
Investigating student memories of cross racial mixing in a postgraduate sociology class in a South African university

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Abstract

The paper reports on a pedagogic and research initiative which I introduced in a postgraduate sociology course on Youth, Childhood and Gendered Identities which I taught at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This involved students participating in Collective Memory Work: choosing, writing and telling a story in class relating to their youth or childhoods (from their early to very recent years) about themes which were selected by the class, and then collectively and critically reflecting on these. The aim of this initiative was to explore and compare constructions and experiences of youth and childhood of different members of the group. The paper focuses on stories students told on one of the selected themes: cross racial mixing. Four stories are selected for closer thematic and narrative analysis. The paper reports on the collective discussions which were held after all the stories had been read, and the kinds of questions raised in these about the shape, form and content of the different stories and the nature and status of memories.

Introduction

The paper reports on a pedagogic and research initiative which I introduced in a postgraduate sociology course on Youth, Childhood and Gendered Identities which I taught at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The course drew on contemporary research in Southern Africa and the West on young people's understandings and constructions of their social worlds, and the significance of gender and its intersections with sexuality, age, race and class as sources of identification and dimensions of power. The first part of the course addressed this research and its findings, as well as the 'young person centred' (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002) methods these researchers developed in order to engage in empathetic and critical ways with young people, in various contexts. In the second part of the course the students explored their own childhoods through Collective Memory Work, (Haug, Andresen, Brunz-Elfferding, Hauser, Lang, Laudan, *et al.*, 1999; Crawford, Kippax, Onyx,

Gault and Benton, 1992). It is this initiative and the students' engagement with this which is the subject of this paper.

Collective memory work, as the name implies, takes place in a group, and involves individuals choosing, writing and then telling a story about their past in relation to an agreed theme and then discussing *these* collectively. In the postgraduate course the class constituted the group, and the students chose to tell stories from early to very recent years on the following themes – toys and games, cross racial mixing, family conflict and first boyfriends/girlfriends. The aim was to explore and compare, through engaging in Collective Memory Work, constructions and experiences of youth and childhood of different members of the group with a particular focus on how variables such as gender, race, age and class influence and shape this.

The article examines stories students told on one of the selected themes: cross racial mixing. Most of the stories students choose to tell on this theme were set when they were at high school or were memories from their more recent past. This, as elaborated later, reflected their increasing participation in multiracial institutions and communities. Opportunities for mixing with people of other races only occurred, for some students, notably lower class black students who went to the more poorly resourced schools, in their later school years or when they got to university. In stories of cross racial mixing in multiracial schools and university frequent references were made to 'culture' and the pursuit of shared cultural interests which were seen to cut across race. So closely tied were 'race' and 'culture' that in some of the stories cultural differences seemed to signify presumed race differences.

For these students, as for many young people growing up in the post-apartheid era race was a familiar marker of identity, which tended to inhibit engagement with others constructed as racially or culturally different. Drawing on these stories and the collective discussions which they provoked, I argue that Collective Memory Work, as practised in this course, opened up opportunities for students from different social and cultural backgrounds (mediated in complex ways by race and class) to engage with and learn about each other, and encouraged critical thinking about race, gender, sexuality, power and processes of identity construction.

Theoretical influences on the nature of the course, student research and the analysis

In the first part of the course students were introduced to forms of research influenced by poststructuralist versions of feminism which, in line with what James and Prout (1997) refer to as the *New Sociology of Childhood*, seek to engage with people as active agents, and to explore processes of identity construction and negotiation in relation to gender and other variables such as race (Thorne, 1993; Frosh *et al.*, 2002; MacNaughton, 2000; Davies, 2011; Pattman and Bhana, 2009). Collective Memory Work was presented on the course as an approach to investigating youth and childhood which was ‘young person centred’ and countered the tendency for adults to construct their identities by forgetting childhood and projecting innocence and ignorance on children (Kehily and Montgomery, 2003; Pattman and Chege, 2003; Bhana, 2008).

The course was strongly influenced by what some writers have referred to as the ‘biographical turn’ in the social sciences (see Thomson, 2007), based on the view that language is not simply descriptive but constitutive of realities (Foucault, 1979), that experiences are never raw but always mediated and shaped by people’s narrative accounts of these (Riessman, 1993). In line with these perspectives, we paid close attention, in the first part of the course, to the narrative accounts of young people in the interview and ethnographic research we discussed, treating these not simply as windows on a real world ‘out there’ but as important resources through which they forged and fashioned particular kinds of identities and relations.

Though Collective Memory Work was used on the course as a way of researching experiences of youth and childhood, the assumption that story tellers could simply step into their shoes in the recent or more distant past and recount (raw) experiences was problematised. When analysing stories produced through Collective Memory Work, students were encouraged not to see these narratives merely as photographic reflections of the past but as reconstructions of the past which in some ways tell us as much about how they present themselves now as about their past (Rosenwald and Ocheberg, 1992; Personal Narratives Group, 1989).

We were interested in how memories were influenced by contemporary concerns, and, following Nuttall and Coetzee (2005, p.1) on the construction

of memories in the post-apartheid era, how “certain versions of the past get to be remembered”. However, whereas Nuttall and Coetzee were concerned with people’s memories of apartheid, our focus was particular university students with no living memories of apartheid, and their memories as young people growing up in the post-apartheid context.

This raises questions, we addressed in collective discussions following the reading of the stories, about how they frame these, how they present themselves (and others) and invite certain kinds of interpretations in their stories. I shall reflect on some of these questions when reviewing discussions about stories of cross racial mixing. The thematic analyses of the stories draw on poststructuralist theories of gender and race, mentioned briefly above, which conceptualise these as relational, imbued with power, and always negotiated and enacted in relation to identities constructed as Other. Such theories, as Glenda MacNaughton (2000) argues, imply forms of ‘binary analysis’ which seek to ‘reveal’ implicit constructions of the Other in relation to which certain kinds of identifications are made. In the stories I shall be discussing, race and gender were central features of processes of identification.

Method

The postgraduate class comprised 18 students, all of whom participated in Collective Memory Work. Twelve were female and six male. Seven identified as black, one as coloured, six as Indian and four as white.¹

The students were asked to write stories relating to the selected theme in which they featured prominently, and to try to tell these from their points of view, as they recalled these. In order to encourage this identification they were asked to write about themselves in the first person. The usual procedure however in Collective Memory Work is to write about oneself in the third person as a way of recognising and highlighting differences between oneself

¹ These were the racial categories which the students themselves used in their stories. The term African which is sometimes used synonymously with black in contemporary South Africa and was used to construct this group under apartheid was not mentioned by students either in their stories or in the discussions. Coloureds and Indians were not subsumed under the category of black as in ‘black consciousness’ but treated by the students as separate categories.

now and then. While writing about oneself in the first person may have encouraged a spurious sense of homogeneity across different moments in their lives, the intention of asking students to do this was to encourage empathy with the people they once were in their stories and to present them as active agents.

After writing their stories each student read them aloud in class. Opportunities were provided after the reading of each story for brief discussion mainly on points of clarification. After all the stories had been read, classes were set aside for more substantial discussions where themes emerging from the stories were identified and discussed and comparisons were drawn between the stories in terms of the emerging themes and story constructions.

Race was chosen as one of the themes for story telling because it had emerged as an important biographical marker when students initially introduced themselves to each other, and also because of the interest generated in one of the classes in the first part of the course which engaged with literature on young people, race, gender and schooling. This literature (which included Nadine Dolby's ethnography of a formerly white school in Durban: Dolby, 2001, and my interview research with Deevia Bhana with grade 11 learners in township, formerly white and formerly Indian schools; Pattman and Bhana, 2009, 2010) raised questions about the significance of race for different students in different schools in South Africa, and precipitated animated discussion in the group about experiencing race in and outside school. The discussion, led by students, was dominated by accounts of not mixing, or not mixing very well, with people from other races. In response to this, I suggested we make *race mixing* a specific topic for Collective Memory Work, and to write stories about mixing with people of other races in and outside school.

Ethical permission was obtained from the University to conduct research on the course using Collective Memory Work, and, before enrolling on the course, students were notified that they would have to engage in this research and that this would entail writing, telling and discussing stories about themselves on selected themes.

Students' stories of cross racial mixing

All the stories of cross racial mixing were about contexts and events which were presented as unusual, strange or surprising, though the implied norm, namely mono-racial mixing, was rarely mentioned or made explicit. Most of the stories were about cross racial mixing through *shared interests* and *heterosexual attraction*. Four of these are selected for analysis. I provide brief descriptive and analytic accounts of these. I then report on the collective discussions which were held after all the stories had been read, and the kinds of critical questions raised in these about the shape, form and content of these particular stories and the nature and status of memories.

1. Stories of cross racial mixing through shared interests

In six of the stories (three told by girls and three by boys) cultural and sporting activities and interests were presented as powerful catalysts for promoting cross racial mixing. These were stories about how, for example, shared interests in particular kinds of sport, music, dance or fashion could provide common points of identification and pull people together physically and symbolically from different races. In the stories below cross racial mixing through shared interests figured most prominently:

Ramesh's story

Ramesh writes about how playing football enabled him and other Indian boys to mix and interact with black boys in a formerly Indian high school in which, generally, 'interaction between black and Indian boys was non-existent'. He describes how playing football not only provided an opportunity to engage with black boys albeit in opposing teams, but also how it led, with time, to the formation of cross racial friendships between boys:

These boys together with my friends and I met once a week to play a game of football. Initially the environment was that of hostility and filled with high testosterone levels. . .our meetings were based solely on competition. . . .As the year went on we began to look past the differences of skin colour. . . we began to enjoy the company of each other as well as the sportsmanship which every boy showed. . .from our meetings which were based solely on sport followed friendships and understanding but this did not mean that the competitiveness in every boy died. We began to mix our teams and include boys from the previously other teams.

When Ramesh refers to his ‘friends’ we know he means not only other Indians but Indian boys; so taken for granted is this that he does not need to specify it. But intersections of race and gender are made very clear as the story progresses. For the story is about how football, constructed as a highly masculine ‘testosterone’ fuelled affair, impacted on black and Indian boys’ racial identifications and relations. It is about how football which had initially seemed to reproduce racial oppositions and tensions in the form of hostile and conflicting assertions of masculinities became a site of racial transformation which produced points of identification between Indian and black boys and promoted all male cross racial friendships.

Reflecting at the end of his story on his participation in racially mixed football at his school, Ramesh makes a bold claim about the ‘amazing’ positive and ‘lifelong’ impact of this on him and his views about and relations with black people:

It has taught me a great deal of respect for different people, it has taught me to be more tolerant and understanding and it has even assisted me in learning a bit of Zulu. It is truly amazing how a simple inter-action through an activity eliminates boundaries of society and unites people forever leaving a lifelong quality in a person’s life

Simon’s Story

Football was also mentioned in the same light by a black boy, Simon. Simon had been to a township school comprising only black learners and like Sultan indicated that his first experiences of social interaction with people from other races was at university:

During my first year there was this Indian guy who I would always sit next to. We both liked football and we would chat about it especially after our favourite, Manchester United, had played. Outside the lecture theatre there was also a bit of mixing between the different race groups. . . For example a white guy would borrow a cigarette lighter from an Indian student. I remember one day sitting in this space and this coloured student, a girl, was playing a very nice song of house music and my friend approached her asking if she could send the song through to him via Bluetooth.

Cross racial socialising at university, as Simon spoke about this, did not seem very common or very deep; the examples he gave of these were very specific, one off, instrumental activities which went on outside the lecture theatre. However football talk did seem to provide an opportunity for developing a more longstanding relationship with an Indian boy even if this did not go beyond football talk and was confined to the lecture theatre.

Jenny's Story

Jenny spoke about her interests in the music of a group called 'Skwatta Kamp' to which her older brother had just introduced her. She said she 'listened to it and loved it' and mentioned telling other children at school about it:

I started telling some of the white kids in my class, they hadn't heard of them, because to them if it isn't on MTV it's not real music. Even with their lack of interest I decided to bring the CD. . . a white friend of mine took it to his car to play at break.

The implication was that white kids were her friends, though the reason presumably why she specifies their race (rather than take this for granted) was that the story was about the very contrasting reactions of black girls to her interest as a white girl in this music:

As the CD started a group of black girls walked past, stopped and shouted to the boys' car asking where he got the CD. He told them it was mine. Next thing they start dancing, yelling, screaming, smiling, laughing and rattling off in Zulu. Then they ran to me and asked me who I got the CD from. I told them it was my brother and they said 'your white brother???' I said 'yes he's white, well according to my parents. . .'. They hugged me and smiled. . . they told me to join them for the rest of break. I did, we talked and then they said I'm one of them now and they all started to agree that Skwatta Kamp was the best new group out

In contrast to Ramesh's story there were no reflective moments in Jenny's story about engaging with people from different races and there were no allusions to ideas of learning and progression. We do not hear about her experiences (or lack of these) of cross racial mixing, her story is about the moment, but this suggests perhaps that this was an unusual and short-lived example of cross racial mixing. Indeed the unstated implication is that not mixing socially across lines of race was the norm. For why would the black girls show such surprise (and joy) when encountering Jenny listening to music which they constructed as black. In the story the black girls appeared warm but irrational, and the laughter the story provoked, when it was read in class, tended to reinforce this view.

Even though this story is about a white person enjoying music normally listened to by black people, it serves to emphasise just how powerful (musical) tastes can be as markers of race, with the black girls claiming her as 'one of them' because of their common tastes in music. Clearly the music was seen by the black girls as appealing to blacks, and, more than that, as a source of black identification. They were shocked then to find a white girl listening

to this music and also euphoric that she ‘was one of them now’, as if through the music she was identifying with them.

2. Stories of cross racial heterosexual mixing

Six of the stories told about cross racial mixing were with people of the opposite sex. All of these were told by women, and four featured conflicts, problems and tensions. These four stories focused on the negative reactions of others to people who were, or were assumed to be, in racially mixed, heterosexual relationships. One of these was about the story teller, a white girl, being treated, mistakenly, *as if* she was in a mixed relationship when her shocked mother discovered that one of her friends who had stayed over after a party was a black man. Another was about a rumour, started by a white girl in an Afrikaans high school that another white girl had slept with a black man, and intended to sully her ‘reputation’. The other two stories were about actually being in mixed relationships, and were told by a black and an Indian woman. I have selected Reesha’s (the Indian woman’s) story for more detailed presentation and analysis below.

Reesha’s Story

Reesha’s story about her relationship with a fellow coloured boyfriend, Elton comprises three interlocking parts which read like, what William Labov (1972. p.354) refers to in his analysis of narrative structures, as “orientations, complicating actions, and resolutions/evaluations”.

She begins by providing an orientation to the relationship which seems to anticipate the negative reactions of her friends, describing Elton, when she first saw him, as coloured but adding that this was not something she noticed, ‘*I thought he was extremely cute and sexy. He was coloured but I did not see that. All I saw was someone I liked*’. She describes her relationship as one in which she made the first move asking him out and also asking him for a kiss and him responding with some reticence.

This sets the scene for the *complicating action* or narrative core: her friends’ negative reactions to her and especially her boyfriend.

Most of my friends thought it was wrong and weird to ask him out, and they saw this as being forward and not Indian like. . . This was further exacerbated by the fact that Elton was

coloured. They went on to tell me that coloured boys only want sex from girls. . .and are big players and that he will cheat on me and that I should watch out for him taking drugs and drinking all the time. All this loving advice came from my Indian friends both male and female.

In stark contrast to the way he was presented in the Orientation, Elton was constructed as a ‘player’, an exploitative sexual predator who would use her and cheat on her and get drunk, simply by virtue of being coloured. Significantly she refers to this advice coming from her ‘Indian friends, both male and female’, with the implication, perhaps, that advice about relationships normally comes from one sex, presumably girl friends, and that her relationship with a coloured man was seen as constituting a relationship problem of a different order to the ones for which she normally sought and got advice from her (girl) friends.

The complicating action is followed by a resolution and an evaluation which reads like a ‘happy ending.’ She not only proves her ‘Indian friends’ wrong, representing her boyfriend as the very antithesis of the man they made him out to be, but also as hypocritical, as practising the very vices which they projected on to coloured people, and suffering in the ways they imagined Reesha would:

Elton has never. . .cheated on me or forced me into sex, he was a perfect gentleman, so sweet and so shy that he would even ask my permission to hold my hand. The so called perfect Indian boyfriends and girlfriends turned out to be the regrets and nightmares of partners, while my so called hyper sexualised cheating boyfriend turned out to be the loving, patient and respectful man who gives me the world and treats me like a queen.

This story does not just describe the racist reactions of her Indian friends to her relationship; it is also a way of responding to and dealing with these, full of emotion and irony, which turns the tables and transforms and re-defines her boyfriend from the racist construction of him as ‘a big player’ to a gentlemanly man, sweet, shy and chivalrous. Racism takes a gendered and sexual form, in this story – stereotyping her boyfriend as a hypersexual male – and is confronted through romantic idealisation. Towards the end she writes in the language of romantic fiction, speaking as the female subject of, what Wendy Hollway (1984, p.??), refers to as, the “have-hold discourse” and describing her boyfriend, still in highly gender polarised ways, but not as a man who dominates sexually, rather a “man who gives me the world and treats me like a queen”.

Drawing on memories to promote critical thinking

One of the main challenges in our Collective Memory Work was to encourage students to move beyond seeing the stories as descriptive accounts of past realities, and to focus instead on the selectivity and work of memories, what memories do, what identities they construct and affirm and how, and our current investments in particular memories. I tried to facilitate the collective discussions we had about the stories, after they had all been read, in ways which sought to promote this kind of critical thinking, (for example working with students to formulate appropriate questions on how the stories were socially constructed and what cultural assumptions and material conditions make the stories possible). Comparisons were drawn in the discussions between the shape, form and content of the different stories and how the story tellers were positioning themselves in these, notably in terms of race and gender.

Discussing Ramesh and Simon's stories

Ramesh's story carried very explicit and 'optimistic' messages, which read like 'concluding' remarks, about his contemporary self and his attitudes to and relations with people of other races. These served to contextualise the story as part of a more general narrative of progression and self development. They were reflections on the past, which drew on this as a reference point to construct a much better version of the present. In the conclusion in Ramesh's story, playing racially mixed football at school was presented as a watershed moment in a narrative of progression from racial segregation to integration. 'Happy endings' constructing narratives of progression featured in four other stories on race mixing. Questions were raised about the popularity of these stories and the immediate and broader social contexts which might encourage the telling of these, the multi racial group in which people were participating as researchers and researched and the wider circulation of Rainbow Nation discourses of 'race and progression' in post-apartheid cultures.

These led to further questions about the absences of *current* conflicts and tensions in stories of race mixing, framed by narratives of progression. Comparisons were drawn, for example, between stories on race mixing in which conflicts and tensions, (if they featured very much) were often ironed out by the end, and stories on family conflicts (which were told in other

Collective Memory Work sessions) which rarely had happy resolutions. Contemporary literature on 'race talk' in South Africa has suggested that alluding to race (in racially mixed company) is 'troubling' and therefore tends not to be done, even if it is relevant to do so (Durrheim, Mtose and Brown, 2011). Elsewhere I have argued that anxieties produced by asking questions about race limits possibilities of doing research on race and cross racial mixing at University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pattman, 2010). Drawing on this literature, questions were posed about whether narratives of progression in stories of cross racial mixing glossed over racial divisions or tensions in the university and whether telling these stories was influenced by anxieties about talking about self and race in a multi racial group.

In Simon's story there was no narrative of progression, no moments of evaluation of the 'progress' he had made; he simply identified specific occasions where he or others he observed mixed across lines of race. Opportunities for cross racial mixing were associated with coming to university, but are presented not as a defining period in his life's trajectory, but as features of a university, which, in contrast to his school, had a multi racial student population. Simon's story invited very different readings in the discussion, on whether it represented the university positively as a place where 'races' mixed, or negatively as a place where race mixing was rare, formal and superficial.

Contemporary critical literature on masculinities and football has suggested that football is not simply a game played mainly by males, but in many cultural contexts may operate, too, as a powerful signifier of masculinity. Engaging with this literature, we discussed how playing or even (as in Simon's story) talking about football might come to be seen as *male* activities and involve various kinds of gendered negotiations and identifications. (See, for example, Frosh *et al.*, 2002 and Pattman and Bhana, 2010).

The idealisation of football, in Ramesh's story, as a vehicle for promoting cross racial friendships, was tied to celebrations of versions of masculinity (indeed Ramesh's story only made sense precisely because of the way football operates as cultural signifier of (hegemonic) versions of masculinity, and questions were raised about the significance of this memory for Ramesh in terms of how it was constructing him and his investments in these identities: a tough and physical male, an anti racist Indian, a child of the Rainbow Nation.

While Ramesh praised football for its inclusive practices with regard to race, (for ‘uniting people for ever’) no mention was made of its exclusionary practices with regard to gender (girls or even boys who did not participate in the ‘testosterone’ (Ramesh) fuelled games). Was there an assumption that gendered forms of segregation in relation to tastes and interests in football were natural whereas racial forms of segregation could be broached through activities like football which appealed to ‘natural’ gendered inclinations which cut across race? These questions opened up critical discussions about how people interpreted racism and sexism, and what they understood by forms of racial and gendered integration.

Discussing Jenny’s story

Though it is a story about racial integration (at least in that moment) and presents black girls as the instigators of this, it also pokes fun at them. When the story was read in class it elicited much laughter, which turned on the black girls and their constructions of and reactions to Jenny, as if these were absurd and over the top, even if warm and friendly. Descriptions of them as ‘yelling screaming’ and ‘rattling off in Zulu’ (as if Zulu was a language for ‘rattling off’) fed into the humour, and the laughter in class was loudest at the moment in the story when the rationality of the black girls’ response was most clearly questioned, that is when they asked if this was Jenny’s ‘white brother’ who had introduced her to the music. (even in the written version of the story, the surreal nature of this moment is marked with three question marks.)

Their shock and surprise reflects the continued racialisation of cultural interests in the post-apartheid context, even in racially mixed schools, and also, perhaps, implicit associations of whiteness with privilege and superiority complex. Whether a similar story could have been told about white girls expressing joy and surprise and embracing black girls for doing things which they (the white girls) constructed as black was asked in the discussion. This was inconceivable, according to all the students, and their reflections on why this was so led them to question the view that cross racial social mixing necessarily challenged race–power relations, and to explore the nature and direction of particular forms of cross racial mixing among young people in South Africa. Typical forms of cross racial socialising on and off campus and in racially mixed schools which were discussed were ones which seemed to take place on ‘white terms’ in the sense that they involved a minority of

blacks or Indians mixing with a majority of whites, in 'white institutions' such as particular nightclubs which played 'white music', such as Rock, or participating in 'white' sports activities like rugby. (A study of racial mixing among 8-year-old coloured, black and white children in the Western Cape makes a similar point; in this the sites for cross racial mixing were formerly white schools and churches in 'white' towns: Bray, Gooskens, Kahn and Seekings, 2010).

In the light of these discussions the black girls in Jenny's story seemed much less irrational, and Jenny's story more partial and less descriptive. If cross racial relations are typically established on white terms, the surprise and joy the black girls expressed when they saw Jenny listening to 'black' music, and their attempts to claim her as 'one of them', made more sense.

Discussing Reesha's story

As in the discussions relating to Jenny's story, questions were also asked about what made Reesha's story possible. In the case of Reesha's story the questions asked concerned why certain kinds of mixed race boyfriend/girlfriend relations become problematised, and why opposition to her relationship took the form of sexual vilification of her boyfriend by her same race friends. Could a similar story have been told if the race of the story teller or boyfriend had been different, if for example the story teller had been black and her boyfriend coloured, or if the boyfriend had been white and she Indian, or if their gender had been reversed, an Indian male telling a story about his relationship with a coloured female? Such questions provoked critical thinking about gender, race and sexuality and their intersections and the complex dynamics of power associated with these.

One of the features of this story was the absence of a clearly defined chronological ending (in contrast to its beginning several years ago when she met her boyfriend at university and started pursuing the relationship). Though the story ends on a 'happy note' it is not clear what her relationship is with her Indian friends and whether she and her boyfriend are still experiencing racist abuse, and if so, how this is expressed. This raised questions in our discussions about her current investments in the story as a way of dealing with and responding to racism. We discussed too how the ways she re-constructed her boyfriend and the particular romanticised forms her

idealisation of him took, were shaped by the forms of gendered and sexual vilification through which the racist abuse was expressed.

Conclusion: memories of cross racial mixing, research and pedagogy

Precisely because the Collective Memory Work exercise offered the students such a wide time span from which to choose to tell their story, it provided scope for individuality, and one of the features of the stories was how different they were, in contrast for example to the stories people may tell in group interviews. But what was also interesting about these personalised stories was how much they had in common in terms of themes as well as form and structure.

Two thirds of the stories were either about cross racial mixing through shared interests or heterosexual desire. Furthermore these stories were highly gendered with similar gendered concerns and issues emerging, for example engagements with 'football' in some of the men's stories, and stigmatisation, sexual vilification and misrecognition in the women's stories on cross racial heterosexual relations. The implication was that these were both significant and common gendered constructions and experiences of forms of cross racial mixing.

The stories, and notably those which turned everyday activities into very specific examples of cross racial mixing as well as those about the problematisation of mixed race relations, implied, too, that cross racial mixing was not the norm though this was not made explicit (perhaps because this was so taken for granted). Of course it could be argued that by being asked to tell a story about cross racial mixing the suggestion was being made that this was unusual, but cross racial mixing was chosen for Memory Work precisely because the students themselves showed so much interest in a class earlier in the course, on race, gender and schooling.

Ramesh's and Simon's stories, with their focus on shared interests as presenting possibilities for forms of cross racial mixing, are supported by Nadine Dolby's ethnographic study, Dolby, 2001, of a formerly white school in Durban. She found that though identities and group affiliations of students,

to some extent, followed the old apartheid divisions, cross 'racial' friendships were common based on criteria other than 'race' such as shared 'tastes' in music, sport or fashion. But such friendships, as implied in some of the postgraduate students' stories, were often limited and were not necessarily sustained on a more general level (e.g. outside school) or across a range of

different contexts in school. Furthermore tastes, themselves, Dolby found, might be racialised, as illustrated in Jenny's story.

Though there were commonalities between the stories, there were also marked differences. The kind of stories different students told and the possibilities of telling them, were crucially affected by their particular and very different cultural and material circumstances, such as the kinds of schools they went to, where they lived, and, as it emerged when comparing the stories, whether they were male, female, black, white, Indian or coloured. What emerged, also, in the stories was how connected gender and race were with power, from Jenny's story about the excitement of the black girls that she, a white girl, was listening to 'black' music, to Reesha's story about the sexual vilification of her boyfriend and criticisms of her by her Indian friends, to Ramesh's celebratory story about cross racial engagements through gender exclusionary (football) practices.

These stories, after they had all been read, provoked discussion about different students from different backgrounds (marked by race, gender and class) and their very different experiences, and their *constructions* of these, of cross racial mixing. The discussion worked both as a research and pedagogic strategy, with the students having to locate their own stories in relation to others and reflect on how their memories and the content and presentation of their stories were shaped by and also served to shape different cultural and material experiences.

In these discussions students were encouraged to see each other's stories not simply as descriptive (if faded) accounts of past events, but as socially constructed and mediated by processes of selection and interpretation. In this sense the stories produced through Collective Memory Work were as much about the present as the past. This was a view implied in some of the questions which were raised when the stories were discussed, about people's investments in the stories.

It may be that the interest and engagement shown by students in my postgraduate group in these stories of race and schooling was influenced, in part, by the multi-cultural composition of the group. Here was an occasion when students were reflecting, in such a group, on their relations with others from different racialised backgrounds with whom, as implied by the stories, they may rarely have socialised in the past and perhaps even the present.

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