., 2014; Leibowitz et al., 2007). White student leaders were seen to take flight, defusing confrontation from black students by means of reminding them of Mandela and the liberation that he had gained for 'them', though of course for South Africa as a whole; in a sense giving the impression that matters are not as bad as portrayed by black students or student leaders (Long, 2011). On the other hand, black student leaders have been seen to take an angry approach. This appears to be along the same lines as when Long (2011) is writing about radicalised spaces. She comments about how in some instances people deny difference and their response to it while in others people present their experience of difference as being more damaging or worthy of concern than that of others (Long, 2011). The black student leaders' perspective regarding the display of narcissistic injury is depicted in the extracts below from dream 3.

Extracts from dream 3

*BF* (Rbf, dream 3, P3):

*So those are the little people there, part of my group and that is me .....*

*WF* (Rwf, dream 3, P1):

*Is there a reason... is it to portray distance why you drew yourself so big and the other people very small?*

In the above quotation, it sounds as if the dreamer, who is a black female student leader, unreservedly holds the idea that drawing herself as a large figure will be acceptable in the group. The respondent, a white female student leader, however appears to challenge the dreamer about this, possibly owing to her feelings of shame.

To draw oneself as big could be symbolic of seeing self as more magnified and elevated than others; which is congruent with the narcissistic discourse or the combat stance in this case (Konrath, et al., 2006).

The said stance of the black female student leader is mainly aimed towards the white male student leader, perhaps as a representative of the white race group in the conversation at that point in time. This seems to be the case according to the transcription as a whole. I suggest that this has transpired as a form of revenge. Neuman (2012) submits that narcissistic injury as expressed in rage could take the form of vengeance. This has furthermore been observed to encompass the discourse of violence by black student leaders during this conversation (Konrath, et al., 2006). In context, the South African historical events at large, but especially in higher education, which disadvantaged black females in particular (Thaver, 2009; Higham, 2012) may encourage the speaking black female student leader to seek a confrontational approach in interaction; in a way pursuing opportunities that they had never experienced previously on behalf of the black females as a racial group at large and in the higher education space especially. Neuman (2012) also points out that such revenge encompasses the need for recognition which is seen to be displayed by the black female student leader. The oblivion towards white privilege appears to facilitate an internalised dominance for the white male (Swartz, et al., 2014), potentially on behalf of the white race group at large and in the higher education space particularly. This could cause him not to understand what the black female is talking about; hence the flight and the display of rejection, in this way appearing not to afford the black female student leader the recognition that she is looking for. Furthermore, according to Neuman (2012), it appears that a person who is vengeful seems to have trouble in containing a painful experience, and as a result employs a sense of justice to express the feelings of insecurity. This approach (focusing on justice) taken by the black female student leader could be in reference to the policies set in place to implement transformation in South African higher education. As it is, the mechanisms have justifiably been put in place to govern the incorporation of those who have not been active in the higher education environment, while the perceived white privilege appears to maintain the status quo which appears to make it difficult for blacks and females or black females to be integrated into this space (Naidoo, 2010; Swartz, et al., 2014; Thaver, 2009).

For this reason a vicious cycle is probable, given the perceived rejection of the black female student leader by the white male student leader that seems to be embodied in shame. This continues to fuel the perceived insecurity of the black female student leader whose feelings are potentially not acknowledged because they are possibly not understood (Konrath, et al., 2006). In turn the cycle might continue to surprise the white male student leader who appears not to be able to relate to the rage demonstrated towards him; and so the cycle is perpetuated.

This begins to suggest how a defended student leadership identity is developed; out of shame or rage as a response to the loss that is represented in the failure of student leadership, which is played out in the conversation about this topic. I would like to make the further suggestion that shame which is also indicated as a sense of inadequacy (Son, 2015) could be masked as rage. Building on the other suggestions that I have made to this point, I would then propose that if rage has been represented by the stance of black student leaders and shame by white student leaders, and if shame could be masked as rage, then black student leaders could be protecting the sense of inadequacy that white student leaders display as shame but also their (the black student leaders') own inadequacy in being part of student leadership. This could also explain how come it may have been referred to in another place in this text that black student leaders seem to take the responsibility for the transformation conversation or are being given the responsibility of the transformation conversation which they take.

#### *5.8.3.2 The perfection(ism) discourse*

The continued emotional distress that has been noted as the anxiety observed within the student leaders could be attributed to and potentially maintained by the maladaptive characteristic of perfectionism in student leadership (Beiling, et al., 2004). According to the same authors, this results in a perpetuated sense of failure and shame which has been discussed earlier in relation to this. The quotation below indicates how student leaders have spoken about this.

Quotations showing perfection

*Dreamer in Dream 1*(Rwf, conversation, P1):

*I'm very, very perfectionistic with leadership – so for me I'm very precise about planning and stuff and sometimes it feels like nothing can go wrong.*

*Dream 4 (Rf, dream, P3):*

*I'm just saying, I like being involved in this and this and at the same time being a perfectionist.*

On the other hand, perfectionism can be regarded as being adaptive, which seems to be the case when student leaders want to make a mark (Beiling, et al., 2004).

Extract from Dream 2, conversation showing making a mark

*F2:*

*But the issue is that leaders must make their mark.*

*Rf, chorus:*

*Mark*

In addition, perfection that leads to rewards as a result of working with a high standard appears to end up in pleasant feelings. The quotation below expresses the high standards that student leaders decide to set themselves so that they can be proud of themselves in student leadership. In this manner they play the game and do the dance in this role.

*Dream 3 (Rwf, conversation, P1):*

*If I can add to that, definitely also as a leader you must be able to take the responsibility for your group, even if it's not always your fault. That's not what matters. You need to get the trophy, so although they coughed, she's singing the solo; the people see she's singing but nothing's coming out, so that's the thing I would say definitely you need to take responsibility no matter if it's your fault or not – you're the leader.*

*Dream 1(Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*The most important thing I get from the dream is that in the end, we're serving 1-year term; it's not like we're the president and 5-year terms, you know what I mean. It's only a year, you're just here for a year and there will be another you next year, there was another you before, and I think it's very important to understand when you're coming in as a student leader.*

## **5.9 THE FLIPSIDE OF THE MIRROR**

While the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university has occurred in the context of a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics (which has been contributed to by identity and relational dynamics), it appears that some parts of this conversation are not always visible. I therefore allude to the flipside of the mirror to write about the parts of the student leaders' identity which they essentially hide. In psychodynamic literature and theory the hidden self is part of one's being that is informed by unconscious processes and is free of our awareness (Schimmenti, 2012). In this instance I refer to the flipside of the mirror that implies a defended student leadership identity. In other words, I could say that student leaders appear to be distracted. This could be attributed to matters being blurry for them and to issues of trust. In consequence, the student leaders are referred to as defended in terms of the premise that their point of reference is one of warding off anxiety or mastering it (Holloway & Jefferson, 2013). The sense of defendedness in the data gathered appears to be evidenced by the nature of the dreams that are shared and the responses to these. The student leaders also refer to themselves as being faceless.

### **5.9.1 Being faceless**

They have indicated that they feel as though they are faceless in student leadership. This may be a metaphor to represent a feeling of being unseen or having disappeared in the midst of a big institution, falling between different lines of authority and potentially of competition in terms of the many agendas in the student leadership space. The theme of being faceless is demonstrated in the quotations below.

*Dreamer in dream 1(Rwf, dream, P1):*

*They are faceless*

*Dream 1 (Rbm, conversation, P6):*

*So, in the end you are faceless but you are part of something and you can contribute. I think that's for me the most important – for me anyway.*

*Dreamer in Dream 6 (Rbm, dream, P6):*

*Everyone else was faceless but I could see their figures*

An important and highlighted discourse regarding identity as students has centred on maintaining a façade vs. positioning oneself as a leader in relation to other students who are not in student leadership. The following quotation demonstrates this.

*Dream 6 (Rbf, conversation, P5):*

*And it's the idea that sometimes they don't know what this strength façade of yours, what it's doing to you as a person when you're sitting alone in your room and you're dealing with all of this that's happening. So that's the flipside, that in public you have to be strong for the people that elected you.*

In terms of keeping up a façade, student leaders appear to have a need to present themselves as stronger than other students, or as more in control of the situation than they really are, in order to be able to be 'seen' in, or take on the role of, student leadership. Even so, the student leaders have a need to identify with other students and claim their identity as students as a means to connect them with the main student community who are not student leaders; thus gaining their support by means of making this connection. This appears to be a challenging task for these leaders because they talk about forgetting that they are students at times. This phenomenon potentially introduces a tension between identity as a student leader and identity as a student, which appears to create a difficulty for the student leaders. The resolution of this

tension may offer the potential for them to present their 'real' faces in student leadership, which could potentially assist them to achieve their intentions there.

However, and congruent with maintaining a façade, student leaders want to appear faceless. I suggest that this may be an unconscious desire for reconciliation, as in a wish that the intended social cohesion has already been attained. This could constitute an unconscious denial of reconciliation that has indeed taken place but that none of the student leaders are talking about or are willing to face. This reconciliation, I suggest, has occurred through the efforts of transformation in higher education that have been achieved thus far. Consequently the students' wish could represent denial of their newly acquired identity, as a collective higher education entity, as if it is challenging to accept that the situation has changed and things have moved on.

A face is a form of identification. As a result, without a face an identity cannot be assumed. Van Wyk (2005) and Le Grange (2011) suggest that working with diversity includes the recognising of humanity. In this case, when the identity of being faceless is assumed by student leaders this may suggest that they never need to be known and may feel that they do not have to present their real faces; hence their toying with the idea of keeping up a façade. This may impact on issues of trust and on how the relational dynamics play out across all interactions, including those with each other as student leaders and others who are not. In addition, this accordingly provides them with a legitimate reason or rationale for not having delivered what they feel or know they need to deliver, or what they have been entrusted by others to deliver on. This will be in terms of the premise that no one sees them; which removes from them the responsibility for non-delivery. Student leaders may also be ignored or perceived as invisible by others if they are being unseen. Since the uneasiness felt by student leaders is with an issue that brings about discomfort (Singleton & Lincon, 2006), others may not be ready to work with the issue and thus ignore them as such; regarding them as faceless. As it has seemed to this point, student leaders employ defences, resulting in a defended student leadership identity as a means to process and cope with the aspects that constitute identity in student leadership.

## **5.10 THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY: A SPACE FOR A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE ANXIETY OF WORKING WITH DIVERSITY DYNAMICS**

Student leadership in a South African university seems to be constructed while using the space of such leadership to engage in a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics occurring in and around leadership of this type. In other words, student leaders construct student leadership in a South African university while having a conversation about the diversity dynamics that they are faced with.

The conversation has been described as being blurry, although trust has been recognised as a key host of the conversation. Identity in student leadership as well as relational dynamics seems to be the major balancing mechanisms of the conversation. This tension appears to be supported by a defended student leadership identity. Mandela and Moses as leadership symbols, as well as the image of the stillborn, give the impression of the psychic and social space in which the student leaders could find themselves when conducting this conversation. However, impressions of the flipside of the mirror emerge, which seem to be contained in a discussion about the notion of being faceless.

It may well be suggested that student leaders had been preoccupied with the South African story in their co-construction of student leadership in a South African university before this research process had commenced. I make this suggestion although the research question does not concern the history of South Africa and its implications for today. Nonetheless this has been the focus of the conversation. It may be the case that it is an important topic in this context, owing to the way student leaders have been preoccupied with it, and as also reflected in existing literature (Sharp, 2006; Sharp & Vally, 2009; Walker, 2005). Also, it may mean that student leaders need spaces to clarify issues of diversity dynamics in South Africa in the general sense or in order to co-construct student leadership in a South African university; this research process may have provided one of those spaces.

In addition, though, a potentially valuable lesson here could be that while the topic of the history of South Africa might be relevant when talking about student leadership in



a South African university, this topic could also be used to distract such leaders from this task as well. I observed that these leaders kept introducing the topic of the history of South Africa when wanting to deviate from the given task of data collection. It could be that since the transformation agenda is the focus of the higher education sector (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Higham, 2012) the students find it convenient to tackle the issue and diverge from their real, 'known', student leadership tasks as well as unknown tasks that they fear and would rather not know about and face, instead of tackling the data collection task. As a result the convenience of the student leaders' attention to the transformation issue might stem from seeming to sound relevant and the hope that others will accept the focus of the conversation, given that this is a pertinent issue. At the same time other studies legitimise the foregrounding of the transformation issue in the university context (Cross, 2004; Rothberg, 2012; Swartz, et al., 2014; Leibowitz, et al., 2007; Notshulwana, 2011; Waghid, 2003). As a result, amongst other aspects language has been used to demonstrate this behaviour. Another perspective on this would hold that language could have been used to assert that the topic of the history of South Africa is more pertinent than we realise for student leadership in a South African university. Social constructionism allows this view of multiple realities and helps us to become aware of more than meets the eye.

It will be recalled that the student leaders' talk about transformation has concerned the change in South African universities that validates the implementation of the South African democracy, particularly redress, which in this case comprises the incorporation of black students in large numbers into a previously white majority university. In the literature, transformation in Higher Education is related to a national programme of 'levelling the playing field' (Thaver, 2009; Hall, 2008; Le Grange, 2011). In the literature, diversity has been employed as the term used to discuss difference and similarities, both in higher education and in other sectors in South Africa or beyond (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Leibowitz, et al., 2007; Pretorius, et al., 2012). Furthermore, in other places diversity has been regarded as a tool that can be used to drive transformation in higher education (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). Student leaders have spoken about diversity as the harmonious co-existence of different people with different preferences, races and gender in a university space; one where these differences can be accommodated, and validated.

As such, and as noted already, the data seems to be telling us that the social construction of student leadership in a South African university takes place in a conversation about the anxiety of tackling diversity dynamics. This was briefly demonstrated earlier in the chapter (Figure 5.1) but is shown in much more detail in Figure 5.2 below. My premise is that the data could be indicating the above, following the lead of the students' preoccupation and working with what I would like to call 'The story of the history of South Africa and afterwards.'

The co - construction of student leadership in SA university : A space for a conversation about anxiety of working with diversity dynamics

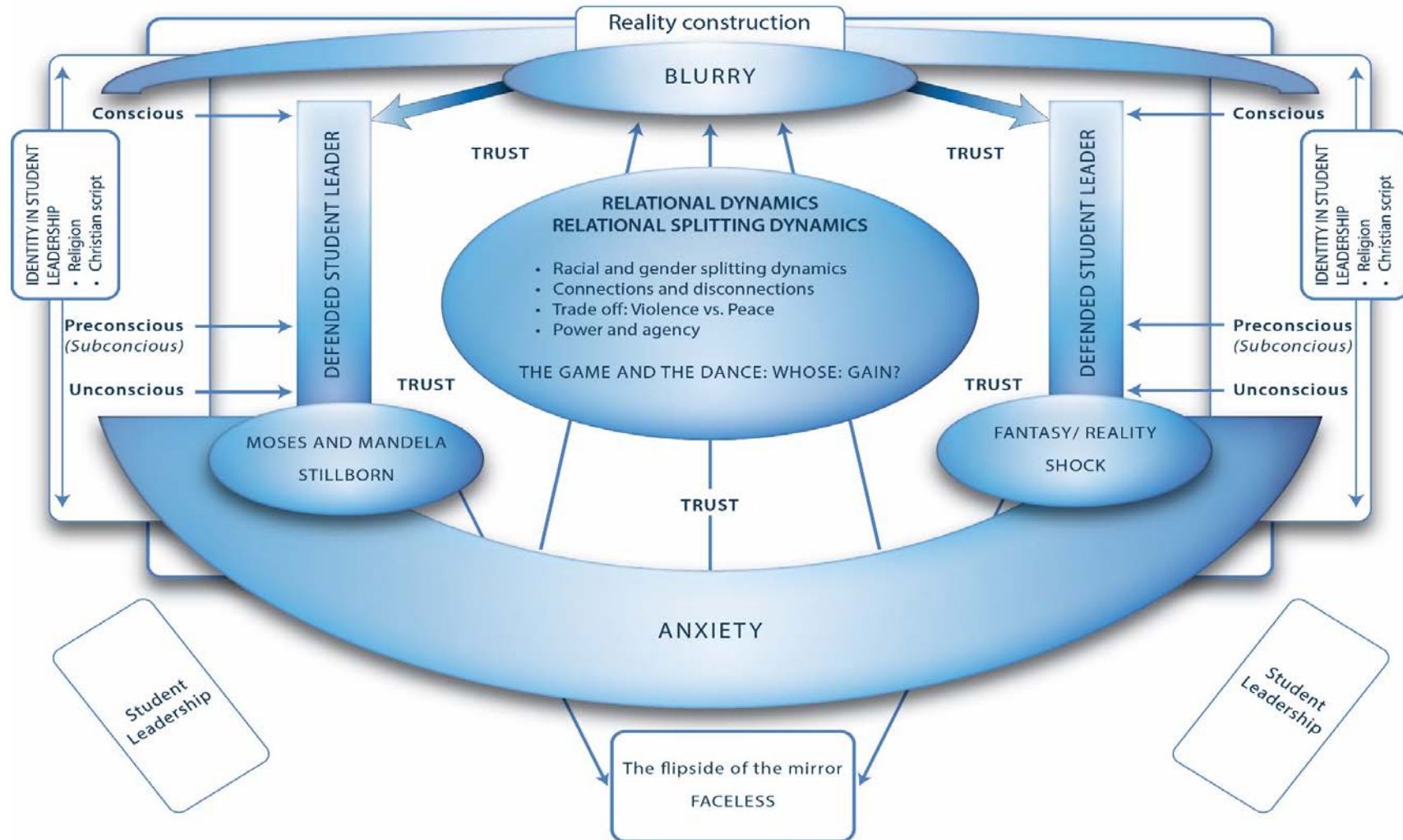


Figure 5.2 Graphic representation of the findings

## 5.11 IN A NUTSHELL

In this chapter the findings of this study have been reported on. Briefly, it has been found that student leaders have spent most of the time thinking about and negotiating the space (Higham, 2012) of student leadership for co-existence in their co-construction of this activity in a South African university. During this negotiation, they have been preoccupied with their anxiety about working with diversity dynamics; almost as if to say that student leadership is a space to make sense of the diversity in South Africa. This comes out of their preoccupation with the South African story: the past, the present and the future. The aspects of this narrative have all appeared to be blurry – at all levels of data collection. While student leadership has been spoken about as an exercise to resolve leadership identity in relation to worry over diversity dynamics, this has appeared to result in their taking up a defended leadership identity position. This has played out in the interactional dynamics; in how trust is facilitated, also in how the hopes and dreams are processed as well as in the construction of reality. There appeared to be a strong need to pursue a common goal and common cause in order to discover a shared agenda; in a way, fantasising about being homogenous. I interpret this as a contradiction of the pursuit of working with diversity dynamics and encouraging space for difference in student leadership; especially in South Africa, owing to the preoccupation with the said narrative. As a result, it appears that the social construction of student leadership in a South African university stirs up the discourse of ‘I am anxious about diversity’. I want to propose therefore that it is possible that the focus of the leadership development of student leaders is facilitated or contained in this, sometimes in ways we are aware of and at other times in ways we are not. Therefore, the different aspects of this conversation about the anxiety of dealing with diversity dynamics could contribute tools that assist student leaders to become the desired graduates of industry and of higher education.

## **CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this chapter is on the reflection, conclusions and recommendations with regard to the current research. Initially, I have spent the first part of the chapter familiarising the reader with the various reflections, undertaken from different angles that I have done in terms of the research. I start with a reflection regarding my experience as a student leader, then reproduce an excerpt from a journal entry that I made during the study to share my journey with the reader. I have also included a reflection regarding the lens through which I viewed the findings, in my position as a university employee and then as a researcher. Lastly, I provide my subjective account of the findings and interpretations that I have arrived at. The act of reflection becomes significant, given the point of subjectivity in terms of how I am positioned as indicated above, but also in the light of the axiology discussed in Chapter 2 that comes across in this chapter. Following the reflection, I take the reader through the conclusions. These comprise the conclusions about the general and the specific aims of the research described in Chapter 1. This section also includes an integrated discussion of the themes that I have recognised as salient from, and between, the literature and the findings of this research. I thereafter discuss the contributions of this study from different perspectives including the consulting psychology field, the existing literature, and the organisation being researched, as well as that of myself. Towards the end of the chapter, I also discuss the limitations to the study as well as the recommendations.

### **6.2 MY EXPERIENCE AS A STUDENT LEADER**

I joined the student leadership system towards the end of my first year at university, as a residence committee member. At that time, quota systems were being used to place black students in student leadership at the particular university where I was a student. The general rule was that students could take on a leadership position once they had been on campus for 18 months. As it turned out, my own assumption of student

leadership was earlier than this rule stipulated. I was thus canvassed to take up this role because there were not enough available black students who were eligible to do so. This is the first non-conforming aspect of my student leadership journey. The concept of having a first year student in leadership was met with some mixed feelings and responses from the other students as well as university employees who were involved with student leadership. Their reasoning was indicated to me as resulting from issues pertaining to tradition in the residence culture. A second non-conforming aspect of my student leadership role was related to my race. In context, I was a black first year student who made it to the residence house committee for the first time in its history. Later on, I was the first black student leader to contest the chairpersonship elections in the residence. My story was featured in a magazine during the following year together with another black student leader who became the first such leader to occupy the chairperson's position in the residence.

These non-conforming occurrences to me speak to the transformation story of the particular university. My experience and interaction had been filled with anxiety though. In most cases, this was anxiety about how to work with diversity and diversity dynamics, if I now reflect on the emotion using the insights of the findings of this thesis. When we were considering residence activities, we would always need to consider English versions of the Afrikaans activities that we were doing. Furthermore, if we wanted to be extraordinary we would consider the inclusion of other South African languages or cultures. Later on, this became a more comfortable exercise as our residence anthem had been translated from Afrikaans into English and Sepedi. This I learnt retrospectively after having moved on out of residence.

I could thus relate to the student leaders who were participants in this study: the black ones, for living non-conforming scripts in the changing community and the white, for the loss of what seemed to them to be normal; I had seen this with my friends, both black and white while living in residence. I relate in terms of the male - female dynamic discussed in the integration chapter; as this seemed to be embedded in the organisational culture while I was a student leader. The transformation agenda that

was placed in the hands of black female students in this study seemed to be a similar story to that of my colleague and me; we wrote a magazine article together. Christianity as a practice, way of life and religion of choice was a definite factor during the time when I was a student leader.

The issue that stands out for me, which represents new learning, is the Mandela and Moses theme. I was a student leader in the early 2000s. The story of Mandela and his legacy was fresh and the promise was in the honeymoon phase. I want to suggest that as a result, the loss and grief that Mandela and Moses have been associated with in this study would have been foreign at that time. Moreover, the stillborn child would have never been a script in our dreams. Therefore having been a student leader, these are disheartening questions, begging for reflection in terms of the journey of the collective unconscious to reach the destination that has been described in this text.

During the time of doing this study, I did experience a dip. The dip was emotional but also physical thus motivational. I kept a journal during that time to have a record of this experience. In my journal entries I found myself calling student leadership and higher education a monster. Below is a scanned copy of the specific journal entry.

## The dip

And so, when I started this ... I don't want to call journey because it sounds so mushy and it's not - path maybe I didn't really realise what I was getting myself into.

My topic - The social construction of student leadership in a South African university.

Before I talk about that let me mention this, just put it out there because I might get too much into the story about the topic and never return here or get a chance to. When I enrolled for the D, I really wanted the coursework. This degree is attached to coursework, and the coursework will help to put me ~~at~~ above the rest if we talk Counseling Psych - I didn't really sign up for the thesis - though it comes with the package so in that sense I did. So, it's been a different sign up to the thesis - Right, now that that's out in the open I can go back to the story about the study.

I chose this topic because of my attraction to leadership and to make a contribution to the leadership field. Because I have a thing for young people, they are talented, raw, they are breeding ground I thought to explore leadership relevant to them. While reading on leadership I did get to know/learn that there is definitely a gap in ~~that~~ this space. So, I decided to study student leadership.

Little did I know that student leadership is a monster on its own. Student leadership occurs in the Higher Education sector. So I have inherited this - by default, for obvious reasons when I started talking student. Maybe I could have said young people leadership, but what is that and would it be contextualised. So I also went for "student" because I could demarcate scope ... little did I know. The bigger monster is Higher Education.

So let me unpack ...

Scanned by CamScanner

Figure 6.1 Excerpt of the journal entry



This signified the intimidation and the heaviness that I felt in relation to the two concepts. Other words that come to mind include pressure, overwhelmed, helplessness and some kind of depression. In this way, I relate to the student leaders when they refer to the stillborn. So, while I could not fully understand their exact experience since I benefited from a more hopeful South Africa in which to express my student leadership, it appears that in the collective unconscious I could live their emotions in relation to my own reflexivity about this role. On this note; it appears to be interesting for me that at the time of preparing for the completion of this document, a participant of this study had indicated to be treated for a major depressive disorder diagnosis – as a reason for not participating in the member checks. This is a thought-provoking factor for me in the collective unconscious, regarding the depression in student leadership.

### **6.3 MY LENS AS A UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEE**

As a university employee, I was tasked to work with student leadership in the capacity of leadership development. As a result, I worked with the majority of the student leadership community and gained an overview of such leadership which was much larger than in my own leadership experience in the university residences. I thus noted the different dynamics at play, mostly created by the various focus areas depending on the leadership structure grouping. In this role I noted that, for example, residence student leaders had concerns different from those of the student representative council, which in turn seemed to have different interests to student leaders in student leadership programmes. As such, student leadership appeared to be diverse. Mostly, student leaders were identifiable through the leadership blazer. This is also indicated in the findings. The blazer signifies an accolade. As a result, that without a blazer seemed to be located on the other side of the 'us and them' split that was evident in the blazer. This also carried a representation of true leadership. This I also saw in the student forum discussions. Student leaders wearing blazers behaved differently to those who did not. Student leaders wearing blazers were seen to be more poised, polished and structured in their approach.

Towards the end of the process of writing up the thesis I had moved to become a lecturer in a Faculty Department in the same university. At this time, I perceived student leadership a little bit differently. My first exposure to this was during the 'Afrikaans must fall' campaign. Here I observed the racial split quite vividly. Black students acted in rage while the white students seemed to be passive and somewhat unaffected in their approach. This looked similar to the findings of this study. Black student leaders appeared to represent the rage in student leadership in a South African university while white student leaders seemed to represent what looked like a flight stance. Similarly, the black females in the campaign gave the impression of being in the forefront of displaying an approach marked by rage.

One of the most difficult aspects of being a university employee, especially in the first job described above, was that of being acknowledged or classified as part of the university management. While having experienced student leadership myself in my time as a student, I felt something that resembled a narcissistic injury in myself. On the one hand I battled to identify with being clumped together with university management by student leaders, while on the other I felt the need for self-preservation most times, as someone who could relate to these leaders. The narcissistic injury or the self-preservation looked as if they were motivated by a rejection by both worlds; thus very often I felt as if I did not belong, which points to issues of identity. As a result, I have learnt that the work of student leadership where the conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics takes place is difficult. This difficulty may leave those who already have a feeling of not belonging with a sense of rejection and of being misplaced. Those who do not belong could well mostly be those who are non-conforming, perhaps with regard to matters of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and possibly age. Thus the space for the conversation about working with diversity dynamics could be said to be an exclusive one, or one for the elite. To my mind this exclusivity seemed to be counterproductive and left me with a sense of frustration because in my mind the exclusivity appeared to close the door to the diversity that is situated beyond the exclusiveness.

As faculty staff, however, there seems to be something disempowering in connection with becoming involved in this conversation. In the end I found out about unofficial clubs that had been formed to contribute to this conversation through informal platforms. Again here, therefore, I had the sense of a pecking order, though in this case the pecking order seemed to be concerned with the position one holds on the hierarchy of the organisational organogram. In these informal structures, I noticed that women were mostly involved. Similarly to the findings of this study, the conversation would be initiated and steered by a white female. Something quite profound for me about these unofficial clubs is their nuance towards being faceless. The clubs are unofficial so they are not recognised anywhere; they function to discuss pertinent issues in the university while off the record and thus operate without a face: unidentifiable. It therefore appears that, possibly in a way similar to the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university, certain features of the conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics occur amongst faceless speakers.

#### **6.4 THE LIFE OF NEO IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

What a profound time this has been! I have found myself immersed in the journey and, task by task, learning new aspects about myself, student leadership, the South African university and all of the possible intersections as mentioned in the title of the study. I should say that at the beginning of this project, I had no idea what I was setting myself up for or what I was getting myself into. My signing up to the D Consult programme was motivated by my interest in the coursework that is a part of the programme. I found myself motivated and excited to tackle the coursework; accepting the other side of the deal: which was to put together a thesis. Since I was much less excited about becoming involved in the research part of the programme, I sought to look for a topic that would make me more enthusiastic than I was. This is because of the way that I am: passion is important to me. As such, I needed a topic that I would be passionate about.

My journey for a topic thus began.

I looked in the sphere of leadership because I have a zeal for understanding and exercising it. The literature search on leadership however did not resonate with me in terms of the gap existing in research. I had some ideas on emotional intelligence and leadership. I have always had an inclination towards social constructionism; hence this worldview became part of the mix. In the end, I identified the fact that leadership in terms of young people, particularly students, is under researched. Naturally, I sought to understand how this leadership would be socially constructed and hence I ended up with the topic of the social construction of student leadership. The concept of the role came into consideration initially. This would have encompassed how student leaders take up their role and how this role is constructed. I realised, though, that including the role would make the study too big and maybe more complex and complicated so I did without it, thankfully so.

The social construction of student leadership in a South African university has been an evolving task and maybe also a journey (in process). It has been intense to be involved in this kind of study when I can, so to speak, realise when it has played out in action outside the study during the duration of the research. I have included some newspaper clippings in an appendix H in this document to contextualise what I refer to. The past two years have been an active time in student leadership and in the context of negotiating space in South African universities; not only the particular university where I have gathered data. As such, I have been affected, and the study has also been contaminated by the shifts that have taken place in me; thus diversity has occurred in me. I experienced a dip as a result of the emotional strain related to these events that I referred to as taking place outside the study: sometimes assuming responsibility for some of the events, rightfully or not. I have thus learnt about the power of the collective unconscious and how it communicates its existence. After the data gathering session, I experienced a stuckness of about 8 months, somehow regretful for what I had learnt through the findings; at times overwhelmed by the knowledge and its meaning which were in my possession. During this time, I felt quite vulnerable and many times felt I wanted to hide, having become somewhat faceless. To an extent I think that this is what the work is about: I refer to the work of diversity dynamics. I felt guilty that I had

been exposed to the anxiety about working with such dynamics in this South African university and my non-conforming traits stemming from when I was a student leader seemed to overshadow me. I do, however, think that in student leadership in a South African university or in the work of diversity dynamics paranoia may well be a normal occurrence. It seems however obvious in any case to ask the question: who is this work for, if not for me and those currently doing it and maybe those who will do it? Somehow we as the community of South Africa and the South African university, or student leadership in a South African university, need to say to each other that someone must do it; then face the possible harsh reality of the emotional strain that will accompany it. I was upset with myself and/ or perhaps the participants for what I had found. At no point did I imagine that the main finding would be 'I am anxious about diversity'.

I now find it important to reflect on the journey regarding methodology. I have experienced a great deal of anxiety in identifying a research strategy in this regard, particularly a data gathering and data study approach that would help me to move beyond what is already in the literature and yield a perspective that makes a meaningful contribution to current literature. I also had, and have, a need to be innovative and to play around with methodology. As such, I find it hard to follow traditional approaches to a tee. I have thus taken the bold step of exploring psychosocial methods in the context of social constructionist research. I found social dream drawing to be fruitful and to yield a transcription for discourse analysis that was rich. I have enjoyed the metaphors and images as well as what they have represented. While it has not been an easy round, especially in being required to justify the scientific grounds for my approach, I have learnt a lot about deploying existing strategies for the benefit of creating new perspectives.

## **6.5 MY REFLECTION ON THE FINDINGS**

When they have attempted to engage with the research topic, the students have been preoccupied with the South African story. I have understood that the main notion

appeared to be a sense of 'I am anxious about diversity'. On the one hand this may be a genuine pursuit for students who wish to be relevant to their environment, by seeking ways to work with this anxiety and be in the forefront of transformation talks on behalf of the student population. In another way, it may be a trap for them. Their preoccupation with it may blindfold them in such a way that they have used the words 'it's blurry' to describe their experience of working with diversity. The blindfold seems to channel them into being tunnel-visioned in two ways. First, they could be focusing on diversity dynamics and transformation as the only issue of concern in student leadership; thus allowing their vision to become clouded and missing the opportunity to explore the wide range of influence that they could exercise, which could include a contribution to the transformation agenda. Secondly, the student leaders could be tunnel-visioned in assuming that there is only one way of approaching the work in diversity dynamics. This is also substantiated by the rules of engagement that have been observed in the data; particularly the selfless, accommodating, peaceful approach that is scripted as the Christian one. This approach further appears to limit the student leaders in challenging the status quo of their own resources. The rules of the game are seen to be used as a way out of non-delivery from the student leaders' perspective. They refer to the expectation being too big or the cause being too large, thus associating themselves with the stillbirth, Moses and being faceless.

The relational dynamics in the social construction of student leadership, which I have asserted takes the form of a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics, have been observed to be characterised by interactional splitting dynamics; ways to transact power at times, as a means of obtaining agentic possibilities as well as playing the field to maintain survival. My proposal about the diversity dynamics on the table is that it is like a marriage. I am informed by the work that I have been doing in couple counselling for approximately 8 years as a psychologist. Immediately I think of the words of a poem by Kahlil Gibran, a Lebanese - American poet, in the book *The Prophet*. "Let there be spaces in your togetherness". The rest of the poem reads as follows:

Let there be spaces in your togetherness, And let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together, yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow (Gibran, 2017, p. 20).

The poem advocates mechanisms of what can be said to be healthy engagement. These appear to be from a perspective of maturity in the self, security in the relationship and trust in the process (Ivey & Long, 2013; Lewandowski, Nardone & Raines, 2010; Perkel, 2013). The authors of the article titled 'The role of the self – concept clarity in relationship quality' suggest that when one has clarity in their identity they are prone to fulfilment in their relationship, which also enhances the experience of the relationship for the other party (Lewandowski et al., 2010). I interpret this notion according other existing research (Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Taylor, 1999) as having to do with how relationship partners balance between separating and connecting or leaning on the other and standing tall on one's own. My observation therefore is that the student leaders tend to struggle with the conversation under discussion, probably because they wrestle with the ambivalence of holding the balance between the identity of the self and the identity in terms of the other. There is recognition or place for needing each other according to the data, but in addition to this I suggest that there is also a place for the enjoyment of one's own diversity. In this conversation diversity or difference seems to be denied and rejected. As such, defenses are found to be used to work with diversity. I am proposing that it is 'okay' to be different although it is essential to need others. Gergen considers that we are relational beings (Gergen, 2009) in such a manner that we need each other to understand ourselves (Neuman, 2012). The interaction, it seems, has an impact on how we feel about ourselves; setting individuals and collectives to achieve growth and betterment of existence.

The use of metaphors and symbols has been rather powerful in the body of this text. Firstly, in the *Life of Pi*, which has been the inspiration for the title of this chapter but also a metaphor used to talk about one of the dreams in the overall text; there is reference to exploration of life choices: some out of the norm in terms of the society being investigated. This is a theme running through this chapter: how challenging the status quo is if one is part of student leadership and also how non-conforming behaviour is consistent in such leadership in a South African university. Secondly, the reference to Mandela and Moses has opened up a whole new world in looking at the data. The symbolism when perceived also in terms of another metaphor that of the stillborn has helped me to extract the profound attribute of narcissistic injury from the data. As it seems, the unconscious dynamics in the conversation about student leadership in a South African university appear to be, to a large extent, characterised by narcissistic injury. This characteristic has been a meeting point for understanding how student leaders link the idolisation of Mandela to the Mandela recently referred to in the literature; like in Findlay (2015). Also, the way in which they have contained shame and rage and used these to 'play the field' of student leadership looks interesting. In addition, insights into the inclusion of perfectionism are seemingly significant.

Having transformation in mind as the topic of the day in universities as well as the broader higher education landscape in South Africa, as regards student leadership I offer a reflection regarding the findings of this study in relation to my experience as a student leader; these being over 10 years apart in time. The pace of transformation in universities as referred to in the literature (Seabi et al., 2014; Sharp and Valley, 2009) seems to be to the fore. I am left to ask the question about whether the efforts to achieve transformation in universities reach a ceiling in the form of cosmetic movements (i.e. the legislation, statistics etc.) where there is possibly a difficulty and struggle for progress regarding the unconscious dynamics that relate to transformation. This discussion is important in this text as I suggest that it relates to the conversation about diversity and diversity dynamics and how these are worked with in a South African university. Having tapped into my reflection on the findings, I have found it



appropriate to present the conclusions that I have reached from the former. These are contained in the next section.

## **6.6 CONCLUSIONS**

Conclusions are offered in this chapter pertaining to the general and specific aim of the research as well as to the literature and research findings. Conclusions pertaining to the general and specific aims are presented to integrate the proposals made in chapter 1, to show how the aims have been achieved. Immediately below, I briefly report on how each general and specific aim of the research was addressed. While in chapter 5 I have discussed the findings and integrated them in terms of the literature, in this chapter I arrive at conclusions pertaining to the literature and research findings as a way of offering the insights that this study proposes. An elaborated discussion of the findings or conclusions reached regarding the literature as well as the conclusions obtained from the findings is contained in the next section.

### **6.6.1 Conclusions pertaining to the general and specific aim of the research**

The research question of the study was stated as follows:

What is the social construction of student leadership in a South African university?

As a result, the general aim of the research was consequently to explore this topic. The general aim of the study was specified in chapter 1. In chapter 2, the worldview of the study was discussed. This provided the lens through which the general aim was achieved. The methodology of the research was explored in chapter 3. This discussion included the tools used to meet the aim, which was ultimately achieved in chapter 5 where the findings revealed in chapter 4 were integrated and also discussed in terms of the literature. Conclusions about the general aim were reported in this current chapter.

The specific aims of the research were:

1. To explore the social construction of student leadership in a South African university.

The previous discussion on the general aim of the research is superimposed on the discussion regarding this specific aim. Therefore the said aim was addressed simultaneously with the general one.

2. To explore literature about different perspectives on student leadership in and out of a South African university as well as literature on South African and South African universities, so as: to inform this research regarding point of departure; context; for historical and cultural relevance; and lastly, to inform the interpretations of the data gathered in this research.

Literature has been explored to provide context to this research. According to the worldview of this study discussed in chapter 2, context is the tool that provides the bases for the theoretical perspectives that relate to this research but also for contextualising the interpretations in chapter 5. The discussion that follows in the next section, 6.6.2, is intended to show how the themes from the literature findings are integrated into the findings of the study. This discussion therefore focuses on how the findings of this research are similar to the literature, extend or add to it. In terms of the literature that has been reviewed, I identify the following as themes that have provided context to the study as well as to the interpretation of the data that has been gathered:

- The South African climate in the post-apartheid era
- The transforming university and higher education sector
- The complexity in South African leadership
- The complex dynamic in student leadership in a South African university
- Diversity dynamics
- Student power and agency

- Coping behaviour
  - Narcissistic injury
  - Pregnancy, stillbirth and grief.
3. To make recommendations to relevant practitioners regarding student leadership in a South African university.

Such recommendations have been addressed in section 6.9. These have been informed by the conclusions reached from the findings and literature in this research.

4. To make recommendations to consulting psychologists in terms of fit for purpose interventions that are linked to student leadership in a South African university.

According to Lowman (2002), a graduate with a doctoral degree in Consulting Psychology is expected to possess competencies that are organised in three broad domains in psychology. These encompass consulting to the individual, to the group and to the organisation. Having taken this advice, in this chapter I make recommendations to demonstrate fit for purpose interventions that are linked to student leadership in a South African university in terms of the individual level, group level and organisational level. These are discussed in section 6.9.2.

### **6.6.2 Conclusions pertaining to the literature and research findings**

The research findings have been organised in a summarised version in figure 5.1 and elaborated in figure 5.2. Seeing that I have integrated the literature with the findings of the study in chapter 5, when I discuss the conclusions in this chapter I present where the literature has provided context for the theme and show how sources help to build the theme, substantiate or support it. Furthermore, I discuss the findings of this research under the themes listed below and show how the findings of this study are

the same as, extend or add to the literature. The themes of this research are, it will be recalled, concern identity, relational dynamics and a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics. Additionally, I discuss the flipside of the mirror and the defended student leadership identity.

#### *6.6.2.1 Identity (Religion and the Christian script)*

In the current study, identity has been recognised from the perspective of the worldview of the research. Firstly, in the realm of social constructionism Foucault (1978) has referred to the contextual identity as a way that people come to understand themselves in terms of the socially acceptable behaviour that they have internalised using language as a communication tool. Furthermore Gergen (2009, 2011) proposes that identity is the outcome of preceding relationships that are lived or dreamt experiences – thus highlighting the relational process. More inclined towards the incorporation of the psychodynamic stance, Parker (1997) has spoken about the repressed self while Hollway and Jefferson (2008) refer to the defended self. Both Parker (1997) as well as Hollway and Jefferson (2008) have provided this researcher with the advice that unconscious processes beyond the relational process (Gergen, 2009, 2011) and the contextual identity (Foucault, 1978) are incorporated in the building of identity. Other literature on leadership however has looked at leadership through a psychosocial lens and found that leaders' identities are transcendental and not homogenous; thus leaders construct multiple, competing and ambiguous identities of leadership (Ford, 2010). As a result, the interpretations made and furthermore the conclusions discussed in this section have been guided by these above mentioned thoughts. Consequently, the South African climate post-apartheid as well as the literature findings about the transforming of universities and of the higher education sector display aspects of the contextual identity that could be relevant to the identity of a student leader. Furthermore, the transforming universities and higher education, both of which are complex, show an effect on identity in a way that infers the repressed self (Parker, 1997) and the defended one (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Below, I discuss the literature findings regarding the South African climate in the post-apartheid scenario as well as in the said universities and higher education sector. In addition, I also show how the

findings of this research add to the literature in respect to existing sources, but more so in terms of the findings of this research relating to the identity of a student leader. The latter serves as one of the components in the social construction of student leadership in a South African university.

*a. South African climate in post-apartheid and student leadership identity*

The South African climate in post-apartheid seems to be dynamic, since research has referred to South Africa as a racialised space in transformation (Long, 2011; Walker, 2005). In this dynamic climate, there seems to be a preoccupation about the state of affairs. This could be a sign of anxiety and uneasiness. This preoccupation seems to be consistent over time, in the literature: first shown by the latter's reference to South Africa as a racialised space in 2005 and subsequently in 2011 (Long, 2011; Walker, 2005). Then in 2000, Yudelowitz wrote about the state of leadership in South Africa. In 2003 and 2004, Jansen articulated the state of South African universities. In recent dates there seems to be concern for the employability of graduates (Akinyemi, 2010; Baldry, 2016; Kruss & Wildschut, 2016) and current trends and challenges in the South African university as a way to audit the journey, during the past years, of post-apartheid South Africa (Singh, 2015; Wolhunter, 2014), but also the status of professions (Louw & Duvenhage, 2016; Manyisa, 2016; Schutte, Kennon & Bam, 2016) and service delivery (de Wet, 2016; Govender & Barnes, 2014). As such, it seems as though there have been changes at a structural level, but as indicated by the climate, it may be that the change is still in process at an emotional level. The literature has found that a gap exists between the structural efforts to implement transformation and the experience of staff and students in universities (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; May, 2012). Benson and Prinsloo (2013) as well as Du Toit and Forlin (2009) have written about transformation in terms of culture. I have found in this research that identity in student leadership has been framed in terms of religion and Christianity, both which have been noted as sub-themes in the discussion about identity. As a result, I conclude that the conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity in relation to identity is also one about religion and culture. Culture because Christianity or the Christian script has

been accepted in this group as a way of life; thus informing socially acceptable behaviour as in Foucault (1978). Religion and culture or the Christian script seems to be regarded as the ideal self or ideal ego state in terms of the findings of the research. In my understanding of these, this ideal self or ideal ego state is used to present the socially acceptable and desirable actions at a cognitive level but perhaps not always at an emotional level (Lemma, 2003). Thus the disconnect between the cognitive and emotional expression ends up in a pseudo self which also causes stress. I thus suggest a conclusion based on the findings of this research that leadership which is expressed from the position of a pseudo self raises questions about the ethical leadership and corruption practices in student leadership and in leadership in the higher education space or in South African society at large. These questions, I propose, could arise as the socially desirable requirement seems to be to present a favourable side of one's personality which may not always be congruent with the true self, as at times seen in the research findings of this study. I suggest the conclusion that when people feel constrained to be congruent, they are more likely to miss the opportunity to think critically about leadership issues; this implicates their ethical leadership capacity. On the other hand, though, religion and Christianity may have been used as coping or defense mechanisms as well as a safety net that students revert to, where they find their solace. The safety net could also be provided for in terms of the notion that because South African is known to be a country practising Christianity (Jenckins, 2006, 2014), it then becomes a convenient shared commonality, in other words a way of being that can be easily predicted. In addition, because it is a culture that subscribes to norms and the like, it is foreseeable and clear. This is consequently positive in terms of leadership behaviour; since the student leaders can be said to be exhibiting self-management techniques in their student leadership. This notion is aligned to the social constructionist theoretical assumptions (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009). The conclusion also resembles the sentiments in the literature that one of the qualities for successful leadership includes having a common vision or a shared commonality within the leadership team (Chang, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2014). Furthermore, in leadership research literature it has been found that self-management, otherwise termed self-leadership, is central to successful leadership and also important in terms of leadership

in relation to transformation (McMillan, 2015; Mfene & Taylor, 2015; Pihl-Thingvad, 2014; Keis, 2014). Next, I discuss the complexity brought about by the transforming universities and higher education, in order to further elaborate on the findings regarding the theme of identity.

*b. The transforming universities and higher education sector and the complexity regarding student leadership identity*

The transformation of universities and higher education began after the inception of the post-apartheid era. The literature has reported times when rethinking transformation in South African higher education had been necessary (Le Grange, 2011). This means to me that the journey of transformation in this respect has not been free from challenges and difficulties. These have also been referred to in the literature (Jansen, 2004; Teicher, 2013). Similarly other researchers have called this transformation a changing of culture (Thaver, 2009, Waghid, 2003) and also referred to it as a social justice issue (Mncube, 2008). As such, the said transforming universities and higher education sector have also been faced with expanding opportunities and creating equality in spite of various levels of diversity (Notshulwana, 2011). The findings of this study concur that the transformation of universities and the higher education sector is a salient task and that this is taking place. However, the findings of this research extend the literature by contributing the voice of student leaders in a historically white university in relation to transformation of universities and higher education generally.

In terms of student leadership specifically, as referred to in chapter 1 the literature points to two main ways in which student leadership occurs in a South African university. One is through a representative body such as an SRC which occupies leadership since it is elected by fellow students. This type of student leadership is recognised and regulated by the Higher Education Act 1997. The other method of

arriving in student leadership involves going through a selection process to participate in a leadership development programme. This study accepts both groups as student leaders. Both groups in this research have been busy with transformation, although differently. The representative bodies are mandated by the Higher Education Act 1997 while the other group will involve themselves in transformation as a practice field for what they have learned in their respective leadership development programmes.

At the same time literature on the transforming of universities and higher education is vast and varied. This aspect of the literature is also evidenced in the reference list of this study. The literature refers to experiences of the participants of the universities including staff and students (Seabi et al., 2014; Sharp & Vally, 2009), the protests in this sector (Jansen, 2003; Koen et al., 2006), the transformation discourse (ASSA, 2009; Hall, 2008; Jansen, 2003; Van Wyk, 2005, Waghid, 2003; 2nd National Higher Education Summit, 2015), the changes that have faced universities and higher education including mergers (Jansen, 2003; Mouton et al., 2013; Sehoole, 2005; Thaver, 2009; Van der Westhuizen, 2011; Woodrooffe, 2011), internationalisation (Kishun, 2007; Louw & Mayer, 2008), Africanisation (Botha, 2010), issues of enrolment and retention (Angelopulo, 2013; Imenda, Kongolo & Grewal, 2004; Kongolo & Grewal, 2004), funding (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010) and so forth. These issues of the transforming universities and higher education seem to me to have set up power dynamics which could bring the identity of a student leader into question. For one, the mergers could have resulted in a 'better and lesser than' dynamics between the historically white universities (better than) and historically black universities (lesser than) that were involved in the merging process. Literature (Sehoole, 2005; Thaver, 2009; Van der Westhuizen, 2011; Woodrooffe, 2011) evidences this power dynamic. In addition, the discourse of the 'new students' used by Cross and Carpentier (2009) could also imply a power dynamic between those who are not new students and those who are new, from a discourse analysis perspective. Some literature has looked at unpacking white privilege in the context of universities and higher education (Swartz et al., 2014), thus recognising the power imbalances in the system as well as the advantages that are available to white students (Constandius & Bitzer, 2014; Daniels



& Damoms, 2011). Issues of internationalisation at times appear to clash with Africanisation though possible compatibility has also been recognised (Botha, 2010). In this research, student leadership has been spoken about as being complex. The complexity of student leadership was found to be enveloped in both formal and informal roles. Mostly, while the formal role was found in the legislation regarding student leadership, the informal one involved issues regarding the complexity resulting from transformation in universities and higher education sector. Thus the issues relating to the transforming universities and higher education arena have been understood in research to have implications for the understanding of the meaning of leadership as a concept. Literature has presented two ways of looking at leadership which seem to be accepted in the context of universities and higher education: Eurocentric, which I propose could coincide with internationalisation, and Afrocentric which may align to the sentiments related to Africanisation. Whereas for student leadership in this research; leadership has meant differing aspects that have been underpinned by an anxiety over working with diversity dynamics.

#### *6.6.2.2 Relational dynamics*

Relational dynamics have been represented in the sub-theme of relational splitting dynamics. This is the place in the data when the defence mechanism of splitting was mainly used. I therefore suggest that the relational dynamics have been managed in terms of splitting as a way of finding safety and security in the conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity. It seems that splitting, which includes the assignment of an extreme position, allows for people to move away from the grey areas that are not extreme. These areas may be the place where integration of difference could happen. Thus, taking an extreme position assures one of a place of belonging in terms of its unambiguous nature.

The splitting in this research has taken place by way of making connections or disconnections using racialised gender dynamics. This is similar to the finding in literature where the literature on diversity and diversity dynamics continues to discover the act of splitting in terms of gender and race (Cilliers, 2004; Cilliers & Smit, 2006;

May, 2012; Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012; Pretorius et al., 2012). The conclusion that I arrive at in relation to this alludes to the notion that women are put in positions of leadership (and power) to serve the agenda of men, whether sent by the men or subconsciously implemented by the women themselves. If the latter, I propose that women subconsciously perceive men as superior because of their historical and cultural disposition. At the same time, it has been reported in the literature that women, especially black females, have found it to be costly to integrate into the academic world of universities (Hills, 2015; Spencer, 2009). Another study shows that when the discourse of women in leadership relates to their studies, the feminist ethic of care is the main finding (Fine, 2009). It is as if women operate with a sense that they cannot exist without men – a dynamic observed in this study. Thus a dependency on men by women is observed in the current research. Therefore the women could be vulnerable to operationalising an agenda that is important to men, at the expense of presenting the agenda that would be important to them. At the same time, this may mean that at an unconscious level, the men send the women to operationalise their agenda on behalf of the men. Men have seemed to have been manipulating the apparent weaknesses of women to cause their goals to be achieved since the era of women's empowerment and development began, where women have gained legislated priority over men in the broader organisational context.

In addition, I conclude from the findings of this study regarding the subtheme of racial and gender splitting that historical and cultural positioning seems to exert a direct effect on leadership vision or on the driving force behind how student leaders decide on aspects of focus. This is evident in the findings of this research when student leaders have gravitated towards each other based on gender or on race, depending on the issue of discussion. It seemed that the student leaders would not hold and/or express personal opinions that would isolate them from the gender or racial grouping that they belonged to. As such, their goals for leadership seemed to have been determined by historically or culturally driven agendas or expectations, as also noted in the literature (May, 2012; Pretorius, May & Cilliers, 2012; Robus & MacLeod, 2006; Sutherland, 2017; Thomson, 2014; Woodrooffe, 2011). In this manner, history and culture seem

to seduce leaders into uttering certain leadership vision statements that draw the crowd to them or keep them connected to those who are similar.

Student leadership as an area in leadership literature is necessarily being differentiated from other kinds of leadership because of the aspect of student power and agency that such leadership necessarily deals with. Some of the literature regards power and agency as hands that feed each other (Bierra, 2014). According to previous research, one would need to experience power in order for them to have the confidence to take a position of agency; but in addition organisations facilitate or hinder agency by how power is being distributed (Bierra, 2014; Tourish, 2014). While this literature finding is an international one it is consistent with the findings of this study. In this study, the issue of power and agency seems to imply a need for affirmation for the student leaders; hence in this way power and agency are used to make connections and effect disconnection – in other words they present a relational splitting dynamic. In some sense, it may be the case that leadership is undertaken to meet an unconscious need that is self-serving and hints at a low self-esteem. I am motivated to conclude by asking why leaders need to be seen. This is because in this research, student leaders have taken positions of agency as a way to assert their power or to assume it. Literature that has looked at the global trends in student power has found that cultural explanations and contexts are important in studies on student power and agency (Klemencic, 2014). This source (Klemencic, 2014) finds that at times when students have a sense of power and take agentic action, this may not achieve the influence that they seek to exercise based on their national and institutional contexts. As a result, this current research concludes that not only the complexity of student leadership but, in addition, the psychological developmental status of the student leaders as well as the changes in higher education situate the power and agency in student leadership in such a fashion that student leadership can be distinguished from other forms in terms of differentiating characteristics. This differentiation of student leadership is based on the heightened importance placed on power and agency in order to respond to the call of serving their fellow students, indeed desiring the camaraderie with fellow students (in leadership and other students not in leadership) as opposed to the scenario in adult samples

(Getz & Roy, 2013; Tourish, 2014). Student leaders seem to use power and agency to mobilise for participative approaches with other students, as also found in previous literature (Getz & Roy, 2013).

Consequently, connections and disconnections have also been made by the trading of peace and violence in this study. In effect, when peace has been used to create a connection by default and implication, violence has been employed to create a disconnection. As such, student leaders had been acting from a position of self-preservation that seems to have been driven by a fear of rejection (Son, 2015). In this manner, student leaders have taken the extreme position without entertaining the middle ground between peace and violence: placing themselves in an antithetical binary (Lemma, 2003). I therefore tentatively conclude that the fear of rejection has translated into an unassertive position for the student leaders. Therefore, by implication the student leaders refrain from taking a position, thus relinquishing self-responsibility and leadership responsibility (Sutherland, 2017). By employing the binary of peace and violence to make connections and disconnections unity is rejected (St Clair & Wigren, 2004; Lemma, 2003). This is to minimise the chances of being rejected by sticking to one's own group of association depending on the diversity characteristic that would be safe to identify with at that time. In addition, the motivation for self-preservation inspires a kind of narcissistic attitude towards those who disconnections are pursued with (Lemma, 2003; Son, 2015). The narcissistic attitude becomes a way to survive in leadership, I want to suggest. As such, it could be the case that the student leader may have a difficult time in connecting to the vulnerability of being human, as appears from the findings. Thus I conclude that student leader may be positioned as - when a leader taps into this kind of vulnerability then they may have failed in leadership. Other research has found that a move from self-preservation that is facilitated by trust promotes growing and learning in the particular organisation (Cilliers & May, 2010; Sutherland, 2017). Research on the topic of violence and strategies that students in South Africa undertake to pursue change in higher education have focused more on students in general than on student leadership as such (Commey, 2015; Dlodlu, 2016; Le Grange, 2011; Leuscher-Mamashela, 2013, 2014; Seabi et al., 2012).

### *6.6.2.3 The conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics*

The conclusion that this study reaches is that the co-construction of student leadership in a South African university is used to create space for a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics. This conversation constitutes the identity of a student leader as well as the relational dynamics between student leaders where a defended student leadership identity is present. In this following discussion I elaborate on the conclusions arrived at in terms of existing literature and the findings of the current study. I do so in relation to the present complex space where the conversation is held, how the complexity affects the conversation, the nature of the conversation as well as the diversity dynamics that are present.

Studies undertaken in the field of diversity dynamics have been reported in the organisational context and with various population groups such as corporate employees (Cilliers & Smit, 2006; Pretorius et al., 2012), university staff and students (Cilliers, 2004; May, 2012) and executive managers (Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012). Their conclusion involves the need in South Africa to integrate the race and gender split, subgroup and individual identities as well as the denigrated and idealised parts of the self (Cilliers, 2004; May, 2012; Pretorius et al., 2012). In this current study, the conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics constitutes identity in student leadership and relational dynamics. In terms of their identity it seems that student leaders experience a fear of failure, while they may also be set up to fail from the system level, given the disconnect between the expected performance and the actual lived experience. The student leaders thus employ omnipotence that leads to splitting, rather than merely employing splitting as reported with regard to other leadership in previous literature (Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012; Pretorius et al., 2012). This dynamic suggests the dilemma in which the student leaders find themselves, since no formal training has been reported for representative groups while when some kind of leadership development initiative is presented for those in leadership programmes there is no formal mandate to express these learnings in the student community; student leaders could be systemically set up to fail. For both groups, the

expectations seem unclear, thereby presenting a relational dynamic for student leaders. Therefore, they find themselves in a dilemma. On the one hand they experience a fear of failure which could be taken to trip them up, to fail, while the unclear systemic expectation sets them up to fail, with the same result. In addition, they may be confronted with the paradox of being both invisible and visible as student leaders.

The conversation about diversity dynamics that is held during the co-construction of student leadership occurs in the midst of differing perspectives in the literature, referring to South African leadership specifically and leadership in general from the global perspective. Although these differences occur there may be common principles on leadership that seem to be consistent throughout. The literature refers to a duality in terms of perspectives regarding leadership, namely the Afrocentric and Eurocentric ones (Booyesen, 2001). When describing leadership in South Africa from an organisational context perspective, it has been found that leadership in South Africa has appeared to have moved away from transactional leadership towards aspects of transactional and transformational leadership being combined, because of the complexity in the environment (Shokane, Stanz & Slabbert, 2004).

Considering the findings of this current research, Moses and Mandela have been idolised as leadership examples. Consistently literature (Barro, 2015; Arslan & Turhan, 2016; Pietersen, 2015; Zivotofsky, 1994) has done the same. In terms of Moses, literature within and on South Africa seems not to be available; as a result, this study makes a new contribution to the literature regarding Moses as a leadership symbol for student leaders. Existing international research (Barro, 2015; Herskovitz & Klein, 1999; Zivotofsky, 1994) has however established that leadership lessons from Moses consist of characteristics that have to do with being caring, concerned for others and willing and ready to act out of this concern (Zivotofsky, 1994), with which the student leaders in this study have identified. In terms of Mandela, it appears that his style of leadership is advocated for conflict resolution and reconciliatory efforts (Kok & Yunus, 2016). As such, Mandela has been associated with Ubuntu in literature (Boyd, 2013; Chasi &

Levi, 2016), which is the case with the student leaders in this study as well. It will be recalled that Ubuntu is a word for collectiveness and humanity. Therefore other research has noted Mandela's leadership as encompassing integration between personal, interpersonal and strategic leadership (Pietersen, 2015; Stengel, 2008).

The sentiments of previous research about Moses and Mandela in terms of their leadership seem to be similar to those in this research. Moreover, servant leadership has been one of the keywords in the literature on leadership in South Africa; which the student leaders in this current study have also referred to as being important. The concepts of servant leadership seem to be congruent with those expressed about the leadership of Moses and Mandela. Additionally, other research has described Julius Malema, who is the leader of the EFF party in South Africa, as the new Mandela (Findlay, 2015). This is an interesting point as it leads me to introduce one other enigma that student leaders in this study have experienced. On one level they would like to identify with both Mandela and Moses for the characteristics that have been described above which relate to being selfless but also iconic or memorable; hence their embracing of the approach of Malema. At the same time, they find themselves only in the shoes of Moses who never entered the Promised Land (Herskovitz, 1999).

Therefore trust also seems to have been the key to the conversation. This might seem obvious because of the anxiety that is felt when holding the conversation about working with diversity dynamics. In literature, trust has to do with the extent, to which defense mechanisms are used to work with aspects of identity as well as with interactional dynamics that pose a threat or cause one to feel that she or he does not have support (Cilliers & May, 2010). I understand that in this study trust would represent a shield against the rejection that the student leaders fear, which offers a perceived guarantee for success in the face of being afraid to fail. The seeming importance of trust in this conversation may lead to the conclusion that when one effects change which challenges the status quo in a system of student leadership in higher education or a South African university, the system could spit one out of it as a way of rejecting unity for the sake of self-preservation. Other researchers have reported in literature on the

student demonstrations regarding dissatisfaction with transformation as well as responses to inequality and equity in some South African universities, and can be cited in this regard (Commey, 2015; Dlodlu, 2016; Seabi, et al., 2012; Sharp & Vally, 2009).

The sense of the missing trust established in the findings of this research has manifested as relational splitting dynamics during the conversation about diversity dynamics. The splitting dynamics appear by way of student leaders' presentation of themselves in a socially desirable manner while also displaying defense mechanisms which are deployed to cope with the anxiety that exists during the said conversation. Consequently I conclude that the ideal ego (socially desirable presentation) that splits in the relational space of leadership ensues in a pseudo self (defended student leadership identity). I propose that this may be exposing a 'damaged' system of student leadership, of higher education and the South African university. While student leaders present with a pseudo self in a system that holds on to iconic leaders (i.e. the past) they struggle to become integrated from a diversity perspective where they will be free to appreciate a different South Africa, for instance in higher education. The latter being the place where learning occurs, the latter suggests the continuous production of a generational collective unconscious that rejects unity. Organisations therefore reproduce themselves as a way of maintaining homeostasis and as a means of coping with the bad and the ugly of the past dispensation.

The conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics has also been referred to as 'blurry' by the student leaders. To say that the conversation is blurry might be out of convenience, so that the engagement with the conversation could be delayed and stalled, which is evident in the literature as well (Seabi, et. al, 2012; Sharp & Vally, 2009). Again and also consistent with the literature (Le Grange, 2011; Sharp & Vally, 2009), to say that the conversation is blurry could stem from a sense of denial regarding the present reality of a 'required' integration and change (or transformation) in the higher education space. In both scenarios though, my conclusion is concerned with the rejection and resistance of 'a new normal' by student leadership, the higher education sector and the South African university. In part, the new normal is



necessitating that these three elements admit to some of the bad and ugly that requires changing. This is painful, embarrassing, costly and uncomfortable. The bad and the ugly that, I suggest, lead to the pain, embarrassment and the like receive a degree of exposure to some level when one enters student leadership as has been reported in this study. Thus for the white student leaders, given the racialised splitting in relational dynamics the exposure to the bad and the ugly inspires shame and flight in the face of white privilege. In the same breath, for the black student leader rage and a fight response emerge in the face of black disadvantage. Both these scenarios imply an injury to the integrity of the self that points to the wound of the stillborn (Harris, 2010; Mann, 2004) as seen in the findings of this research. The stillborn in this study characterises the disappointment and unmet expectations of the promises of a reality that leaders have not yet seen. In a way, this calls for a psychic reconstruction. As intimated, student leaders have seemed to hold on to perpetuating the legacy of iconic leaders while placing a leadership burden on themselves to attain an idolised leadership. Leadership therefore begins with high expectations and ends with harsh lack of attainment. Hence leadership appears to be a place to face the reality of the true self – where deep intentions are tested and deep self-knowledge is acquired. I apply this to individual student leaders, the organisation of student leadership, the higher education sector and the South African university.

The blurry conversation about student leadership may also be linked to the current legislation and policies that advise such leadership. As mentioned; I have understood from the literature that representative groups while they are mandated by the Higher Education Act, 1997 to play the role as indicated in the Act; the student leaders seem to have no formal development initiatives that create competence and capacity for them to execute this mandate. At the same time, student leaders in development programmes may receive input in terms of leadership competence and capacity building but no formal platform to implement the learning. The presentation of student leadership in the literature in a way that assumes student leaders who are involved with student representation are concerned with and focused on political issues, while student leadership development programmes focus on the professional aspects of

leadership practice, leaves the impression that political leadership capacity is removed from professional leadership practice; or that the two cannot happen together at the same time. As has been observed in this thesis, students on the SRC perceive student needs differently from those who are not on the SRC. Furthermore, students in the residences seem to have different needs to those living elsewhere. This is important to note given the finding of Tourish (2014) that organisations would mostly legitimise the actions of those they consider to be within the parameters of formal leadership. As such, the different perspectives on student leadership seems to show to me that student leadership may need to be legislated more broadly than currently. In addition, leadership development has been advocated in literature discussing student leadership in South Africa especially on the premise of recognising the significant role that leadership can play if geared towards social issues (Getz & Roy, 2013). Internationally, it seems that issues of racism and socioeconomic status (Chung, 2014; Delgado, Reche, Lucena & Diaz, 2013; Wu & Bao, 2013) are also the concern of student leaders. As such, policies and legislation that relate to student leadership could be more fully aligned and integrated in terms of the different dynamics pertaining to the university environment. I envision that the view of student representation could shift, wherein the political aspect of student leadership could be reviewed or allowed to enjoy more diversity. I make recommendations in this regard later in the chapter.

#### *6.6.2.4 The flipside of the mirror and the defended student leadership identity*

On the flipside of the mirror, student leaders have presented themselves as faceless, which may also represent a defended student leadership identity. Given the prior discussions in this chapter it seems that student leaders may be resisting being known, and thus prefers to appear to be faceless as a means of being powerful. In a way, exposing the face, or the act of not being faceless, is like giving up power – therefore appearing faceless seems to be understood by them as an act of being powerful. This occurs simultaneously with the fact that the student leaders are consciously and actually known by others because they have been elected or selected into their leadership position. For this reason, holding on to power is like having one's bread buttered on both sides. Thus there seems to be a limited self-awareness of student

leaders because the power that they have and hold on to places them in a situation where they are trapped between the university management and the general student population. Consequently they may lose their strategic leverage of facilitating effective advances in higher education and the South African university. Appearing faceless is thus a form of coping behaviour: as mentioned, behaviour that is used to cope with the situation at hand. Literature refers to religious coping (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015; Brelsford et al., 2015; Pargament, 2011; Ross et al., 2009); or using religion to cope as such that can be referred to as coping behaviour. Furthermore, the literature relates fantasising (Greenwald & Harder, 2003; Matsui & Kodama, 2007), perfectionism (Beiling et al., 2004) and counselling (Bowman & Payne, 2011) to coping behaviour. These findings are similar to the findings of the current study because student leaders have used Christianity as a basis to identify what they have called 'true leadership' as a sense of student leadership identity. The taking up of Christianity as a coping behaviour that enjoys socially acceptable standing thus appears to legitimise this sense that may be interpreted as true leadership by these leaders. In addition, though, student leaders have also used defense mechanisms such as omnipotence and splitting to cope with their student leadership environment. Perfectionism has been referred to by student leaders as a way to contain or express their high expected performance and has been related to a mechanism to protect themselves against failure.

It thus appears that student leaders are coping or in survival mode while exercising leadership. This coping or survival mode I interpret to be the defended student leadership identity which is exhibited through the socially acceptable views of Christianity, as well as defence mechanisms mainly of omnipotence and splitting as well as perfectionism. The necessity to practice coping behaviour, points to the narcissistic injury as well as the stillbirth and loss that student leaders experience in leadership – hence their defendedness. Below I discuss the conclusions that I have reached about the narcissistic injury as well as the stillbirth and loss.

### *a. Narcissistic injury*

It may be that student leaders' need coping behaviour as regards such injury. Literature presents it as referring to deep wounds that occur in the core of the self, which shred, weaken, splinter and drain the self in a way that lowers self-esteem or the security that one finds in one's identity, in that manner inducing rage, shame and humiliation (Levin, 1993). Other literature has referred to narcissistic injury as an expression of revenge (Neuman, 2012) and as associated with aggressive behaviour (Konrath et al., 2006; Levin, 1993; Perkel, 2013; Richardson & Hammock, 2011). Furthermore, previous research has found that there could be a relationship between narcissistic injury and perfectionism among university students (Mann, 2004). In addition, the literature has linked narcissistic injury to death and explored how Western societies face death and work with loss as a way of understanding shame in terms of such injury (Harris, 2010). While not all the above authors have discussed this type of injury in the context of leadership, at least one source (Son, 2015), has linked narcissistic injury to Moses as a leadership figure and has understood that self-preservation comes into play when leaders perform in such roles. Therefore this study concurs with the findings of previous literature and extends the literature by identifying narcissistic injury as a concept in the student leadership research area. In addition, while other research in South Africa refers to characteristics of narcissism in leadership or the preference for characteristics that are different from narcissism such as servant leadership (Chathury, 2008) and Ubuntu-like qualities (Booyesen, 2001; Boyd, 2013; Mukoza & Suki, 2013; Zekan, Peronja & Russo, 2012), this current research extends the literature by relating narcissistic injury to leadership, specifically student leadership. In addition, while the leadership lessons from Moses' life have been linked with narcissistic injury, this research makes a new contribution by identifying him as a leadership role model for student leaders in a South African university who have also been observed to display such an injury. The contribution made by this research in terms of the said injury proposes a different understanding in terms of contextualising the diversity and diversity dynamics especially in terms of the splitting by race. Previous research (Son, 2015) has informed the present study about narcissistic injury manifesting in rage and

shame. Thus the finding that White student leaders displayed shame, while Black student leaders displayed rage, offers this different understanding of narcissistic injury in the given context. Therefore this current study concludes by extending and adding explanations to the literature concerning diversity and diversity dynamics as displayed in the said type of injury amongst student leadership in a South African university.

*b. Pregnancy, stillbirth and grief*

Life and death have been part of the discussion in this current study. One of the main themes discussed in chapter 5 relates to pregnancy, stillbirth and grief (loss). In the literature, these three concepts have also been clustered together at times (Bonnette & Broom, 2012; Henriksen & Thuen, 2015; La Marca-Ghaemmaghami & Ehlert, 2015; Napal & Francos, 2015; Refabert, 2014). In some instances, literature discusses pregnancy in terms of stress (La Marca-Ghaemmaghami & Ehlert, 2015; Napal & Francos, 2015). In other instances gender differences in terms of responses to pregnancy and stillbirth have been explored (Bonnette & Broom, 2012; Henriksen & Theun, 2015). Further literature has looked at life and death issues in relation to silent rage in connection with homosexuality (Refabert, 2014). This literature finding is the closest to the findings of this study as a connection in this study has been made to the stillborn in the context of rage associated with diversity dynamics. Moreover, other literature findings that are similar to the findings of this study deal with the effect of loss on identity as well as the relation between shame, grief and trauma (Kauffman, 2010; Lichenthal & Breibart, 2016). All the literature that has been found and discussed in this study has indicated that the topics relating to life and death are not linked with leadership. As such, this study brings such issues of pregnancy or possibility of life, stillbirth and loss closer to leadership, particularly in a student leadership context. This is where psychodynamics helps us to understand the deeper meaning of the metaphors used to represent issues in student leadership. The latter finding (that brings issues of hope and loss closer to student leadership) could be important in light of the despondency that people in South Africa, including student leaders, may feel regarding the outcome of the promise that enabled many to envision a bright future in

South Africa following the inauguration of Mandela as the president of South Africa (McGroathy, 2015; Woodrooffe, 2011). Some of these despondency features are referred to in Netshitenzhe (2015) and Woodrooffe (2011) as dynamics that seem to make the transition and interactions amongst student leaders, and probably many South Africans, tricky while still in the process of transformation.

The narcissistic injury referred to above, together with the issue of the stillborn and grief, relate to a possible depression experienced from a pregnancy that did not turn out as expected. This depression therefore could explain the paradox and numerous dilemmas that student leaders experience as referred to above; since paradoxes and dilemmas are characteristic in depression (Abramson & Sackheim, 1977; Lester, 1989; Nicolson, 1999). Additionally, the issue of depression impresses on me the thought that in student leadership they need to take on a task that is bigger than them. The task could be larger than them based on the stage of their life, the magnitude of their responsibility for student needs in terms of the Higher Education Act and the dilemma that they may encounter in terms of being students and having to rise above all this when in the student leadership role. As such, this assumption of the task that is impacted by the dynamics that have been found in this research may blur the reasonable task of completing their degree and growing as aspiring leaders.

### **6.6.3 Concluding thoughts – literature and research findings**

As concluding thoughts to this section, I propose that there is a learning in the study about an aspect in the South African societal discourse regarding the embracing of difference or living with it. In a way, it seems to me as if there is a battle with difference because the South African discourse seems to be about looking for harmonious living. If this is true, it may mean that in the discourse there is an assumption that difference cannot ensure harmonious living; only sameness can. This premise may come from historical influence. I suggest, though, that enabling diversity could open space to experience the vibrancy of different perspectives that would yield the different unconscious dynamics that we have seen in this text which have more potential for

psychological harm. A more open space for diversity, I propose, enables a space for trust that makes room for more authentic connections and honest disconnections. Student leaders would thus construct their identity with less defensiveness, which I believe would facilitate their representation of fellow students and place them in a more fertile space for growth on their leadership journey.

## **6.7 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY**

This study was undertaken as part of the requirements towards a qualification in the field of consulting psychology. As mentioned elsewhere in this document, consulting psychology provides a place in psychology where the different psychology practice fields interact, thereby affording a platform for intervention on the level of the individual, group and organisation (Lowman, 2002). Contributions of this study to the field of consulting psychology have thus been made in both research and practice to enable intervention at the level of the individual, group and organisation in relation to student leadership in a South African university. In terms of research, this study has indicated areas of similarity to other research as well as extensions and additions to research in the interest of consulting psychology, especially from a methodological perspective. The use of pluralism, as well as fusing discourse analysis and a psychodynamic interpretation have been significant to me and hopefully will be to the wider consulting psychology fraternity. Literature (such as Chamberlain, et al., 2011; Frosh, 2003; Frost, 2011; Frosh & Saville Young, 2008) has spoken about the importance of this research approach. Other studies (such as May, 2012; Mersky, 2013; Long, 2013, Pretorius et al., 2012) have explored psychodynamic approaches in research methods in organisational research and in the consulting field. This current research makes a contribution in terms of the use of pluralism in the organisational research field, specifically in the student leadership landscape. As per the aims of the study, recommendations have been made to relevant practitioners regarding student leadership in a South African university, thus making recommendations to consulting psychologists in terms of fit for purpose interventions in this respect. Of these, I would like to mention the recommendation of the implementation of student leadership

schools (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Keeling, 2004, 2006; Osteen & Coburn, 2012; Page, Loots & du Toit, 2005; Rosch & Anthony, 2012) as well as the facilitation of organisational effectiveness (Lowman, 2013) by aiming for more integration in the student leadership landscape, which will be discussed in section 6.9.2.

The contributions that I regard this study as having made to existing literature first of all entail having heard the student leaders' perspective. Other studies that have been referred to in the literature such as Cross and Carpentier (2009), Getz and Roy (2013) as well as Seabi, et al. (2014) have only investigated students in general; without looking at student leadership specifically. I find it important to consider student leaders in particular, given that student leadership has been included in the decision making processes of the university (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013; Luescher -Mamashela & Mugume, 2014).

Additionally, I have studied the perspective of student leadership in terms of considering the three levels of interaction, the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. In fact, studies relating to this one mostly show interest in the conscious level of interaction. As a result, the unique feature of my approach seems to lie in the unconscious dynamics discovered. I have looked at student leaders from their defended position as informed by the work of Hollway and Jefferson, supported by Boydell, 2009 as well as Mersky (2008, 2012, 2013, 2015).

The unconscious element in the data has potentially given rise to another method of understanding student leaders and the dynamics that are at play in the space that they operate. Drawing from diagram 5.2 in the previous chapter, I make the following statements regarding my reflection about the findings. These emphasise the learnings that I believe stem from the findings of the study and are also the meaning that I derive from the findings after reflecting.



Looking at the social construction of student leadership in a South African university from the perspective of a multiple lens has established the conversation to be about anxiety about working with diversity dynamics, as mentioned. It is known that the conversation about diversity and particularly transformation in higher education is topical and prioritised at this stage. The uniqueness of my study brings in the psychodynamic element and, as intimated, affords a new level of awareness in terms of the unconscious dynamics that are at play in this already existing conversation.

As such, I propose that this study offers an opportunity for an integrated conversation between the different stakeholders in student leadership. This could have implications for policies and implications regarding student leadership practice. I take this further in a later section by making a recommendation based on this probable contribution of the study.

Lastly, the contribution that the study has made to me is on different levels. Firstly, I have learnt more about consulting psychology as a field. This knowledge gained has broadened my scope of thinking about intervention especially in terms of considering the individual, group and the organisation as a counselling psychologist. Currently in South Africa there are debates and discussions about the scope of practice of psychologists which also bring the discussion about the relevance of psychology in society as well as how psychology serves society to the fore. Therefore, this learning about consulting psychology in terms of the three levels for possible intervention has contributed a fresh and constructive perspective to engage with the current conversations in the psychology field in South Africa.

Secondly, while I recognise quality practice as stemming from a scientist-practitioner perspective, I have always identified myself as more of a practitioner than a researcher. In this way, research has been for me a tool to approach practice and to ensure the quality of the interventions that I engage in. As such, I have identified with the sentiments of Lowman (2013) where he has commented that consulting psychology seems to be more relevant to practitioners than researchers. Therefore; I have

consistently had in mind the practical implementation of my study throughout the process. Thus, the study has contributed legitimacy to my inclination towards being more of a practitioner than a researcher.

My skill in integration of theory and practice has been advanced through this study. Owing to my experience as a student leader, the study has also contributed the ability to rise above the issues that I have been familiar with by using theory to strive towards possible solutions to issues I may have conceptualised as a problem. In this way, the study has helped me to resolve past unresolved issues in my own process of leadership.

The study has also contributed to my knowledge and understanding about diversity dynamics. Having had an interest in issues of relationships when I started the study, I now have acquired more understanding about differences that may occur in an individual, group and organisation. My understanding is also based on the new knowledge that I have gained about the unconscious processes at play in relational spaces that may at times negate the stereotypes which condition people to act or relate in a certain, expected way. I have also learnt that we are all (as people) the same, while we are different, but we are all (as people) different while we are the same. We are the same because we are human and we seek to have connections and community. At the same time we differ in terms of religion, race, social class, education, preferences etc. As people though, we seem to be prone to regard difference as a mechanism to deny similarity (sameness); thus difference facilitates our rejection of unity or rather mutuality. I realise through this research that mutuality can facilitate for us a democracy that could open up space for us to negotiate co-existence that would help us to appreciate diversity. In this way, diversity is a dynamic, not a static, issue and the unexpected interaction is not as farfetched as we may make it out to be. Therefore, as a psychologist I have learnt that leadership is an interactional process and undergirded by unconscious dynamics. It may be the case that people in leadership might interact with others merely from a conscious perspective yet remain with unresolved parts of the interaction that are rooted in the unconscious dynamic. As

a result, the unconscious dynamics in the relational space help to explain some of the usually unexplained dimensions of interaction. More so, as a lecturer I have learnt that students (or student leaders) could be approached more from a deeper point of interaction than the cognitive. Because lecturers are in an academic space, they unwittingly interact with students from a cognitive mode. However, the emotional and deeper-lying dynamic of interaction is at play in the relational process, and in my view interaction that excludes it appears to be restrictive.

## **6.8 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY**

Potential limitations could encompass aspects such as excluding students who are not in student leadership positions / roles, though they may have provided another perspective from those who are in these positions / roles. In terms of sampling, I had anticipated that the method preferred might delay the process of project completion as the data gathering process could not continue until participants had volunteered themselves; because they should not be coerced in any way or form. This was quite a task and it was at times frustrating to schedule a session. Moreover, the participants could only be contacted once the gatekeeper had been identified and a relationship established with such a person. Also, the support of the gatekeeper was essential and this took time. I used consistent follow up and electronic contact with the gatekeeper to manage the time factor. Eventually I was able to secure a time to attain the needed signatures for approval to execute the data gathering process. The primary researcher facilitated the group session of social dream drawing: this was the first time she had done so. As referred to when discussing the methodology in earlier chapters, I addressed this potential limitation by inviting a facilitator with training and some experience in social dream drawing to assist with the issues of the integrity of the session to gather data for this research. In the session there was only one white female and one white male as well as two male participants out of the total of six, which could raise questions about issues of representativity (Babbie & Mouton, 2007; Willig, 2013). However, the theoretical assumptions of the methodology (Boydell, 2009; Gergen, 2009; Lawrence, 1998; Mersky, 2015) helped me to continue even though the sample

distribution was probably unrepresentative. The said theoretical assumptions involve the idea that people exist in a collective unconscious and these unconscious dynamics can be expected to play out in the discourse of the participants (Parker, 2015). The answer to having continued with a 'non-representative' sample also lies in the dynamic of the composition of the group that was present in the data gathering session. This includes myself, the co-facilitator (who is also of Coloured race), and the student leaders. The collective unconscious at play in the group that was present carried an unconscious dynamic that allowed for the continuing of the data gathering session. At the same time, the requirements of confidentiality and especially anonymity posed a threat; as they (the white male and the white female student leaders) could be easily recognised during the member checking process by their fellow group members, while the rest of the group might not be. The group was satisfied to continue with the member checks although these issues of confidentiality and anonymity existed. I also owned up to the realistic perspective that I could not fully guarantee confidentiality and anonymity; all the potential threats that I could foresee were discussed with the group as part of my professional responsibility guided by the ethical rules of conduct for practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974 and also required by the literature (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Howitt & Cramer, 2014; Neuman, 2012; Willig, 2013). Furthermore, the sample size could be seen as a potential limitation. However, a small sized sample was preferred as the best way to approach this research. Firstly, qualitative researchers have advised that small samples facilitate in-depth and detailed gathering of qualitative data (Creswell, 2007; Dalton et al., 2001; Flick, 2007; Willig, 2013). In addition, the social dream drawing technique is usually best enabled in a small sample (Mersky, 2013). Furthermore, the interest of this study was also in the collective unconscious which was accessed through the composition of the sample, not its size (Parker, 2015).

An observation that I have made is that the voices of the Coloured and the Indian student leaders have been left out of this conversation (Daniels & Damons, 2011). Potentially, because the conversation has been referred to as blurry, the two voices may have been unconsciously rejected as they would not have fitted into the two

polarised extremes of black and white that have been represented in the study. Secondly, the two voices may have been left out because they represent the in-between, not belonging to either part of the polarised racial group, and the two poles might not have known how to relate to them (Long, 2011). It could be that the conversation space is not ready for these voices, probably because the extremes have not been clarified yet. I have the idea that they may represent what could be said to be grey voices.

On another but related point; I regard the 'marriage' that South Africa is involved in as an arranged one. The missing voice of the Indian stance is, I suggest, well acquitted with the concept of the arranged marriage. As it stands, in terms of this conversation, we have not asked the Indian voices to contribute their insights into the matter. My proposal is that the inclusion of the Indian voice could afford insight in terms of how an arranged marriage is made successful (Thomas, 2013). I also know from couple counselling and from the literature (Grizenko, Fortier, Gaudreau-Simard, Jolicoeur & Jooper, 2015; Henriksen, 2015; La Marca-Ghaemmaghami & Ehlert, 2015) that pregnancy complications such as a stillbirth are potentially the result of stress in the marriage. Such tension in the marriage (of South Africa) could potentially be alleviated by the counsel of those missing voices which are familiar with arranged marriage.

A further possible limitation might include not having both a theoretical and a literature chapter. The theoretical departure point of this study was assumed by the chapter on the worldview. The worldview taken to approach this study clarified the interpretation lens and facilitated the approach to reading the discourse in the data that has been gathered. This approach allowed for the researcher to respond to what the data was doing, rather than steering in the direction of a specific theoretical stance (Willig, 2013). Literature was thus used to support and provide context for the interpretations made. Given the method used regarding the psychodynamic interpretation, literature in the psychodynamic field was consulted. In addition, other literature that was relevant has also been consulted. Therefore, the literature was used as a base and a basis for the contributions made; rather than to direct the contribution. In this manner, the literature

is included in chapter 5 where the findings of the study are discussed. In chapter 6, a report on how the findings of this study are similar to existing research, how they extend or add to and conflict with the literature is included.

On another matter: this may be not so much a limitation depending on one's perspective, but the challenges that I have encountered with the methods and the methodology might subject the study to questioning and challenge it. I do however ask the question that even though some aspects did not function as well as in the traditional sense, does this mean that I did something wrong? In a sense, I am asking a critical question: is the traditionally accepted way the only way to do sound research? From the perspective of transparency and openness as advocated by Demuth (2013), Freshman et al. (2010) as well as Greckhamer and Cilesiz (2014), I would like to believe that I have ensured the rigour of this research and have exposed the methods and the methodology to the scrutiny of others. I also believe that the discourse of student leaders has been heard in a manner that has not previously been accessible and that this could be a most valuable contribution.

## **6.9 RECOMMENDATIONS**

I make recommendations in two ways: those for future research and those pertaining to the findings of this study; therefore the latter are recommendations for practice.

### **6.9.1 Recommendations for future research**

The main finding in this research is that the social construction of student leadership in a South African university is a space that has been created for a conversation about diversity dynamics. This is regarded as a working hypothesis that is summarised in figure 5.1 and elaborated in figure 5.2. Given that I refer to the main findings as a working hypothesis, I make the recommendation that research explore this hypothesis with greater focus and depth, by repeating this study with the same sample involved in it. It could be valuable to return to this exact sample to intentionally study the issue of diversity dynamics and the conscious and/or unconscious dynamics as this issue

became an unexpected finding of this research. In addition, employing a similar research design, with a pluralistic approach that incorporates the study of language with a psychodynamic interpretation in a sample that includes student leaders from as many race groups as possible in a South African university, could aid further exploration.

Furthermore, since the data gathering process included a facilitation of one group activity, it could be the case that more group sessions with the same group of participants as well as a different group could provide others with a perspective which might provide different views to what has been reported. Having housed this study in a social constructionism worldview, the findings become endless and ways of learning about the topics of this study are also multiple. In addition, future investigations may enhance existing research by including a sample size that is representative of more race (and perhaps cultural) groups than those in this study. I make the recommendation specifying race as a diversity dynamic (Cilliers, 2004; May, 2012), not excluding other possible diversity characteristics in the sample, but acknowledging race as a salient one in this study. When more race groups are included in a study such as this, there is more potential to hear the voices of those not mentioned, like those of the Coloured or Indian person.

I also make a specific recommendation regarding the representativity (Babbie & Mouton, 2007; Willig, 2013) of the sample, for future studies into the current topic. It was mentioned earlier that the representation of participants in the sample of this research included males and females, from the black and white race groups without, for example, people of Coloured or Indian affiliation. As such, it is recommended that it may be of benefit for future studies to intentionally represent groups that have not been represented in the sample chosen for this study. While the theoretical worldview of this study legitimises the completion of this study in the context of the representation achieved, data gathered from other research with other population groups may yield an even further thicker and richer description of the topic of interest. Also, the field of study concerned may gain more insights about the issues raised in this study, but a

researcher could also test the insights of this study when a wider representation is present in data gathering. In terms of the sample as well, it may be beneficial for future researchers to explore a similar topic in other higher education institutions such as historically black universities and other universities where mergers took place. This recommendation is important for research as research settings appear to inform the construction of realities (Babbie & Mouton, 2007; Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004; Willig, 2013) and contribute to the dynamics of the collective unconscious (Mersky, 2013; Parker, 2015)

More recommendations have to do with methods and methodology. Firstly, I propose doing more work using psychosocial research methods. Given its diversity and political landscape, Parker (2015) has suggested the suitability of such methods in the South African context. I propose that the richness of accessing data from the conscious, unconscious and subconscious is a powerful tool to reach the hidden or uncovered places and even unheard conversations in South Africa, in South African universities as well as in student leadership generally and in student leadership in a South African university. Referencing to some of the observations of this research, it seems that some South Africans may have achieved transformation in a structural manner but not so much in terms of the emotional aspect. As a result, undertaking more research beneath the surface might enhance and advance knowledge in terms of this aspect – what it is, how to work with it and the dynamic relating to it? Clarke and Hoggert (2009) have suggested that researching beneath the surface helps to clarify core issues within the social sciences. Other researchers such as Frosh and Young (2011); May (2012); Parker (2015) and Pretorius, May and Cilliers (2012) have followed similar approaches in the South African context. The practice is however further recommended for incorporation in more research.

In addition, I would like to make two recommendations in relation to pluralism. The first concerns pluralism as a research strategy and also as a worldview. It offers a researcher a broader terrain in approaching data and looking at data (Barnes et al., 2014). The diversity of the South African context could benefit from research carried



out from a pluralistic stance. Some research in mixed methods (the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods) has been undertaken in South Africa. On the other hand, research using more than one qualitative method could still be of benefit. I believe that the use of pluralism in South African research should assist in ensuring rigour as data will be viewed from multiple perspectives and thus considered from a perspective of differing knowledge. Therefore, room for collaboration in research and embracing diversity is enabled.

### **6.9.2 Recommendations for practice**

Recommendations are now made for practice because, as indicated, consulting psychology has been noted to be more relevant to practitioners than for researchers (Lowman, 2013). These areas include recommendations for universities in South Africa, the higher education landscape, the organisation of student leadership and lastly the South African society. In addition the consulting psychologist and other practitioners as well as future research in consulting psychology are also considered.

As a contribution of this study I have suggested a possible one regarding an integrated conversation between the different stakeholders in student leadership. These could include student leaders and university management, which could incorporate student affairs departments as well as the Department of Higher Education and Training in government. Firstly, universities seek to produce students with graduate attributes; some of which include leadership competence and capacity (Griesel & Parker, 2009). This is in response to the call by industry for graduates who are ready for leadership positions when they enter the work environment (Mukoza & Suki, 2013). Secondly, universities seek to adhere to the Higher Education Act, 1997. The limitation however is that the Act does not necessarily recognise or place a mandate on student leaders in development programmes. Yet, Student Affairs as a function of the university deals with both groups (Bawa, 2012; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). The Student Service Guide found at <http://www.chet.org.za/books/guide-student-services-south-africa> also refers. The organisational diagnosis that I make is that the resources are available but

have not been integrated or always aligned. I recommend that the HE could recognise leadership development programme initiatives and allow the South African university to use these initiatives in an integrated manner to involve both student groups that have been researched in this study (Frost & Roberts, 2011). In this way, student representatives may receive the student leadership development and support that they currently lack (Arnall et. al, 2014; Avery, 2004a; Getz & Roy, 2013). At the same time, an adjustment to the Higher Education Act, 1997 so that it recognises the student leaders who are not part of representative bodies could afford an added competence and capacity to the student leadership organisation (Chang, 2014). In this way I recommend student leadership schools (Evans, et al., 2010; Keeling, 2004, 2006; Osteen & Coburn, 2012; Rosch & Anthony, 2012). The student leadership groups would end up as intervention on the three levels as follows:

- On the individual level, the student leadership schools have potential to afford an opportunity for an educational (Haber, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2014) training (Herbst & Maree, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2014) coaching (Keeling, 2004; Page, Loots & du Toit, 2005) and counselling intervention (Bowman & Payne, 2011; Coetzee & Cilliers, 2001). Practitioners relevant in the work of student leadership could participate in the educational and training aspects of such an endeavour (Evans et al., 2010; Keeling, 2006; Le Cordeur, 2012) while consulting psychologists could maximise the coaching and counselling aspect of this while also acquiring scope in terms of the education and training aspect (Lowman, 2016). Additionally, registered psychologists could also be incorporated in terms of the counselling scope of the work (Form R 704, 2011).
- Important for this study, all these domains of intervention would foster the development of leadership behaviour: the interpersonal relations and psychosocial challenges in the organisations (Lowman, 2002) that have been noted in this study. Given the main findings of this study pertaining to diversity and working with diversity dynamics, this recommendation proposes an intervention regarding intrapsychic aspects that have to do with the emotional management involved in student leadership as well as the work of adjustment

and change found in the South African university and higher education sector (Pretorius, et al., 2012). As such, the recommendation could add value in terms of aiding the individuals to work effectively with diversity in the diverse organisations and systems where their student leadership occurs.

- On a group level, the implementation of a student leadership school should add value in terms of interpersonal relations and conflict as well as working with diversity (Lowman, 2002). The value added, I propose, would be in terms of role analysis and renegotiation; clarification of identity in the group and groups as well as intergroup relations (Lowman, 2016). Some of the focus in the student leadership schools could involve working with the unconscious dynamics and processes within the individuals as suggested in this study in relation to others, within groups and between groups and as regards how respective individuals go through these processes to function as group representatives of the group they are affiliated to (Lowman, 2002).
- On an organisation and systemic level, I consider student leadership as an organisation (Long, 2016) and make the recommendation with higher education in mind as well as the South African university and the South African society (Foucault, 1978). To start, in terms of universities in South Africa I recommend that the issue of student leadership could be brought into closer focus as a transformation issue (Getz & Roy, 2013) in terms of bringing about more integration (Lowman, 2016) between legislation/ policies and practice as indicated above. I suppose that this recommendation might also be dependent on some actions of the higher education landscape. Some of these actions that I recommended include the alignment of the legislation and policies so that these regulations can be more clearly related to student leadership in the changing context where student leadership occurs. When the legislation and practice of this type of leadership are brought closer to each other, I propose that the political connotations of such leadership could be reviewed or allowed to enjoy more diversity. In this way, student leadership as an organisation could be positioned for enhanced organisational effectiveness (Kezar, Eckel,

Contreras-McGavin, Quaye, 2008; Winston, 2001). Thus an organisational intervention that aims to close the gap between the relevant legislation and the two forms of student leadership practices that occur in the South African university is recommended.

Pertaining to the South African society, I recommend that it make more space available to appreciate difference. The appreciation of difference by this society may well have a ripple effect in terms of the conversation about student leadership. I make this recommendation bearing in mind that the participants in such leadership are students who live in the society of South Africa (Foucault, 1978). Thus according to the sentiments of this research, the student leaders are expected to enact, but also to question the discourse that occurs in their environment.

Additionally, observing from an organisational effectiveness perspective (Lowman, 2002, 2016), I recommend that student leadership as an organisation should make use of psychotherapeutic support and intervention together with leadership development interventions such as the student leadership school. Psychotherapeutic support could intervene regarding the depressive symptoms that might occur during a student leader's term of office. In addition, the psychotherapeutic support and interventions could aim to be a preventative strategy regarding the depression that might be associated with the student leadership organisation (Bowman & Payne, 2011). I also propose that the said organisation to be aided by means of leadership development strategies such as the student leadership school to aid the student leaders in, for example, attaining the development of emotional intelligence (Avery, 2004b) that enhances the capacity of such a leader to manage the emotional strain that is associated with the said organisation. Psychotherapeutic and student leadership development interventions could together aid student leaders to hold matters in perspective. The spinoff is potentially that the student leaders could enhance their confidence in setting appropriate boundaries and assigning responsibilities to others who are suitable, instead of assuming an overwhelming burden inappropriately (Mortensen & Haas, 2016; Trefalt, 2013). Furthermore, keeping matters in perspective

could facilitate an opportunity for the student leaders to remain aware of the priority of their studies while they also spend time on growing as a leader and fulfilling the expectations related to the assumption of student leadership.

From a diversity perspective, I make the recommendation for practice regarding the transformation in university particularly in terms of knowledge systems. The limitation pointed out earlier regarding the representativity of the sample yields an insight that informs us about the diversity of knowledge and the need for a space for differing knowledge (APA, 1998; Chisholm, 2015). As such, it is recommended that universities would benefit from looking at the diversity of knowledges when considering the knowledge systems that would be consulted for teaching material and approaches, the drawing up of curricula as well as ascertaining institutional culture (Chisholm, 2015; Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Weber, 2011).

## **6.10 IN A NUTSHELL**

In the end, I would like to point out that I have probably not said everything that I could have said in my reflections and conclusions. I find it really hard to write about this. On the one hand I struggle with the paranoia of needing to be vulnerable to write about this in an academic space where the English language that I need to use has already been prescribed while on the other I find that there is not always enough space to write all I would like to.

In this document, I have taken the reader through an orientation to the contents of the thesis. Thereafter I have clarified, for the reader, the worldview position that I have adopted for this research. It has been an interesting exploration in terms of looking through a social constructionism lens upon which a discourse analysis filter has been laid, while simultaneously using the eyes of the psychosocial perspective. Having discussed the worldview, I indicated the research methodology, followed by a summary of the findings and the integration chapters. The Mandela and Moses leadership symbols themes together with that of the stillborn remain intriguing; perhaps even a

central finding in this study on a subconscious level. The main conscious finding of this research has been that the social construction of student leadership in a South African university is a space for a conversation about the anxiety of working with diversity dynamics.

In this chapter I have opened up my reflections regarding the different positions and perspectives that I have occupied. I have also written about my life as a student leader in a South African university and potentially shown my contribution to the social construction of student leadership in a South African university. This chapter also carries my reflections on the findings, which I then follow up with conclusions that I derive from the findings. These conclusions that I arrive at from the findings have been presented in two ways: as conclusions pertaining to the general and specific aims of the research and as conclusions pertaining to the research findings. These have provided me with some insight that has aided me to make recommendations both for research and for practice. In this chapter I have also discussed the limitations and contributions of the study.

I end here, on such an open-ended note. This is congruent with the worldview of the study, with no full stop for the mere sake of continuity

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## APPENDIX A. RESEARCH PROPOSAL APPROVAL



FROM: Department Industrial and Organisational Psychology  
AJH van der Walt Building 03-84  
Muckleneuk Campus  
UNISA  
Pretoria

10 February 2014

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the Research Proposal submitted by Ms N Pule, was approved and qualifies her to register for the Dissertation Module: TFCPS02 PHD-Consulting Psychology.

Student Nr	53747860	PULE	N T	MISS
	98993	PHD (CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGY)		
Exam Date	Study Unit		Mark	
2013/12/09	DPEMS01	DOCTORAL PROPOSAL: CEMS FG 1	0	Comply with Requirements

We trust that you find the information in order.

Kind Regards,

Prof D Geldenhuys  
**COD: Industrial and Organisational Psychology**  
College of Economic and Management Sciences  
AJH van der Walt Building  
Muckleneuk Campus  
UNISA



## APPENDIX B. ETHICS APPLICATION FORM



Ref #: 2013/CEMS/IOP/00115

### ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

STUDENT: NEO PULE (student number: 53747860)

SUPERVISOR: PROF M S MAY

Joint supervisor: N/A

This is to certify that the application for ethics clearance submitted by

**NEO PULE**  
(Student number: 53747860)

For the study

#### THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Decision:  
Application conditionally approved

The application for ethics clearance for the above mentioned research was reviewed by IOP *unit committee* on 29/10/2013 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics. **Ethical clearance has been conditionally granted subject to submission of letter of approval from research organisation.**

Please be advised that the research ethics review committee needs to be informed should any part of the research methodology as outlined in the Ethics Application (Ref. Nr.: 2013/CEMS/IOP/00115), change in any way.

The Research Ethics Review Committee wishes you all the best with this research undertaking.

Kind regards,

Dr O M Ledimo

(On behalf of the IOP Department Ethics Committee)



University of South Africa  
Pretter Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
www.unisa.ac.za

## APPENDIX C. INFORMATION LETTER



The social construction of student leadership role in a South African university

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### INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPATING STUDENT LEADERS

*Dear participant*

Thank you for your participation in this research regarding the social construction of student leadership role in a South African university. As the researcher, I hope that this is as exciting for you as it is for me. I also hope that it will be an insightful learning process for you as I anticipate it to be for me. I hope that the process will offer an added opportunity for you to be empowered and also offer resources to empower other student leaders outside of this process. This letter is to ask you to be part of this research process. It also serves to inform you about the aims of the research as well as providing an outline of your role, rights and responsibilities in the research. This information is provided so that you can make an informed decision to be part of the research process.

#### Aims of the research

This research project is part of the requirements for a qualification in PhD (Consulting Psychology) at the University of South Africa. According to the research approach the aims may be adapted as considered by me and the participants during the research process. The following are the aims of the research process at this stage:

The aim of this research is to explore the social construction of student leadership role in a South African university. As indicated before, a student leader in the context of this research would refer to a student who is enrolled at a university and has been elected or selected to take a leadership role. It is the aim of this research to understand parts of what the role constitutes or means but more so how the role is socially constructed. The social aspect seems important as I believe that constructions of the student leadership role come to be within the context which they exist. It is also important for me to highlight the South Africa university in my focus as this context provides a platform for the student leadership to occur. Secondly, the South African university has also seemingly had similar experiences to that of the broader South African experience (Cross & Carpentier, 2009, Jansen, 2003) by way of democratization (Mncube, 2008), mergers (Sehoole, 2005, van der Westhuizen, 2011), transformation (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Jansen, 2004, Lumadi & Mampuru, 2010), protests (Koen, Cele, Libhaber, 2006), diversity management in the form of campus diversity (Cross, 2004), and internationalisation (Kishun, 2007, Louw & Mayer, 2008). In this context, I therefore study the student leader role, in terms of the social construction of the role.

#### The role and responsibilities of the participant

The participant that is needed for this process is a student leader who holds a student leadership role / position at a South African university. The participant input is seen as equally important as the researcher participation in this research process. The latter rises from the acknowledgement that both I and the participant have experience and knowledge to bring to the table. The experience of each student leader is essential in making the research process fruitful.

The participant is informed about the confidential nature of the information shared during the research process. It is however important for the participant to note that since the research process is part of academic study requirements, my supervisor and assessors will have access the information of the research. It is therefore expected that the participant will make me aware of information that the participant seeks to keep from the supervisor and assessors. Furthermore, it is important to note that I am also bound by psychology practice ethics according to the regulation set by the Board of Psychology

of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Participants therefore are willing to participate in the research process with the knowledge that the information shared will be included in the writing of a dissertation as a form of a report of the process undertaken, but also aware of the beneficence and non – maleficence clauses. These clauses refer to the researcher’s effort to minimise harm in the research project as well as protect and act in the best interest of the participant given the limitations and boundaries of the scope of the work.

Furthermore, it is the participants’ choice whether they want their real names or a pseudonym to be used in the writing of the dissertation. All information regarding the participation of the participants will be available to participants and is subject to adjustment as regarded by the participant so as to present a more accurate reflection of the proceedings. The participants are also welcome to possess a copy of the material shared as well as the outcome of the process. Finally participants are free to withdraw from the research process at any time without any consequences. Since the participants are involved in the research process as volunteers; no monetary remuneration will be awarded.

The research process will take place in two phases. The first phase serves as a group activity where a social dream drawing group activity will be facilitated. Once this is done, I will undertake a process of interpretation and reflection on the group activity. In the second phase; I will host another group activity where I will reflect together with the group members on the interpretation and reflection which I have acquired in terms of the social dream drawing activity. In total therefore, the participants are needed to be available on two separate days. Since being involved in the research process includes the sharing of your experience, participants are encouraged to note that they will not be expected to share deeper or more than they are prepared to. The participant is furthermore encouraged to take note that the research activities do not include therapy.

As mentioned above, a social dream drawing session will be facilitated as part of the research. Social dream drawing is based on the premise that it is not only individuals who can have an unconscious but so can a group. One way of discovering the unconscious of a group is by the form of drawing dreams and presenting these in a group setting. Each member of the group will have an opportunity to present their drawing of a dream while the rest of the group will be given the platform to make free association about the presented dream. Free associations can be what ever comes to mind when the dream is presented. The associations can be motivated by the way that the dream is being presented for example, the colours, shape or design. As a result of this, amplifications can arise. These are cultural or political elements which come up when presented with the picture. This can be a chaotic process but it can assist in exploring the social unconscious; bring those issues to a conscious level of thought which can be used to think about the issue which is being explored.

In this research therefore, the participant will be asked to bring a drawing about ‘my dream of student leadership’ to the group activity.

Participants can feel free to request for more information in cases where this letter does not satisfactorily offer enough information. It is my desire that participants feel knowledgeable and have understanding of their role and the proceedings of this research. The latter will assist in the participants’ informed consent and will allow the research process to reach its potential.

Contact information

For further information or questions as well as for the purpose of indicating interest to volunteer to be a participant in this research, please feel free to contact Neo Pule on 0821759703. If necessary; participants can contact the supervisor of this research at [mayms@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mayms@unisa.ac.za) .

Thank you for taking time to read this. I hope that this will be a matter of interest to you.

Yours sincerely



Neo Pule

## APPENDIX D. CONSENT FORM



The social construction of student leadership role in a South African university

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### Consent form for participants

I hereby declare that I have read the information letter. I agree with the contents of the letter. All information concerning the research process has been satisfactorily communicated. I am aware that I am free to request any further information at any stage. In acceptance to the following, I volunteer myself to be part of the research process:

I know that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary and will participate and arrive at the data gathering venue at my own cost.
- I understand that I am required to be available on two separate sessions which will happen on two separate days
- I am free to withdraw from the research at any point.
- I am aware that some of my personal information may be used in writing the thesis.
- I am free to select my own name or pseudonym to be used in the activity and will ascertain to communicate this to the researcher.
- I will not receive any monetary compensation for my participation as my participation is voluntary.
- The supervisor and assessors of this research will have access to the information shared in the research process.
- The information shared during the research process as well as the name of the tertiary institution the participants are registered with will be held confidential.
- The research data gathering process does not serve as therapy but a data gathering session by means of social dream drawing and the interpretations as well as reflections thereof.
- I understand what is social dream drawing and how it will be used as a data gathering technique to enable the researcher to complete the writing of the thesis
- The data will be stored in a secure storage by the researcher for a period not longer than 5 years.

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

## APPENDIX E. CO-FACILITATOR AGREEMENT



The social construction of student leadership role in a South African university

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### Co – Facilitator confidentiality agreement

This study, **The social construction of student leadership role in a South African university** , is being undertaken by Neo Pule at UNISA.

The aim of the study is to explore the social construction of student leadership role in a South African university by means of conducting a social dream drawing group activity as well as a reflection group activity.

Data from this study will be used to explore the thinking which student leaders have about their role in student leadership in a South African university.

I, Michelle May, agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g. disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the Principal Investigator;
2. Keep all research information in any form or format secure while it is in my possession;
3. Return all research information in any form or format to the Principal Investigator when I have completed the research tasks;
4. After consulting with the Principal Investigator, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Principal Investigator (e.g. information sorted on computer hard drive).

Co - facilitator:

\_\_\_\_\_

(print name)

(signature)

(date)

Principal Investigator:

\_\_\_\_\_

(print name)

(signature)

(date)



## APPENDIX F. TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT



The social construction of student leadership role in a South African university

### Confidentiality Agreement: Transcriptionist

I, Ilse Kattin transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from **Neo Tshireletso Pule** related to her research study on the researcher study titled, **The social construction of student leadership in a South African university**. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, **Neo Pule**.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to **Neo Pule** in a complete and timely manner, which as agreed is two weeks from the date of receiving the material.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

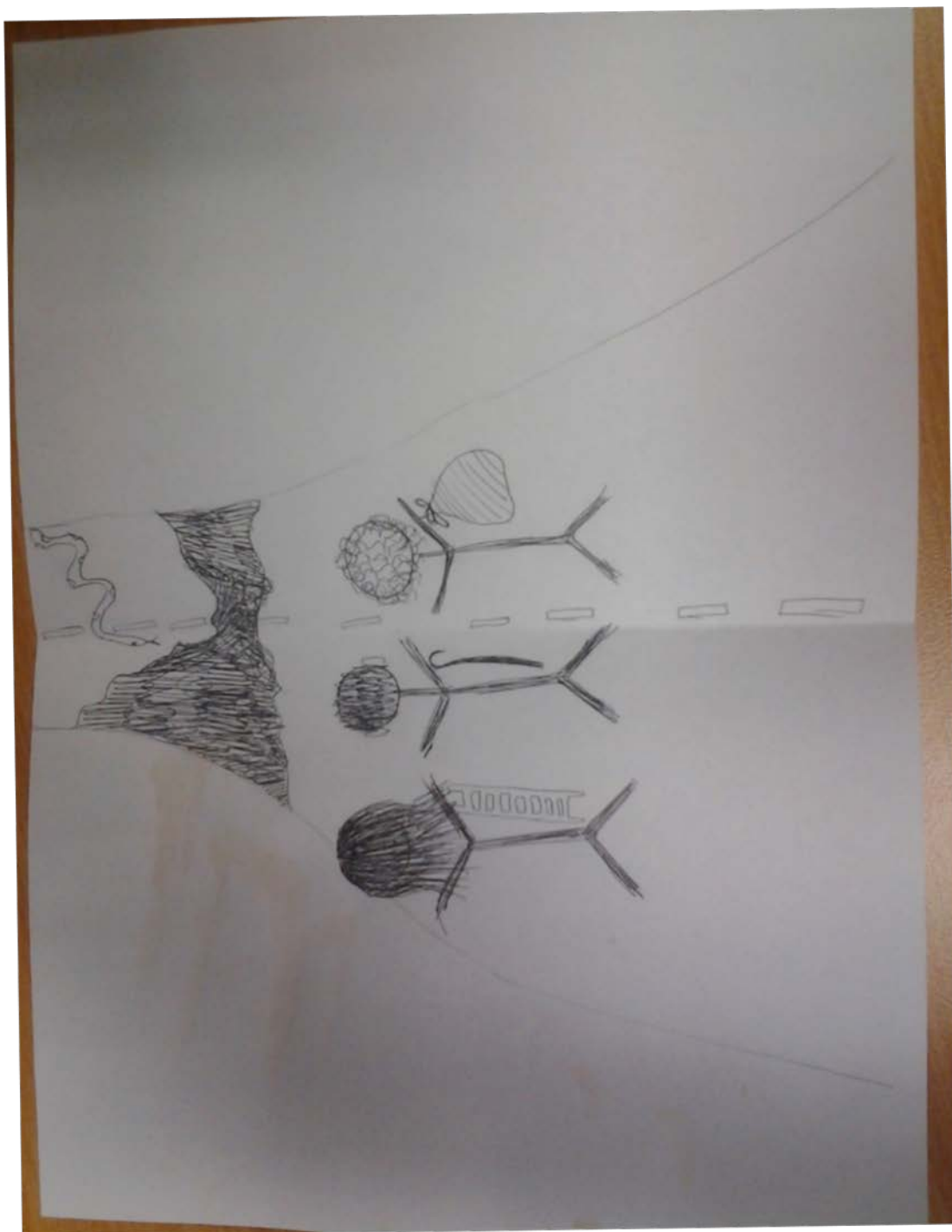
I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) Ilse Kattin

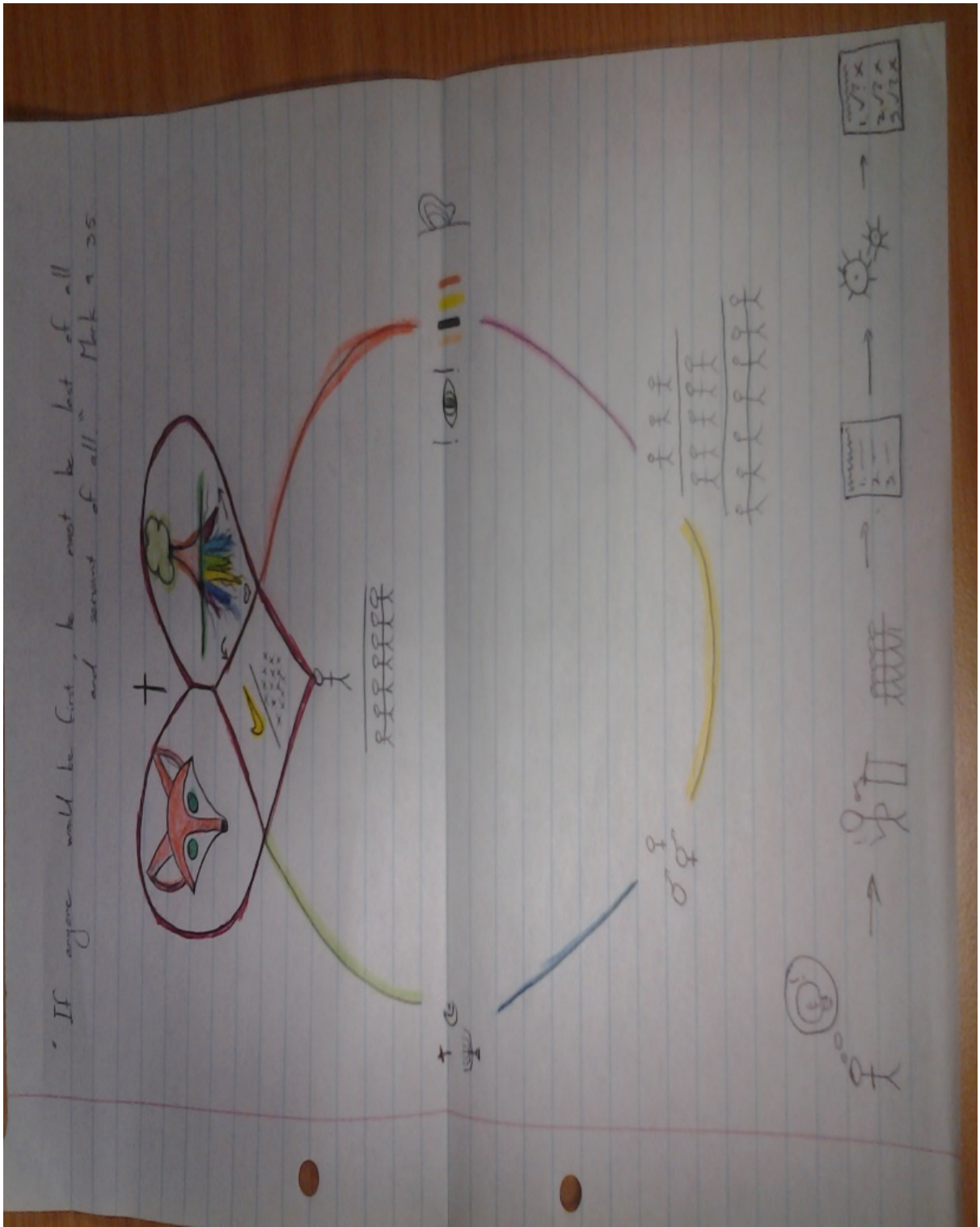
Transcriber's signature Ilse Kattin

Date 20 OCTOBER 2014

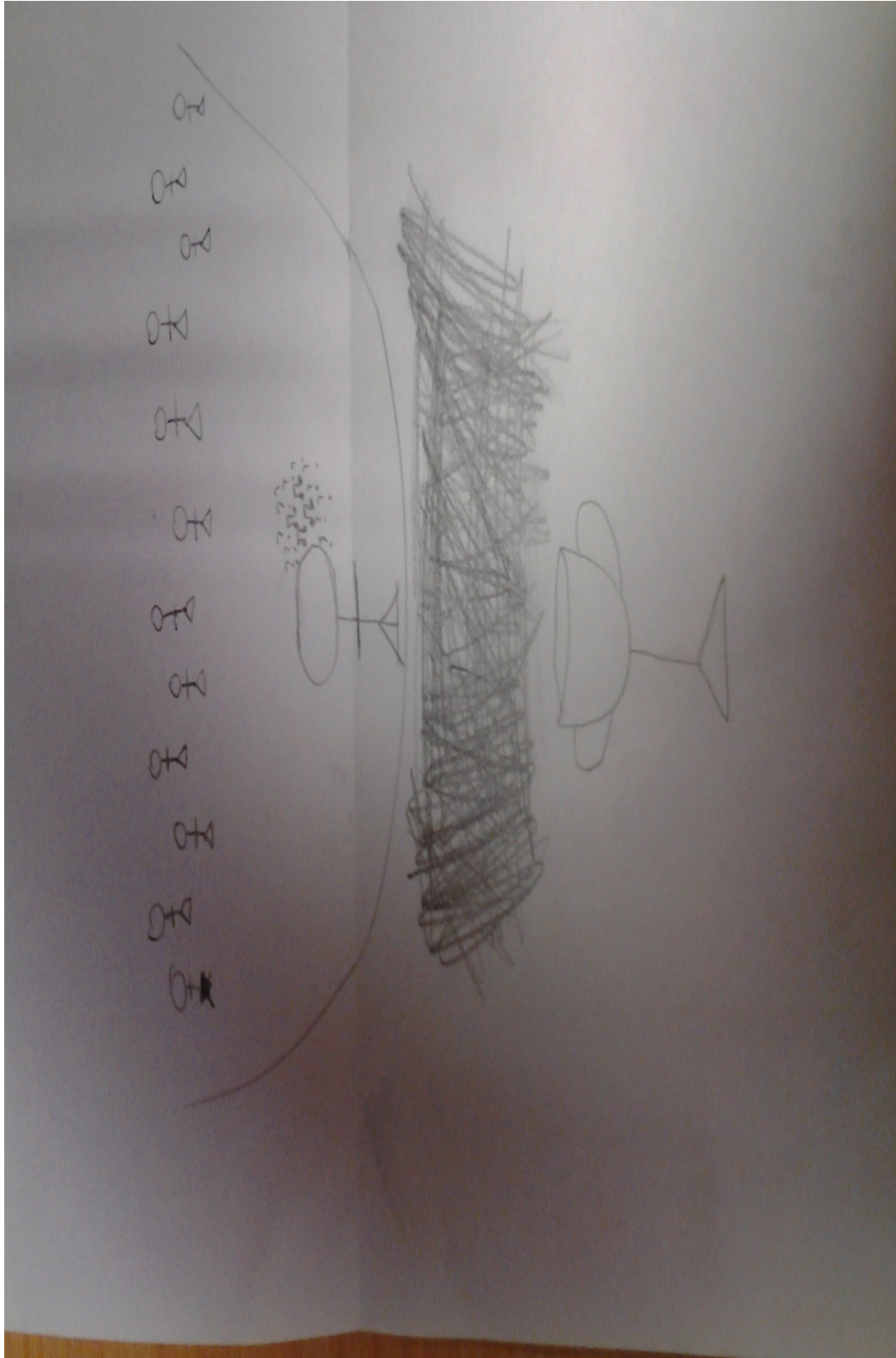
**APPENDIX G. PHOTOS OF THE DREAM DRAWINGS GATHERED AS DATA  
FOR THIS RESEARCH**



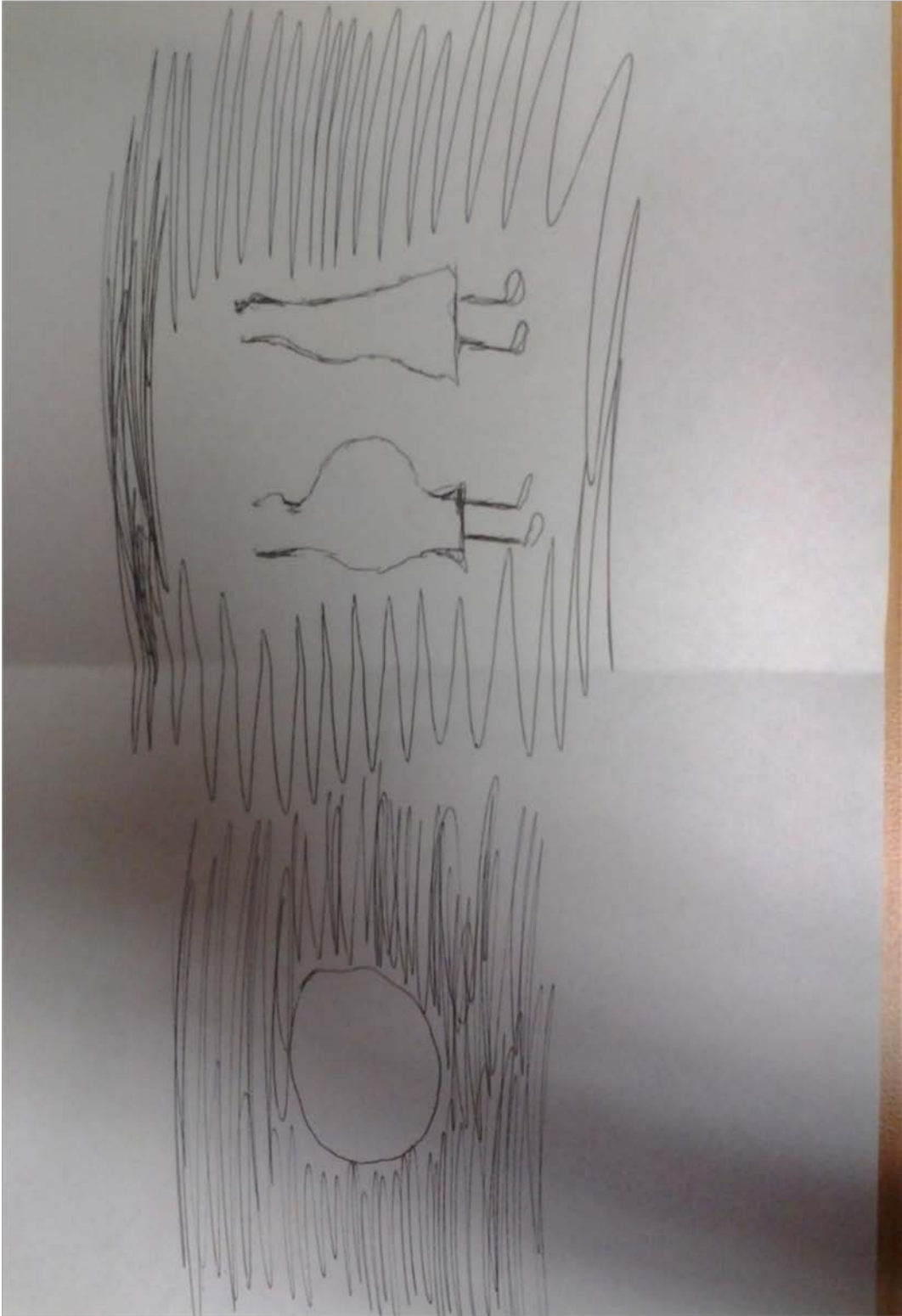
Dream drawing of Dreamer 1



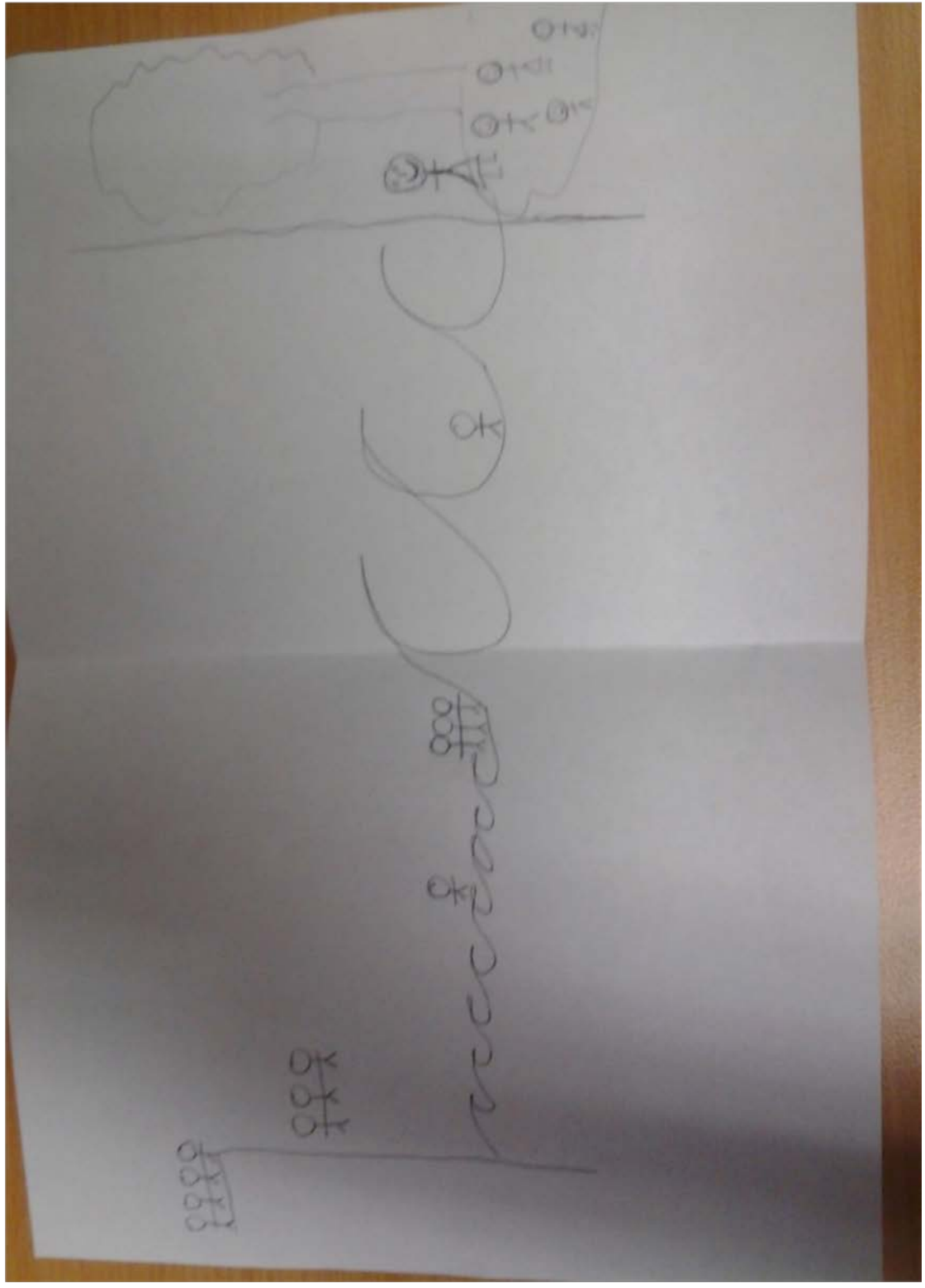
Dream drawing of Dreamer 2



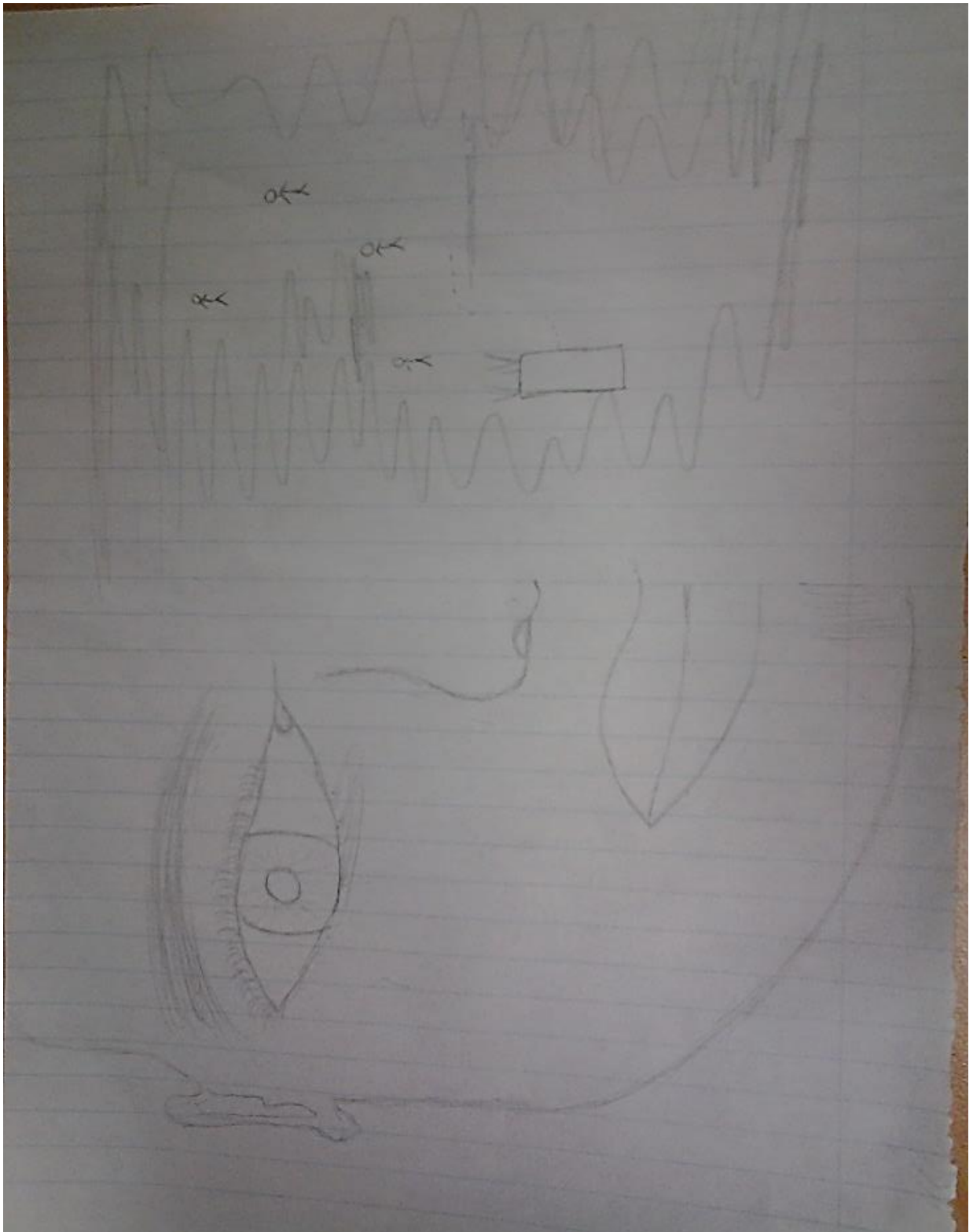
Dream drawing of Dreamer 3



Dream drawing of Dreamer 4



Dream drawing of Dreamer 5



Dream drawing of Dreamer 6