Doing, being and becoming a first year occupational therapy student

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the experiences of three occupational therapy students from middle-class backgrounds who encountered academic challenges during their first year. In contrast to notions of academic risk being linked to constructs of working class status or being first generation university entrants, the three students in the case study came from middle class backgrounds, had parents and siblings who held tertiary qualifications and had attended 'good' schools. This study forms part of a larger, longitudinal research project that explores students' learning by tracing their progress over the course of the undergraduate years. Bourdieu's analytical constructs of habitus, field and capital were used to analyse data obtained from individual interviews, a focus group interview, questionnaires and examples of students' written work. The challenges experienced are reported in three themes – challenges in academic literacy; in balancing social life with academic demands; and in negotiating diversity and complexity in a new social world.

Key words: Academic challenges, first year, academic literacy, middle class, institutional practices

Introduction

The recent philosophical and theoretical shift towards Occupational Science in the profession of occupational therapy[1] has resulted in the inclusion of more theory on the human as an occupational being into the South African occupational therapy curricula. The reference in the title of this paper to Wilcock's[2] well known proposal of viewing occupation as 'a synthesis of doing, being and becoming'[2:1], serves to remind the reader that it is through the acts of doing, being and becoming that first year occupational therapy students construct and reconstruct themselves as students in the field of higher education.

South African research on student experiences of higher education has tended to treat 'black' students' backgrounds as self-evident, using short-hand generalised descriptors such as 'disadvantaged'; 'working-class' or 'English second-language'. Such descriptors account for student failure in terms of their schools and home backgrounds. Race, class and language are conflated. The end of Apartheid has resulted in unprecedented rapid social class mobility. For many young 'black' people, this has meant growing up in linguistic, cultural, school and neighbourhood contexts very different from those of their parents and extended family. These students do not fit into the patterns which have been described in local and international studies about the difficulties experienced by working-class and non-traditional students who are admitted into higher education[3,4,5,6,7,8,9]. This unusually fluid context, coupled with a changing national school curriculum, has blurred and disrupted conventional social indicators of potential success or failure in higher education and presented higher educational institutions with new challenges around admissions and provision of appropriate support structures.

This paper reports part of a larger longitudinal study which attempts to understand this changing context by tracing the progress of 100 'black' students over the course of their undergraduate years. The transition of three young, black women from middle class backgrounds into a historically white, relatively elite, English medium university, is explored. All three students were high achievers at school and matriculated from well-resourced, English medium schools. The students had obtained high matriculation pass rates and university entrance endorsements. They all had parents or siblings with tertiary-level qualifications and professional careers. On the face of it, these students should have had little difficulty negotiating the transition and learning to interpret and master the rules and practices of university requirements. Nevertheless, all three were placed on a Foundation programme after they had failed at least one course in their first semester.

A central aim of this study was to try to deepen our understanding of students' experiences of challenges in order to establish why these students struggled despite their seeming privileged status relative to students from under-resourced schools and print-impoverished home backgrounds. Using Bourdieu's[10] analytical constructs of *habitus, field* and *capital,* the paper describes the students' backgrounds; explores how they negotiated the school to university transition; how they position themselves socially and as occupational therapy students and what they perceived as challenges in the learning environment. Central to our study was a consideration of how the students reflected on their learning experiences and their sense of agency in the process.

Theoretical framework

Bourdieu's[10] theory of *field, habitus* and *capital* was selected as a theoretical framework for analysis as it provides an analytical lens for exploring the complexity of an individual's transition from one social context to another. The concept of *field* illuminates the institution while the concepts of *habitus* and *capital* shed light on the student.

Bourdieu[10] explained *fields* as structured social spaces in which sets of rules are operational[11]. These social spaces or spheres are bounded to form distinct social worlds in which forms of practices are taken for granted[12]. In this sense, an institution of higher learning, with its own institutional culture and its academic practices, is viewed as a field. A university, characterised by its institutional culture and specific sets of academic practices becomes the field in which principles or organising laws determine practice. The notion of a field (rather than context or social background) draws attention to hierarchies, power relations, and contestation within social spaces[13].

Habitus is described by Bourdieu as a system of dispositions held by an individual that shapes their behaviour and provides a lens for viewing and judging the world[10]. Habitus is therefore "a structure of the mind characterised by a set of acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and taste that encompass the totality of learned habits, cultural dispositions, practices, styles and skills of an individual"[14:448]. An individual's exposure over time, to the particular social influences of his/her family, school friends, culture and community, informs their habitus. Socialisation over time takes on a particular structure that is similar to the social context where it originated[15]. The structure becomes an unconscious filter through which the individual views the world[12]. The students' habitus then refers to their mindsets, world views or lenses that unconsciously influence their behaviour and understanding. Habitus represents the students' enculturated, internalised schemata that are shaped by

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social experiences during their life time and are continually shaped by exposure to new social experiences. However, the notion of habitus is not totally determined by structures. The notion includes a person's own understanding, creativity, knowledge and ability to take up a number of positions[10].

Capital in the Bourdieuan sense refers to "all goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, which present themselves as *rare* and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation"[16:178]. *Cultural capital* is understood as the forms of knowledge, language, skills, education, aesthetic preferences and advantages that a person has which potentially gives them more power and credentials. Cultural capital is inherited from the family milieu[11]. Non-financial social assets, such as educational or intellectual capacity that might promote social mobility is understood in the Bourdieuan sense as *social capital* and includes resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support[12].

The relationship between *field, habitus* and *capital* provides a theoretical framework for viewing the student as an owner of habitus, who has stocks of cultural and social capital when they enter and learn to negotiate the field of higher education. The student's habitus is not static. Bourdieu suggests that individuals are socialised in a field through roles and relationships. While operating in the field, social forces and expectations required for operating in that field continue to shape their behaviours, perceptions and expectations[12:670] to the point of becoming internalised and habitual, eventually forming the new *habitus*[14].

Furthermore, a students" existing habitus and accrued capital influence his/her experience of ease or unease in adapting to and acquiring the mechanisms needed to negotiate the requirements of the field. For example, the closer a student's background in social and enculturating experiences are to the culture and practices of the institution, the easier it will be for that student to adapt and to be successful in the institutional environment. And conversely, the greater the incongruence between habitus and field, the more likely it will be for the individual to struggle to understand and participate in the practices of the field[12]. Congruence between habitus and field, as a construct to view the fit students experienced when making the transition from school to university, is also used as an analytical construct in this study.

Bourdieu's theory enables one to situate student learning. It recognises that academic institutions and in particular disciplines, value specific kinds of capital, particular ways of knowing that are expressed in particular ways of reading, writing and assessing. Institutional discourses are not necessarily transparent to students who come from a different habitus[12,15]. This view enables one to take individual identity and agency into account, but moves away from deficit, reifying constructs that suggest that learning difficulties are internal to the student[15]. A similar departure point of viewing the complexities of academic and social integration into university life has been reported[12,15]. This study aims to understand the students' perspectives – how they interpret and make use or do not make use of the resources available to them.

Research Methods

The study used a qualitatively framed, case study design[17].

Participants

Purposive sampling was used for participant selection. From a pool of six possible participants, three students met all the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were that the student was enrolled in the occupational therapy course of a foundation programme; had matriculated in 2008 the first year of the new National Senior Certificate; was from a middle-class background as defined below) and had volunteered to participate. At the time of the study, the three participants, Ntwetsi, Zandile and Amanda (not their real names) were in a foundation course after they had failed a major course in their first year.

Data collection

The main sources of data were transcriptions of individual, semi-structured interviews and a focus group in which students' stories

of their transition and learning experiences were explored. The interest was in students' construction of their identities, their notions of learning and in their agency, the extent to which they acted purposively and reflexively[18]. Additional sources of data were questionnaires on family, school and community background and examples of students' written work.

Data analysis

Data analysis methods used were the strategy of theoretical propositions and the technique of explanation building[17]. Analysis of data was done manually, using Bourdieu's analytical constructs of habitus, field and capital[10] for coding. Codes signaling habitus, capital or field were identified in each individual case followed by cross-case analysis of codes signalling congruence or incongruence between habitus, capital and field. Codes were sorted into categories and emerging themes were elicited.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Cape Town. Written informed consent was obtained after explaining the nature of the study, the principles of informed consent and voluntary participation with the right to withdraw at any stage without negative consequences. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms.

Aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability[19] were employed to ensure trustworthiness. For example, prolonged engagement in the field[19] was evident as students had been part of a small group who met the author a few times per week over the period of a year. Triangulation of data was sought through use of multiple sources of data – individual and focus group interviews; a questionnaire and examples of students' written work. Participants read the draft article to ensure respondent validation.

Findings

The middle class backgrounds of Ntwetsi, Zandile and Amanda

For the purpose of this discussion, 'middle class' is being constructed around two central ideas. Middle class is viewed as a socio-economic class where firstly, parents can afford to choose the kind of educational opportunities they want for their children for secondary and tertiary education. Secondly, the parents themselves had had the benefit of tertiary education. As congruence between habitus and field is implied when students' socio-cultural background experiences have been similar to the field they were entering[4], it is further assumed that students from middle class homes had formative experiences in the form of social and cultural capital that had, to some extent, prepared them for success at university.

In the case of the three participants in this study, Ntwetsi and Zandile had lived in suburban homes in major cities. Amanda's home was in an established part of a township with good services and infrastructure near another city. All three students' parents had professional careers. Their fathers worked respectively in the field of communications doing translation, as a magistrate and as a school principal. Their mothers' careers were those of a financial consultant, a school vice-principal and a director of health services. Being graduates themselves, it was assumed that the parents valued tertiary education and that the students' home-life experiences provided them with some stocks of social and cultural capital needed to succeed at university. Zandile and Amanda had older siblings who had all graduated from higher education or were in the process of doing so. Ntwetsi was the eldest child in her family.

A further assumption about a middle class background is that good education during the school years facilitates the accrual of social and cultural capital in addition to providing an academic foundation for learning in higher education. In this respect, Ntwetsi attended a small, private school for girls that had obtained a 100% matric pass rate during her matric year. The classes were small with 15 fellow students in her biggest class. She reported that the standard was high as the examining authority had been the Independent Examination Board. Her entire matric class went on to higher

education. Getting to and from school had been comfortable as her school was close to home and she was driven to school. Describing her own and her fellow class mates' attitudes to working hard at school, Ntwetsi stated: "*Its never cool not to work. They always claimed that they didn't do anything but we worked. I had a bunch of really clever friends, hardworking friends. They got a bunch of distinctions. Yes, it was important to work hard*".

Zandile had attended a prestigious school for girls in her home town that had a 100% matric pass rate in her matric year. She reported that only seven of her 80 fellow martriculants had not entered higher education. Zandile described her school as a very good school based on a teacher-pupil ratio that allowed students to get enough attention. Futhermore, Zandile's experience of her school career left her with confidence in her own abilities during her matric year, revealed by her statement: "*That was my peak… I think matric was the best time for me in terms of self image and how I felt about myself*." She reported that her achievements, serving in leaderships positions, her friendships and being in the hockey first team had contributed to how she saw herself.

Amanda had attended a Catholic boarding school which had been rated the third best in excellence in the province. She mentioned that the school had been extremely strict with rules disallowing cell phones and watching television during the week. Her parents were also strict. She reported that during her high school years, she had been at home during school holidays only and that she then did not go anywhere except to participate in church youth activities. An amount of social isolation is suggested by her reporting of her background experiences. While rich in social and cultural capital regarding educational and learning opportunities, her upbringing may have been limited in learning about the outside world. These experiences imply less accrual of social and cultural capital than those experienced by Ntwetsi and Zandile.

The middle class backgrounds of Ntwetsi, Zandile and to a certain extent of Amanda implied congruence between habitus and field. Stocks of Bordieu's social and cultural capital would have been accrued from their family backgrounds, their school careers, their social milieu, and financial comfort of a middle class upbringing. Arguably, their habitus should thus have allowed for congruence with the field, in this instance the institutional culture of the university. Congruence between habitus and field imply that social forces shaping students' experiences before entering higher education, affect their adaptation to and success in higher education. The assumption is that students who grew up in the comfort and privilege of middle class backgrounds have, by implication, adequate stocks in social, cultural and economic capital and better congruence between habitus and field.

Discussion of findings: Incongruence between habitus and field

From the above assumption, areas of incongruence between habitus and field were of particular interest in this study. The findings are presented in terms of three themes that emerged from analysed data. The three themes were: 1) academic literacy challenges – '*the most referencing –strict subject I have ever heard of*'; 2) the challenge of balancing social life with academic demands; and 3) negotiating diversity and complexity in a new social world.

Theme 1: Academic literacy challenges – '*the most referencing –strict subject I have ever heard of*'

The three students experienced challenges in learning to decode and apply academic expectations of written tasks such as essays. In their first semester, the students were registered for *Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Becoming a Health Professional* and *Human Biology*. They were required to engage in extensive essay writing in the first three courses. However, the disciplinary base of each course is significantly different, which meant that there were marked differences in terms of what constitutes acceptable claims and evidence and in overall argument and structure. The exit level outcome for Grade 12 writing in high school is stated as: "Write and present for a wide range of purposes and audiences using conventions and formats appropriate to diverse contexts"[20], may or may not have taught students the academic practice of referencing to the depth of conceptual understanding that university writing requires.

The students' experiences of university requirements for early written work such as essays, reveals incongruence between *habitus* and *field*. The students were all surprised and disappointed that school writing practices had not prepared them adequately for the tasks required at university. They had assumed that their proficiency in English would mean that they would have little difficulty. Amanda, who had studied English as a first additional (that is second) language, experienced the greatest difficulty. In comparing differences in requirements between school and university essays, she reported that in school essays the emphasis was on expressing their own opinions. Teachers seldom valued content and mainly paid attention to correct use of grammar and punctuation. She foregrounded referencing as her main source of difficulty: "*UCT is still hard on references. It's not even funny…. Psychology is the most referencing strict subject that I have ever heard of, because you know, you are still first year, you have no idea what referencing is, you're still learning on referencing*." Amanda mentioned that she also struggled with the Latin terms for anatomical concepts, erroneously referring to Latin as Greek and Italian: "*Anatomy is a language on its own. So it's Greek, most of them are like Italian words and you have to get a way to separate the words and see what they mean. It's a whole lot of work… They would say a word that is just foreign on its own*". Ntwetsi foregrounded 'facts and referencing' as her main source of difficulty and also attributed this to the fact that school essays stressed opinions. Zandile had been taught writing skills in her History classes at school and had been told that the skills learnt there would prepare her for university. She foregrounded structural differences between those essays and the ones she was now required to produce and spoke of her struggles "*to put ideas across*".

It was evident from the students' draft essays that their struggles with academic literacy practices reflected much deeper conceptual difficulties than described in their interviews. Their academic writing difficulties were inextricably linked to their limited understanding of the disciplines' ways of reasoning and constructing knowledge. For example, while Ntwetsi believed that her main problems related to "*facts and referencing*", it was clear from her essays that she struggled to distinguish main points from evidence, that she had little notion of how to paraphrase and how to insert her own view where required. She also really battled to apply theory or provide examples where required. The academy had assumed that because these students came from 'good' schools, they would all have accrued the necessary cultural and linguistic capital to cope with their disciplinary requirements. Yet, each discipline had markedly different forms of reasoning and expression[21]. In the absence of sufficiently explicit instruction, the students simply applied their school study methods and school ways of knowing, and then when those did not work, they had to deduce disciplinary practices on their own. In Ntwetsi's words, working out that a good essay in the academic context is different was knowledge "*you had to acquire over time*".

The practice of referencing is a good example of the incongruence between university expectations and the students' academic literacy skills and could be viewed as an example of incongruence between habitus and field. It is clear from both Amanda and Ntwetsi's comments that they understood referencing as a surface level skill of attributing sources to authors whereas the practice reflects the discipline's way of building knowledge through debate and argument among peers[22] The skills underlying this process are complex in terms of both reading and writing and include reading research articles to extract and summarise relevant facts, ideas or theoretical assumptions, comparing and contextualising these ideas. The concepts then need to be paraphrased into students' own words and used to support or contest arguments and the authors need to be acknowledged. This is a task of advanced higher order cognitive skills and is a well known practice by academics but not by students. Some refer to such phenomena as the hidden curriculum and others as the masked or implicit rules of institutional practices[23]. Studies that focus on facilitation of first year student learning through orientation to and explication of institutional

practices, emphasise the need to make these rules explicit, to assist students to identify, understand and decode the implicit rules that govern academic practice[7, 24, 25].

Theme 2: The challenge of balancing social life with academic demands

Three categories of incongruence became evident from the students' portrayal of adjustment to university life. Firstly, the amount of freedom of being a university student was experienced as overwhelming. Secondly, the adjustment to not having parental or external control was difficult to transform into self-regulation early enough to ensure academic success. Thirdly, students underestimated the amount of time that was required to succeed academically and they needed a longer period of adjustment to gauge how much time was needed to manage the pace and load of university studies.

When responding to interview questions about their experiences of coming to university, Ntwetsi, Zandile and Amanda all fore-grounded the social milieu of university life as the arena for describing their adjustment. In doing so, they identified a lack of balance between social life and time spent on academic tasks as contributing to academic struggles.

Too much freedom

The students reported that having too much freedom had contributed to failing to thrive academically. Too much freedom and too many choices have been found to be counter productive to affect and motivation[26]. Ntwetsi described herself as a "*people's person*" and said that she had made new friends and friendships she valued. Student social life appeared to have been an area where Ntwetsi's social and cultural capital resulted in congruence between habitus and field. However, she identified lack of balance between time studying and time spent socialising as a contributing factor to her experience of academic challenges. "*In Res, there is always something happening, always something to distract you. So it was the balancing between partying, chilling and social and the work…Balancing, balancing varsity homework with social things.*" On reflection of contributing factors to the academic challenges she experienced she stated: "*I don't think the work was bad. The workload wasn't too heavy. The contents weren't too difficult. I was too busy and too focused on a boy. That was my problem. I'll tell you the truth*". Mechanisms to self-regulate the amount of time needed to engage in academic tasks for successful outcomes were lacking in the beginning of university life. A factor of the field that resulted in incongruence appeared the amount of freedom experienced by being away from home and parental control. Lack of external regulation was experienced as overwhelming and manifest in such actions as not attending all classes. Ntwetsi's interpretation was: "*Too much freedom all at once.*" Zandile too mentioned that the amount of freedom had influenced her studies: "*The freedom is overwhelming. Ja, that is overwhelming. Like, you don't have to ask anyone to go anywhere or whatever, that was overwhelming.*"

Amanda, as the other two students, also identified a balance between socialising and working as key to academic success. She stated: "*It's just one of the things and social life where you don't know how to, you have no clue how to balance it.*"

Adjusting to the lack of external control

The sudden freedom of being away from parental or external control and discipline, coupled by the distractions and possibilities of social life at university , emerged from the interview data. A gradual decrease of parental control as autonomy for self-regulation emerges during adolescence, has been described as influential in students ability to adopt self-regulatory behavior[27,28].

The contrast between new-found freedom when away from home compared to previous strict parental control was thus interpreted as an area of incongruity between habitus and field. Zandile's response to interview questions about her choice of career revealed parental control as follows: "*I didn't want to come to UCT at all. I hated Cape Town, I hated everything, I wanted to go to Wits to do Dentistry …OT wasn't my first choice, like I said but my mom*

felt… *even though I didn't want to do OT, I wanted to do Dentistry and my dad wanted me to do Law, but my mom is more influential, so she made me do OT.*"

Amanda's experience of external control was revealed in her description of life at boarding school: "*I went to girls' high school. It's a Catholic school, very strict rules, no cell phones allowed… you have nothing else but study. We were not allowed to watch TV from Monday to Thursday.*" Amanda described her parents' strictness and control about her social movements. "*There are initiators by other parents to get kids out of the street and I am involved in church youth stuff. So I'm never at home. If I'm not at home I'm at church… we have very strict parents.*" Responding to an interview question about why they chose the university, Ntwetsi and Amanda both said that they wanted to be as far away from home as possible. Amanda said: "*Since Grade 10, I wanted to get away from home so bad and I'm still glad that I'm away from home.*" Adjusting to the lack of parental control or strict external control had been a challenge for these students.

Misjudging how much time was needed for academic success

Students underestimated the amount of time needed for studying to keep up with the pace. Amanda said: "*The hard thing was having to cope with the workload, that was the hard thing, social life and everything else… having to focus on my workload, that was another issue*". In terms of habitus, Ntwetsi's adjustment to the requirements of academic work at university took time to develop. The ability to decode expectations and to understand the level of commitment and time needed for success had not manifest during the first semester of her first year. Ntwetsi's response to a question which asked what advice she would provide to a new first year students was telling: "*The load, even if it seems not such a lot, don't push it aside, don't put it off. Do it immediately.*" Zandile's response similarly revealed her own difficulties with self-regulation: "*Have rules for yourself… you must just basically know yourself … because then you won't go wrong*".

The students' reports of experiencing freedom as overwhelming in the absence of parental or external control and the suggestion that skills in developing self-regulatory mechanisms early in their academic careers are lacking, have been reported in other South African studies, as have the phenomenon of underestimating the amount of time needed for studies[29,30]. Social and academic integration of first year students into higher education is reported to be crucial for academic success. In a study describing indicators of risk for dropping out of university, unrealistic student perceptions on what university studies entail is described as one of eight academic indicators[30]. In the same study, lack of time management is described as one of four social indicators of early academic failure[30]. Lack of balance between academic and social activities is described as one of four social risk factors in a model of first year risk factors of early student failure[29]. Furthermore, international studies report that many first year students have ill-informed preconceptions about learning at university[31] and "that students face increasing complex and dynamic issues of diversity in terms of both their demographics and backgrounds and their preparedness for tertiary study"[31:2] and that these factors contribute to them not being able to do their best[8].

Theme 3: Negotiating diversity and complexity in a new social world

The challenge of adapting to the new social milieu is echoed in other studies[31,32]. The social adaption in the transition into university is time and energy consuming as "it may constitute a conflict of values, a challenge to one's identity and a threat to familiar ways of knowing and being"[32:1]. In describing their experiences of adjustment to being at university, some of the challenges of being a first year student in a new and diverse social world were revealed. Incongruity between habitus and field manifests in the students' descriptions of finding their feet and constructing their identities in a complex social world.

Zandile explained her experience of fitting in as follows: "*The thing is, like my personality, I just kind of do fit in because I talk a lot, so I just found myself fitting in and I don't really think there is, you can't*

not fit in. There are types of people everywhere and they're all different, unlike high school which is like, there are certain types of people that are like cool, whatever, but at university, no one cares what you wear, whatever, whatever. So you always find a group of friends or people that you can identify with." Her identity, social confidence and social and cultural capital appeared to have facilitated congruence between habitus and field. However, in terms of her emerging identity, she experiences some confusion and discomfort on encountering racial divides as revealed by her statement: "*From the school that I came from, practically all my friends, well it didn't matter like, no one looked at you because of what race you are. Your personality, like it was about you, the type of person you are. But here everyone just kind of went into their racial group and that made me uncomfortable at the beginning because in my whole school career I only had like two black friends because of other reasons. So now I had to come here and then, it was really like uncomfortable, strange.*" In contrast to her observation of other students' behaviour, her own circle of friends was racially diverse. She described new friends as: "*of all races actually except for, yes I've got Chinese friends, Indian friends, coloured, Muslim, black, white, it's great.*"

Incongruence between habitus and field was revealed in Amanda's response to encountering fellow students of differences in race, gender and sexual orientation: "*First you go to a place where there are all races, whereas where I come from its only blacks. Then you get to have to mix with different, like genders. In my school, (it was) all ladies. OK, then you get to realise the people who have other sexualities. Even if male, the person is gay. Where I come from, you're straight… But when you get here, you like, does this really exist? So that was, nothing familiar, I won't lie, nothing, I had to familiarise myself to a lot of stuff.*"

Despite the new social environment being very different to her previous experiences, Amanda's final statement in the above quote, '*I had to familiarise myself to a lot of stuff*' reveals agency in her adaptation process. She responds critically when asked whether she feels that she fits into the university environment: "*I don't have to fit in, I can say I do have a good group of friends, we are close together, we clicked the first week here and we are still together. So I can say we didn't have to fit in because we're all very different and we were excited that we're different but there is just something that brings us together and we didn't have to fit in.*" Amanda's perception of not having to fit in as well as her statement she and her group of friends were excited that they were different, reveals a strong sense of self and confidence about who she is, despite perceiving a distance between herself and others and the social environment. The implication is that Amanda does not interpret difference as inadequate stocks in social or cultural capital needed to achieve success in higher education but rather adopts an agentic stance about her identity.

Unlike Zandile and Amanda, Ntwetsi's experience of social integration revealed more congruence between habitus and field. She described herself as a people's person with two separate groups of friends between which she had to divide her time. Although time consuming, she reported her social life as supportive: "*It was great. It was awesome. Every-one was really friendly and had lots of opportunities for help. The lecturers would help like, monitors helped, you can talk to anyone, whether they were a friend or an adult or whatever. It was amazing.*"

Conclusion

The experiences of the three first year students who were doing, being and becoming occupational therapy students were explored in terms of Bourdieu's analytical constructs to gain deeper understanding of the challenges students encounter during the transition from high school to university. Areas of incongruence between students' habitus, or what they bring, and field, or the institutional practices of the university, were elucidated. Despite the accrual of social, linguistic and intellectual capital derived from middle-class backgrounds and good schooling, the students reported challenges experienced in understanding, unpacking and mastering institutional requirements related to academic literacy. In keeping with the notion of the university as field with practices, rules, attitudes and behaviours that are known and transparent to academics but not necessarily to incoming students, these students' grappling with academic literacy skills serves to illustrate that more could be done to explicate the academic rules and practices of the institution. Furthermore, it was revealed that these students needed earlier acquisition of self-regulatory skills to balance social life and studies and that they experienced the social worlds of the university as overwhelming. The social dimension of adapting to university life was fore-grounded by the students as a domain of transitional challenge. The analytical method of uncovering incongruence between the student habitus and the institution as field was useful in gaining understanding of challenges experiences by these three students and serves to inform educators and those interested in supporting incoming students of areas of possible challenge.

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A pilot study on sexuality in rehabilitation of the spinal cord injured: exploring the woman's perspective

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was aimed at gaining an understanding of spinal cord injured women's subjective views and perceptions regarding the inclusion of sexuality in their rehabilitation.

A focus group comprising four women with complete spinal cord injuries who had received their injury not less than 2 years previously and who had been through a rehabilitation programme in the past 5 years confirmed the significance of the dialectical relationship between sexuality and self esteem. Self esteem had a great impact on the participants' ability to resume their lives as sexual beings and their receptiveness to sexuality being addressed in rehabilitation. Further, the participants' ability to resume their lives as sexual beings was impacted on by personal, partners and societal attitudes. It was also equated with their ability to engage in the physical acts of sex. This supports the theoretical constructs of occupational science which recognises the relationship between doing, being and becoming.
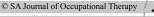
One of the significant shortcomings of rehabilitation was the failure to provide individualised and client-centred intervention when including sexuality. Therapists need to adjust the time and manner in which sexuality is addressed and consider the use of peer counselling, group discussion and access to detailed information and resources.

Key words: Activities of Daily Living, Female, Rehabilitation, Sexuality, Spinal cord injury

Introduction

Sexuality is an innate and multi-faceted dimension central to one's being. The perception that sexuality is only comprised of sexual intercourse and other physical acts is a common misconception. Literature tends to narrow sexuality to the physical capabilities of the individual. These capabilities may include sexual acts, positioning and sexual arousal, but from a holistic point of view, sexuality also encompasses biological, psychological, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual qualities. These qualities may include among others one's sense of self; expression of self; relationships with others, intimate or otherwise; desirability and self esteem[1,2]. Couldrick, cited in Sakellariou and Simo Algado, defines sexuality as a component of an individual which develops throughout one's life and is an integral part of everyday thoughts, feelings and behaviour[3].

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