AGI Action Research Project: Young women's SRHR in HE

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1. Project Focus

It is the stated aim of the University of Witwatersrand to create a ‘university we can call our own’. Our participation in this project affords us an opportunity to critically explore to what extent young women students experience the university in this way, and to actively engage with making this vision a reality. There are two primary dimensions to the research project: 1) an ethnographic account of the spaces of campus and how young women navigate these spaces of belonging or alienation, particularly with reference to sexual ‘safety’; 2) an analysis of points of (dis)identification with the world of the university or the academy and how other dimensions of identity, particularly sexuality and gender, intersect or conflict with student and intellectual identity.

2. Participants

The project will be conducted under the leadership of Peace Kiguwa and Jill Bradbury from the department of psychology, School of Human and Community Development at Wits. Five senior women students have been identified as co-researchers. Two of the women are from the psychology honours class – the only two black African women in this cohort. The remaining members of the group were all participants in the International Human Rights Exchange Programme. Participants have therefore been selected in terms of three primary criteria: 1) proven undergraduate academic track record indicative of potential future contributions as intellectuals and researchers; 2) disciplinary area: the question of identity is central to programmes of study in psychology and human rights; 3) marginalized gendered identities: the project creates an opportunity to engage young African women in research, encouraging this under-represented target group to participate in knowledge production and to consider research careers.

Identified senior student team
1) Hlengiwe Mchunu – Psychology Honours Student (hlengie@yahoo.com)
2) Daphne Mogopudi – Psychology Honors Student (Mogopudid@yahoo.com)
3) Ayanda Khumalo – Third Year Political Studies and International Relations Major (interned with the International Human Rights Exchange Program in 2nd year) (yandi.baby@yahoo.com)
4) Zandile Ngubeni – Third Year Political Studies and International Relations Major (interned with the International Human Rights Exchange Program in 2\textsuperscript{nd} year. Currently Vice-President of SRC) (ngubeni7@gmail.com)

5) Mabogoshi Matlala Third Year Political Studies and Media Studies Major (interned with the International Human Rights Exchange Program in 2\textsuperscript{nd} year (mabogoshimatlala@yahoo.com)

In addition, in the second phase of the project, it is proposed to select a group of excellent first year students to participate alongside this group. The participation of this group is aligned with institutional imperatives to develop high potential students, increase postgraduate registrations and nurture research activity and intellectual culture. The inclusion of junior undergraduates within this project will pilot an intervention towards these ends and we will approach the relevant university stakeholders to match AGI funding for this component e.g. the Transformation Office, The Student Equity Programme, High Potential Youth. This ‘layering’ of participation will create a network of conversation and possibilities for sharing experience.

3. In-depth reading and analysis of the University

Student members of the Wits project will be added to the Virtual Platform allowing them access to the central bank of reading material and enabling conversation with the wider membership of the project. Beyond the shared AGI reading programme, this group will read further in three domains related to the specific focus of our project: a) higher education, including Wits university policy documents; b) theories of identity, particularly sexual and gendered identities; c) narrative methodologies, including a range of modes of life-documentation. This reading programme will supplement and enable the ‘reading’ of the world of the university and our experiences as we capture and reflect on them.

4. Methodology

Given the action-research orientation of the project, the aim of the project is to create a framework within which the participants can document and reflexively analyse their own experiences of the university and inform programmes of action. The form of documentation will be jointly decided upon by the research team and may include, photography, diary keeping, audio-recording, video-recording. Forms of analysis will include phot elicitation, ethnographic, conversational and narrative analysis.
5. Meetings

An initial planning meeting of the research team took place on 22 July to introduce members to one another, agree on the parameters of the project and plan the pilot phase. We discussed two introductory papers, MaGuire, Uneven ground: Feminisms and Action Research and Schulze, The Usefulness of Reflexive photography for qualitative research: a case study in higher education. Disposable cameras were distributed and we discussed the process for capturing photographs of our experience of campus over the course of the week. These cameras will be returned for processing and the photographs then discussed at a meeting on 12 August. A further final meeting in August before the September workshop in Cape Town will focus on discussing two further papers, one on gender, sexuality and identity and the other, a Wits policy document, The Academic Plan 1010 – 2014.

6. Budget

1. Running costs
   Paper and sundries R2000
   Meetings and activities R2500
   Pilot phase disposable cameras and processing R1000

   Subtotal R5500

2. Equipment
   Digital cameras (x 5) R5000

   Subtotal R5 000

3. Personnel
   Transcription R5000
   Web design R5000
   Photography workshop training R5000

   Subtotal R15 000

4. Exhibition
   Opening event catering R10 000
   Equipment Hire R5000

   Subtotal R15 000

Total R40 500