

Student Success Stories

BREAKING BARRIERS: ESCAPING POVERTY, EXPECTATIONS & GBV

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I remember moving into my undergraduate residence, quite late in the Welcoming process, with some borrowed blankets and donated clothes from old teachers, family, and friends. It did not matter if my blankets or shoes were a bit worn out or old. What mattered was the journey that I would embark on for the next five years at Stellenbosch University.

My journey was tumultuous. Struggling to adapt to my new environment, not having financial support from my parents, and navigating my identity as a queer Muslim woman. On top of that adapting to academics and fitting into a predominantly white residence space. In short: I started looking for spaces where I could truly belong, and in which my voice echoed.

I came out later during that first year, and the next year I set my pace in joining societies and committees. Now, fast forward a bit, I am a well-respected student leader. First Primaria of Walter Parry, one of five South Africans who represented our country at this year's Y20 Summit, where I pushed for menstrual health access and eradicating GBV-F, and I have also appeared on radio, in newspapers, and most recently on Via TV to tell my story!

I would hope that my story will help other students from low-income or poor communities, and that they can find my story to be inspiring and powerful. My story is a testament to every little brown, queer girl who was silenced, conditioned, and never seen. Now I lead, boldly, unapologetically, and radically.

My name is Hakeemah Malaykah Matinka, and I am a first-generation coloured woman from a small community called Happy-Valley. I was raised by a single mother of 8, and I had to deal with the harrowing reality of a drug addict father. I am the eldest of 10 and my path was already set with expectations of being my mother's predecessor in providing for the entire family. Our community was riddled with poverty, and oftentimes I was too embarrassed to tell people where I lived.

My acceptance into a tertiary institution is one of my fondest memories. I remember my entire street gathering to congratulate me and send me off as one of the first in my family to go to Stellenbosch University. ***I did not want to settle for bare minimum, and setting my path for Stellenbosch University, and for being accommodated at residence meant an escape from poverty, expectations and the constant gender-based violence experienced in my household.*** But I also held a big secret: I was queer. And I was Muslim.