Research article

Thinking with Nancy Fraser in Understanding Students' Experiences of Accessing Psycho-social and Academic Support during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Faeza Khan*

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the face of higher education institutions in profound ways. After the restrictions of movement under lockdowns imposed in response to the pandemic from 2020, higher education institutions were forced to think creatively and quickly about how to respond to arising challenges of completing the academic year and ensuring throughput and retention of students. Historically disadvantaged institutions in South Africa were particularly hard hit in taking on the challenge of online learning given their restricted resources and the under-preparedness of the student cohort who are attracted to these institutions. This article uses data from two surveys conducted among students at the University of the Western Cape which measured students' experiences and access to psycho-social and academic support services in 2020. In addition to the findings of these surveys, emails from a student counselling line at the university are also used to reflect on students' expressed needs for support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilising Nancy Fraser's model of social justice and focusing particularly on the economic and cultural dimensions of this model, this article seeks to provide an understanding of the constraints and support that students experienced when seeking to access online academic and psycho-social support. Fraser's affirmative and transformative approaches to producing change are discussed to help identify how the constraints that were experienced could be addressed to achieve participatory parity.

Keywords

social justice, online academic support, psycho-social support, participatory parity, COVID-19, higher education

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of restrictions on movement and gatherings which were imposed by the national government in response severely impacted the higher education sector. Many students were expected to adapt to learning in an online environment, while many of those living in residence halls were asked to make the journey home when a national lockdown was announced from March 2020, leaving them without the support services provided to them on campus by universities'

* Dr Faeza Khan is the Living Learning Coordinator for Residential Services at the the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. Email: fakhan@uwc.ac.za. ORCID: 0000-0003-4736-7638.

student affairs departments. The challenges that students faced at home were significant. The new mode of learning brought about many psycho-social challenges for students who were now back at home with limited to no support. Not only were students having to contend with using a new online platform for learning, they also faced increasing levels of anxiety and isolation from their social circles and increasing levels of hunger (Sifunda et al., 2020).

Creating conditions that can support online learning and facilitate access to psycho-social support requires a set of institutional arrangements. Fraser's thinking (2008, 2009), which is used in this paper to examine the data, presents a multi-dimensional, multi-level theory of social justice which provides a lens through which injustices can be scrutinised in the higher education space. Fraser's (2009) social justice framework enables an appraisal of existing social arrangements against the principle of participatory parity which, she explains, provides for all social actors in social life to participate as equal peers. Fraser's (2008, 2009) concept of social justice is therefore useful in examining whether the institutional arrangements that were put in place under COVID-19 were sufficient in allowing all students to participate in learning and access support on an equal basis. For this reason, only two dimensions of Fraser's theoretical framework of social justice, namely the economic and cultural dimensions, are utilised in this study as it seeks to foreground issues of maldistribution and misrecognition. Fraser's (2009) theory is also valuable insofar as it presents an understanding of how affirmative and transformative strategies can contribute to the achievement of participatory parity among students to enhance academic learning and access to online psycho-social support.

Literature Review

According to the United Nations (2020), an estimated 40% of the poorest countries failed to support learners at risk during the COVID-19 crisis, and past experiences show that both education and gender inequalities tend to be neglected in responses to disease outbreaks. Domestic chores, especially for girls and young women, and the care work required to run households can also prevent female students from being able to access sufficient learning time.

Insufficient resources

At a basic level, many families lack the space for both parents and students to work from home, which leads to competition for the use of limited home space for teaching, learning and work (Mukute et al., 2020). Meanwhile, teaching and learning within the higher education sector has become increasingly technologically based. Within this space, students need access to tools such as computers, Wi-Fi and printing facilities to complete academic tasks (Khan, 2019). In this context, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, many students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) were already struggling with access to technology and resources. After the COVID-19 outbreak, access to these resources became an even bigger issue for many students who now found themselves

in homes where access to such necessary technology was non-existent. (Khan, 2020b). Furthermore, a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2021 found that only half of the students (49.9%) surveyed reported having a suitable place to study during lockdown (Sifunda et al. 2021). A total of 20.8% indicated that they had a suitable place to study only some of the time; while 29.3% of the students indicated that they had no suitable place to study. Meanwhile, although the majority (78.6%) of the students had regular access to electricity, 5.7% did not have access to electricity during lockdown.

According to a study conducted at the University of Johannesburg, a conducive learning environment where optimal learning can take place refers to an environment that is safe and provides the appropriate technology (computers, Wi-Fi and printing equipment and services) to facilitate learning (Agherdien, 2015). The study acknowledges that optimal learning takes place when the student is stimulated intellectually; when ideas and opinions are encouraged; and when students are supported by the university to develop themselves intellectually, socially and personally (Agherdien, 2015). Also, ensuring that students' basic needs are met, including in relation to safe accommodation, access to basic utilities and food security, is a precondition for students' holistic development, that is, their intellectual, social and personal development. These findings are supported by other studies (Swartz, 1998; Khan, 2019) which show that student residences are strategically important as ideal locations for teaching and learning, as well as for social and recreational life, not least because they can create a sense of community. The COVID-19 pandemic forced students into isolation in their homes with many of them living in conditions that were not conducive to studying. The lack of resources for many of these students resulted in them experiencing maldistribution, which impeded their capacity to compete with their peers from wealthier families in completing their academic projects. According to Fraser (2008, 2009), insufficient resources to support student learning results in distributive injustice, preventing students who lack such resources from achieving academic success on a par with those students with access to the necessary finances to purchase laptops and data. In the digital age, with technology being an integral part of learning, not having access to a computer places a student at a serious disadvantage.

Food security

One of the greatest challenges for Southern Africa during COVID-19 has been food security (Goolsbee & Syverson, 2020). In the HSRC (2021) study, a total of 41% of the students between the ages of 18 and 35 years who were surveyed reported that they had been unable to buy food at various points during the hard lockdown that was imposed in 2020. A further 10% had relied on food donations and 15% had gone hungry on some days. In 2018, a study conducted at UWC found that 70% of students were food insecure (Makwela, 2018). Food-insecure students have great difficulty studying and focusing on their academic projects (Raskind et al., 2019). In addition, they also report

feeling stigmatised because, unlike many of their peers, they are reliant on food support programmes (Khan, 2019). This, according to Fraser's (2009) theory, results in students losing their sense of self-esteem in society as they feel inadequate in relation to their peers who are not food insecure.

Mental health

In another study conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2021, it was found that undergraduate and full-time students were, respectively, about two and four times more likely than postgraduate and part-time students to indicate problems associated with mental health (Oje et al., 2021). Those aged between 18 and 24 were approximately 1.75 times more likely than students older than 24 to present problems associated with mental health. The findings also revealed a gender dimension to mental health. Specifically, female students were 1.83 times more likely than male students to indicate problems associated with mental health. These problems included stress, anxiety and depression. In an earlier study conducted by Freeman (2018), it was found that a significant percentage of university students who participated in the study were not equipped with the coping skills or support structures required to handle the kind of problems that they have to deal with every day.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, students had to adjust to a new situation of lockdown and confinement. They were unable to enjoy the social engagement which face-to-face contact had allowed; and the increased sense of isolation eventually took its toll, affecting the mental health of students (UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020). Research has shown that the families of people living with mental illnesses are often subjected to stigma by virtue of their association with them. This stigma against families may take the form of blame being assigned, and may also be made manifest in the form of social isolation and rejection (Nxumalo & Mchunu, 2017). Such stigma perpetuates a cycle of disability for the patient and family (Nxumalo & Mchunu, 2017) and affects their social status as they feel inferior to their peers.

Markers of inequality and gender-based violence

Students' experiences of campus life can reflect exclusionary and unequal practices on the basis of gender, race, class, and other markers of inequality that they encounter in their communities (Clowes et al., 2009; Gordon & Collins, 2013; Hames, 2009). The material and ideological contexts of inequality and how they play out in higher education are instrumental in shaping students' participation in higher education. South African students' experiences on university campuses continue to be shaped by inequalities and broader social perceptions of being and belonging which find their roots in apartheid history and centuries of colonisation (Shefer et al., 2018). Lived experiences continue to be significantly shaped by the legacies of apartheid and its divisive and unequal systems of education. The inequality in lived experiences has been bolstered by the strengthening

of individualised and corporatised neoliberal policies in higher education (Badat, 2010; Mbembe, 2015a, 2015b). A study conducted at the University of Stellenbosch among residence students in 2018 revealed significant inequality in students' experiences of university life on the basis of race, gender and sexuality (Robertson & Pattman, 2018). Race, gender and sexuality were intertwined and framed the marginalisation or exclusion of students from certain programmes and activities at the residences. This marginalisation or exclusion was deemed to be part of the university's culture which has its roots in the apartheid era (Robertson & Pattman, 2018).

The presumption of men that they have a right to sex is entrenched in the notion of patriarchy and misrecognises female students' rights to determine when and with whom they wish to engage in sexual encounters. Clowes et al. (2009) found that university campuses are highly sexualised spaces and that there is great pressure on students to engage in sexual activity. This peer pressure places students who are experimenting with their sexuality and their identity in difficult positions, with many students claiming that they engage in sex because this is considered normal behaviour (Matthyse, 2017). Meanwhile, under lockdown many women and children were unable to escape the wrath of abusive men in home spaces (UN Women, 2021).

Drawing the parallels between maldistribution and misrecognition

It is unjust for some students to be excluded from participating as full partners in social interaction as a result of institutionalised patterns of cultural value which debase them on the basis of immutable and inherited characteristics. Fraser (2009) contends that misrecognition is a status injury that finds its locus in social relations rather than in individual psychology. Misrecognition occurs when students are devalued because of their identity, cultural background or if the subjugated knowledge that they bring with them to university is debased (Bozalek, 2017). This devalued status prevents students from being able to participate on a par with their peers and acts as a constraint to their learning. Fraser (2009) contends that maldistribution can result in misrecognition: a student feels that, because of their straitened circumstances, they enjoy less social esteem than those students with greater access to financial resources. A rise in student poverty during COVID-19 has been linked to increased depression and suicide among young people (Hattangadi et al., 2019). An analysis by public health researchers showed a rise in the number of young people in Japan taking their lives in 2020, potentially due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kakuchi, 2021).

Nancy Fraser's framework on social justice

Central to Fraser's (2008, 2009) concept of social justice is the notion of participatory parity, that is, the ability of an individual to participate equally with peers in social interactions. Participatory parity is shaped by a number of factors: the distribution of resources (social or economic dimensions); whether the perceived attributes of individuals, groups or institutions are valued or devalued (cultural dimension); and

whether people are included or excluded from the learning context (political dimension). For social justice to be achieved and for participatory parity to be promoted, all three dimensions need to be addressed. First, the distribution of material resources must be equitable to enable all students to interact equally with others in social interactions (economic dimension). Second, the status order must reflect respect for all students, regardless of their perceived attributes (race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, etc.) and must ensure conditions under which all can achieve social esteem (cultural dimension). Third, all social actors must have access to a political voice to influence decisions that affect them (political dimension). All three dimensions are interlinked and influence each other; no single dimension can be reduced to another and none alone is sufficient to achieve participatory parity.

According to Fraser (2008), a lack of participatory parity on account of maldistribution (in the economic dimension), misrecognition (in the cultural dimension) and misrepresentation (in the political dimension) can be addressed by either affirmative or transformative types of intervention. Affirmative strategies for redressing social injustice aim to correct the inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying social structures that generate them (Fraser, 2003). Transformative strategies, on the other hand, aim to correct unjust outcomes by restructuring the underlying framework which gives rise to social injustice in the first place (Fraser, 2003). Simply stated, affirmative strategies target the end-outcomes of social arrangements, while transformative strategies address the root causes of injustices.

For the purpose of this article, the author has addressed the economic and cultural dimensions as posited by Fraser (2008, 2009) because these are the most useful in providing an understanding of the constraints and enabling factors that shaped how students experienced using online platforms to continue learning and accessing psycho-social support under COVID-19 lockdown. The economic and cultural dimensions also highlight how a lack of resources (maldistribution) as well as insufficient strategies for addressing issues of misrecognition prevented students from achieving participatory parity. The article will then go on to consider some affirmative and transformative strategies to ensure more equitable access to learning and psycho-social support.

Methodology

The study reported on in this article used a mixed-method methodology in the form of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative method includes the use of two annual surveys conducted at the University of the Western Cape (Khan, 2020a; Khan, 2020b) comprising statistics assessing students' usage of services, and a qualitative component to establish student experiences of these services. The table below outlines the details of the data sources that were used in developing this paper.

The students who completed the survey were enrolled at UWC and had received a place within UWC's residential precinct for the 2020 academic year. The survey targeted both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Students who participated in the surveys, as well as those whose emails were reviewed for the purposes of this article, hailed from

rural and peri-urban, poor socio-economic South African communities. The gender of the students was not requested as part of the survey, but there were more female students (35 out of 50 emails) who sought assistance through the counselling helpline.

Table 1: Description of data sources

Data source	Purpose	Target population	Sample
UWC's Residential Services Annual Feedback Survey (Khan, 2020a) which surveyed students from the 2020 academic year	To measure how many students use the services of UWC's Department of Residential Services and to obtain feedback on what their experiences of this service were	Residence population: 3,602 students	535 students responded to the survey
UWC's Students' Experiences of Academic Support Services at Residences Survey 2020 (Khan, 2020b) surveyed students from the 2020 academic year	To understand how those students who have accessed academic support experienced it and to understand how the academic support services can be improved	Those who sought tutoring in the 2020 academic year: 500 students	52 students responded to the survey
UWC ResLife helpline emails (from March to November 2020)	Students request academic support or counselling assistance via this helpline.	Residence population: 3,602 students	50 emails from students were reviewed

Students were requested to complete the surveys on a voluntary basis. The Residential Services Annual Feedback Survey (Khan, 2020a) collected data about student experiences of various aspects of service delivery, ranging from the conditions of the facilities to the students' ability to access academic and psycho-social support. The survey asked students to describe their challenges in accessing services and asked for any recommendations about how the services on offer may be improved. The academic support survey asked students to describe their experiences of using the academic support services on offer and sought to elicit how, if at all, they had been helped by these services. The data gathered from these surveys were collated into a Google spreadsheet so that they could be analysed.

In addition to relying on data from the two surveys referenced in Table 1 above, this paper also draws on data received through the ResLife helpline, which is an email service that students can access to seek either academic or psycho-social support. The author is responsible for ensuring that all emails that come through this helpline are attended to. This article also draws on the overall experiences of the author who is responsible for coordinating psycho-social and academic services for the Department of Residential Services at UWC.

The above data sources provided information about students' experiences of working online and attempting to obtain academic or psycho-social support from UWC's

Department of Residential Services. The email inquiries that were reviewed provided significant background information on students' actual situations and problems.

For this article, the data were analysed with reference to the economic and cultural dimensions of Nancy Fraser's participatory parity framework (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). The author made use of the economic and cultural dimensions as a lens through which to examine the data and make sense of it. The data were analysed using a number of themes presented as part of the economic or cultural dimension of Fraser's theory.

Permission to use the content from the data sources listed above was obtained from UWC's Department of Residential Services which collects these data as part of its quality assurance process. Consent was also obtained from the students who participated in the surveys to use the data for research purposes which included the writing of articles. When the Google survey was presented to the students, they were given some information about why the survey was being conducted and how the results would be used. The students were informed that their participation was completely voluntary. Their anonymity was assured; and they were told that they could choose to stop participating in the survey at any point. They were then asked to provide consent for using the data for research purposes. All survey responses were anonymously completed, thereby protecting the identity of the respondents. For this article, the author reviewed 50 emails which came through the helpline between March and November 2020. Where data were drawn for the purposes of this article, the author requested permission from the student in question via email, asking whether their experience could be used as part of the data for this article. Only the stories of those students who consented via email were used in this article. Anonymity was assured and the author indicated that no personal markers would be used in the article in order to maintain the anonymity of the student.

Findings

Data for this section were drawn from UWC's Residential Services Annual Feedback Survey (Khan, 2020a) and Students' Experiences of Academic Support Services at Residences Survey 2020 (Khan, 2020b). This section also draws on emails that were sent to the ResLife counselling helpline.

Economic non-equivalence maldistribution

A lack of resources can be seen as one of the biggest challenges encountered by students during the COVID-19 pandemic at UWC. Many students recounted narratives that reflected their impoverished home circumstances and how these severely affected their ability to access psycho-social and academic support.

Considering the provision of online support during COVID-19 from the perspective of the economic dimension, social justice is concerned with economic constraints which impede a student's ability to participate fully in the academic project and access psycho-social support. Referencing Fraser's framework (2008, 2009), economic constraints can

result in students being subjected to distributive injustice. In this context, social justice is concerned with the (mal)distribution of rights, resources and opportunities which impede students' ability to participate as equals with their peers in university life and, by implication, to achieve academic success. The section below describes some of the rights, resources and opportunities that were unavailable which impeded the students' abilities to study and access the psycho-social support needed to further their academic pursuits.

Conditions in the home: Creating a conducive learning environment

Students reported to the counselling helpline that environmental conditions in their homes were not conducive to studying, with many reporting that they had no privacy and no electricity which had prevented them from undertaking their academic activities.

> *During the day, my mum expects me to do household chores and look after my younger siblings. At night I am so tired I cannot focus on my studies and complete my assignments.*
>
> *My family is suffering and I look after the children in the community to bring in extra income to help my family during this time. My mother lost her job as a domestic worker due to Covid [sic] and we have no income. At night there is no electricity in our home, so I cannot do my assignments.*
>
> *The workload online is so much and I can't finish everything during the day. At night there is no place for me to study. I live in a shack and we all sleep everywhere. There is also no electricity and it is impossible for me to work at night.*

The resources that are required to support student learning and create a conducive learning environment also include adequate study halls; functional computer laboratories; functional and adequate printing facilities; and reliable internet connectivity. All of which many students were unable to access from their home environments under lockdown.

> *I rely on the computer labs in the library and at residence because my own laptop is so old, I worry that one day soon it will no longer switch on. At home now I am so anxious because sometimes my screen blanks out and I think about how I am going to study without this laptop. I asked the university to get me a laptop but it is taking so long I have given up.*

Access to technology: Connectivity and data issues

Many students reported that they had no internet connection or experienced poor connectivity and that this was hampering their ability to study online; reach out for psycho-social support; and keep in touch with their friends. In addition, many students did not have laptops and under normal conditions are reliant on the computers that are generally available in computer laboratories on campus. Some students reported that they had tried using their cell phones but that this had limited their online activity and ability to complete assignments in the prescribed formats. One student expressed frustration at the fact that the data given to them by the university was barely sufficient to complete the academic requirements. Meanwhile, undertaking an online counselling

session or attending a co-curricular event in support of their mental health was not in their immediate purview due to their lack of data.

> *I needed to speak with someone because my home situation was becoming unbearable. Where we live there is no stable internet connection and when my university data was up there was no money to get more. I suffered alone because my family does not believe in talking about problems.*
>
> *I have to go to a specific spot in our community on the hill to get some kind of connection. The connection is not strong enough to access and download any readings. I am so worried that I am going to fail.*

The lack of connectivity and insufficient data were huge stumbling blocks not only in relation to learning but also in trying to gain access to psycho-social interventions.

Accessing psycho-social and academic support

The Residential Services Annual Feedback Survey (Khan, 2020a) asked students about the difficulties they had experienced with online support, including in relation to accessing psycho-social support as well as academic support. One student described it thus:

> *It's been a rollercoaster experience but talking to my Development Officer in my residence helped me survive.*

Another student noted:

> *Very stressful and very time consuming. It's much more work this semester and the work keeps piling.*
>
> *I could not survive without the support of my residence tutor who broke down concepts for me in the absence of the lecturer. I know I could email my lecturer but this kind of learning feels so impersonal and I am still getting used to these online platforms.*

Many students were not prepared for the drastic switch to online learning platforms. The social isolation produced by lockdown was impacting their ability to reach out and engage in peer learning and approach lecturers for additional support. The lack of data was a major obstacle in getting students to reach out and get support.

Student experiences of misrecognition

Misrecognition goes beyond just looking down on someone or thinking ill of them; it entails a denial of their status as a full partner in social interactions and prevents them from participating as peers in social life. The deeply entrenched institutionalisation of cultural devaluing denies people social esteem and respect. When such patterns of disesteem are entrenched in societal life, they impede parity of participation in the same way that economic inequalities can. Fraser, (2007, p. 11) argues that "recognition reforms cannot succeed unless they are joined with struggles for redistribution – no recognition without redistribution". Three key themes emerged from the data concerning the

ways in which students felt misrecognised and prevented from participating in social interactions as full partners. These are described below.

1. Student hunger

A key factor that can compromise participatory parity is student hunger. This was a real concern at UWC under lockdown. Students indicated that food insecurity was an economic constraint that was hampering their learning:

> *At home we run out of food and this makes it very difficult to concentrate on my studies. I am far away from campus so I cannot get assistance with food.*
>
> *I always share my NSFAS [National Student Financial Assistance Scheme] food with my family back at home. This means that sometimes I run short but I feel better knowing that my family is also eating. Now things are so difficulty [sic].*

2. Mental health stigma

In the Residential Services Annual Feedback Survey, Khan (2020a) found that just over 46% of students who were surveyed had sought counselling services. Anxiety and depression accounted for two of the major issues for which counselling was sought, followed by relationship issues with family members. A total of 42% of students indicated that they had found counselling to be helpful and that it had alleviated the stress that had been brought on by their personal circumstances.

> *Being in lockdown made me feel so alone. I thought of ending it all so many times. I wake up in the morning sad and went to bed at night feeling sad [sic]. Nobody in my family understood me. I reached out to the ResLife helpline and got some help.*

Stigma in relation to mental illness is a serious social problem that has a multitude of consequences for the individual concerned, as well as for his or her family. In the 2020 Residential Services Annual Feedback Survey, 54% of students indicated that they had not sought counselling (Khan, 2020a). This number is statistically significant as it bears testimony to the stigma that still commonly exists in relation to seeking assistance for mental health issues. Stigmatising students suffering from a mental health illness is a form of misrecognition, since such students are seen as being less competent, unreliable and innately disposed to fail. As a result, they are unable to participate in society on a level footing with other students who are not labelled as suffering from a mental health illness.

> *I recently had a breakdown and feel deeply ashamed to let my friends and family know what is happening to me. People don't understand this kind of illness and I feel like I am different from my friends because of what happens to me.*
>
> *Suffering from depression is a lonely place and people treat you differently because of what you go through. You are seen as weak and different.*

As part of the drive to provide improved services to students, UWC in collaboration with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) provides a 24-hour toll-free line to students who are experiencing mental health distress. Given the fact that mental health is not freely discussed, many students who contacted the residential services counselling line expressed a reluctance to talk to someone with whom they were not familiar.

3. Gender-based violence

In the Residential Services Annual Feedback Survey (Khan, 2020a), 27 students noted that they had been exposed to gender-based violence during lockdown, while 37 students indicated that they knew of someone who had been affected by gender-based violence.

> *I know a good friend who lives in residence with her boyfriend. During lockdown they were fighting every day. He threatened not to give her food and I know he beat her a few times.*
>
> *There are many students on residence who are in abusive relationships. Most of them stay because they are fearful or because they are dependent on the boyfriend.*

Gender-based violence is a violation of the rights of women and is an extreme form of misrecognition. It annihilates the self-esteem of the woman and erodes her sense of self-worth. Within weeks of countries being placed on lockdown, violence against women increased sharply across the region (UN Women, 2021).

Discussion

Affirmative strategies to address maldistribution and misrecognition

Maldistribution arises when a lack of economic resources prevents students from participating as equals with their peers. For example, when students do not have data, or laptops, or smart cell phones, they are unable to access online learning platforms and psycho-social support. In response to this predicament, UWC embarked on a "Leave No Student Behind" campaign which was aimed at ensuring that all students could purchase a laptop (the expense was added to their fees account) and were given data to complete their academic assignments Many unfunded students were concerned about the increase in the fees as a result of the additional laptop charge.

> *I applied to the university via the link they sent to get a laptop. I am still waiting and I am really struggling to complete my academic assignments. I am using my phone at the moment and this only allows me limited functionality.*

An additional strategy adopted by the university was to allow all students who were unable to complete assessments during the first semester of 2020 to participate in a catch-up programme which took place immediately after the close of the second semester.

> *I was told by my lecturer that I qualify to write one of my modules during the catch-up time as I did not have a laptop and was waiting for the university to deliver to me. I am not so sure how I am going to make it. I missed so much work and am so overwhelmed.*

The laptop-provision and catch-up initiatives could be viewed as affirmative strategies, as defined by Fraser (2003), since they do not change the status quo that produces and perpetuates the economic inequality in question but rather provide short- to medium-term relief to enable students to participate.

A student who is a victim of gender-based violence will experience low self- esteem as a result of the psychological impact of the violence and this will impact on their academic ability. The university's strategy to address gender-based violence has included the promulgation of a Sexual Violence Policy (UWC, 2018) which is an important measure to give expression to the rights of victims. However, the policy in itself does nothing to dismantle the normative gender relations at the university and in society at large which are steeped in the notion of patriarchy and which promote men's power over women.

> *I am aware that the university has a sexual violence policy but it doesn't help me when the person I am telling my story to doesn't believe me and makes me feel like the sexual assault is my fault because I went out alone.*

Transformative strategies to address maldistribution and misrecognition

Transformative strategies which seek to change the current status quo promise outcomes that are more sustainable and enduring but which are more difficult to achieve. Transformative approaches, while more challenging to implement and sustain, are more likely to bring about social justice, as they aim to change the status quo in society, making participatory parity possible. It is important to note that the provision of transformative strategies to address maldistribution may not be in the purview of the university as this would entail an anti-poverty strategy that addresses the fundamental inequalities that are a legacy of apartheid and which were exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which included the loss of jobs and livelihoods (Sifunda et al., 2020). In this situation, affirmative strategies bring some relief, but do not address the underlying inequities in the provision of higher education.

In order to address misrecognition. Fraser (2003, p. 30) proposes that a transformative approach requires moving beyond reification; and suggests "a status model" under which recognition is treated as a question of social status. This approach rejects models which simplify individual identities into a single group identity and rather advocates for a deconstruction of identities that broadens knowledge and perspectives and, in relation to student development, challenges students to think critically about themselves and the broader social world. A transformative strategy to address misrecognition would further require interventions that target unequal gender relations and seek to promote recognition that identities are multi-faceted (and that university policies and processes should take cognisance of this).

Conclusion

Fraser's (2008, 2009) three-dimensional view of social justice emphasises that, for such justice to occur, institutional arrangements must facilitate the participation of all social actors at the same level as their peers (participatory parity). While the implementation of transformative strategies would bring about substantive change, affirmative strategies can provide temporary solutions which may serve as platforms to raise awareness of the structural changes that are needed. It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic and government and institutional responses to it impacted the student experience in a number of far-reaching ways. Despite the efforts of higher education institutions to transition students to online teaching platforms, the impacts of being isolated in communities where resources are scarce had a profound effect on the ability of many students to participate in the academic project. Increased pressure on mental health; exposure to gender-based violence; and heightened food insecurity during the pandemic affected the social statuses of many students and revealed a close correlation between those who experience maldistribution due to lack of resources and those who experience misrecognition due to a devalued social status.

In this regard, there is a need for both the state and institutional leadership in higher education to prioritise pertinent affirmative and transformative strategies which could bring about participatory parity so that all students can study in an environment that is conducive to learning, including in the real world as well as in relation to online access.

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