Focus group

Int: Hello and welcome participants, I hope you are all doing well.

ELIZABETH: Yes, we are.

Int: Ya, so this session is going to focus on belonging. One of the things that came out of the individual interviews – remember I asked you all, ‘What does belonging feel like?”. A lot of people responded with just this sense of being comfortable, like being comfortable to express yourself, to be yourself in an environment without the fear of being misunderstood or being rejected. So, with that being said, is that something that you all feel as well; do you agree to the statement that ‘belonging is comfort’?

ELIZABETH: Ya, definitely. I feel like if you’re not comfortable then you feel like you’re being judged by people and then you can’t really be yourself. So, ya I definitely feel like it is that.

JULIA: I agree, ya. I definitely agree. It’s a bit difficult to be myself if I feel like everyone feels like I shouldn’t be there. So, if I feel accepted I feel a lot easier to be who I am.

Int: Matilde, would you like to add?

MATILDE: No. No, I’m joking \*Laughs.

\*Group laughs.

MATILDE: No I do agree as well, but I also feel like it depends on ‘your crowd’.

\*Group nods.

MATILDE: In the sense of – like for example, Cape Town is very well known for its cliques and there you really feel like you can’t be accepted and being yourself is… ya, like you can just forget about it. It’s near impossible.

Int: So, with this thing of acceptance, we kind of have outlined that it is a group of people – like Matilde just said now, Cape Town is not a place where you feel really accepted because it is very cliquey. Um, but Matilde, do you think that if you grew up in Cape Town that might be a bit different?

MATILDE: Ya… but I also feel like I would be a different person, if that makes sense. In the sense – well, obviously, just in the sense of how, ya, just the way we grow up is just very different than in other parts of the country. But, ya I do think it would be different. I would just be part of another clique that I was there with from a young age, so. I would be accepted in my own way there, but yeah it would be different.

Int: So, there are certain things that we feel when we feel accepted. What would those type of things be for you specifically? Elizabeth you can start or whoever.

ELIZABETH: Oh… It’s just kind of like, you could do like anything like… just being yourself fully. No body cares, no body’s judging, no body’s looks at you, I don’t know, weird. Ya, I think for me it’s that… just a safe space. Ya.

JULIA: Sorry, I didn’t hear the question, I was-

Int: No worries. So, there’s – ya, ya, so being accepted is this thing that we attach to a ‘belonging with people’, um. How do you know you’ve been accepted, or how does this acceptance feel like?

JULIA: I love how you’re just starting off with the hard questions because- \*Laughs. Um… ya I’d say feeling safe and… I don’t know, I can honestly say that I haven’t felt accepted in a lot of places. Um… it’s very uncommon to experience that feeling. But when I do feel accepted, I feel like I am… I don’t know. I just feel happy, loved, and um… it usually comes from a ‘protected area’ so in my house where I know I need to do what I need to do just feel… ya. Feel myself.

Int: Anyone want to add on that or?

MATILDE: I personally feel relaxed if I feel accepted. Like the tension in the shoulders – simple stuff like that, the tension in the shoulders just goes away, the jaw doesn’t clench as much, the anxiety is gone because then you’re not so on edge about needing to act the way that they expect you to act. Which was a mouthful, but ya. I just feel like relaxed – ya, you’re relaxed enough to be yourself and you’re not trying to like step up to their standards.

Int: So, what we’ve outlined and spoken a lot about now is like this ‘belonging to people’, but now there’s also this belonging to a place; feeling comfortable in a place. What are the specific places where you guys feel comfortable in?

ELIZABETH: Mine would probably be my flat where I stay at home, because then I’m completely alone. Like there’s no body there, so I can literally do whatever. It is where I am the most comfortable, because like even though you are comfortable with people, there’s always that little bit that’s not showing completely showing everything ever, like ya. So… ya I think definitely there when I’m alone.

JULIA: I think I agree with that, definitely my house and also it is connected to my animals as well, my dogs and my cats, then I’m actually really relaxed. It’s more of the place where my animals are.

MATILDE: Ya, I’m gonna… I actually don’t know, to be honest with you. Like I do think how back in South Africa is definitely that because I don’t feel the same up here in Denmark. Ya, I agree with the whole, ‘your space’ – your room, you can do it the way you want it. You know, you can do whatever you like, you want to do one thing, you know, you’ve got no one to stop you or whatever, so.

Int: So, actually you guys have all moved out of your childhood homes which is – I mean congratulations, it is a big step.

\*Group applauds and laughs.

Int: Some have moved away a little bit further than others. But this missing of your childhood home, is that still a place that you wish you could be in or are you kind of really happy that you are out in your own place?

ELIZABETH: I like love the independence. Like I love being away, like it’s nice to come home, you’re always like spoilt and get nice food and stuff. But no, I like having my own space and like – for me, it’s just I like doing things for myself, and like having that space for that independence, ya.

JULIA: My childhood home wasn’t exactly a very happy place, so as soon as I got away from that I felt safer. So, now in my own place, that I have fought for, um, I am quite happy to be away from everyone else and be by myself, ya.

MATILDE: Mine is bittersweet. Like I miss home because of like my family, but ya like my recent reality has made it a lot tougher as well. But at the same time, like I live with my aunt and uncle here in Denmark, so I feel like I would be a lot happier if I had my own apartment and my own space because like, I have my own room but I’m still living in someone else’s space, if you know what I mean so.

Int: Ya, you can’t make noodles at three in the morning and not-

MATILDE: No!

\*Group laughs.

Int: Have a little bit of a situation there.

JULIA: That’s the definition of happiness.

Int: The true sign of independence.

Elizabeth: noodles at three in the morning.

MATILDE: And not having to tell people for how long you’re going to be out for.

\*Group nods.

MATILDE: I know it’s different if you have a fiancé, you know, it’s best to tell them, “Ya, I’m here.” But it’s nice to come back whenever you want, leave whenever you want. You don’t have to. You’re just you and that’s nice.

Int: Ya, so one of the other things is a sense of safety. So, you guys have all kind of said your homes are places where you belong, where you feel comfortable in. Um, is that linked to safety or is that more just a familiarity with a space?

ELIZABETH: Ya, for me, it’s not – it’s safe in the sense that I feel comfortable, so it’s that. So, for me it’s just more a comfortable thing.

JULIA: I wouldn’t say it’s familiarity because we haven’t exactly lived in a place for a really long – we only moved here two weeks ago, and it’s still weird to be here – to know that this is our place, but I know that as soon as I can, like it’s weird but I can just close all of my curtains and I can take my clothes off and I’m fine. I am comfortable, no one can just walk in on me. it’s just that kind of being able to do whatever I want to do when I want to do it, so I think it links back to independence. And also knowing that no one here is going to judge me and if they do judge me then they have to take me to the ‘Customary Board’, so.

MATILDE: I think for me it’s emotional-safety.

\*Group nods.

MATILDE: Where home is… with, well personally, with my family I can let the walls down, I can cry, I can talk. But physical safety – I live in Denmark, so \*Scoffs. Enough said.

JULIA: Ya, ya.

Int: The pinnacle of safety.

MATILDE: No, exactly. Last night I literally – I probably shouldn’t say this on a recording, be we move. Drunk as hell, took a bus home, got home safely, walked – it was night time walked home. Can’t – I can remember bits and pieces. But the fact that I in a drunken state that I felt comfortable enough to do that alone as a female, screams volumes.

\*Group nods.

Int: Ya, I mean like walking home here at night has also been like a really weird thing for me because I’m like you get back from the bars and clubs at like two in the morning – you don’t have a car, Ubers are way too expensive so you kind of just have to take a bus and then walk for a bit.

MATILDE: Ya.

Int: You, I know the last time that we spoke, you said that you were still a little bit uneasy about that – still checking over your shoulder, is that still something that is happening?

MATILDE: Ya. You can take the girl out of Africa but you can’t take the Africa out of the girl. It’s deeply rooted.

Int: Our other participants still in South Africa, is that anything you thought about doing?

JULIA: Even if I’m not drunk I will be looking over my shoulder and thinking about where the nearest place is to scream and run.

ELIZABETH: Ya, I’m always like alert, even just in like big places, you’re always just looking around you.

\*Group nods.

ELIZABETH: And you think someone is walking behind you for a bit too long, like ‘Are they following me?’ like – it’s just like automatic. You just don’t notice it anymore because it is just so normal to do that.

\*Group nods.

MATILDE: It’s subconscious.

\*Group nods.

ELIZABETH: Mm.

Int: Ya it’s a subconscious thing. I think we just grow up with, I mean like ya it’s just what it is – gravity is gravity and safety is safety in South Africa.

MATILDE: Or lack thereof.

\*Group laughs.

Int: Or lack thereof – exactly. But there is also this other thing that came out through the interviews was a sense of belonging to South Africa. So, we all say that we’re South Africans, we grew up in South Africa, but our connection to South Africa becomes a little more problematised when we include race. Being white and African doesn’t seem like it goes hand-in-hand. And then participants who have travelled internationally have said that, “Well, it is weird when you tell people ‘I’m from South Africa’, and then they’re like, ‘But why are you white?’ like there is this disjunction.” Um, how do you think this effects your sense of belonging to your country.

ELIZABETH: Ya, I definitely think it effects it because, it’s like – people are like saying that you are not from this place and you don’t really belong there. And I think sometimes the people in South Africa will also say. Or like, I don’t know, they think they are above you because they were here first or whatever. So, ya, I definitely think that it does. It’s not nice. It doesn’t like leave a good taste in your mouth, you’re just like – ya, ‘Do I even belong here?’ \*Laughs.

JULIA: Its quite funny because literally an hour ago \*fiancé and I were talking about moving out of here, so – out of the country, not out of place. But we – well, I feel specifically… I have felt more at home in Mozambique than I have felt in South Africa. So, I don’t know if even African is – like African people are the issue that I feel that I don’t feel this is my ‘home’. I think that it is more the violent… the violent racism to white people, specifically white women, that make me feel like this is really not a good idea to stay here. So, ya it’s the violence, that’s it.

MATILDE: I actually got the ‘black comment’ last night. And I get told that I’m the wrong colour recently, ya literally by one of my colleagues. “You’re South African? But you’re the wrong colour.”   
And I’m like, “Um, okay?” No, but um. I actually – I know this is a bit of a weird connotation or link to make but, I post a lot of TikToks about South Africa and being South African and stuff. And I have wanted to change my content because of the amount of the amount of times that I get called a coloniser, get told that I am not welcome in South Africa. I got called a child rapist because I’m white, and I was like – it’s constant. Every single time I post about South Africa it’s ‘You’re a coloniser’, ‘South Africa is not home – you’re not South African’. And for me personally, I’m proud to be from the country because we’ve got so many beautiful cultures, we’ve got – trust me we’ve got good food with flavour. \*Laugh. It’s so good. And like beautiful landscapes, good humour. You know when we come together as a nation it’s the most beautiful thing under the sun, like if you look at the World Cups and stuff – the way we came together is beautiful, but then you also get those people that are like, ‘You’re white, therefore you’re not from here’. But we are more African than some African Americans who have never been to Africa.

Int: Are those comments coming from South Africans or?

ELIZABETH: Ya, I was just about to ask.

MATILDE: Mainly South Africans, and ironically – it’s very, very weird because like half – obviously they are from black people, who say that I’m not South African. But then there will be black people who are like, ‘We are so proud to have you. You’re one of us’. So, not all of them can even agree as to whether white people are in or not, or where they should stand on ‘Should we take our land back or this is our reality and lets make the best of it’. You know. But it did suck at a stage when I was getting those comments all the time and I was thinking, you know, I do feel more at home in South Africa than I do in Denmark, even though people are saying that this is my ‘home’ now because I have some back to my country or whatever. So, ya, it’s from both.

Int: Um would anyone like to add onto what we have just spoken about – we are going to get kicked out in the next two minutes. So, if we want to let this settle for a little bit we can join the next meeting in the next five minutes and then speak about this. Or if you guys are ready to just speak about this, we can skip the break and then just go straight into the next meeting – which I will end earlier so that we can have that fifteen-minute break, and then end off hopefully a little bit earlier.

ELIZABETH: I don’t mind. I’m fine to go, but it people want a break then I’m also really easy.

JULIA: Yeh.

MATILDE: I’m fine to carry on.

Int: Okay, so I’m going to start the next meeting right now, so we’re going to end this one and then start the next one. And then we’ll get into this little chat about race and belonging in South Africa as white women.

ELIZABETH: Cool.

Int: Thanks guys.

Int: Alright welcome back. We’re just going to continue with what we were talking about previously – about being white and being South African, specifically a woman because I do think that opens us up to more attacks because we’re seen as well, weaker. Um, Matilde has indicated that she has experienced this over social media. Hasn’t been a great thing, hasn’t always come from South Africans but there is quite a clear divide between the South Africans, like there is a group saying, “She’s South African, we’re proud of her”, and then there’s a group going, “Well, you’re a coloniser, we don’t want you here.” So on and so forth. Would Elizabeth or Julia like to respond to this or speak of their own experiences of this?

ELIZABETH: Did you say me or?

Int: No, no you or Julia.

\*Group laughs.

ELIZABETH: Okay ya, um… for me I really – like you don’t always see it. Like when I’m with my friends or stuff, then you don’t really – you feel like you belong and stuff like that, but like I get really frustrated and really see it when you go to Home Affairs or something like that and you clearly see how you are treated differently just because you are white.

\*Group nods.

ELIZABETH: And they are so friendly to the people of the same colour, but then with you they’re in a mood and no matter how friendly you are, like you can be so nice, but they just give you nothing. And that really, that really – it’s almost like it hurts you because you’re like trying so hard with them and then it’s like they’re giving nothing back. That’s where I feel it a lot.

JULIA: I think that is such a good example actually.

\*Group nods.

JULIA: About the Home Affairs things because the other day I had to go to Home Affairs – no actually the Licencing department.

\*Matilde shakes her head.

JULIA: There are a few words that I can say and speak and try to connect, but you can hear that I am white. That is evident, that is always going to be the end point. So, I think for me the experience that I had… I grew up in the city and then halfway through high school I moved to a plot and there the dynamic is very different – Afrikaans is in control and all of that. so, I understood the disrespect because I could almost sympathise with how Afrikaans people can sometimes be very rude.

ELIZABETH: Ya.

JULIA: Because even being English, even though I am white just being English was enough – I was a traitor and all of that, so I can understand the anger and when I try to sympathise and support them, I’ve actually gotten more backlash than anything else.

\*Matilde nods.

JULIA: So, it’s not a thing of ‘No, you’re white – you’re white, you’re trying to help me but you’re still going to be a problem just because you are white’. That’s it.

ELIZABETH: It doesn’t make sense.

JULIA: It’s honestly ‘reverse racism’ – just because I’m white I cannot even try to contemplate what you are going through. And I mean I try. I’ve got a lady who works for us, she’s from Zimbabwe. She is the nicest lady I have ever met in my entire life and she honestly – she knows the issues that are going on here. She doesn’t like South Africans at all because they are even aggressive towards her. So, for me it is a white thing but it is a definitely a South African thing of being aggressive towards people that you view as different.

ELIZABETH: Mm.

MATILDE: I actually really agree with that because xenophobia is also so bad in South Africa, and it’s like we – not just we, but South Africa as a whole – we just kind of can’t win, because like you said it’s a South African problem, it’s not a black and white problem. It’s ‘If you’re not from here which whites are seen as – you know, we’re not from here – then we don’t like you’. And it can – it does get very violent, like actually like – also another point that you made, what was ironic what I found with my TikToks, because someone was like, I speak so much negativity about South Africa which is… not true, I just speak facts and they just happen to be negative, but you know. Posted a mini apology but then also, ‘Okay here’s some positives about it’, and I got more hate on that video – the ‘Positives of South Africa’ video than I got on any other video.

ELIZABETH: You can’t win.

MATILDE: Hey, I – no.

ELIZABETH: You can’t win, literally.

MATILDE: That’s why I was like, ‘You know what, I’m just going to change my content because’ – like I’ve always gotten hate, like I’ve got a fair following so I’m going to get hate but I’m so tired of this hate. You’re saying that I’m not from the country that I’m from, so – and many people are like, ‘Well, you’re not actually from South Africa so you’ve got no right to talk’, ‘Just stay in England’, and stuff like that. Like all whites-

ELIZABETH: But you are!

MATILDE: Ya!

JULIA: Ya, you are South African.

ELIZABETH: Like how do they know? They’re speaking like they know everything.

MATILDE: No, it’s exactly. Joh, and I even got blamed for the housing problems in South Africa.

\*Julia laughs.

MATILDE: They said that I – “The damage was done.” \*Laughs.

JULIA: This makes me so angry, like do you know how many white people actually own houses, not many.

MATILDE: \*Laughs. Ya, you know how many black people own houses.

JULIA: Quite a few.

MATILDE: Ya. It’s treated like only whites are privileged.

JULIA: Mm.

ELIZABETH: Ya!

MATILDE: And I do believe in white privilege I have seen it first hand, but that doesn’t not mean that no blacks are privileged as well. I mean you do get black – or non-white people that are better off than other white people.

ELIZABETH: Ya, definitely.

JULIA: Ya, actually if I could add onto that about privilege. I enjoy this concept of it because everyone gets a degree of a privilege or underprivilege like there’s always that. But what I think has gone wrong, is the amount of people, the amount of black people specifically that are getting the privilege now, like with the BEE, I work with this on a daily basis. The unfortunataility is that there are so many people grabbing for it and grabbing as much as they can that they don’t share the rest of the privilege. So, one person gets a BMW, that’s great but then that poor person that actually helped them – worked with them and helped them get there, still has to stay in the back and can’t do anything. So, the… the sharing I think is a problem. That’s the privilege that needs to start changing – sure we’ve got white privilege, I understand that, and we are facing a different reality of what happened in the past, but don’t take everything for yourself – share.

ELIZABETH: Ya, but it’s a selfish culture because – Bye.

\*Matilde lost connection.

ELIZABETH: Ya because even like the government they just care about themselves. They don’t care about the people, they’ll just take, take, take for themselves even though it is messing the country up. I think the example you see is that and all of them are just taking like you said.

Int: So, one thing that Matilde said which was very, very interesting is that it is this specific kind of hate that you just can’t take. Like you can take other forms of hate, it’s going to come – whether you do something, there going to be someone upset with it. I mean there eight billion people on this planet; someone is going to find a problem with you or with what you are saying. Why is it that that make it hurt so much? Is it because it’s a rejection from your own country or is it a denial of identity – what is it tat makes that hate so hurtful for you?

MATILDE: It’s just that I am a very proud South African and a big part of my personality and obviously the people that we are is because of South Africa, and that the fact that we’ve grown up there; and like I really miss the country, you know if the economy was better I would have stayed. I love the country. And ya, a big part of my personality is the pact that I come from there, and not being told that ‘No you don’t belong here’, ‘You’re not from here’, ‘You’re a coloniser’, stuff like that. I’m like ‘But now you’re attacking a part of my identity and a big part of my personality’ and that – I’m just like, “No, I am.” Like “I am from South Africa, I was born and I grew up there.” So, it’s also like they say “Go home.” And I’m like, “But I don’t feel at home here in Denmark.” Yes, it is ‘home’, yes I am half Danish whatever, but I don’t feel like ‘home’ here, you know. I feel more at home in South Africa. So it’s just like a part of who I am and now you’re saying that I’m not allowed to feel that. So yea, it just attacks the heart, the home, you know.

Int: Yeah, it hurts the soul. Um, ya and then for Julia and Elizabeth, is that’s something that you have experienced as well, and if so why does- \*Cough. Sorry. Why does that hurt perhaps more than other things that might be thrown your way.

ELIZABETH: I have never actually experienced that. But I don’t know if it would hurt so much for me, because I mean like, I’m kind of like – all the bad stuff that is happening in South Africa, like the load shedding is so horrible, like it really ruined South Africa for me. And I think like I will appreciate it more when I leave because you can – you don’t really know how good something is until you don’t really have it anymore. So, I think I will really see it then and then really miss South Africa, but at the moment it just kind of really frustrates me. So I don’t know if it would hurt me so much, I do think that if I leave and then people say that to me I would have a completely different answer ya.

JULIA: To be honest, I’m so tired of fighting this fight. I’m so tired of trying to be on their good side… and making them feel superior. I really try – I go out of my way to make, not just black people but anyone just feel a little bit better about themselves and… just today just a stupid example. We were in spar buying food for the week because we can’t buy in bulk because of loadshedding and all of that, so there’s this lady and she’s go this pretty ring on, she the cashier. And I tell her, “You’ve got such a pretty ring.” The cashier behind her turned around and kind of looked at me like, how dare you say this – I was giving her a compliment. Is that so bad, is that really so bad and I kind of um… you know some fights you just leave alone, there’s no point in even trying to get involved because you’re not going to win and you’re not going to help. You’re just probably going to make it worse. And that’s how I feel right now being here. I rather just want to go to Cape Town or just move where I belong. I haven’t really had anyone tell me that – well, not to my face, but ‘I don’t belong here, I should just go back home’, but you get the um… you get the feeling. So, ya.

Int: Ya, so we are going to have to move a little bit forward, but if there is any part of this that you would like to add on or if there is something that you would have liked to say, please, please put it in a message and email it to me. Because I would love to put this in, I think this is a very important conversation that we as South Africans are not having. But yes, because I am a bit worried about time – if we have time at the end, we can come back to it. But one of the things that really, really, really, came out quite constantly throughout the interviews was this fear of spiking when going out to the club. Is that something that you guys would agree with that, and that’s why you cover your drink or you don’t drink at clubs and you’d rather drink at home?

ELIZABETH: For me it’s like it’s never my – like my friend has never been spiked when we’ve been out, I’ve never been spiked. So I don’t actually think about it at all, and I probably should because I does happen often, but it’s like if it doesn’t happen to me or my immediate friends then I think like ‘Ah, you know just carry on’, which is dangerous because I know it happens a lot. So I actually just don’t think about it – but I mean, you don’t just leave your drink lying around. That’s like obvious. Another subconscious thing, but ya.

Int: So, I suppose the next question-

JULIA: I-I-

Int: Oh, please go for it Julia.

JULIA: Sorry. Ya, I’ve been spiked twice. So ya.

ELIZABETH: Oh.

JULIA: And that’s with me holding it at private party, and at a club.

\*Group gasps.

ELIZABETH: At a private party even – okay, I’ll start covering my drink ya.

MATILDE: Ya, that’s probably a good idea at this point. Like start covering. \*Laughs.

JULIA: Wear it around your neck.

MATILDE: Get those – you know those confessions, like ‘Confessions ZA’. We all know ‘Confessions’. They’ve got those scrunchies that you just put over your cup and it’s got a little hole for your straw.

ELIZABETH: Oh that’s cool.

MATILDE: I feel like we should all invest in those.

ELIZABETH: Ya.

Int: Ya, as you leave high school – like as you get into high school like, ‘Here’s your new scrunchie girls’.

MATILDE: ‘It just folds over your glass – use it’.

JULIA: Give it to them when they’re sixteen.

MATILDE: I was just going to say, not when they leave high school. Maybe at fifteen.

\*Group laughs.

Int: Yeah, they’re a bit young at thirteen. But why is this fear of spiking a big deal? Why are you afraid of being spiked, or those of you who have been spiked, why is that a scary experience specifically?

ELIZABETH: For me like, I think it is just the possibility for people to like completely take advantage of you, and they’re doing it purposefully for a reason, so you know they’re out to get you, like so ya. That’s why it’s so scary for me, because you’re literally helpless.

JULIA: Yah, I think that sums it up quite well.

MATILDE: Personally, I know when we drink a lot of alcohol, we do tend to lose control but it something that we have done to ourselves. So we lose control by our own choice and we’re in control of the fact that we are losing control. Whereas if someone spikes us, we don’t know what we have been spiked with – it could kill us, it could make us completely limp or half paralysed as Elizabeth said, we could easily um… ya, we just don’t have control, you know and that – someone could take advantage of that, there we go, and we know with the gender-based violence in South Africa where that could lead. So, yah. A loss of control.

Int: So, we have spoken about this, and we as South African women know that the club in South Africa- \*Coughs. Sorry. Is not a safe place for us to be. Whether it be in terms of spiking, theft, I mean shootings happened at the strip when I still live in South Africa – ‘Still lived in South Africa’, when I was in South Africa.

\*Group laughs.

Int: But we all still gout to these clubs with the knowing that like, ‘Okay I have to do this to protect my drink so I don’t get spiked’, ‘I should probably not have my phone out, I should have it put in a pocket or in a chest bag’, ‘I should probably watch what I’m going to be dressed in because I mean I probably will be touched in the club’. But we still go to these places, but why?

ELIZABETH: Because it’s fun.

\*Group laughs.

ELIZABETH: It’s a sacrifice that I am willing to take – I’m just kidding. For me it’s again like, nothing has ever happened to me so, I’m just like innocently hoping that it doesn’t which is stupid, but ya that’s me.

JULIA: \*Laughs. I’m still coming down from that.

MATILDE: Okay, I’ll go while you breathe. Ya, no there was a – I was talking to my best friends mom, the one in England, and she got caught in situations with ISIS with all those bomb attacks and bomb threats and everything. So, when I went back in 2018 that’s when it was kind of getting really bad. There were a lot of bomb threats and stuff, and she just told me like “Listen, we can’t just stay inside and not live. Like yes, there is that possibility of that happening but what’s the point of life if we don’t live and go out.” Because there was a threat to literally walk outside, but it’s the same with clubs. As Elizabeth said, they’re fun. Unfortunately it is a risk that we have to take, but we’re young, we want to live, we should be able to, clubbing is part of that.

JULIA: Okay, I’m going to be on a completely different track. I’m one of those people who prefer the pub than the club – I’ll go out but not for much. I also, because of my experiences which have kind of shaped my distaste for it – I don’t feel safe in a club. I just – I don’t. and I think its getting worse, I’ve just noticed that the clubs are getting really bad and really dangerous, but I mean – every now and then you’ll hear about this stabbing or this shooting. And I, I don’t like that so I’d rather go to a place that I know is a bit more chilled than what my age group enjoys that – I just cannot do a club most of the time, I have to be really drunk to go to a club. And there you need people who take care of you, it’s that kind of situation.

Int: So, I think one of the things that makes us feel better when we go to the club is that we do have safety precautions. I mean we know it’s not a safe place, so we protect our drink, we take a group of friends with, we kind of tell our parents ‘Hey listen, I’m going to go here’ – we tell someone we’re going somewhere. We work as a team. We make ourselves as safe as we can be in those spaces. And I think the same can be said for how we build our homes, we make it as safe as we can. But these daily safety precautions that we take, like putting your handbag in the boot, or not walking with your phone out, or not going to certain places, we do those with the knowing that even if we do this something could still happen. And the same thing can be said for all these safety precautions. I’ve asked this to some participants and they’ve said, well we don’t want to make it easy – we want to do all that we can to be safe. Do our safety precautions make us feel safe or is it rathe the thing of ‘I’m going to do as much as I can, I don’t feel safe that I have to do it, but I’m just going to do it to make it more difficult for someone else’?

ELIZABETH: I – for me like, it does make me feel a little bit more safe, like for instance when I drive by Fountains I’ve got a little pepper spray in my car and I like have it ready when I stop there at the traffic light, so I does make me feel like at least I can try to do something to help myself. Obviously I know that it might not work, that it might backfire, but it does make me feel better yeah.

JULIA: Yeah, I think it’s the latter – the, it’s not really going to help, it’s still a dangerous situation. I still feel like I’m in a dangerous situation, but let me rather decrease my risk and not, let’s call it ‘tempt’, someone to try and steal from me or stab me for my phone. That kind of thing.

MATILDE: I feel like it’s weird, because my thought process is like, I feel really unsafe because I need to take that extra precaution now – like you said at Fountains. Like I’m feeling unsafe, well more unsafe because I need to take this precaution but at least I’m taking this precaution so I’m prepared if something were to happen. Because I also heard like we shouldn’t have ponytails because they are easy for men to grab – sorry, not men, perpetrators.

Int: I mean.

MATILDE: Not all men, but you know.

Int: Yeah, because we have some time I think we can go back to our previous discussion on race because that seemed to be quite a fruitful one. Matilde you did say that you wanted to add something.

MATILDE: I’m just trying to remember the point.

\*Group laughs.

Int: We’ll open this field up now – if there is anything that you guys want to add or talk about or even what this whole process of being a research participant made you think of or made you feel in a specific way.

ELIZABETH: I can actually add something to that race thing – its just like, not all people are like that, not all black people are like that. And I think it is so bad because like the people that are makes us feel negatively towards them, but its actually not all people who are like that, and I think it’s those people who do that are making it worse for all the other nice people out there. And ya, it makes it a stereotype and so, ya that’s also a problem.

JULIA: It goes both ways as well – sorry.

MATILDE: That’s the thing. Everyone gets put into a box, irrespective of what category if I can say – I mean also now with the whole transgender movement, there are transgender people who are being put into a box and it’s not all of them. And it’s like these white people who are being put into this box of being colonisers. You know, obviously we didn’t do the colonising it was like hundreds of years ago, but you know. Oh! I remember the point that I wanted to make. It was that – with Julia’s comment regarding the fight of not wanting to fight anymore. Like with all the comments that I get, because I’m white I feel like I can’t say anything back. So with people who say, ‘You are not South African’, or ‘Go home’, I can’t go back and say ‘No, I’m actually South African’, because that will just be met with a battle that I can’t win – a fight I cannot win, I will never win. And even if there were people on my side being like, ‘We accept you’, if I now go back and say, ‘I am South African, how dare you say that to me’, they’ll take the black side. The likelihood of them taking my side is slim. So, it’s just a pointless fight. But now I have started opting to say, ‘No I identify as South African’. Since we can all identify as whatever, I’m identifying as South African.

ELIZABETH: It’s sad that you have to do that though, because you are.

Int: Yeah, it is sad, because I mean we get this term of ‘I’m identifying as something’ because technically, ‘naturally’, you aren’t that something. But by definition.

\*Matilde laughs.

Int: You are a natural – a national of South Africa. You can only be a nationality because you are born within a country.

JULIA: Yah.

ELIZABETH: Yah.

MATILDE: Yah.

Int: That must have been really tough for you because – is it something tricky for you to say or is it something that you say through gritted teeth, or do you just say, ‘You know what, I give up at this point, let’s just not cause more fights’?

MATILDE: I hardly ever reply to comments. I usually delete them or – actually no, I don’t delete a lot of comments, I keep them there, but a few of them, like the child rapist one. That one I deleted. I was like I cant have that on my page. Like that’s going to be triggering for other people as well. It’s not just trying insult me, the amount of people that were raped as children and now they see that, it’s going trigger them. So, I was like comments like that I can’t have on my page, but like most of the time I just ignore them. Every now and then I’ll have like a sassy moment, and I’ll be like, ‘Nah I’m from South Africa, it’s okay’. I will mainly reply with sass, I won’t be serious about it because, again it’s just generally – what I have also found is that a lot of the time it’s just people trying to get a reaction out of me. So, if I don’t react then cool.

Int: I mean the research that has been done on this type of hate has basically said is that what you experience online, and I suppose you can speak to this directly, is never what you’re going to experience in person. Like the amount of anger and almost viciousness of these attacks you won’t have in person. Like people will be like, ‘Well I don’t agree with you but I’m not going to yell and scream and call you a child rapist’.

MATILDE: Ya, no completely. Because I mean I have never been told any of these things to my face. And yes, granted I’m on the other side of the world, but when I was still in South Africa I never got any of that. and ya, like you said the comments are like very aggressive but if I – if we had to challenge them and be like, you know, ‘Come say it to my face’, then they would be like. Because I actually had an incident like that back in high school in grade eight, there was a girl that I think – ya, Julia will know her, but I will not name-drop. But um, you know, she was very loud in the class and she would threaten a lot of us and one time in grade eleven I think she was like, ‘If you guys don’t do this then we’ll – or else’. And then I got so sick and tired – got gatvol of her crap, I was juts like, ‘Or else what? Or else what?’ and then it was completely, ‘Oh noting \*Matilde, I like you’, and stuff. It was like, you were threating all of us and now I challenge you and you shut up, like ‘Oh nothing, nothing’.

ELIZABETH: Cowardly, ya.

MATILDE: That was in person, so yah like you said – with the comments, I don’t think I’m big enough of a creator for it to be genuine if that makes sense.

Int: I mean not yet, let’s see how the future goes. Yeah, go for it Julia.

JULIA: It’s funny because it’s always extremes. It’s never just ‘You’re just white’, or something just stupid. It’s always some kind of an extreme like going in and telling someone that they’re a child rapist is really extreme. Saying that in court without evidence you could be like fined or that kind of thing. So, saying that in person without evidence without anything you are really brave – or you have a lot of money, I don’t know. But I think it’s those kinds of extremes that people are able to – like they are able to just say it, to no consequences.

ELIZABETH: Exactly.

\*Matilde nods her head.

JULIA: You’ve removed the comment, but now nothing is going to happen.

MATILDE: Ya.

JULIA: You should have just left the comment up there.

MATILDE: I could easily sue for defamation of character.

\*Group nods.

M I definitely have a screenshot.

JULIA: Everyone is brave until they go to court, then things change quite quickly.

MATILDE: Do you think I can do this with all the coloniser ones, because guys I would be fucking balling.

\*Group laughs.

MATILDE: I will be rich.

JULIA: I gave you the business model, there you go.

MATILDE: This is how I’m going to be rich. This is my money.

JULIA: Why not, why not.

Int: Yeah, we’ll meet again in ten years and then Matilde can pay for drinks. It’ll be great.

MATILDE: Oh one hundred percent. You know, maybe I should comment back and be like, ‘Defamation of character?’. Actually also just adding on to the, I have challenged a few people when they have made comments like that and then it’s silence, because I have had people say – like I made an Afrikaans video about how Afrikaans originated and people were like, ‘Are you so fucking stupid, you can’t comprehend learning something new’, even though my caption said, ‘If I’m wrong, teach me’, but you know we move. But people were like, ‘You can’t learn anything new, this is wrong’, and I’d be like ‘Okay, teach me. What’s correct then’ – silence. I’m like, ‘It makes no sense, you know what I mean’. Anyways.

Int: What I’m getting from all of you is this like sense that if you can’t win so might as well not even fight.

JULIA: To be honest, there is a day coming where I’m going to look at someone telling me I’m racist for doing something very arbitrary, and looking at them and going, ‘Is it because I’m white?’. I am so close.

MATILDE: Oh no, it’s fun. I’ve done it, it’s fun.

\*Group laughs.

MATILDE: It feels great.

JULIA: I’m ready.

Int: Matilde is the pot stirrer in this group, I mean even in a group of pre-schoolers there always one corrupted individual and I mean, we’ve found ours.

MATILDE: Bad influence. With anyone who asks me or says, “You don’t look South African.” “Because I’m white.” Or “Because I’m not black?” And they’re like, “Ya, well, you know…”

Int: I had the same thing happen here. I had like a, one of the other exchange students ask me – actually they were really sweet about it, they were like, “I hope you don’t, I hope-” Well, they are French and I don’t want to butcher the French accent. They were like, “I don’t want to – you know, why – um.” I’m like, “are you trying to ask why am I not black?” And she was like, “Yes, I mean.”

\*Group laughs.

Int: And I’m like, “I mean.”

ELIZABETH: Do they honestly think that there are only black people in South Africa?

MATILDE: Oh no, they do.

Int: I that the idea, ya.

MATILDE: They do.

Int: I mean was Arab from France, and I’m like, ‘Shouldn’t you be stone-cold white then too?’ if your thinking is.

MATILDE: You’re also contradicting a stereotype here.

Int: Exactly.

ELIZABETH: So, true.

MATILDE: I actually-

Int: Yah go for it.

MATILDE: A conversation that I had last night. This guy, shame he was also a sweetheart about it, but he was also like “I don’t mean to, you know, but-” I was just like, “There are a lot of us white people in South Africa.” “Not what I meant, my actual question – no, no, my actual question isn’t that, you know, are there a lot of black people? But there is isn’t there.” “But, yeah.” But I’ve personally only ever had it in Denmark, where they have been – not in England. In England, I got asked where South Africa is, but that was something else, but anyway.

\*Group laughs.

MATILDE: But here they’re like, “But aren’t you a little white? The wrong colour?” Stuff like that.

Int: Um well, guys we are unfortunately out of time. I just wanted to say a massive thank you for your interviews and for your focus group. It’s been a very fun experience for me, and I hope it has been a great experience for you.