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**CAREER NARRATIVES OF WOMEN PROFESSORS  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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## ABSTRACT

The statistics on the gender profile of academics in South African universities show that women are concentrated at the lower levels of the hierarchy with very few women at the uppermost level of professorship. At the time that this study was conducted women comprised only eight percent of the total number of professors in South Africa. The central aim of the study was to tell the story behind these statistics on gender inequalities by examining the subjective experiences of women academics. Twenty-five women professors from a diversity of universities, academic disciplines, race groups and ages were interviewed for about two hours each. The general areas of questioning were: family background, educational history, trajectory of career development, professional experiences, and relation between personal life and professional life. All interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed. Using narrative analysis, the interview transcripts were then analysed. The processes of analysis and interpretation were informed by the theoretical underpinnings of the study, which was located within the ambit of feminist post-structuralism and social constructionism. Central to the conceptualisation of the study was the idea of self as constructed through narrative with narrative viewed as an inherently social process. Thus the analysis of the narratives moved between attention to the particular and the general examining how broader historical and social processes of stratification are given form in the narratives of self. The unfolding of the narratives of the 25 women professors illuminated complex articulations between the legacy of apartheid and processes of gender organisation both inside and outside the academy. Both gender and race were pointed to as salient factors in the subjective representations of academia, but neither of these manifested as unitary and fixed. Instead gender and race shifted in and out of focus along with other axes of difference such as age, relationship status, family status and career stage in shaping the narratives of self. There were multiple and shifting intersections. Consequently, there were no straightforward, continuous lines of commonality and difference. Constructions of gender were shown to shift within a complex matrix of relations relevant to academia in South Africa. Albeit complex and multidimensional, the significance of gender in shaping academic careers was confirmed. The gendered implications of performing as an academic pervaded the

narratives in diverse ways at the level of both form and content. While all the narratives followed a progressive form, the analysis showed that the career lines of most participants did not follow the standard linear model of career. The frequency of regressive micronarratives nested in the larger progressive narrative drew attention to late beginnings and interruptions to career development. The analysis gave visibility to the interconnectedness of subjective experiences of being multiply positioned as academics, women, mothers and wives. Tension, ambivalence and contradiction permeated the accounts of having to perform multiple tasks. There was a shared representation of academic life as a battle to be fought. Achieving success in moving up the academic hierarchy was constituted as involving varied shifts in self-construction such as a change from the naive self to the ambitious, competitive self. Self-management, loneliness and isolation were commonly noted as features of academic life. A shared sense of gender consciousness and solidarity was largely absent from the narratives. Feminism was claimed as self-relevant in very few narratives whereas in others it was positioned as a reference point from which the self could be distinguished. Juxtaposed against feminism was the discourse of women's issues, which was framed as less militant and more womanly. These representations of feminism were interpreted in relation to the fissures that mark the historical development of feminism in South Africa. In sum, the study succeeded in producing a complex account of the subjective experiences of women professors in South Africa, giving visibility to the diverse ways in which social processes of gender are given form at the level of self-narrative. The varied narratives of what it means to be a woman professor in South Africa in the late 1990s were seen to be shaped by past policies, as well as current practices and policies. Finally, noting the diversity in the narratives, the importance of theorising difference was affirmed, the need for a complex change agenda was signalled and the need for a scholarship that is comfortable with the notion that our analyses are always limited, in process and constantly in need of modification was noted.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the demise of apartheid, the policy that legislated and implemented racism in South Africa, the question of how to redress the inequalities of the past has confronted every sector of society. In making the shift from apartheid to democracy, the government elected in the first-ever democratic elections in April 1994, made a commitment to not only eradicate racism but all forms of discrimination including sexism, a form of discrimination which is given specific attention in the Constitution. Consequently, across various sectors such as the judiciary, industry, sport, welfare and education there is a great deal of debate about the development of appropriate strategies and policies to redress race and gender inequality.

Education is widely perceived as a crucial component of societal reconstruction in South Africa. As in many other national contexts, education is seen as an important agent in the development of the economy and the society as a whole. This study focuses on gender inequalities in education. Unlike many other countries in Africa, the statistics on gender and education in South Africa show that overall there are an equal number of girls and boys enrolled in schools. There is a gender gap, however, at the level of higher education. On the whole, the position of women in the South African higher education sector mimics the international trend which has been simply summarised as "the greater the status and monetary reward, the less likely there are to be women in organisational positions; and the greater the intellectual approbation, the less likely it is that what women do will be included within it" (Stanley; 1997: p.5).

Over the last few years a number of higher education institutions have implemented policies and procedures such as equal opportunity programmes, in an attempt to achieve a more equitable institutional environment. Experiences of the success of such programmes both nationally and internationally have been ambiguous, resulting in a widely expressed observation that equal opportunities and gender policies can be both enabling and constraining (Nicolson, 1996; Samson; 1999). Analyses of gender ratios in higher education in different national contexts (e.g. Rose, 1994) show that in many cases even

when there are strong programmes to support women, the proportion of women at the highest levels has not significantly increased.

Political and moral imperatives to redress inequalities juxtaposed against the ambivalent results of redress strategies and initiatives implemented to date, has brought to the fore the need for further research, in particular the need for research which goes beyond a mere quantitative description of inequalities. As Brooks (1997) has argued, statistics denote the outcomes but tell us very little about the processes of discrimination. This study aims to tell the story behind the statistics on gender inequalities in higher education in South Africa by investigating the subjective experiences of women academics.

### 1.1. Statement of aims

The central aim of this study was to examine the subjective experiences of career among women academics in South Africa. Although quantitative data provides important information about trends and patterns in access and promotion rates, for example, understanding gender relations in academia requires an approach that goes beyond the figures. As Nicolson (1996) pointed out, quantification reveals only part of the story. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study sought to expand on the story of women academics in South Africa, which to date, has been told largely in quantitative terms.

As in most countries, despite the wide-ranging dimensions of discrimination that militates against the advancement of women as a group, in South Africa there are some women who have achieved greater success than most others. With regard to academia in South Africa, women professors would fall within this category as most women academics are clustered at the lower levels of the academic hierarchy where they are positioned as junior lecturers and lecturers. By focusing on women professors, this study explored how women who have achieved some mobility within the system, reconstruct their experiences, report on their career trajectories and make sense of their own positioning in relation to the higher education system and the broader social and historical context in ways that seemingly permit them to achieve their desired goals.

## **1.2. Outline of Chapters**

The next chapter outlines the context of the study by providing an overview of the higher education system in South Africa describing both historical and current patterns of exclusion. The chapter shows that an analysis of gender in South African universities must take account of the legacy of race discrimination that has left its mark on the present configuration of the university system. Chapter Three then reviews the literature on women and higher education paying specific attention to research on the experiences of women academics. Related material on gender and career development, women and leadership and women and work is also reviewed. In Chapter Four several theoretical strands are interwoven in mapping the theoretical framework of the study which has been primarily informed by feminist post-structuralism as a critical and contested theoretical movement. Within the ambit of this metatheoretical movement, a social constructionist perspective of self as narrative is elucidated. Narrative analysis then is the methodology described in Chapter Five, which also includes details of method such as the interviewing process and the sample. The following three chapters present the analysis of the narratives of the career experiences of women professors in the sample. The analysis focuses on both form and content of the narratives, moving between attention to the particular and the general to show how broader historical and social processes of stratification are given form in the narratives of self. The final chapter draws together the entire thesis, reflecting on the contributions and process of the study. Overall, the chapter maintains that the study has produced an account of the subjective experiences of women professors in South Africa that is complex and multidimensional.

## **1.3. A Note on Terminology and Race**

In these post-colonial times the use of racial terminology is widely recognised by authors (e.g. Casey, 1995 in education research) as problematic. South African society with its history of colonialism and apartheid has long grappled with the problematic of racial terminology. In its current phase of development as an emerging democracy, South Africa is trying to discard the racism of the past and in the process of trying to do so, there is much public debate about race terminology. As a result there are no taken-for-granted meanings

of racial terms. In this thesis the terms black and white are the racial terms used most frequently. White refers to members of the group who under apartheid enjoyed the rights of full citizenship. All members of groups who were disenfranchised under apartheid are included in the term blacks. The terms coloured and Indian are used in places to refer to sub-groupings within the category black. These terms are in widespread use in present-day South Africa and the meanings of these terms have been shaped by the apartheid history. Coloured refers to people of mixed race and Indian to people who trace their lineage to India. The term black, unless otherwise specified, includes coloureds and Indians. Where necessary, these sub-groups of the category black are distinguished. All these terms are all currently under contestation, however, the old apartheid meanings are still used in many policy and research documents for purposes of analysis and monitoring social changes.

Having briefly sketched the scenario and the topic, the thesis now turns to a deeper description of the context of the study.

## 2. HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The South African higher education system is highly stratified both vertically and horizontally. Higher education institutions may be broadly categorised into three types: universities, technikons and colleges. Although the boundaries between types of institutions are becoming more flexible due to recent policy changes, the various types of institutions may be seen as a three-tier system with universities occupying the highest level. The boundaries between types of institutions were originally defined according to their differing functions as described by two government commissions, the Van Wyk de Vries Commission (1974) and the Goode Commission (1978). The main function of universities was described as to educate students in a range of basic scientific disciplines with a view to high-level professional training; while that of technikons was described as to train students in the application of knowledge rather than in basic knowledge itself, with a view to high-level career training. Colleges were, on the other hand, designed to provide vocational training in fields such as nursing, agriculture, theology and teaching (National Commission on Higher Education [NCHE], 1996). A further functional distinction concerned the role of research. While colleges were not expected to do any research, technikons were to conduct developmental scientific research and universities to engage in basic scientific research. These functional differences were matched by differences in qualification structure with universities awarding degrees and technikons and colleges awarding diplomas and vocational certificates. In spite of some blurring of the boundaries, universities are still largely responsible for scientific and intellectual research and produce virtually all the doctoral degrees awarded in South Africa.

In total the higher education sector in South Africa comprises 21 universities, 15 technikons and about 140 single colleges (NCHE, 1996). Within each of these categories there is further differentiation, mostly as a result of apartheid policy. Under the apartheid system, higher education was stratified along racial lines with different institutions for each racial group. The racial classification system in use during the apartheid period relied on the identification of four racial groups: blacks, coloureds (mixed race), Indians and whites. Therefore, within each category of institution, there were different

institutions for each racial group. Education policy under apartheid was explicitly intended to reproduce and maintain a racially divided political, social and economic structure. This was not a flat structure however. Wolpe (1995) identified the university sector under apartheid as a dual system that combined a relatively advanced system for whites with an under-developed one for blacks, coloureds and Indians. But the under-development itself was not uniform, nor flat. It was hierarchical. The hierarchical operation of apartheid was clearly visible in the allocation of resources to the different institutions such that the institutions demarcated for Indian and coloured persons, although under-developed compared to institutions designed for whites, were better resourced than those intended for black persons. In spite of ostensible efforts by the democratic government to develop a new integrated, equitable system, these historical differences are still evident in the current higher education system.

This study focuses specifically on the highest tier of the higher education system, namely, universities. In South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, universities constitute the domain most marked by intellectual power. South African universities are important sites of knowledge production and dissemination. Through research, teaching and outreach activities, universities have the capacity to contribute to societal reconstruction and development. Jayaweera (1997) points out that in modern societies universities may both filter through high-level human resources to meet national economic needs and they may also function as instruments of democratisation and social equity. On the other hand, universities may reproduce and widen social inequalities. The remaining sections of this chapter review the available information to delineate the status of women in South African universities at the time that this study was conducted. Before the data on the status of women is presented, the differentiation among the universities is elucidated in greater detail.

## **2.1. Universities in South Africa**

Given that the current democratic government only assumed office five years' ago, the legacy of apartheid is still evident in the university system. Universities may be categorised into two groupings; the historically white universities (HWUs) and the

historically black universities (HBUs). These are the key groupings currently in use for the purposes of policy development and implementation. However, there are further sub-groupings within these main categories as neither the HWUs nor the HBUs constitute homogeneous groups.

Subotsky (1997) classified the HBUs into three clusters as follows:

1. six historically black universities located in rural areas, six of which were specifically associated with the bantustan homelands or African reservations — University of Fort Hare, University of the North, University of the North-West (formerly Boputhatswana), University of the Transkei, University of Venda and University of Zululand.
2. two HBUs located in urban areas; one to serve coloured people (University of the Western Cape) and the other to serve Indian people (University of Durban-Westville).
3. two special purpose HBUs, one to train medical personnel to serve the black population (Medical University of South Africa) and the other, created as late as the 1980s, in response to a growing urban black population ( Vista University).

In a similar, yet different vein, the HWUs may also be meaningfully classified into different clusters:

1. four English-speaking HWUs — University of Cape Town, University of Natal, Rhodes University, University of the Witwatersrand.
  2. five Afrikaans-speaking HWUs — University of the Free State, Potchefstroom University, University of Pretoria, Rand Afrikaans University, University of Stellenbosch.
  3. one bilingual HWU- University of Port Elizabeth.
  4. one special purpose HWU which caters for distance education — University of South Africa. Although this university enrolled students from all race groups, its administration and management were fully controlled by whites only.
- Furthermore, in the apartheid era the principle of complete segregation was

followed in all matters that might have involved physical contact e.g. examinations and graduation.

## **2.2. A Historical Overview of University Education in South Africa**

### **2.2.1. Early years 1829-1920s**

The historical development of universities in South Africa is embedded in the history of the country as a British colony and then later, as a republic ruled by a white minority through a unique policy of racism known as apartheid. The beginning of university education in South Africa can be traced back to 1829 when the South African College was established in Cape Town. This was no university, however, it "was really a superior kind of high school" (Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 1972 p.24). The College prepared students for matriculation and some more advanced examinations of the University of London. From that time on a number of similar other colleges were established across the then British colony, many under the auspices of the churches. Many of these colleges were later developed into universities. In 1858 a Board of Public Examiners was formed to examine candidates from the various colleges and to issue certificates. In 1873 an Act of Parliament established the University of the Cape of Good Hope which replaced the Board of Public Examiners. The University was purely an examining body for students from the colleges, no teaching was undertaken. However, it did have the power to confer academic degrees. Consequently, the founding of the University of the Cape of Good Hope made it possible for students to write examinations for degrees in South Africa. Brookes (1966) notes that the University of the Cape of Good Hope was consciously modelled on the University of London, a purely examining body. It remained an exclusively examining institution until its demise in 1918.

The University Act of South Africa, 1916 radically changed higher education. It made provision for the incorporation of the University of the Cape of Good Hope into the University of South Africa which came into existence in 1918. The 1916 Act also provided for the transformation of two colleges into universities: in 1918 the South African College became the University of Cape Town and the Victoria College became the University of Stellenbosch. All other university colleges were incorporated into the

University of South Africa which functioned as a federal examining body for external students. The establishment of the University of Cape Town, mainly for English-speakers, and the University of Stellenbosch, mainly for Afrikaans-speakers, marked the beginning of university teaching and research in South Africa.

The development of university education for black South Africans did not follow an identical trajectory to that for white South Africans. In the main until the South African Native College was established in 1916, blacks had to travel to Great Britain, the United States or to Europe for higher education (Burrows, Kerr & Matthews, 1961). It took ten years of discussion and planning by various missionary churches and local individuals to realise the development of the South African Native College, later known as Fort Hare. The Higher Education Act, No.30 of 1923, gave recognition to the Native College as a higher education institution performing the dual role of a secondary school and a university college. This college also prepared black students for the degrees of the University of South Africa, the federal examining institution. Although initially intended for black students only, four months after the opening, the College agreed to accept Indian and coloured students.

There is evidence that the University of Cape Town admitted black students from the turn of the century when it was still the South African College (The Conference Committee, 1957). The exact year when the enrolment of blacks began and how many black students were admitted are not recorded in any of the volumes on the history of the University. Although the volumes by Ritchie (1918) provide a detailed account of the history of the South African College, no mention is made of black or non-white (the term of the period) students. However, he does refer to "colour prejudice" in describing the development of education in the then Cape Colony. For example, in the section on the history of schooling where he informs the reader that the earliest schools in the 17<sup>th</sup> century enrolled both "European" and "coloured" children he includes the comment "The colour prejudice seems to have been non-existent in those good old days" (p.14). The absence of specific data on black student enrolment may also be partially attributable to the dominant meaning of the concept race at that time in the Cape. This meaning is elucidated in the following quotation from a book published by the University of Cape Town Publications in 1929 entitled *The*

*Development of Higher Education in South Africa 1873-1927:*

"Racialism" that bogey which is still preserved for political purposes by our politicians, has been killed once for all at our Universities and the youth of the English and Dutch races are being welded together in the firm bonds of a common culture and common ideals, which will assuredly stand the test of time.

( Metrowich, 1929, p.100)

In the above quotation it is clear that "races" referred to people of English and Dutch descent as two distinct groupings who were living in South Africa. In this book there is no reference to the education of black people.

### **2.2.2. Middle years 1920s-1959**

In the years following the establishment of the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, a number of other colleges attained university status. In 1921 the University of the Witwatersrand, the second English-speaking university, was instituted. It was followed by the second Afrikaans-speaking university in 1930 when the University of Pretoria was established. The University of Natal was inaugurated in 1949. The 1950's marked a period of relatively rapid expansion. Two Afrikaans-speaking universities, Orange Free State (1950) and Potchefstroom (1951), as well as another English-speaking university, Rhodes, (1951), were established. Also in 1951 the South African Native College became an affiliate of Rhodes University.

The growth in the university sector from the early **1920s** to the 1950s was chiefly for the benefit of white South Africans. Metrowich's (1929) account of the early debates on the appropriate number of universities for South Africa indicates that a pivotal consideration was the ratio of the white population to number of universities. The educational needs of black citizens were not factored into these debates. By 1951 South Africa had eight teaching universities for whites. Only three of these admitted blacks on a limited scale. Two, the Universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand were called "open" universities because they admitted blacks. However, the term "open" is misleading, as the policy of these two universities was not entirely open. Although black students were permitted in the

lectures, in all matters described as social — residence, sport and recreation- the policy was racial segregation. Nonetheless, these two universities followed the most liberal policy compared to the other six. The University of Natal admitted black students but they followed a policy of segregation not only in social activities but in the classroom as well, as blacks, except for a few postgraduate courses, had to attend separate classes. Even use of the library facilities was segregated. Lectures for black students were held over weekends starting on Friday afternoons, during vacation times or in off-campus venues.

The remaining four universities did not admit any black students. Besides Fort Hare, which by 1951 was affiliated to Rhodes, the only other university education available to black South Africans was distance or correspondence studies through the University of South Africa, which until 1946 was chiefly an examining body. In 1946, tuition to external students through written notes and teaching manuals was made available to students of all races. However, examinations and graduation ceremonies were segregated.

Enrolment figures for the 1950s confirm that the provision of university education for blacks by the white universities, and indeed overall, was limited, in spite of evidence of a growing demand amongst the black population. In 1957 there were about 22 000 enrolled students in the universities, only 1 300 (5.9%) were black. These black students were enrolled at four institutions — about a third at Fort Hare (400) and the rest (about 900) at the Universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand and Natal. In the same year the University of South Africa had about 4 000 white students and 1 700 black students (The Conference Committee, 1957).

### **2.2.3. Apartheid years 1959-1994**

The year 1959 was a landmark year in the impact of apartheid policy on South African universities. In this year the Extension of the University Education Act, which provided for the complete racial segregation of the entire system, was passed. It marked the culmination of a number of shifts that had occurred since the National Party assumed political power in 1948. Soon after he came into office, the then Prime Minister, Dr D F Malan declared as undesirable the policy of those universities that permitted access to black students. Enforced racial segregation at all levels of education was to be the new policy throughout

the country. Steps towards the implementation of this policy were taken towards the middle of the 1950s when plans for the development of separate universities for blacks were discussed. From 1959 onwards, not only would there be segregation of whites and blacks, there would be segregation of blacks into three distinct groupings of universities — for bantu (the apartheid term), for coloureds and for Indians. There was opposition from universities directly affected by the 1959 legislation. Fort Hare which, by virtue of the 1959 legislation, would be transferred as a university college to the Department of Bantu Education, consistently opposed the changes proposed by the Nationalist Party government. Several memorandums and petitions were circulated. A selection of these is included in the text by Burrows, Kerr & Matthews (1961). In short, there was vociferous opposition to the proposals because the effect would be that all control of the institution would be in the hands of the apartheid government. Furthermore, enrolments would be limited to Xhosa students only in spite of the fact that by this time, Fort Hare student enrolment reflected a diversity of African ethnic groups as well as a high proportion of Indian and coloured students (about one third). In a similar vein, the Universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand totally opposed racial segregation and rejected academic segregation. One of the measures taken by these universities to express their opposition was a jointly convened conference in January 1957. The overall purpose of the conference was to formulate a statement in response to the then intended Government actions. The deliberations of this conference were subsequently published by a Conference Committee later that year (The Conference Committee, 1957).

Notwithstanding these efforts, the apartheid legislation was implemented. In the period from 1959 the university sector became deeply divided along racial lines far so more than in the past. Full control of Fort Hare was transferred to the Department of Bantu Education. Since Fort Hare was from then onwards specifically for Xhosa-speaking students, other racially- and ethnically-segregated state-controlled institutions had to be created. Until about 1970 none of these institutions had university status. In terms of the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, they were all set up as university colleges. The University College of the North for Sotho, Tsonga, Venda and Tswana students was founded in 1959, plans having been made from the mid-fifties. Likewise, with the University College of Zululand intended for Zulu and Swazi students. For coloureds, a

University College was established in the Western Cape in 1960 and for Indians, there was the University College, Durban started in 1961. A further consequence of the 1959 legislation was that a black person could only study at an 'open' university if the proposed course was not offered at the racially designated college and if permission was granted by the government.

During the 1960s two more universities were established for whites only. In 1964, a dual Afrikaans and English medium university was set up in Port Elizabeth, and in 1966 another Afrikaans university, Rand Afrikaans University, was founded. The number of universities for blacks increased in the 1970s and 1980s when the government implemented its homeland policy. When the homelands were created, a university was developed for each one with the aim of providing for the education of civil servants and professionals to serve these homelands. In this way the Universities of the Transkei, Boputhatswana and Venda were formed. No new university was necessary when the Ciskei was declared a homeland, since Fort Hare was already within its geographic reach. However, another two universities were deemed necessary when it became clear that the homelands policy and other restrictions on the movement of black South Africans, such as the Influx Control Laws, could not contain the growth of an urban black population. The Medical University of South Africa, exclusively a medical school with the addition of animal health, came into being in the late 1970s. In 1981 Vista University, a multi-campus institution with sites in a number of urban areas, was the last university to be founded by the apartheid government. Subotsky (1997) argues that the intention was to create an urban black middle class to dilute the growing resistance among youth in the townships.

The creation of a racially divided university sector as envisioned by the architects of apartheid did not proceed without resistance. Since the enactment of the 1959 legislation, all the black universities experienced student protests and concomitant periods of closure. In a report published by the South African Institute of Race Relations, Dreijmanis (1988) observed that the unintended consequence of separate universities was a highly politicised black student population. Many of these students subsequently became leaders in the struggle that ultimately led to the fall of the apartheid government.

Having outlined the history of South African universities in broad strokes paying particular attention to race, the chapter now turns to an examination of this history from the perspective of the participation of women. As is evident from the above account, racist practices had a decisive influence on the historical development of universities in South Africa. Therefore, a focus on women without regard to race would ignore a powerful dimension of stratification in the university sector and in the society at large. A combined gender-race analysis is, however, not easily achieved because such data is not readily available. As has already been pointed out, in the early stages of the development of the higher education sector participation rates according to race group were not recorded. In later years when details of race were recorded, data on gender would be listed without regard to race. Even at present aggregated race and gender data are not recorded across all institutions. In spite of these limitations, sufficient information was available to form the following overview.

### **2.3. Participation of Women — A Historical Perspective**

From the time that it was established, there were no rules that barred white women from writing the examinations and being awarded degrees through the University of the Cape of Good Hope. In 1886 a Bachelor of Arts degree was awarded to a woman (white) for the first time in South Africa (Eberhard, 1987). This woman graduate had been privately tutored as at the time there were no colleges open to women although Ritchie (1918) reported that extra-collegiate classes for women were held in the Botanical Gardens in the immediate vicinity of the South African College.

Given that for the most part gender was not considered an issue worth noting, there has been very little documentation of the history of women in the South African university system. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter the participation of women from 1886 onwards is examined mainly through reference to two institutions as case examples — the oldest historically white university, the University of Cape Town, and the South African College as its lineal ancestor, and the oldest historically black university, the University of Fort Hare and its lineal ancestor, the South African Native College. A point worth noting is that when the University of Cape Town celebrated its centenary (1886/7-1986/7), a report,

*The Centenary of Women on Campus* (Carr, 1987), was published. This has been a valuable resource in gathering the information presented hereafter.

The only recorded mention of the role of women in the history of the South African College (SAC) prior to 1886 is the financial contribution made by two women and women's efforts in fundraising activities (Ritchie, 1918). The question of opening classes to women was brought before the Senate of the SAC in 1886. The outcome of the deliberations was a decision to permit an experiment - for one year women students would be admitted to the Chemistry department only (it was the Professor of Chemistry who had raised the matter). Since no negative consequences were reported, at the end of that year all departments in the College were opened to women. Ten women students immediately enrolled. In 1905 the first residence for women students was founded. By 1929 about 100 of a total of 469 undergraduates at the then University of Cape Town were women (Walker, 1929).

The appointment of women as members of the academic staff came some years after the enrolment of the first women students. In the *Centenary Report*, Eberhard (1987) identifies 1911 as the year that the first woman was employed as a lecturer at the SAC, albeit as a temporary replacement. In 1912 the first permanent appointment at the College was made in the Botany department. The second permanent appointment of a woman as a lecturer was in the same department not long after in 1914. Interestingly, by 1917 the Botany department was staffed entirely by women (three in all). It was the only department in the College to have been staffed totally by women although this lasted for a very short period until 1919 when a man was appointed as professor.

At the time when the SAC was to be transformed into a University, a Provisional Committee was appointed to submit draft proposals to a commission empowered to formulate the statutes and regulations on matters pertaining to the future Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and South Africa. Of the four members appointed by the government to the Provisional Committee, two were women who were both members of the first Council of the University of Cape Town (UCT). Although women were included in the very first Council, by the time of the Centenary celebrations (1986/7) only 10 women

had served as Councillors.

The documented history of women at UCT is by and large the history of white women at the University. In *The Centenary Report of Women* the use of "women" can be safely assumed to refer to white women as each time a black woman is referred to, her race is listed as a qualifier. This is notable in the identification of the eminent women graduates. Among these reference is made to the first "non-white" woman to receive an MA degree in 1932 and the first "coloured" woman to obtain a M.Sc. in Botany in 1957. Many other women are named but they are not identified in racial terms. As noted earlier, for blacks access to UCT was very limited. Given the general subordination of women at the time, it may be inferred that the proportion of women among the limited number of black students enrolled at UCT was very small. A better indication of the participation of black women in universities, however, may be inferred from an examination of the history of Fort Hare.

When the South African Native College was opened in 1916, the first students comprised two black men, two black women and two white men (Burrows, Kerr & Matthews, 1961). A residence for women students was opened several years later in 1941. In mid 1959 when the College was the University College of Fort Hare, out of a total enrolment of 489, only 57 students were women. A combined race and gender breakdown is not listed by Burrows, Kerr and Matthews (1961); figures for race and ethnicity are provided without regard to gender.

The staffing composition is revealed in a complete listing of staff members for the period 1916 to 1959 in the fore-mentioned source. The list consists of the names of individuals who were employed as members of the teaching staff Sex maybe confidently inferred from the list as at the time it was customary to list the title as either Miss or Mrs for women or if their titles were either Dr. or Professor, the first name of the woman was included. Of a total teaching staff of 135, 33 were women. There is evidence that at least one woman was employed right from the birth of the institution. Race is far more difficult to infer by merely examining names. Many black people, especially coloureds, have names of English or European origin. Nonetheless, among the list there are African and Indian last names. None of the women have such last names. Given the broader socio-political context at the time as

well as the particular configuration of higher education access, it was likely that most of the women teaching staff (if not all) at Fort Hare were white.

From this sketch of women's participation in the early life of these two institutions, it is clear that there were no legislative barriers or institutional rules that barred women, in particular white women, as both students and academics,. However, gender discrimination in all other spheres of society -economic, legal and social- would have severely constrained women's access to education. Beyond the structural-systemic discrimination, social prejudices would also have limited women's activities. Examples of such prejudices appear in documentation of the histories of universities such as Fort Hare and Cape Town. Agnes Ellen Thomson, the first woman BA graduate in South Africa, reportedly often told the story of how parents of pupils at the school where she taught, drew up a petition asking the headmaster to forbid her from riding her bicycle to school because she displayed her ankles as she cycled (Simpson, 1987). Another indication of the attitude that prevailed at the time was the addition of the phrase "the South African pearls" to the South African College song the year that women were admitted for the first time. Even though women were granted access, they were regarded as adornment. The boy student was by all accounts of those early to middle years of the SAC history, viewed as the exemplar.

With the development, implementation and subsequent entrenchment of apartheid legislation, all attention became focused on race discrimination. In the reports of the period from 1959 onwards gender discrimination was not given any consideration. The first signs of some concern about gender bias in education emerged in the late 1980s when debates about education policy in a post-apartheid South Africa began. Within the organisations and groupings that sought to abolish apartheid education, women's sub-groups developed in an attempt to ensure that gender equality would become a core component of the task of reconstructing education in a post apartheid society. The insertion of a gender analysis in these debates led to publication of reports such as those commissioned by the Union of Staff Democratic Associations (Peacock, 1993) and the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (Truscott, 1994). At the outset both these reports comment on the lack of data on gender at the time. Peacock (1993) noted that the majority of universities were unable to provide even the most basic data on gender and staffing. Truscott (1994) reported that in

trying to develop policy options to achieve gender equality, it soon became clear that the task would be limited by the paucity of empirical research and exploration of gender in education in South Africa. Nonetheless, both these reports managed to assemble sufficient statistical data to give a picture of the status of women in South African universities just prior to the collapse of apartheid policy.

Using data from 17 universities Peacock (1993) reported that the average percentage of women employed as teaching and research staff in 1989 was 27.5%. Women were severely under-represented in senior academic positions and decision-making structures. Women comprised 8.3% of the professoriate as a whole (professors and associate professors), but only 5.1% of full professorships (the highest academic rank). At the lowest end of the academic hierarchy, women were in the majority, constituting 61.2% of all junior lecturer positions. Information on the racial composition of staff was presented without regard to gender. For the HWUs, 96.5% of the academic staff in 1990 was white. White academics were also the majority group in the HBUs. Data from five of the HBUs reflected that whites constituted 63.5% of their academic staff. Since the focus of the Peacock report was employment patterns, data on student enrolment was not included. On the other hand, Truscott's (1994) report did include some data on the enrolment of female students but no comparable data for staff. In 1988 females comprised 44.8% of the total student enrolment for 18 universities. In trying to investigate gender and race in combination, Truscott (1994) gathered data that showed that black females comprised 20.7% of the 1990 total enrolment for these universities.

By 1992 when the end to the reign of the apartheid government was in sight, white academics were still the dominant group by far as they comprised 87% of all teaching and research staff employed by universities (Budlender & Sutherland, 1995). Again, the figures reported by Budlender and Sutherland (1995) did not aggregate race and gender. In terms of gender, they report that in 1992 women comprised 29.8% of the academic and research staff of universities. Unfortunately, conclusions about patterns of change over time cannot be made, as each of the reports referred to use data based on different groupings of universities — only Budlender and Sutherland (1995) report figures for all 21 universities with the exception of their figures for academic rank and gender which were only based on

15 universities. According to these figures, women constituted only 9.2% of the professoriate in these 15 universities, with the percentage dropping to 6% for full professors only. They reported that the majority of universities had under five women professors with one university not having any women at that level.

Overall, the above sketch of the participation of women in South African universities gleaned from the few available sources, shows indisputable evidence of gender discrimination but the impact thereof on women was filtered through a rigid system of race discrimination such that white women would have been negatively affected, but black women would have been subjected to the combined negative impact of both gender and race discrimination. At the formal demise of apartheid in 1994, the South African university system was deeply divided along racial lines with gender disparities criss-crossing these divisions.

A distinguishing feature of the democratically-elected government was that it not only committed itself to non-racism but also to non-sexism. This commitment became enshrined in the Constitution adopted in May 1996. Not only did the Constitution prohibit discrimination, it also made provision for special measures to promote the achievement of equality. By the time that this study was conducted, the university system as a whole was paying attention to the development of policies and strategies to achieve race and gender equality. The next section of this chapter outlines the gender profile of the universities at the time of the study.

## 2.4. Participation of Women — A Current Perspective

### 2.4.1. Students

At the time of this study, figures obtained from the Department of Education showed that women comprised 53% of the total headcount of enrolled students at South African universities. The Department of Education Annual Report 1996 presented the following breakdown according to institution and gender.

**Table 1:**  
Universities - Headcount of enrolled students according to institution and gender, 1996

INSTITUTION	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
<b>ALL INSTITUTIONS</b>	382 348	178 252	204 096
University of Cape Town	15 407	8 754	6 653
Univ. of Durban Westville	10 436	4 837	5 599
University of Fort Hare	5 606	2 520	3 086
Medical Univ. of South Africa	3 413	2 013	1 400
University of Natal	15 412	7 927	7 485
University of the North	16 914	7 740	9 174
Univ. of the Free State	9 383	4 716	4 667
University of Port Elizabeth	5 248	2 509	2 739
Potchefstroom Univ. for CHE	10 459	5 111	5 348
University of Pretoria	24 849	12 474	12 375
Rand Afrikaans University	21 227	8 880	12 347
Rhodes University	4 812	2 205	2 607
University of South Africa	135 079	61 171	73 908
University of Stellenbosch	15 009	8 245	6 764
University of the Western Cape	13 568	6 211	7 357
Univ. of the Witwatersrand	17 057	9 657	7 400
University of Zululand	7 054	2 709	4 345
Vista University	30 946	11 551	19 395
University of Transkei	7 287	2 979	4 308
University of the North West	5 876	2 351	3 525
University of Venda	7 306	3 692	3 614

On the surface, the 53% (n = 204 096) women at universities as shown in Table 1 may seem laudable, but on closer investigation these total figures are shown to mask several

areas of gender inequalities. Firstly, there are disparities among institutions. Universities that are noted for high rates of research output and a relatively high number of highly rated scientists, such as UCT and WITS, have more men than women as students. Women are in the majority at nearly all the historically black universities and also at UNISA, a distance learning institution.

Survey data reported by de la Rey and Quinlan (1997) although based on only nine universities and seven technikons, provides a more nuanced picture. Student enrolment at universities was categorised in terms of eight fields of study. Women constituted the majority in the fields of education, arts and social sciences and medicine. It must be noted however, that the category medicine included all health sciences as well as nursing. Women comprised half the total number of business students but were in the minority in sciences, law, architecture and environmental design and engineering. The gender gap was by far the greatest in engineering and engineering technology where women comprised only 14% of the total. Once again, there were disparities among the universities, with the HWUs in many instances showing a relatively lower proportion of women. The overall trends show that certain fields of study such as the natural sciences remain male-dominated whereas there is a concentration of women in other fields like education. Furthermore, there is a thinning out process from undergraduate to postgraduate levels, which becomes most marked at doctoral level.

### 2.4.2. Staff

Table 2 lists the number of permanent staff by university and gender as published in the Department of Education Annual Report 1996. Women comprise 42% (n = 15 463) of the total number of permanent staff at universities, an under-representation relative to the total population of an estimated 54% women.

**Table 2:**  
Universities — Number of personnel with permanent appointments according to institution and gender, 1996

INSTITUTION	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
<b>ALL INSTITUTIONS</b>	36 392	20 929	15 463
University of Cape Town	2 553	1 386	1 167
Univ. of Durban Westville	1 165	820	345
University of Fort Hare	1 602	991	611
Medical Univ. of South Africa	1 215	674	541
University of Natal	2 647	1 589	1 058
University of the North	2 003	1 187	816
Univ. of the Free State	1 822	1 049	773
University of Port Elizabeth	756	437	319
Potchefstroom Univ. for CHE	1 634	883	751
University of Pretoria	3 767	2 261	1 506
Rand Afrikaans University	897	563	334
Rhodes University	1 053	590	463
University of South Africa	3 028	1 613	1 415
University of Stellenbosch	2 434	1 502	932
University of the Western Cape	1 396	816	580
Univ. of the Witwatersrand	3 370	1 832	1 538
University of Zululand	957	612	345
Vista University	1 358	637	721
University of Transkei	1 076	562	514
University of the North West	988	533	455
University of Venda	671	392	279

The proportion of women varies between 30 and 48% of the total number of permanent staff at universities. Vista is the exception since it is the only university with more women than men on the permanent staff; women constitute 53% of the total. As is the case with student enrolment, universities that are noted for high rates of research output and a

relatively high number of highly rated scientists, such as UCT and WITS, have more men than women as academic staff.

Using total figures without reference to category (academic, administrative), rank and academic discipline can obscure a range of disparities. Data for the year ending December 1995 presented in Table 3 provides information on gender and rank of permanent academic staff at 15 universities.

**Table 3:**  
**SAPSE (South Africa Post-Secondary Education) data for 15 universities**  
**as at December 1995**

<b>RANK</b>	<b>MALES</b>	<b>FEMALES</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
PROFESSOR	1645 (92%)	138 (8%)	1783 (100%)
ASSOCIATE PROF	779 (82%)	170 (18%)	949 (100%)
SENIOR LECTURER	1738 (71%)	717 (29%)	2455 (100%)
LECTURER	1399 (49%)	1464 (51%)	2863 (100%)
JUNIOR LECTURER	185 (39%)	285 (61%)	470 (100%)
BELOW UNDESIGNATED	19 (61%)	12 (39%)	31 (100%)
UNDESIGNATED	83 (52%)	76 (48%)	159 (100%)
TOTAL	5848 (67%)	2862 (33%)	8710 (100%)

Women comprised 33% of the total percentage of permanent academic staff at these 15 institutions. Noteworthy is the dramatic decrease in percentage as the rank increases in status: from lecturer (women = 51%) to professor (women = 8%). Figures on the highest levels of executive management were easily obtainable at the time — there were two women vice-chancellors across all 21 universities.

## 2.5. Overview

The central purpose of this chapter was to situate the topic of this study by describing the South African higher education system. Particular attention was given to the participation of women in universities as this is the topic under investigation. By reviewing the historical development of South African universities, the chapter sought to show that gender cannot be viewed in isolation from the legacy of race discrimination that has left its mark in the configuration of the university system. Although there have been some increases in the participation of women and blacks, there is still a majority of white men at the upper levels of academia and in certain fields of study. The task of this chapter was however, hampered by the paucity of documentation on gender discrimination in higher education. Although in recent years there has been an increasing focus on gender, much research is still needed. This study seeks to contribute to knowledge on gender and higher education in South Africa.

### **3. WOMEN AND ACADEMIA - A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Having surveyed the status of women in South African universities, this chapter begins with a brief review of the position of women in universities from an international, comparative perspective. Statistics on the position of women academics in a number of countries are presented to assess the South African context in relation to scenarios for academic women across the world. Thereafter, the chapter reviews the research literature on women and academia, drawing on related research domains where it is deemed relevant.

#### **3.1. Women in Universities — An International Comparison**

Lie and O'Leary (1990) have compared the status of women in universities across nine countries — India, Israel, Jordan, Norway, Germany, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, the United States and Turkey. Comparisons of the history of the admission of women students in universities across different countries proved to be rather complex. Firstly, although a simple comparison of the dates when women were first admitted was done, there was great variation in the dates when universities were first established in the different countries. For example, in the case of Jordan 1964 is denoted as the year that Jordan University was established whereas in European countries universities are centuries old. Secondly, within a national context the admission rules frequently varied from university to university. An example is the US - Lie and O'Leary (1990) note that the admission of women began in 1833 with the establishment of Oberlin College but this was certainly not applicable to all universities in the country at the time.

Notwithstanding the complexities of doing an accurate national comparison, Lie and O'Leary (1990) concluded from their historical overview that for centuries women have struggled to gain access to universities, both as students and as scholars.

In the course of the hundred years or more that women have been admitted into universities, there has been a rapid growth in the percentage of women students such that

in the US about half of all undergraduate students are women. In the nine countries surveyed by Lie and O'Leary (1990) the percentages of undergraduate women students in the mid-1980s varied between 29% in India and 51% in the US. Although there has been overall growth in the total number of women students, in each country there is a pattern of decreasing percentages as the level of study moves upward from undergraduate to doctoral levels. In a more recent publication, El-Khawas (1997) reported that in the US women comprise only one-third of doctoral students as a group. Figures for women students in Finland (Academy of Finland, 1998) and New Zealand (Morris-Mathews, 1993 in Brooks, 1997) show a similar pattern. The Finnish report noted a steady growth in the proportion of women graduates but twice as many men compared to women in postdoctoral programmes. Furthermore, it is reported that women and men continue to be concentrated in different subjects. Similarly, in New Zealand there was growth in the percentage of women students from 31% in 1970 to 55% in 1990. Again, a clustering of women in certain subjects was noted, with most women enrolled in social sciences, arts and humanities subjects.

In general, the overall trends for women students in South Africa as outlined in the previous chapter, seem to resonate with trends reported in several countries across the world. These trends maybe summarised as:

- rapid growth in the total number of women students,
- a thinning out from undergraduate to postgraduate levels with the sharpest decrease at doctoral level,
- a gender bias in fields of study such that men still constitute the larger percentage of students in the natural sciences and engineering.

Internationally the percentage of women academics has grown at a slower rate than for women students. Again, compiling exact comparisons across countries is a complex task because of the differing circumstances in each country. One of the differences is the variation in staff categories and definitions of categories. The professoriate as a category is an example — in some countries there are three ranks within this category, assistant professor, associate professor and professor. Other countries apply a different ranking

system that includes only two ranks within the professoriate. Another example is the title lecturer. It does not have the same definition in countries like New Zealand as it does in the US, for example. Furthermore, researchers' attempts at data collection have often been hindered by the reluctance of universities to reveal the statistics, issues of institutional confidentiality applicable in some countries and that keeping records of the gender breakdown of academic staff is a recent development. In some cases it is still not done.

Bearing in mind these variations, Lie and O'Leary (1990) concluded that in the nine countries they surveyed women lagged significantly behind their male counterparts in access to academic positions. Moreover, those that were academics did not fare well in terms of promotion to positions of prestige and power. The overall trend irrespective of the country was the higher the position in the academic hierarchy, the fewer the women represented there. Across the various countries, the total percentage of women academics, ranged from 12.5% (Israel in 1983) to 26.9% (USA in 1982/3). Interestingly, of all the nine countries Turkey, a Muslim country, had the highest percentage of women at the rank of full professor.

More recent figures show some improvement. According to El-Khawas (1997) just over a decade later the figures for the US show that women comprise slightly more than one-third of all full-time academic staff. Brown (1997) reported that in Britain in the period from the early 1980s to the early 1990s there has been progress, but it has been slow. The overall percentage of women professors increased from 3 to 7.3%. A pattern of progress with slow upward movement at the professor level has also been observed in New Zealand. Between 1980 and 1991 the percentage of women employed as full-time academic staff increased from 11.6% to 21.6% but the proportion of women professors only shifted from 2.3% to 3.8% (Brooks, 1997). In Australia women comprise about one third of all academic appointments and of these about 18% are at senior lecturer level and above, an improvement from the 9% in 1986 (Eggins, 1997). The report by the Academy of Finland (1998) shows progress in the appointment of women but the degree of progress varies with the status of the position. Women comprised 57% of the full-time fee-paid teaching staff, one third of persons in research, 22% of the associate professors

and 13 % of professors. Because turnover among professors is generally slow, this report paid specific attention to new appointments in the period 1992-1996. During this time only 17 percent of all new professors were women. In sum, examination of the figures from country to country reveals an overall similarity in the status of women academics — some increase in the total numbers over the last decade or so, but the higher the hierarchical level, status and power, the fewer the women.

In recent years a number of studies have been undertaken to investigate the inequalities between men and women academics. The figures clearly show that in spite of some changes, gender equality has not been achieved. The statistics state the outcomes, but only by doing research into the processes behind these inequalities can we gain insight into how and why this discrimination happens (Oakley, 1997). The rest of this chapter reviews the research that has been conducted in an attempt to illuminate the processes influencing women's participation and well being in higher education.

### **3.2. Research on Women Academics**

The systemic, institutional, intellectual and psychological processes that may impact on women's capacities to undertake academic careers only gained research attention in the last two decades. Since then, however, there has been a growing interest in the experiences of women academics, the subject of this study. The literature covers a wide range of processes, policies, structural and institutional arrangements that affect the possibilities for women to enter universities and to succeed at every level. El-Khawas (1997) has identified three overlapping foci in the evolution of the debate on women in higher education: first, a focus on the individual and how women's preparation, training and attitudes maybe strengthened; second, an understanding of the institutional and organisational barriers, and third, a focus on the broad influences of culture and society. Although the subjective, inner world of women academics constitutes a pivotal focus in the following review, organisational, policy and other systemic issues are covered as these are not separate domains, instead they are interconnected. However, given the breadth of the literature, the following review has been organised into subsections according to issues pertinent to the current task.

### **3.2.1. The subjective, inner world**

One of the earliest in-depth studies on the experiences of women in academe was undertaken in the US by Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) who interviewed 37 women categorised as off the normal career track and 25 tenured women academics. The general areas of information covered in each interview included: the formation of ambition to pursue an academic career, familial attitudes towards professional career goals, graduate school experience, professional socialisation, personal life in relation to professional life and issues concerning the support of other women. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed similarities across disciplines, ages, marital status and class origins which overall contributed to a portrayal of professional marginality and exclusion from the centres of professional authority. Instead of finding clear lines of demarcation between tenured and the category comprising part-time, non-tenured academic women, Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) surprisingly reported a continuum of outsidership.

A central theme emerging from their study revolved around the difficulties academic women faced in dealing with the co-existence of two sets of social norms about the role of women; on the one hand the old norms which privilege the significance of marriage and family in the lives of women continue, but on the other hand, there are new emerging norms which endorse equality of opportunity. While the authors acknowledged that these difficulties are probably faced by all professional women, they argued that it is especially salient in the lives of academic women because academia constitutes the domain most directly marked by intellectual power and there is a long tradition in western history which has seen womanhood and intellectual power as antithetical. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) contended that for women, entry into academia marked a process of transformation of self that is typified by an internal battle not to be limited by traditional gender expectations. This internal strife, they argued, manifested in the accounts of the interviewees: common across all the accounts was a sense of tentativeness about their careers typically expressed as a period of veering and doubt, hesitation, often accompanied by shifts in direction and false starts.

This psychological conflict is likely to produce negative consequences for the careers of academic women, according to Aisenberg and Harrington. They found that the early period

of hesitation is generally viewed as a lack of commitment when it comes to considerations of appointment and promotion. Also, because of the sense of internal strife these women experience, they usually show no clear career strategy. Furthermore, it seemed to result in an obscurity of the boundary between work and self evidenced by an extremity of reaction when work is rejected. Problems in developing a voice of authority were also evident in the interview transcripts: silence, self doubt, a sense of being inadequate and being an impostor permeated these accounts.

Many of the trends reported by Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) were confirmed in the more recently published work of Nicolson (1996) which focused extensively, although not exclusively, on academic women. Nicolson examined the psychological dimensions of power in work organisations from the perspective of senior, middle ranking and aspirant professional women. She too found that a central dilemma for these women concerns the question of how to negotiate and give meaning to their sense of femininity and gender identity in a world of power and intellect that views ambition and career success in women as inimical to femininity. Again, it was found that women in such positions experience difficulties in managing psychological boundaries between self, social context and gendered identity.

Nicolson (1996) proposed that for women there are three main stages of socialisation into patriarchal organisational culture: firstly, shock on entry, secondly, anger and/or protest that may either result in a decision to leave or the development of a coping strategy and thirdly, for those who remain, the internalisation of organisational values. This latter group of women, says Nicolson, become the future Queen Bees, a term used to describe women who because of gender discrimination, have to succeed by distancing themselves both from men and other women. Consequently, they often end up seeing themselves as exceptions to the rules. Furthermore, it has been found that most women in senior positions eschew feminist ideology (Nicolson, 1996), in particular at the earlier stages of their careers. As a result of all these factors, they often do not enjoy gender loyalty nor experience the support of other women.

Hawkins and Schultz explored this issue in an earlier publication. In a chapter published in

the edited book by Lie and O'Leary (1990), these researchers compared the findings of studies on women academics in West Germany and the Netherlands. They reported that in both countries women in universities agreed that discrimination exists but they denied that they had been victims. West German women academics who were interviewed reportedly used four distinct strategies for reconstructing their experiences. Firstly, there were those who had long histories of discrimination, the "suffering critics". Secondly, there were the women described as self-assured and strategy-conscious. A third group were described as assimilated and achievement-oriented and finally, there was a group of women who actively engaged in activities to change their work environment. From the analysis of the interviews, it was concluded that women cope by adopting cultural reconstructive strategies that are consistent with their personal experiences as well as with the socio-historical context in which these experiences occurred. This argument is echoed in the work of Apfelbaum (1993) who contended that women's accounts of their career development and of their life stories can only make sense if one considers them not only in psychological terms but also in relation to the social context of gender relations.

Although the sample in Apfelbaum's study (1993) comprised mainly political leaders rather than academics, there are some remarkable parallels. Apfelbaum (1993) collected narratives from 30 French and 20 Norwegian women leaders who held highly visible and responsible positions, mostly in politics. Analogous to Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) continuum of outsidership, Apfelbaum noted that a sense of double marginality as an outsider is an inherent part of women's identity when they are in public leadership positions. She explained that their exceptional achievements alienate them from other women while, simultaneously they are seen as different from their male colleagues. Unlike Aisenberg and Harrington (1988), but in a similar vein to Hawkins and Schultz (1990), Apfelbaum extended the analysis to include the specific question of how the narratives, in spite of similarities in social relations of gender across cultures, are rooted in the specificities of a cultural location. Key differences emerged in the comparative analysis of the Norwegian and French narratives. A central difference concerned the connection or lack thereof to feminist movements. Apfelbaum reported that regardless of their party affiliation, Norwegian leaders consistently paid tribute to feminism whereas for the French leaders if they did mention feminism, it was usually in a negative sense, very often to distance

themselves from it. Norwegian women also differed in their reliance on support from other women unlike the French who tended to act solo, in their greater overall sense of solidarity and in their greater willingness to recognise and act on sexism. Apfelbaum linked these dissimilarities to differences between the two countries in the history of women's movements and the responses of government and political parties to claims for equal representation.

Thus it is evident that the identification of the barriers faced by women academics cannot be seen in isolation from the broader context of gender relations. Social institutions and structures such as marriage, the household and the family have all been found to have an impact on the capacity of women to succeed in higher education. But before this area of the literature is reviewed, some consideration will be given to an examination of how the very understanding of the concept of a career may be part of the problem for women academics.

### **3.2.2. The concept of career, academic careers and gender**

Career development as an area of research has in the past tended to ignore gender as an analytic category. However, with the increasing participation of women in the paid labour force, gender as factor in career development and success became a research issue such that by the early eighties Osipow (1983) noted that there was general agreement within this field that gender affects career trajectories. There has since been acknowledgement that career is a gendered concept and that some men's careers are used as the norm (Evetts, 1994). The standard model of career is one of continuous service with regular and steady promotion to positions of greater responsibility. Achievement is typically assessed in terms of movements up an organisational hierarchy (Evetts, 1994).

Heward (1996), in answer to the question what is the problem with women's careers in higher education, turned to a critical examination of the concept of career. She proposed that the notion of career has been constructed around men and masculinities. By limiting the meaning of career to paid work, it implies specific assumptions about gender, family and the domestic sphere. The split of paid work and family responsibilities into different spheres has had gender specific consequences. Due to childbearing and childrearing, women are not likely to follow the anticipated pattern of uninterrupted service that

contributes to promotion. Academic careers follow a linear, hierarchical model which has been shown to be constructed in ways that privilege men and masculinities.

Becher (1989)'s work on academic careers has cast light upon the hierarchical organisation of universities and how this shapes career development. He analysed the academic career by organising it into stages: early, middle and late career stages with differing issues at each stage. In the early part of the academic career, according to Becher (1989) the goals are to establish a professional reputation and obtain a tenured appointment (context-specific). In the mid-career, he saw the central challenge as one where the academic has to decide whether or not to continue with the same specialism. The late career, he saw as a time of synthesis when an active research career maybe relinquished for a sizeable administrative component. Based on his work Becher (1989) contended that the most productive period is between ages 30 and 39. In a similar vein, Baldwin (1990) also proposed that the academic career can be organised into a series of loosely ordered stages which he saw as follows: career entry, early career, midcareer and late career. In this model factors such as gender, race and ethnicity are viewed simply as sources of variation but the basic sequence remains.

The findings of a growing body of research on women in academe suggest that women may have different career trajectories compared to men. Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) findings, for example, support such a gender difference. Interestingly, in Becher's work gender only appeared as an addendum, which he acknowledged was included only in response to readers' comments on the draft. An alternative perspective on the academic career was used by Weiland (1995) in a life history study on the career of a professor in the US. He examined how an academic career may be a form of narrative understanding in which self images are given form over time in a context marked by the tenure system, academic ranks, records of activities and achievements and changes in this system over time. Heward 's (1996) work has drawn attention to how the arrangement and mechanisms of this context privileges men and masculinities and disadvantages women and femininities. In interviews with sixteen professors, eight men and eight women, the importance of self-confidence to success was brought to the fore. Women were found to be in a double bind insofar as behaviours such as assertiveness, self-confidence and self-advertisement were concerned. These behaviours which were seen to be crucial to success,

are typically praised in men, but are viewed as unfeminine for women. Studies such as this one have shown that values seen as desirable for men have become institutionalised in many university settings. Similarly, the findings of Kettle's (1996) study on the experiences of women academics in English universities indicated that the acceptance and currency 'of particular values and beliefs that are associated with masculinity makes it difficult for women to succeed. Thus the normative academic career is based on values, beliefs and expectations that favour men. Although gender bias in the construction of the concept of career is not limited to the academic environment, it takes a particular form in the organisational culture of universities.

King (1994) suggested that an obvious way of approaching the issue of women's under-representation in academia is to examine the ways in which scientific careers are made. In doing so he drew on the work of Cole (1987) who presented a model of career building in academic science which proposed that the momentum of an individual's career is sustained by building up a reputation. According to this model the processes of reputation and career building are affected by feedback mechanisms which ensure that past research performance brings fresh rewards that promote even further activity that enhances greater reputation. Although reputation is closely linked to research performance, it is also affected by other factors such as seniority and length of service. King's analysis of data on how women's academic careers lag behind those of men, suggests that women find it more difficult to build personal reputations on the basis of their research achievements. Using a case study, King draws attention to how the process of making a reputation involves more than publishing papers and then waiting to be rewarded. He points out that reputations are made through informal networks that involve colleagues, friends, critics and competitors. Overall, he proposes that it works like a narrative, story-telling process through which the characters of a science are created. Thus reputations are not simple translations of research productivity but they are cultural constructs. In analysing the case of Rosalind Franklin who played a key role in the discovery of the structure of DNA but was not given the recognition that her work merited, King reached the conclusion that women find it more difficult to turn research productivity into reputational capital.

Similarly, after examining data on gender differences in reputational standing, Davis and

Astir (1990) concluded that various gender-specific personal obligations and social responsibilities negatively affect the professional lives of women up to the point of blocking them from positions of high status. Among these gender specific social responsibilities, marriage and having children have been identified as key factors. The research literature published during the last decade or more, indicates that even though career goals have assumed more significance in the lives of women as their participation in all sectors of the paid labour force has increased, women's responsibilities in the family and household domain have not diminished concomitantly. These latter responsibilities have been shown to have a considerable impact on the careers of women. In a recent review of the literature on women and career development Phillips and Imhoff (1997) concluded that the increasing importance of work goals in the lives of women together with the continued importance of family and home roles, has presented women with additional challenges in career planning compared to men. The literature on marriage, family and careers has grown such that it is not feasible to offer a comprehensive review here. Instead, a selective review is presented based on the relevance of the research to the current topic.

### **3.2.3. Marriage, family and academic careers**

Studies on women, careers and family have been largely framed by the question of whether having a career as well as being married with children is beneficial or harmful to the well-being of women. (Kaltreider, 1997). Two main hypotheses, role conflict versus role accumulation, have been tested. The role conflict or scarcity hypothesis assumes that because human energy is limited, women who assume the multiple, and perhaps incompatible, roles of being a professional, wife and mother will experience strain and conflict. The second hypothesis, also known as the enhancement hypothesis, suggests that any tensions that may emerge in dealing with the work-family interface are likely to be outweighed by the benefits of multiple roles such as improved status and self-esteem. Research evidence on these hypotheses has been contradictory showing some support for each. Baruch and Barnett (1986) found that neither of the two gives an adequate explanation of women's experiences. In their study of women's experiences in the roles of paid worker, wife and mother, it was found that women who occupy the same roles might experience the quality of each role differently. Furthermore, it seemed that it was the quality of the experience rather than the number of roles occupied that had a greater impact

on well being.

Later studies such as the work of Crosby (1991) who conducted interviews with women and men found that for both sexes multiple role involvement may lead to enhanced satisfaction but may also lead to greater stress and tiredness. According to Alejano-Steele (1997) professional women often describe their experiences in terms of a balancing act comprised of career, relationships and family. This challenge to find a balance has also been described as juggling, a term used in the title of the book by Crosby (1991). Whether women find a balance or not has been shown to be influenced by several factors.

Kaltreider (1997) reviewed how the tensions are played out differently as issues of psychological development and career development change across the life cycle of women. She pointed out that at the time of starting off their careers, the majority of young women in the US reportedly plan to have a career, many and have two or three children. By mid-career, women are typically dealing with increased professional demands and at the same time they are facing the reality of the critical period for reproduction. At this point, there may be a divergence in work and family paths. In support of her argument, Kaltreider (1997) cited evidence that women are marrying at a relatively later age, that many more marriages end in divorce and more women remain single. She further argued that the emotional consequences of these forced choices women make are strongly influenced by earlier psychological experiences in the family, especially with regard to the mother. This issue was explored in a study by Harris (1995) who interviewed 40 successful career women in their mid-thirties. Each of them were found to be experiencing an emotional paradox in relation to their mothers - although each woman was vociferous in not wanting to be like her mother, at the same time she deeply identified with her. Harris argued that this paradox produced ambivalent consequences; a troublesome inner conflict but it also explained their tremendous drive to succeed. Kaltreider noted that professional women are generally well-organised high-achievers, so when the demands of work and home increase, they are likely simply to work harder. Thus the emergence of the superwoman syndrome as explored in the work of Apter (1993).

The superwoman has been described as the woman who does everything she can to meet

the demands of work, relationship and family. Because she does everything, the man in the relationship does not have to change. But in order to achieve this superwoman-type status, the woman typically neglects her own needs and emotions. By mid-life however, there is a characteristic shift in perspective from seeing infinite possibilities to an appreciation of the finiteness of life. At this time, according to Kaltreider, the stressful era of young children and high career demand is over. Gender roles, too, may become more fluid with women becoming more expressive and assertive about their own needs and men becoming more affiliative and tolerant. At some point, however, women consider retirement with many opting for early retirement. Kaltreider's conclusion is that ultimately there is an awareness of the benefits of juggling multiple roles.

The unfolding of tensions between career, relationship and family in the lives of women academics compared to men academics surfaced in a study by Karp (1985). During in-depth interviews, 47 women (n=24) and men academics (n=23) in their fifties traced their career paths. Karp observed that most of the men could tell their stories in a straightforward linear way and while they might have mentioned that they married and had children at particular points, they rarely talked further about their family lives without prompting. Unlike the men, the women's stories were tied to the stories of others, typically their husbands and their children. According to Karp, these women in their fifties had been socialised to think that careers were secondary to marriage and family. Few had gone to graduate school immediately after college and nearly all had become housewives. They also reported fragmented educational and career patterns as a result of movements in the careers of their husbands. For many women in the sample, influenced by the women's movement, the mid to late thirties marked a time of getting back into the pursuit of a career. For some this led to divorce.

These differences in the career paths of the men and women in Karp's study meant that by the time that they were in their fifties they were in different places in their career development. The men who had followed uninterrupted, linear careers had a clear sense of their achievements and were showing indications of an exiting consciousness, thinking about leaving their mark. For the women who had only been in academia for a decade or so, making their mark was still an issue. Thus in his analysis Karp made a distinction

between chronological age and professional age. He also noted that women made a distinction between their age peers and their professional peers. The women perceived their same-aged male colleagues as much older than themselves and less productive. Consequently, Karp concluded that ageing is a socially constructed phenomenon. The subjective meanings attached to chronological age in the context of career development are influenced by many factors, among these gender being significant. Overall his study revealed that there are differences in the developmental and career tasks faced by women and men academics.

Alejano-Steele (1997) posited that academia fulfils the criteria for front-loaded professions. This was a term coined by Denmark (1992) to describe those careers that require large investments of time and energy during the early stages. Alejano-Steele (1997) pointed out that professional education and training in fields like law and medicine consume large amounts of time so that by the time careers are being established, decisions about relationships and family also have to be made. She noted that there are two major sequencing patterns: establishment of career followed by family, or establishment of family followed by career. Applied to academic women in the US, Alejano-Steele suggested that there might be a question of whether to attain tenure before having the first child or to delay childbearing into the mid-to late thirties. She contended that this decision has a great impact on the life-course of a woman. Research has indeed indicated that there is a predominant belief that childbearing and childrearing slow down the career development of women. For example, in a study by Levinson, Tolle and Lewis (1989) 67% of full-time academic women in departments of medicine reported that they believed that their careers had been adversely affected by childbearing.

Although several studies in the US and in European countries have found that women academics are less productive than men (Cole, 1987; Cole & Zuckerman, 1987; and Franklin, 1988), it has also been found that married women and women with children publish as much or more on average than single women and women who do not have children (Lie, 1990). These findings then apparently contradict the belief that childbearing has a negative impact on women's academic careers. In a similar vein, the findings of studies that have attempted to test the effects of marriage on women's

research productivity have also not shown a negative impact. After reviewing the research on the influence of gender on productivity, Davis and Astin (1990) noted that the results were inconclusive.

To unravel what she termed "the productivity puzzle" (p.109), Lie (1990) conducted secondary analysis of two investigations in Norway: a national survey of academics' participation in university life (Kyvik, 1988; 1990) and an investigation of career and family role compatibility of women university graduates with advanced degrees. Similarly, Davis and Astin (1990) tried to unravel the complexities of women and productivity in academe by using both primary data and data from two surveys conducted by themselves at an earlier time (Davis & Astin, 1987; Astin & Davis, 1985). Interestingly, in both cases an examination of gender in relation to life-course factors was seen as the route to solving the so-called productivity puzzle.

The secondary analysis conducted by Lie (1990) revealed that the age of the children is a critical factor in understanding the impact of motherhood on women's productivity. Women with at least one child under 10 years old produced 47 per cent fewer article equivalents than their male colleagues in a similar situation. The difference decreased to 14 per cent among women and men with children older than 10 and with even older children, there were no gender differences. Researchers have also tried to unravel the puzzle with regard to the effects of marriage on the productivity of women academics. After reviewing the findings of a number of studies, Davis and Astin (1990) concluded that the influence of marriage in explaining gender differences in productivity appeared to be negligible. A possible explanation for this 'puzzling' finding is that many academic women marry academic men (Astin, 1969). Through their husbands these women are likely to gain access to collegial networks. Similarly, Hakim (1997) reported that for women scientists marriage to another scientist facilitates access to professional networks. Although children's age and marriage to another academic may explain the so-called productivity puzzle, Davis and Astin (1990) and Lie (1990) have suggested that the explanation is far more complex. These authors have argued that marriage and children are only two factors among many that collectively contribute to a cumulative disadvantage for women. Using a life-course perspective, they have drawn attention to

how gender intersects with a number of variables, in addition to motherhood and marriage, to contribute to women's disadvantage. Among these other factors are age and organisational climate.

#### **3.2.4. Age and the life-course**

Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) have explained the life course perspective in terms of two sets of time lines: historical and socio-biological. The historical refers to the societal influences applicable in a particular time period such as expectations about employment and role responsibilities. Socio-biological includes the timing and sequencing of life events such as schooling, entry into the labour market, having children and retiring. According to this perspective, in order to understand any part of a life, the whole life course, the context and how these change over time need to be examined.

A life course perspective was used in a study which asked ninety women employed by Scandinavian universities in tenure positions to record their work history and major life events (Lie, 1990). The findings of this study revealed that women of different age groups had different life experiences due to differing ideological and contextual influences. For the analysis the sample was divided into three age groups: 50+, 40+ and 30+. The oldest group typified what was termed an 'in-out' strategy; the majority had had disrupted careers. A 'part-time' strategy seemed to be typical of the second or middle group. Unlike these two older groups, over half of the younger group had worked continuously since graduation. This younger group had seemingly benefited from policy changes which made provision for parental leave. A larger percentage of the younger women had doctorates and they had consequently achieved promotions at an earlier age compared to the older women. The findings of this study as well as the findings of other studies such as Karp's (1985) work discussed above, clearly show that a comprehensive understanding of the status of women in academia must examine gender as a complex analytical category which intersects with many other variables such as age, relationship status and children's age, and all of these interrelated factors are enacted within the limits and boundaries of a particular institutional, social and historical context. The next section turns to an examination of the research that has paid specific attention to policy, institutional and organisational factors.

### 3.3. Policy Issues

Institutional and social policy developments provide the context within which women's careers are shaped (Evetts, 1994). Some policy issues have already been alluded to in this chapter, for example the combination of paid employment and unpaid family and domestic work. This sub-section reviews research on several other policy issues, beginning with equal opportunities policies.

Brown (1997) has defined equal opportunities and practices at the most basic level as a means for avoiding discrimination by ensuring that people are treated equally. As she summarised it, equal opportunities typically involves re-examination of recruitment practices, ensuring that interviews and other selection processes are unbiased and setting job criteria that are justified by the demands of the job, and are not met more easily by men than women. But, as Lie (1990) has pointed out, there have been different ideologies of equality that have led to different types of policies and practices. One of the ideological dilemmas has been identified as the double need to treat people equally but at the same time attempt to compensate for past discrimination by treating people differently (Wilkinson, 1992). Implementation of the latter has largely been through the provision of staff training and development programmes. The impact of these staff development programmes has however, generally been hampered by a fragmented and ad hoc approach which has focused on individualised rather than organisational learning (Brown, 1997). Examples of strategies that have been used include support for individuals to attend conferences and to take study leave. Overall, analyses of equal opportunities measures in employment practices have produced ambivalent results. Brown's examination of the evidence led her to the conclusion that such policies are necessary but are not sufficient to bring about equality for women in higher education.

A related debate has revolved around the question of the effectiveness of legislative measures Aziz (1990) reviewed the Canadian experience which shows that legislation designed to protect women has produced mixed consequences. Her analysis of the Canadian experience indicated that the major proportion of sex discrimination claims were unsuccessful and that even when they were successful, their impact tended to be limited

and short-lived. Institutions frequently responded by taking defensive or retaliatory action. Thus, her pronouncement that "legislation creates a lifeline; but it also puts up barriers" (p.43). Similarly, Pascall (1994) indicated that British equality laws have had little impact on women's careers. In reviewing the law in the United Kingdom and European Economic Community, Shruballs (1994) stated unequivocally that using legal measures to combat discrimination is extremely difficult, largely because the practices which block women's career advancement are often indirect and are not sufficiently overt to be effectively challenged by law. Further factors are that the legislature itself is male-dominated, that interpretation of the law is often narrow and restrictive and that the legal framework typically operates in a way that pitches individuals against institutions with far more resources (Pascall, 1994).

There is general agreement in the literature that contemporary discriminatory practices are not sufficiently direct or overt to be dealt with entirely through legislative and other institutional equal opportunities measures. In countries such as Australia there has been an acknowledgement that legislation and other policy measures have solved the "simple problems of overt discrimination against women" (McMaster & Randell, 1993 p.7). Yet, women in such countries have remained disproportionately at the lower rungs of organisational hierarchies. Therefore, the assumption that the operation of gender stereotypes may be eradicated through formal systems and procedures of equal opportunities policies has been seriously challenged by the insubstantial outcomes (Brown 1997). Research on institutional culture and organisation has illuminated implicit, systemic factors that operate within universities in ways that cannot be sufficiently addressed by equal opportunities as currently formulated.

### **3.4. Institutional Culture**

The institutional culture of universities has been widely described as masculinist (e.g. Oakley, 1981, Blackmore, 1993; Heward, 1996). In a chapter based on interviews with seven women who were high level education administrators, Blackmore (1993) elucidated the meaning of 'masculinist culture'.

Blackmore's (1993) point of departure was the conceptualisation of organisations as contested cultural sites in which certain cultures become hegemonic and other cultures are subordinate and positioned as 'other'. Drawing on Connell's (1987) work on gender and the state, she argued that the discursive practices of contemporary educational management are both constructed and are constructed by particular hegemonic masculinities, while women's interests are marginalised, particularised or ignored. She proposed that recent reforms in Australian educational governance have led to the emergence of a new form of masculinity epitomised in the notion of the 'multi-skilled manager'. By examining the institutionalised discourses, she revealed that the dominant hegemonic masculinity was associated with rampant individualism, competitiveness, authority and technical competence.

Each of the participants she interviewed talked about a dominant masculinist culture which was given form through behavioural norms and images of good management and leadership. The women in the study described symbols, rituals and myths that shaped the organisational culture. These included the use of sporting metaphors to refer to models of leadership, rituals such as meeting at the pub after work, specific types of dress and body image and myths about women and indecisiveness. All participants were reportedly aware of the importance of impression management for their credibility. Fitting a particular stereotypic female image by dressing for the job was seen as critical to establishing credibility. Here was an illustration of how organisations control sexuality, according to Blackmore. She argued that there is an ongoing process of desexualising organisations while simultaneously utilising gender and sexuality to maintain asymmetrical power relations. Thus sexuality is integral to the construction and reproduction of hegemonic masculinities that shape and are shaped by the institutional culture.

Sexual harassment has been widely identified as one of the barriers that create a hostile environment for women. In response many institutions adopted sexual harassment policies. But as is the case with equal opportunities policies, there is a growing awareness of the limitations of dealing with the problem of sexual harassment simply through policy and legislative mechanisms. At the recent "Winds of Change: Women and

the Culture of Universities" Conference in Sydney, Australia (13-17 July 1998), there were at least two presentations on this issue. Bessant (1998) explored the question of how discrimination, violence and harassment are known and the practices used to demonstrate these. In this regard she showed that existing policies fall short because they fail to address many instances of exclusion and violence which she labelled 'opaque violence'. The reason for this term is that many such instances are opaque from the perspective dominant ways of knowing and theorising about violence against women and they are opaque for many who have either not been subjected to such experiences or who have not seen these activities in operation. In another presentation, O'Brien (1998) argued that sexual harassment policies offer a rigid, bureaucratic and legalistic solution to a problem which involves structural and non-structural power dynamics, conflicting sexual and non-sexual desires and a range of class and ethnicity issues. In sum, in almost the same ways that equal opportunities policies have been shown to fall short, the limitations of sexual harassment policies are increasingly being brought to the fore. There is a growing research focus on the complexities and subtleties of organisational culture in higher education.

Several of the studies already reviewed in this chapter specifically named the masculinist culture of universities as a problem for women academics and then attempted to identify its constituent elements and processes. Heward (1996) is an example. She drew attention to how institutions of higher education are hierarchically organised in ways that privilege hegemonic masculinities. Her work examined how the processes of being identified as intellectually able, making a reputation, mentoring and networking tend to provide cumulative advantages to men and disadvantage women. Kettle's (1996) study referred to earlier, also pointed to the masculinist culture of universities and how a series of attitudes and cultural practices act as "invisible but stalwart barriers to the career progression of women academics" (p.63).

### **3.5. Marketisation of Academic Work**

A recently identified problem for women revolves around a global trend towards marketisation of higher education. In several countries, including South Africa, higher

education is being restructured and reorganised as a commodity in the marketplace with students, the private sector and society as a whole viewed as the consumers. At the same time there has been a contraction of finances with concomitant deregulation and moves towards privatisation of some services.

The argument that recent moves towards managing universities using the imperatives of a corporate model with its focus on commodification of knowledge, is likely to exacerbate the disadvantages faced by women was promulgated in several papers presented at the "Wind of Change" conference (Allport, 1998; Brooks, 1998; Halliday, 1998; Kinnear, 1998 and Sachs & Blackmore 1998). Allport (1998) reviewed the implications of an increasingly deregulated higher education sector for women in terms of two tensions: education as public good and education as a market commodity. She argued that the 'public interest' and the 'public benefit' serves women's interests but the market does not, as in a market-oriented system choices are driven by economic circumstances which are unlikely to support policies such as family leave. Furthermore, given the concentration of women in the humanities, education and arts, disciplines most likely to fall victim to financial cuts, Allport contended that women are likely to be most affected by economic restructuring. Indeed, one of the effects of economic restructuring in higher education was investigated some years earlier by Aziz (1990), who highlighted the trend to make short-term academic appointments in UK universities. As she predicted, examination of the statistics showed that the majority of the short-term appointees were recently qualified women.

The tensions and dilemmas confronted by academic women in response to the increased performativity demands of universities were elucidated in a paper by Sachs and Blackmore (1998). They argued that universities are presently operating in a globally competitive environment based on a principle of performativity which makes efficiency the bottom line. In such an environment quantitative output has become the measure of success — how much money is brought in, how many students and how many publications are examples of the indices in use. Sachs and Blackmore conducted interviews with aspirant women leaders in Australian universities to examine their responses to these performativity demands. Drawing from their qualitative data, they contended that as a consequence of these

demands women are positioned in the academy in highly contradictory ways. Instead of an autonomous self, the new demands have created the need for a dual identity which straddles the tensions of a managed self versus self management. Sachs and Blackmore argued that responding to the new exterior demands requires the production of an academic self within the emotional, physical and intellectual constraints set by the new definition of academic work. Universities now require what they termed the "do-everything professor" who has to have a near obsessional commitment to academic work. This scenario, they suggested, has produced new sets of inclusions and exclusions that are unlikely to favour the interests of women in academia.

In an earlier paper, Blackmore (1993) elucidated the complex ways in which the agendas of restructuring are generally inimical to all equal opportunity initiatives. She argued that those who represent the privileged are positioned by their own rational/ethical claims to respond positively to equality-driven initiatives but, at the same time, they seek to conserve their privileges. She identified the shift to market-focussed demands as a strategy used to deal with demands for equality that have emerged in the post-colonial era when the exploitative relationships of the past no longer command legitimacy. The strategy being used, she contended, is to let the market sort out the winners and the losers. This is likely to have a negative impact on the equity-oriented components of universities that are already defined as marginal to the core functions. Blackmore's argument (1993) cast light upon tensions and contradictions between market agendas and social/public interests, an issue that was picked up later in Allport's (1998) paper, as outlined above. Blackmore predicted that an equity-oriented substantive vision for academia is most likely to come from those who are positioned as marginals in relation to the traditional leadership and management, and according to her, women constitute the core marginals in the binary ordering of reasoning and embodiment that marks academia. However, she acknowledged the potential limitations of having women as the change agents, in particular she noted that there is no guarantee against classism and racism on the part of women. Indeed, the literature reviewed thus far does not offer anything substantial in the way of a focus on the salience of race in the lives of women in academia. This is the issue to which the chapter now turns.

### 3.6. Race, Racism and Women in Academia

The focus on race as a separate sub-section in this chapter reflects the status of the topic in the literature for as Moses (1989) observed, the impact of racism *and* sexism on women in academia is rarely researched. In particular, she noted that although black women in the US have been participants in higher education for more than a century, they are almost totally absent in the research literature. Moses tackled the subject of black women in academe in the US in a report (Moses, 1989) that drew from the files of the Project on the Status and Education of Women as well as from informal interviews and anecdotal material.

In terms of their positioning in the US higher education system, Moses reported that black women were most concentrated in the lower academic ranks and were most likely to be in two- and four-year colleges rather than in research universities. Double discrimination encompassing the effects of both sexism and racism typified the experiences described by many of the black women quoted in the report. In many cases Moses noted that racism and sexism were so fused that it was difficult to single out which was which. There was also evidence of what she described as the "token syndrome". This may be said to happen when the small number of individuals from a racial or ethnic group in a particular context are treated as representatives of their group or as symbols rather than as individuals.

The report described the consequences of double discrimination and the token syndrome for black women academics. Extra work was often the consequence of being in a token position - the extra work of being asked to sit on numerous committees and being called upon to handle situations involving black people. Moses reported that black women tended to engage in more teaching, counselling of students and committee work than white males. Another burden was the struggle they experienced in trying to balance professional, family and community obligations. The need to have a sense of community consciousness and social responsibility emerged as important in the lives black women professors.

According to the report, a consistent theme was that black women were often viewed as outsiders or 'other' and as a result were likely to be excluded from the university networks that assist in career development. A related aspect was that they did not experience a sense of collegiality in their professional lives; this was especially the case for black women on predominantly white campuses. Associated difficulties that were reported included less access to sources for research and difficulties in gaining recognition and acknowledgement.

The experiences of black women academics as documented by Moses have been echoed in subsequent publications. In a chapter in the volume co-edited by Lie and O'Leary (1990), Reid also noted that black women, unlike white women or black men, are subjected to the negative impact of both sexism and racism. In a similar vein to Moses, she described the role of the double token as a source of difficulty. Reid explained that black women on predominantly white campuses in the US have to confront the dual burden of isolation and insensitivity intensified by relatively greater visibility and responsibility. A further challenge pointed to by Reid concerned same-race peers. She observed that some African-Americans have internalised racial stereotypes such that they do not value academic success, labelling it as characteristic of whites. Such attitudes thus contribute to the notion of black women as deviants in the academy.

The idea of a dual or double disadvantage was again confirmed in Ross's (1996) work on the disadvantages faced by black women in professional and management education. Allen (1996) took a rather different tack when she used her own experiences to make explicit acts of subtle racism in academia. Similar to the arguments on subtle sexism, she maintained that racism in the US has generally shifted from overt discrimination to subtle acts that perpetuate the status quo. She reflected on how she, as a highly qualified adult, often feels unwelcome and distrusts the rhetoric of racial equality that she encounters in a dominantly white university. Using her experiences of trying to publish her research work (the findings of which did not conform to dominant racial stereotypes about African-American children) and her experience of trying to obtain a research grant, she showed how discouraging the environment may be for black women. Allen openly acknowledged that there had been times when she considered dropping out, but she had

decided to remain because there are successes and supportive collegial relationships.

The complexities and ambivalences of being an insider, yet simultaneously an outsider, have been explored by Bannerji (1995) in a reflective account of being an Indian woman teaching social sciences in a Canadian institution. In speaking of her teaching relations she reflected:

"Once again I must begin from myself. From my body as a political signifier. The gendered perception of my sex receives a further negative (and also latently violent) reference from a prevailing racist common sense. This perception of the students is not neutral — it calls for responses from them and even decisions. I am an exception in the universities, not the rule. As a body type I am meant for another kind of work —but nonetheless I am in the classroom. And what is more, **I** am authority. I grade and therefore am a gatekeeper of an institution which only marginally tolerates people like us in scarcity rather than in plenty" (p.61).

The above extract gives a graphic account of the tensions experienced by black women and women of colour in universities dominated by white men.

Given that race and racism is so deeply embedded in the historical development of universities in South Africa, the literature on racism as a determinant of the experiences of women academics is especially germane to the present project. The South African research has to a large extent focused on the quantitative outcomes; very little qualitative work has been done on the subjective experiences of women in academia. Nonetheless, that which is available is reviewed hereafter.

### **3.7. South African Women Academics**

An autobiography by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, Mamphela Ramphele(1995), also a medical doctor and social anthropologist, provided a multiplicity of insights into the subjective experiences of being a black woman academic at a

historically white university in South Africa during the latter apartheid years. Ramphele asserted that "Being black, woman and mother places one in a challenging position anywhere in the world, but more particularly so in South Africa" (p.153). She substantiated her statement by showing how in her own life she had to extend herself across the enforced boundaries of race, class and gender.

Ramphele's descriptions of having to cope with the demands of housekeeping, child care, being a wife and a medical doctor, to a large extent confirmed what is known in the international literature, except that she had the additional role of being a political activist. An issue alluded to by Moses in relation to the African-American community, was given more detailed attention by Ramphele, namely, the need to for black academics to show a sense of community responsibility. In reflecting on her decision to join the academic ranks of UCT, Ramphele gave an account of how she jostled with the question of whether she could justify her decision and claim that her positioning and work as an academic could make a difference. Like Reid observed in the African American community, Ramphele also remarked that among black activists, there was a sense that intellectual work was not regarded as real work. She pointed out that intellectual activists, like herself, often had to undertake other activities in order to gain credibility among activists. Yet another parallel to the African American experiences emerging in Ramphele's autobiography, are her references to the double jeopardy of racism and sexism. On a different note, though, Ramphele referred to the impact of colonialism. An accusation levelled at her by political activists was that she had associated herself with anthropology, a discipline particularly identifiable with the colonial enterprise. To deal with the discomfort she felt, she had to learn to make the distinctions between different strands of the discipline.

Ramphele proposed that women cope with the multiple demands placed on them by using three approaches. Firstly, she identified a group of women who seemingly respond by operating as if they were men by becoming aggressive and doing all they can to fit in exactly the same way that men do. Secondly, she identified a category of women who do the best they can but they struggle with the stresses in their lives. According to Ramphele, unless these women find some support network, they crumble under the

strain. Thirdly, she distinguished a group of women who cope by drawing on both the feminine characteristics and the masculine traits that comprise their personalities. According to her schema, these three approaches are not mutually exclusive, as she claimed that she coped by relying on elements of all three. By examining her own life, she speculated that these approaches might operate as phases such that a woman, when she assumes a position of authority and power, has to initially act aggressively to assert herself in a sexist world, and only when she realises that she does not have to be aggressive, does she find a different way to cope.

On being a black woman in a historically white university in South Africa, Ramphele identified the challenge of having to stretch across the boundaries of race, class and gender. This, she said, is the challenge facing every citizen in a changing South Africa. On the one hand, stretching across boundaries and transgressing them could lead to rejection and rupture, she suggested, but on the other hand, it could produce creative responses to social change.

Responses to the shaping effects of race and gender in South Africa was one of the issues reflected upon in a study by Walker (1998, 1999) who conducted interviews with 13 women academics. Based on her analysis of the transcripts, she observed that at times women resist, at other times they succumb, sometimes choices are made for them and at other times they make choices. Not surprisingly, in the interviews with black women race emerged as a social categorisation that had had a determining impact on their lives. Walker noted that race had affected their construction of themselves as academics and had shaped relationships at work and in their daily lives. Moreover, she observed that being black meant that these women had been positioned as insiders in the various struggles against apartheid. All the black women participants spoke about personal experiences of both overt and covert racism. In contrast, Walker reported that most of the white women she interviewed did not speak about race as applied to their own identities, so she found it difficult to delineate the effects of race for their identities. **I**

Although race emerged as a central site of power and oppression, Walkers' interviews also revealed the effects of gender in the lives of the 13 participants. Gender had affected

their access to higher education, their progress through university and the development of their academic careers. Walker's analysis confirmed the findings of studies in other national settings that have shown that academic women have to struggle with the tensions of being an academic, a mother and a partner in a relationship. Tensions between being an academic/intellectual and feminine were also highlighted.

Walker argued that the narratives of the interviews illustrated that identities are multi-layered and different selves are not easily distinguished or disentangled; at different times either race or gender seemed more or less salient. She concluded from her analysis of the interviews that the identities of academic women are constructed as "sites of complex and chaotic struggles and that gender is but one strand mapped onto the landscape of academic lives" (p351). Race and class were the two other strands given focus in her study. All the participants saw themselves as being middle class, but the lived experiences of class were mediated by race. As Walker pointed out, being middle class did not buffer the black women from the exclusions of racist practices. Overall, Walker's study contributed to knowledge about the articulation of personal career experiences with the social and historical forces that have shaped the academic lives of women in South Africa. This is a task addressed in greater detail in this research project.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Much of the research reviewed in the previous chapter was informed by feminism, both as a body of scholarship and as a political movement. As Acker (1994) observed in the introduction to her book *Gendered Education*, feminist theory has provided the theoretical basis for much of the work on gender and education. Similarly, the study to be described in the following chapters has been principally informed by feminism as a body of knowledge, although several other areas of theorising also have been drawn on in the development of its theoretical framework. This study has been shaped by theoretical developments in the domains of the sociology of women's education, sociology, social psychology, and career theory. This chapter maps the theoretical framework of the study, beginning with an overview of feminist theory with reference to how it has been applied to the task of understanding gender and education. It then considers poststructuralism as a critical movement, how it conjoins with shifts in feminist theorising and consequently, social constructionism as a theoretical approach. Finally, the social construction of self as narrative is outlined as a theoretical point of reference for this study.

### 4.1. Feminist Theory, Gender and Education

Feminist theory is multifaceted and complex, comprising competing perspectives and worldviews. Identifying points of sharedness or commonality is not a simple task as the various disputes and tensions that characterise contemporary feminist theorising resist juncture even in and through the concept gender, since gender itself is a contested concept. The once-accepted distinction between sex as biological and gender as social construction has been obfuscated by numerous critiques (e.g. Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1992). Flax (1990) has posited that the single-most achievement of feminist theory has been that it has problematised gender. Using this as a common denominator, for the purposes of the current task it is thus ventured that the theoretical perspectives boundaried by the term feminist share the belief that gender is conceptually significant in the analysis of society and that the relationship between the sexes/genders must be problematised. Within the broad scope of this definition there are several ideas and tendencies that

sometimes may be interlocking, in contradiction and in parallel.

Several writers (e.g. Acker, 1994; Evans, 1995 and Whelehan, 1995) have expressed reservations about classifying the different perspectives within feminist theory into schools of thought or different theoretical strands. Nonetheless, in the literature there is general consensus about the labelling of differing strands or perspectives. "So these labels, problematic as they are, 'represent' overlapping views as they may do, nonetheless constitute part of our social reality; and of identity, some would say" (Evans, 1995: p.8). Each feminism is typically labelled according to its ideological source with each having distinguishable views on the origin and perpetuation of the oppression of women.

In a 1984 paper, Middleton identified three feminist perspectives, which, she argued, had made an impact on the sociology of women's education. These three perspectives were liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism. Similarly, in later publications Arnot and Weiner (1987) and Acker (1994) proposed that the tripartite classification of liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism provided a useful heuristic device for examining how feminism approaches the task of critiquing education. In fact, Middleton (1993) pointed out that the term "sociology of women's education" came about as a result of the development of feminist scholarship in the sociology of education. This field of study is focussed upon next.

#### **4.1.1. Liberal feminism and education**

Liberal feminism is the oldest, and perhaps the most influential form of feminist thought. Its origins have been linked to the liberal philosophy of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, drawing on their ideas about natural rights, justice and democracy. The central assertion of liberal feminism is that women should be accorded the same rights as men. This claim is based on the idea that women and men have the same capacity for reason and rationality, and thus should enjoy equal status in all sectors of society. An achievement of liberal feminism is that it took the doctrine of rights seriously and used it to dismiss the idea of women as second class or deficient citizens (Connell, 1990). Through campaigns such as those for the enfranchisement of women, liberal feminists claimed the rights of full citizenship for women.

In education the goal of liberal feminism is to achieve equality of opportunity and rights for women. According to a schema used by Arnot and Weiner (1987), the campaign for "Equal Rights in Education" exemplifies the liberal feminist perspective in education. This perspective has had a considerable impact on the research literature on women and education. Acker (1993) noted that most accounts of women in higher education have to some extent drawn on liberal feminist perspectives. Key concepts such as equal opportunities, sex discrimination, sex stereotyping and socialisation that surfaced frequently in the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, are all concepts associated with the liberal feminist perspective.

Acker (1994) distinguished three major themes in liberal feminist scholarship in education — equal opportunities, socialisation and sex stereotyping, and sex discrimination, but like Arnot and Weiner (1987), she identified equal opportunities rhetoric as its definitive feature. On this very issue, there has been fierce debate. The question, what does it mean to claim equality of women and men, has been at the centre of the critique of liberal feminism. Evans (1995), after exploring this question in some depth, concluded that for liberal feminists equality means sameness with men but the problem with this claim, she suggested, is that they seek equality of opportunity with men in a hierarchical society where resources are not equally available to all men. Evans then posed the question of whether equality of opportunity really translates into some women having an equal chance, in competition with some men, of obtaining access to resources they seek. Therefore, in effect, liberal feminists seek equality for some women. This has been the most pointed charge against liberal feminism.

A second main concern of liberal feminism in education is socialisation, sex roles and sex stereotyping. The central tenet is that from early childhood women are socialised into prevailing gender roles and stereotypes, which limit their full development as human beings. In fields such as sociology of education and psychology, numerous studies have focused on how children learn about socially acceptable behaviour for girls and boys, which deeply influences the kinds of activities and interests they pursue. Such research has investigated issues like the impact of socialising agents such as caregivers, teachers, the media and social institutions in producing and reproducing sex stereotypes and how

socialisation patterns later influence success or failure in particular school subjects and consequently, career options.

A third theme within liberal feminism, as identified by Acker, has paid attention to notions of discrimination, rights, justice and fairness. This theme, she proposed, has come closest to dealing with structural issues. But, overall the strategies for change stemming from liberal feminism attempt to achieve change by extending and reforming the existing policies and structures to accommodate women, rather than changing the fundamental components of economic, political and cultural life. Weiner (1994) pointed out that the use of terms such as access, choice, disadvantage, underrepresentation and underachievement has produced a discourse which has found "acceptability" as it is unlikely to make overtly threatening demands on the educational establishment. Acker (1994) made a similar point in her comment that the discourse of equal opportunity, however flawed, has gained acceptance in the public arena in Britain among research teams, trade unions, political parties and government agencies but amongst these groupings there is scarce usage of terms such as oppression and patriarchy. Middleton's (1998) succinct statement that the liberal feminist stance seeks equality with men throughout the hierarchies of capitalism highlights the limitations of this version of feminism.

Beyond the criticism of the strategies for change adopted by liberal feminism, it has also been strongly criticised for its theoretical shortcomings. Connell (1990) in fact suggested that the liberal feminist analysis is "theoretically rootless to a striking degree" (p.513) because it has no explanation for why men should have a collective interest in need of defence. In an earlier paper, Connell (1985) pointed to the absence of an explanation for why socialisation should proceed as it does, with apparent detrimental consequences. He criticised liberal feminism for basically seeing the problem as expression of prejudice. Seeing a social problem as an expression of prejudice has been widely criticised as an individualised, reductionistic perspective. Insofar as liberal feminism has a theory, it is sex role theory, stated Connell (1990). This theory, too, has been widely criticised.

Acker (1993) summarised how sex-role theory would explain the status of women in higher education. In short, the explanation would focus on the family-career role conflict

faced by women academics. Notwithstanding the complexities of findings of the research on the impact of marriage and children on women's careers as highlighted in the foregoing chapter, Acker indicated that such an explanation individualises the problem by either implicitly or explicitly blaming the victim for not successfully resolving or managing the conflicting demands and/or alluding that women are powerless in the face of such social expectations. She suggested that a more convincing approach would examine the role of marriage and parenthood as facts of women's and men's lives in conjunction with institutional factors which render these responsibilities incompatible. Beyond this concern, however, the main point of critique against sex-role theory has revolved around its inability to account for the division of labour in the wider economic system defined by capitalism. Overall, liberal feminism has been criticised for its inability to conceptualise gender in relation to institutional, systemic and structural apparatus.

#### **4.1.2. Radical feminism and education**

Unlike liberal feminism, radical feminism deals expressly with the social system through the concept of patriarchy, a term about which there has been much debate. Notwithstanding the debate, there is broad agreement in the literature that patriarchy as a term has generally been used to describe the principles underlying the historical domination of men over women (e. g. Connell, 1990; Whelehan, 1995). In her review of modern feminist thought, Whelehan (1995) observed that across the shades of debate within radical feminism, there has been a focus on gender as a social construct from which all female oppression emanates, leading to the proposition that gender is analytically independent of other sources of oppression. A related assumption that marks radical feminism is that the oppression of women is universal. This point in particular, has attracted strong criticism for generalising western patterns of male domination to the rest of the world (Connell, 1990).

With regard to education, radical feminism posits patriarchy as the reason for male dominance. Acker (1994) identified two major concerns in the literature on radical feminism and education: firstly, a concern with male control of knowledge and culture, and secondly, a concern with the sexual politics of everyday life in educational institutions. Indeed, this second concern which engaged with the sphere of female sexuality has been acknowledged as groundbreaking work (Whelehan, 1995). In education it drew attention to

issues such as sexual politics in schooling and sexual harassment. The first concern too, had an important impact in highlighting the ways in which men as a dominant group shape institutional culture. Applied to higher education, manifestations of male dominance would be seen in the curriculum, pedagogy and the sexual politics of everyday life (Acker, 1993).

In trying to overcome patriarchy, radical feminism turned to strategies that sought to place women at the centre of concern. Rejecting the existing knowledge base and culture as male defined, radical feminism worked towards the creation of knowledge that would be firmly rooted in the experiences of women (Weiner, 1994). As Weiner (1994) and Acker (1993) acknowledged, this led to a burgeoning number of Women's Studies courses and women-only groupings. Acker listed the other efforts of radical feminism as making institutions safe for women, finding space for women both inside and outside the academy and the development of woman-centered knowledge.

In spite of these developments, radical feminism has been subjected to a great deal of criticism. Already mentioned was the criticism of radical feminism for suggesting a false universality. Over and above the overgeneralization of patriarchy to all women, the idea of a universalist concept of patriarchy was criticised for leaning towards biological essentialism (Acker, 1994; Whelehan, 1995). Essentialism refers to the assumption that identity is a permanent and stable feature of the individual. The specific problem with radical feminism has been located in its failure to offer a non-biological explanation for why men seek to dominate women. As Whelehan (1995) noted, the concept of patriarchy connoted ahistorical and universalising tendencies, which implied that all men are irredeemably the enemy, and that all women are inevitably oppressed. From a present day perspective, it seems that a key limitation of radical feminism was that it oversimplified the causes of female oppression. Another point of criticism centred on whether the goals of radical feminist are realisable. Because radical feminism viewed male domination as diffuse, the articulation of the operation of patriarchy led to a call for separatism as a strategy to end female oppression. There was a call to celebrate female culture both because it was undervalued by the dominant male culture and, because it was seen as a departure point for organising efforts towards eradicating male supremacy. Acker (1993) suggested that in education the goals of radical feminism are not realisable in the immediate future.

She used Women's Studies courses in Britain as an example to support her contention. While these courses put women first, she pointed out that they are poorly resourced, frequently marginal and dependent on the commitment of a few individuals. The reality is that the territory as a whole is still controlled by men. Thus, Acker questioned the feasibility of separatism as a strategy to end female oppression. Overall, such a position led to fragmentation within radical feminism although, as Whelehan acknowledged, patriarchy as a concept accompanied by the call for separatism did have a significant impact as an oppositional strategy.

#### **4.1.3. Socialist/Marxist feminism and Education**

Patriarchy was given a historical materialist basis through Marxist and socialist feminism which brought together ideas about women's oppression with ideas derived from classical Marxism. The demarcation between Marxist and socialist feminism is a source of debate in the literature with some writers arguing that they represent two distinct tendencies (e.g. Tong, 1989) and others putting forward the view that there is no distinct dividing line (e.g. Evans, 1995; Whelehan, 1995). Where a distinction has been posited, it has centred on the issue of class versus gender as the primary source of women's oppression. Marxist feminism is generally defined as the view that class is the ultimate determinant of women's status, whereas socialist feminism is seen as the assertion that class and gender are equally significant as sources of women's oppression. Those that subscribe to the view that there is no clear distinction between the two (such as Whelehan and Evans), argue that socialist feminism is evidently Marxist in that it also relies on historical materialism, but that the term socialist was adopted in response to the fraught relationship between Marxism and feminism. Dissension between Marxism and feminism revolved around the issue of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy with Marxists arguing for the primacy of class. For the purposes of this discussion, the two strands will be treated as one as this is how it has been handled in the literature on feminism and education.

Overall, Marxist/socialist feminism was concerned with women's place both inside and outside the labour market. Whelehan (1995) noted that a point of departure was that female domestic labour defined as reproducing and maintaining the labour force, should be incorporated as a part of the relations of production within a capitalist system. Moreover, it

was argued that women's role in the labour market was hugely influenced by their labour in the domestic sphere, and this rendered their relationship to production distinctly different from that of men. Socialist feminism spoke of the key role played by women in the reproduction of capitalism's labour force. The sexual division of labour in the family and household came under scrutiny. A critical break with the assumptions of radical feminism was that patriarchy was seen as taking different forms in different settings. The history of the gendered division of labour was examined in socialist feminism's attempts to unravel the perceived entwinement of patriarchy and capitalism.

In education, radical feminism paid attention to how schooling and higher education reproduces the class and gender divisions that perpetuate capitalism. Acker (1993) suggested that higher education would be seen as a scarce resource which produces and reproduces class privilege. At the same time, however, institutions of higher education could be seen to have its own gendered internal division of labour with women clustered in the lower, temporary, contract, and service categories of employment. Radical feminism would also pay attention to the articulation between the sexual division of labour in the family, the internal division of labour in the institutions and production in the broader labour market. Acker (1994) summed up the socialist-feminist work in education as consisting mostly of theoretical arguments, historical research and policy analysis. She noted that it seemed rather underdeveloped in the area of strategies for educational action, although she acknowledged the significance of theorising itself as a strategy for change. Indeed, this should not be under-valued for as Whelehan (1995) indicated, Marxist/socialist feminism succeeded in exploding biologicistic assumptions that home-making is something for which women have a natural propensity. To achieve this, radical feminism examined the family from a historical perspective showing how it adapted in response to changes in the dominant social and economic forces, and how it reproduces itself through ideological representations. Weiner (1994) credited this feminist perspective for having greater explanatory power than the other two perspectives, but she noted that it was not successful in attracting a large number of women supporters and it became fragmented as a result of intra-feminist disputes, especially about its connection with historical materialism perceived by radical feminists as a male-oriented discourse.

When Middleton (1984) first presented the typology of the major theoretical perspectives behind the sociology of women's education as outlined above, she pointed out that like all typologies, it risked incompleteness and oversimplification. However, it succeeded in providing an overview of the impact of feminism within the sociology of education and as she had intended, it served as a starting point for debate. Indeed, it turned out as intended. As already indicated, the typology was taken up by others such as Arnot and Weiner (1987) and Acker (1993; 1994), but both these sources had to contend with criticism of the tripartite schema. This was acknowledged by Weiner (1994) who said that they were rightly criticised for ignoring black feminism and lesbian feminism. Both black feminism and lesbian feminism developed out of a dissatisfaction with the exclusionary concerns of second wave feminism. Before these moves within feminism are overviewed, the term 'second wave' is briefly discussed below.

The term 'second wave' points to both a continuation of a movement and a period before marked as the first wave (Whelehan, 1995). The earlier phase, or the first wave, refers to the movement which fought for the enfranchisement of women. The second wave is generally marked as the period from the late 1960s up until the 1980s when a crisis in feminism emerged. An identifying feature of second wave feminism, according to Evans (1995), was that it was primarily concerned with the identifying the causes or sources of women's oppression. The labels liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, lesbian and black have each been used as to describe a brand of feminism within the second wave. This historical classification of feminism can arguably be labelled western-centric, as it is a classificatory device that is wholly informed by events that occurred in Britain and the US. Nonetheless, the impact of second-wave feminism extended far beyond these national boundaries informing developments in other parts of the world including South Africa. In the sections above, the impact of second wave feminism on the sociology of education was reviewed. This review of second wave feminism is continued below in the coverage of black feminism and lesbian feminism.

#### **4.1.4. Black feminism**

Black feminism emerged both in response to the reluctance of feminism to address racism inside and outside its ranks, and the failure of black consciousness groups to deal with

gender issues. In the US black feminists confronted the women's movement for ignoring racism and failing to acknowledge differences among women as a group. The criticism was that the category 'women' was assumed to be synonymous with white women's experiences with black women regarded as the 'other'. Black feminists such as bell hooks (1982) illuminated the double-bind that faced black women — a feminism based on sexism or patriarchy excluded black women by not addressing racism, and black power organisations in failing to deal with women's oppression were also exclusionary. The articulation of a feminism which challenged the hegemony of white feminism by insisting that feminism can only be meaningful if it addresses racism became defined as black feminism.

Black feminism in the US and Britain drew attention to how black women were subjected to a triple of oppression of sex, race and class (e.g. Davis, 1982). In Britain black feminism also focussed on the unjust treatment of black immigrants from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. Black feminism gained momentum in many different societies across the world and its overall thrust was and is the examination of racism in the lives of black women as a result of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and new forms of global oppressions (Watt & Cook, 1991).

Mama (1995) explained that for both white feminists and for black men, the articulation of black feminism was viewed as divisive as both were concerned with preserving the unity on which their politics depended. White women, she reported, initially found it inconceivable that they, who defined themselves as the victims of male oppressors, could be seen as oppressors too. However, as black women's interests were increasingly articulated by a growing number of black feminist authors such as Carby (1982), Davis (1982) and hooks (1982), the impact of race in defining women's issues became clearer. As Mama (1995) summarised it, sometimes the interests of black and white women coincided but sometimes too, they not only had different interests, but antithetical ones. An oft-quoted example in the literature is the issue of the family. For white radical and socialist feminists, the family was an institution that sustained patriarchy and capitalism, whereas for black feminists the family was an institution that acted as a buffer against systemic racism (Whelehan, 1995).

The challenge by black feminists ruptured the notion of a universal sisterhood and made way for identity politics (political organisation based on shared subjectivity) within feminism allowing for debate about within-group difference. Black feminists, however, were not the only group who felt excluded by mainstream feminism. Lesbian feminists, too, struggled to gain visibility for their concerns.

#### **4.1.5. Lesbian feminism**

Like black feminism, lesbian feminism developed in response to discontent with a feminism that claimed to embrace their concerns under the notion of sisterhood, but failed to do so. Another parallel identified by Whelehan (1995) involved the sexism lesbians experienced in the gay liberation movement similar to black women encountering sexism in black power organisations. Lesbian feminism created an awareness of sexual orientation as a factor in the oppression of women through developing a critique of heterosexuality. The concept of political lesbianism was introduced following the articulation of lesbianism as not simply as a matter of sexual preference but as a way of life based on the rejection of heterosexuality, which was seen as a cornerstone of patriarchy. The critique of heterosexuality contributed to the disruption of the notion of sisterhood, especially insofar as it questioned the politics of heterosexual relationships. Many heterosexual feminists reported feelings of being attacked for being in relationships with men who were positioned as the enemy. These feelings were not only expressed by white women, but also by black women who saw themselves as positioned in alliance with black men against racism (Mama, 1995).

As a result of the growing seriousness of the inner tensions around various groups of women - black women, lesbians, working class women - feeling excluded from mainstream feminism, in the 1980s a crisis in feminism was documented (Whelehan, 1995). Feminism became more fragmented as other sites of disillusionment were articulated. In international forums, women from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America challenged the domination of white, western women in feminism as a form of imperialism. This challenge is of particular interest to the current study and will be touched upon in the next section on feminism in South Africa. Overall, however, the chapter will show that the

crisis of the 1980s compelled feminist theory to move away from the universalist tendencies of liberal, radical and socialist feminism towards the need to deal with difference within women as a group.

#### 4.2. Feminism in South Africa

It was only in the 1980s that feminist theory trickled into social analysis in South Africa. Noting the absence of a significant South African feminist movement, Bozzoli (1983) categorised the literature on gender relations into three streams: firstly, writings which attempted to recover the hidden and omitted history of women and of gender relations; secondly, Marxist analyses which sought to provide a material explanation for female oppression by examining its relationship with capitalism and thirdly, an approach based upon the notion of struggle rather than structure, but retaining a materialist focus. This literature reviewed by Bozzoli constituted the work of a very small number of social scientists (nearly all white women) conducting research on women and gender in South Africa. Notwithstanding the variations among the three streams, these writings relied mostly on feminist theories developed in North America and Britain. In this respect, there is a degree of similarity in the development of feminist theory in South Africa and in countries like New Zealand as recounted by Middleton (1993). From the perspective of New Zealanders, feminist ideas came from overseas. So too in South Africa where early references to feminist theory were predominantly informed by the theoretical developments as they were occurring in the US and Britain. Since in those contexts it was the time of second wave feminism, the thinking of liberal, radical and socialist feminisms shaped many of the ideas of early feminism in South Africa. But as Middleton discovered in New Zealand, South Africans found that these Northern feminisms were not completely applicable to local circumstances. In South Africa it was the time of apartheid and, as a result, the development of feminist theory was to a large extent shaped by racial divisions and the struggle against apartheid.

Many South African women, especially during the time of the anti-apartheid struggle, rejected feminism as intellectual imperialism and as a potentially divisive issue among black South Africans. The perception of feminism as imperialism resonated with the

international challenge to the domination of white, western women in feminism and in particular, it resonated with the debates about an African/non-western feminism. One of the main debates in the 1985 Nairobi women's conference held at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women revolved around the distinction between western feminism and African feminism (Bazilli, 1991a). However, the criticism of feminism as an import from the west also had a specific South African flavour in that the charge that feminism was imported by white academic feminists spoke directly to the racial divisions among white and black women. The racial cleavages of apartheid were visible in the development of feminist theory which saw white, university-educated women as the producers of theoretical knowledge with black women positioned as the objects of investigation, the activists and the consumers of knowledge. Hendricks and Lewis (1994) pointed out that: "In South Africa, 'defining and naming' has usually meant black women questioning their representation by white feminists, white monopolisation of academic, research and financial resources, and the domination of whites in feminist politics" (p.62).

The rejection of feminism as a label and as a body of knowledge should not, however, be mistaken for a disregard for dealing with gender oppression. Women in South Africa, in particular black women, have a history of organisation and mobilisation to the extent that writers such as Patel (1988) could justifiably refer to "a rich tradition of organising and mobilising women against class exploitation and national and sexual oppression" (p.28). But, this history of women's organisation was, to a large extent, framed by the struggle for an end to apartheid. Cock (1991) pointed to a central problem to be confronted in mobilising for gender equality in South Africa, namely, that the agenda of struggle was dominated by apartheid. Zama (1991) framed it in terms of contradiction. She wrote of the contradictions to be addressed by South African women in the apartheid era — on the one hand, the need for women to form a broad front to fight for women's emancipation, and on the other hand, an emphasis on unity with men in the national liberation struggle. Many black South African women gave priority to the struggle against legislated racial inequality and for them gender was important, but incidental. This view was given form in what was known as the two-stage revolution thesis, which claimed that the anti-apartheid struggle was of primary importance and needed to be fought before potentially divisive struggles like gender (Hendricks and Lewis; 1994). A factor contributing to the political currency of

this thesis was that during the early development of feminism, most of those who identified themselves as feminist were white, middle-class intellectual women. Another factor, according to Hendricks and Lewis, was that the nature of feminism at the time comprising prescriptive, western-centric, middle-class and white options, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism, alienated many South African women activists who were occupied with nationalist discourses.

Contradiction, fragmentation and difference mark the development of feminist thinking in South Africa. In 1991 at the first conference on women and gender to be held in South Africa the issue of difference took centre stage when black women disrupted the proceedings. In short, black women were angry about the dominance of white women seen in the organising committee, the presenters of papers and in the composition of the audience. Letlaka-Rennert (1991) presented the problem in quantitative terms: all the women organising the conference, except one, were white; there were only about 20-something black women among 300 whites and of the forty papers presented only five were by black women. In addition to the racial divide, a second dichotomy emerged as a source of tension and anger, that between activists and academics. Given the apartheid legacy, these dichotomies were not wholly discrete as most academics were white. The conflict between academics and activists centred on the issue of accessibility.

In the post conference analyses, there was general agreement that the 1991 conference marked an important milestone for feminism in South Africa (Agenda Editorial, 1991; Bazilli, 1991b). As Hendricks and Lewis (1994) commented, questions that for years had surfaced informally were from that point on debated openly within formal, public spaces. The shifts and turns in these debates have been regularly documented in *Agenda*, the oldest, and for several years the only feminist journal in South Africa. In 1993 an editorial in *Agenda*, identified the difference debate as one of the "hottest issues in the broader context of gender relations right now" (p.2). While delineation of a 'difference debate' is internationally acknowledged, in South Africa the concept of difference in the 1990s has been primarily deployed to refer to race and racism and in particular to relations between black and white women.

Hendricks and Lewis (1994) analysed the difference debate in South Africa with reference to trends that manifested internationally. As a point of departure they noted that on an international level the response to the challenge to the universalising tendencies of second wave feminism seemed to be anxiety about whether feminism could maintain its political impetus. 'So too in South Africa, they observed, where raising issues of difference is frequently viewed as disruptive. Instead, they proposed that the difference debate be viewed as a guideline for new practices from the point of view that in South Africa it created the space for black women to meaningfully contribute to the development of feminist theory. In support of their argument they referred to the many black women who, as a result of the difference debate began to identify with feminism. These authors then reviewed the various feminist theories that have in recent years found support among black women in South Africa.

Beginning with US black feminism, they noted that although few black South African feminists used the label black feminism, there is a local equivalent. The attempts by black South African women to organise themselves into research groups with the aim of developing new theories based on their own experiences was identified as an example of black feminism in South Africa. However, Hendricks and Lewis pointed to two key limitations of black feminism: firstly, it is founded on a reaction to male dominance in racial struggles and the dominance of white women in gender struggles, and secondly, its reliance on the assumption that black women, simply by virtue of their biological heritage, automatically would have a shared insight into their experiences. This they argued was evidence of essentialist thinking. Mama's (1995) research on the way in which issues of identity continuously constituted problematic terrain for black British feminists has illuminated the fragility of proclamations of unity founded simply on identifications of being black and woman. Her study showed that the assertion of black sisterhood was undermined by diversity of histories, cultural roots and political thinking. Similarly, in South Africa, there are beginnings of an interrogation of the notion of black sisterhood. In a recent issue of *Agenda*, Ntone and Meth (1997) and Tutu (1997) reported on a public forum that discussed differences among coloured and black women in South Africa. At this forum women talked about tensions, diversity of histories and hierarchies of oppression. In sum, the discussion pointed to the problematic of a politics based on an identity assumed to be

unitary with common definable interests.

An essentialist view of identity was also seen as a central problem in the two other strands of feminist theorising identified by Hendricks and Lewis, namely, womanism and African feminism. Womanism, as formulated by Alice Walker (1984), is a philosophy concerned with the psychological, spiritual and existential meanings of black womanhood. In South Africa this philosophy often manifests as motherism, when women's identities as mothers epitomised by the frequent reference to Winnie Madikizela- Mandela as the "mother of the nation", becomes the basis for the mobilisation of women (Fester, 1998). The third strand, African feminism is rooted in an attempt to counter the imperialist view of gender relations in Africa. In so doing, African feminists often turn to an analysis of gender in the pre-colonial era. Hendricks and Lewis suggested that African feminism as taken up by black South African women such as Qunta (1987) shows a tendency to romanticise the past by idealistically seeking evidence of matrilineage.

In seeking to overcome both the racism of white South African feminism and the essentialist tendencies in black South African feminist theorising, Hendricks and Lewis turned to post-structuralism in their quest for a feminism that would openly engage with knowledge/power struggles and the hierarchy of identities in western thought. By the 1990s, the universalist, essentialist premises of earlier feminist theories was under ongoing interrogation and the notion of woman as a unitary category no longer prevailed. This was not only as a result of the internal challenges to feminism (Mama; 1995). Post-structuralism as a critical stance had gained ground in challenging some of the assumptions at the epicentre of western thought. Therefore, in turning to post-structuralism, Hendricks and Lewis were responding to more widespread theoretical shifts not only in feminism, but also in social theory more broadly.

### **4.3. Post-Structuralism as Critical Movement**

Just as in feminism the conception of the subject, woman, was challenged, so too in many scholarly domains such as philosophy, psychology and literary criticism, knowledge claims that long held sway increasingly came under critical scrutiny. As a result, the legitimacy of many of the conceptions focal to modern western thought has

been called into question. The certainties offered by grand theories (e.g. Marxism) which attempted to explain the totality of social experience were cast as doubtful and inappropriately universalizing. Conceptions of truth, rationality and objectivity were problematised. The long-held view of the individual as a locus of knowledge was also in dispute. These epistemological challenges have been labelled post-structural or post-modern (Gergen, 1994a). For the socio-behavioural sciences, the emergence of post-structuralism and post-modernism has meant that its traditional mandate of producing objective knowledge about humanity was fundamentally challenged. This critique of the hegemonic conceptions of modern western thinking constitutes a point of departure for the theoretical framework of this study.

The theoretical framework is informed both by recent theoretical movements in feminism and by post-structuralist enterprises within psychology. While this project crosses the boundaries of academic disciplines, the rationale for its leaning towards psychology stems partly from the disciplinary ancestry of this work. The researcher/myself is a psychologist and therefore, it is the subject domain with which I am most familiar. Although post-structuralism is perhaps most identified with literary theory, its impact has been transdisciplinary (Gavey, 1997). In psychology it has destabilised the conception of the subject (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The following discussion of post-structuralism, which tries to distill the common features of the critique, is in a sense treading shaky ground. As Gavey (1997) pointed out when she undertook a similar task, attempts to identify and describe some of the central features of post-structuralism risk fixing and oversimplifying the ideas. She noted that an important aspect of post-structuralism is its resistance to definition, partly because such practices are suggestive of pinning down an essence that does not exist. Gavey further pointed out that the task is rendered even more elusive by the reluctance of many authors to label their work post-structuralist even when it seemingly follows such lines. Despite the 'riskiness' of the task, the following discussion attempts to delineate key features of the critique that brought the hegemony of modern western thinking into crisis.

Close to the concern of psychology, there was the repudiation of individualism, in particular the view of the individual as the centre of experience, the locus of knowledge

and as a coherent whole (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The subject of psychology has traditionally been the unitary, rational subject, a conception which has been identified with enlightenment thought (Venn, 1984). Thus, the critique against individualism ties in with the broader criticism of the assumptions of the enlightenment. Ramazanoglu (1993) explained that the term 'enlightenment' denotes a shift in European thought largely from the eighteenth century onwards. The dominant ideas of this period centered on the notion of the unitary human subject who was presumed to possess the capacity for reason. The notion of reason became regarded as a superior mode of thought that could be rightfully applied in the pursuit of knowledge. The dominant idea was that the human self could progressively use reason to discover the truth and so become liberated and achieve autonomy, justice and independence (Ramazanoglu, 1993).

As Gergen (1994a) noted, the conceptualisation of an individual mind has played a prominent role in the theoretical explanations proffered by academic disciplines like psychology, sociology, anthropology and education. Moreover, he suggested that the rationale behind the workings of major modern institutions and public policies are predicated on the view of knowledge as individual possession. In illustrating his argument, Gergen drew attention to how, for example, educational institutions are designed to train and expand the individual mind. He further argued that psychology, more than any other discipline, readily took on the task of rendering valid and reliable accounts of individual mental processes. As a scientific discipline it undertook research to produce supposedly useful insights into how persons can effectively collect and store information, think logically, recall information, make rational plans and turn these plans into behaviour. Education, law, religion, the economy and family life were all to benefit from these insights. Thus, Gergen argued, psychology epitomizes the assumptions dear to individualism.

Another feature of enlightenment thinking that has been called into question, is dualism. Dualistic thinking is evident in theorizing founded on the counter-positioning of mind and body, reason and emotion, man and woman, black and white and western and non-western. In psychology this is most saliently seen in the binary treatment of the individual and the social. The relation or non-relation between these binaries constitutes

a focal concern of dualist epistemology. Structuralism in the social sciences and humanities is a case of an epistemological movement which carried a dual focus on an exterior as the apparent, the observed and the given, and an interior as structure, force or process (Gergen, 1994a). It is frequently presumed that the exterior may only be understood with reference to the influence of the interior. Freudian psychology which attempted to use the spoken word as the route to the unconscious and Marxism with its emphasis on the modes of production underlying the superstructure were offered by Gergen as examples of structuralism in the human sciences. Loosely speaking post-structuralism is the critical stance which emerged in opposition to these epistemological positions.

Although the terms post-structuralism and post-modernism are often used jointly or synonymously to refer to critique of modern western epistemology (e.g. in Gergen's (1994a) and Whelehan's (1995) writings), post-structuralism is often distinguished by its specific attention to the role of language in representations of subjectivity and truth, whereas post-modernism is seemingly used as a periodizing concept to denote a break with the enlightenment heritage and to refer to the emergence of new philosophical, economic and social times. However, this distinction borrowed from Marshall (1994) is not absolute since in many writings there is convergence and overlap in the use of the terms. As Marshall herself pointed out, post-modernism refers to a heterogeneous body of critique and so does post-structuralism. In this work, the concept post-structuralism will be used hereafter as it seems to better fit the work that foregrounds a concern with language and subjectivity.

As already indicated the vociferousness of the internal challenges within feminism led to a crisis which coincided with the broader challenge to enlightenment thinking. Post-structuralist critique resonated with the rejection of a universal womanhood and the abandonment of the search for a grand theory of the source of women's oppression. As Whelehan (1995) commented, many theorists have argued for the compatibility of feminism and post-structuralism and feminism and post-modernism. Such arguments have been informed by the criticism that second-wave feminism's reliance on gender as the single most important category as well as its usage of women and men as binary categories

were symptomatic of the flawed thinking that typified western enlightenment thought. The idea of compatibility has gained currency to the extent that feminist post-structuralism is now constituted as a theoretical movement, for example in Brooks's work (1997) on academic women. In framing her work within feminist post-structuralism, Brooks specified that it does not constitute another branch of feminist theory, but it is a critical strategy which draws on a range of concepts and analytical models.

Of particular interest to this work is the rejection of the presumption that science can produce objective accounts of the world. As Holiway, (1984) pointed out, psychology's traditional approach assumes that the knowledges that make up psychology are scientific and contained in this assumption are ideas about objectivity and progress towards truth. Post-structuralist critique rejects the possibility of absolute truth and objectivity (Gavey, 1997). Feminist theory has shown how an underlying intent of objective science has been to suppress some accounts of reality and elevate others and to sustain masculinist, western ways of thinking above all others. In the humanities and social sciences accounts which were ostensibly portrayed as objective truth have been shown to be aligned with particular ideological, moral and political purposes. Gavey (1997) observed that feminists' explorations of realities have tended to produce different truths, thus calling into to question the notion of one reality and one truth. From a post-structuralist perspective, the quest for objectivity, and claims of truth that purport to transcend the perspective of individuals or groups, are rendered illegitimate. Instead, post-structuralism points to the specific historical contextuality of, and interests invested in, all knowledges. This shift in thinking about knowledge is evident in a growing body of work that considers knowledge as socially constructed. In psychology Potter and Wetherell (1987) attributed the movement from the self-as-entity to a focus on how the self is produced through language largely to post-structuralist trends. Earlier, Henriques et al (1984) acknowledged the displacement of the notion of the individual as a unitary, rational, autonomous subject as an important achievement of post-structuralist critique, but they argued that not enough had been offered in the explanation of the possibility of subjectivity. On this point, the theoretical framework of this study turns to the constructionist approach to the self.

#### 4.4. Social Constructionism

In a sense social constructionism may be seen as a theoretical project which crystallised elements of post-structural and post-modern critique. Gergen (1994b) cast it as a successor project devoted to developing an alternative to major traditions in science. As such he suggested that constructionism be considered as a metatheory which has affinity with a number of theoretical positions. One of these is feminism. Whelehan (1995) noted that most feminists see themselves as constructionists. But since constructionism is not an internally consistent set of premises, this in all likelihood has a variety of meanings.

Gergen's social constructionism has its roots in the 1980s when he initially sought to break with individualism of psychology. As he explained in his book, *Realities and Relationships* (1994a), social constructionism is a view of knowledge which grew out of three strands of critique. Firstly, an ideological critique that scrutinised the scientist as a moral agent; secondly a literary-rhetorical critique which demonstrated that accounts are not determined by the events themselves but by the conventions of literary rendering; and thirdly, a social critique which proposed that all scientific accounts are shaped by social interests. Social constructionism is both a synthesis of this critique and an attempt to develop an alternative orientation towards science.

Gergen's formulation of social constructionism replaced the individual as the locus of knowledge with a view of knowledge as constituted through the human co-ordination of action. Thus, what we take as knowledge is not viewed as the outcome of individual cognition on or action but as the result of social relatedness. By locating knowledge within the sphere of social relatedness, Gergen gave centre-stage to the role of language. In particular, he interrogated the relationship between language and the world it is intended to represent and he came to view knowledge as constituted through language. The following key suppositions summarise Gergen's views of discourse:

- the terms by which we account for the world and ourselves are not dictated by the stipulated objects of such accounts;
- the terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and of ourselves

are social artefacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people;

- the degree to which a given account of the world or self is sustained across time is not dependent on the objective validity of the account but on the vicissitudes of social process;
- language derives its significance in human affairs from the way in which it functions within patterns of relationship
- to appraise existing forms of discourse is to evaluate patterns of cultural life; such evaluations give voice to other cultural enclaves (Gergen, 1994a; pp 49-53).

Through these suppositions, social constructionism rendered the link between language and the world as contingent. Furthermore, as Gergen (1994b) pointed out, once this link is shown to be contingent, the focus of analysis shifts from what is the case about social life to the languages of description and explanation themselves. Thus, social constructionism contributed to the development of discursive psychology, a now recognised domain (Burman, 1994).

Many feminist scholars in psychology, noting the limitations of the traditional focus on the empirical study of sex differences and the essentialism of standpoint psychology (for example, Gilligan's 1982 book), turned to social constructionism in search of an alternative framework. Very recently Burman (1998) observed that in psychology feminist and critical work flourish under the banner of social constructionism and discourse. The contribution of Mary Gergen is eminent in this regard (Gergen; 1988 and Gergen & Davis, 1997). Although acknowledging several differences among feminist scholars who claim social constructionism, Gergen and Davis (1997) identified the premise that science is a communal achievement as a common theme. Furthermore, they distinguished five features which seem to give coherence to feminist constructionist work. These are:

- reflexivity in approach,
- the understanding that knowledge claims are continually developing and are never at an endstate;
- an acknowledgement that the group identifications of the author/researcher and the

group identifications of the participants have an influence on the work;

- the centrality given to the search for alternative forms of cultural life; and
- contextualising research so as to enhance its usefulness to people.

In the feminist literature, constructionism has been pitched as an alternative to essentialism as a way of understanding gender. Some, for example, Bohan (1996) have argued that issues such as how to address difference and diversity, are resolved through constructionism since it endorses a view of gender as an agreement that arises from social exchanges. It may not be this simple though, for as Fuss (1989) suggested, essentialism and constructionism should not necessarily be regarded as binaries or alternatives. As outlined earlier in this chapter, in feminist theorising perspectives which rely on universal female oppression; theories based on the assumption of a totalising system of patriarchy and accounts that depend on the fixity of male-female difference have been criticised for being essentialist. An issue which sharply polarises essentialism and constructionism concerns the relation between the natural and the social. Whereas essentialism sees nature as a determinative starting point for the social, constructionism sees the natural and that which is known as essence as socially constructed. Constructionism proposes that the existence of phenomena is established through language and not by virtue of given or natural essences (Fuss, 1989).

Fuss contended that constructionism is not entirely apart from essentialism and that there is some, even if minimal, point of continuity. In illustration she pointed to constructionism's continued use of the category gender. According to Fuss, this implies some notion of essentialism at least at the linguistic level. Moreover, she pointed out that the constructionist strategy of specifying more precisely groupings within the category women, such as white, middle-class woman, does not necessarily preclude essentialism. Therefore, she argued that essentialism subtends the very idea of constructionism. Instead of seeing them as binaries, Fuss proposed that essentialism and constructionism be viewed as a tension constitutive of the domain of feminist theory. But, she affirmed the importance of two distinctions: firstly, a distinction between two kinds of essentialisms; and secondly, a distinction between "deploying" essentialism and "lapsing" into essentialism.

Drawing on the work of John Locke, Fuss proposed that it might be analytically useful to differentiate between real essence and nominal essence. The concept of real essence may be used to connote that which is fixed, stable and irreducible, and nominal essence may be used to encompass the idea of women as a notional category, as linguistic rather than natural. The second distinction between "deploying" versus "lapsing" into essentialism she regarded as especially politically important. Whereas "deploying" permits the use of essentialism for strategic value, she suggested that "lapsing" implies a reactionary inevitability. These distinctions she viewed as meaningful because according to her analysis, the politics of essentialism to a significant degree depend on who is utilising it, how it is deployed and where its effects are concentrated. In short, Fuss was signalling a note of caution to what in her opinion, was a sense of paranoia among feminist scholars about the threat of essentialism. Thus her argument creates the space for a scholarship on women. Indeed, the literature reveals that the move against essentialism seemingly threw feminism into disarray and the legitimacy of a scholarship that focuses on women as a category was contested. A highly debated issue revolved around the implications of post-structuralism as a political framework with a key question being: if gender relations constitute only one of a multiplicity of manifestations of power relations, is there still a place for feminism? Across the heated debates that ensued, there generally has been an affirmation for the significance of gender as *a* concept which conveys political and analytic intention; but the key consequence is that gender is no longer seen as "synonymous with the whole" (Stanley, 1997; p.15); nor as *the* singular analytic concept in feminism. This shift is widely accepted as particularly necessary for dealing with racism in feminism (Yates, 1993).

In feminism in education there has been popular agreement on the significance of new forms of theorising that move beyond a one dimensional focus on gender, at the same time, however, there is consensus on the need to address the palpable inequalities which affect most women as women. Post-structuralism is currently a strong but contested framework feminism in this domain of scholarship (Yates, 1993). Weiler (1993) summed up the challenge as "to try to take account of and make sense of the complexity of all forces of identity formation acting upon women in relation to educational institutions and policies in a rapidly changing world" (p.213). This is a challenge taken up in this thesis.

This project aims to analyse the construction of academic women's lives in a society defined by relationships of inequality and oppression. It is a project located within a post-structuralist feminism which deploys a nominal essentialism to illuminate the ways in which women as academics are positioned and position themselves in institutions of higher education and in the South African policy, cultural and social context at large. In seeking to avoid a lapse into a biological or mythical essentialist notion of what it means to be a woman, a constructionist approach to self as culturally and historically contingent and constituted through talk is used. Thus, it rejects a notion of self as unitary, fixed and relatively autonomous. In psychology this rejection of the traditional view of the "self-as-entirety" led to a growing focus on the methods of constructing the self. Collectively these methods are all concerned with how people make sense of themselves. This study is largely shaped by the idea of self as narrative as developed in psychology initially by Gergen and Gergen (1984). Since then, however, narrative as a path of study has developed considerably with an entire Sage series on the topic (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Lieblich & Josselson, 1994; Josselson, 1996). As elucidated in the rest of this chapter and then in greater methodological detail in the next chapter, this study, although drawing heavily on the ideas of Gergen and Gergen (1984), is informed by narrative construction as a broad domain.

#### **4.5. Social Construction of Self as Narrative**

A constructionist perspective of knowledge paved the way for the idea of self as narration with narrative viewed as a product of social interchange. Drawing from relational theory as an affiliative position within the social constructionist metatheoretical umbrella, K.Gergen jointly with M. Gergen. (Gergen & Gergen, 1984; Gergen, 1994a) proposed a relational view of self through the elucidation of narrative as a product of social interchange.

In simple terms, the principal idea is that we make sense of our lives and our relationships through constructing stories- stories about childhood, our school days, our families, sexual relationships and working experiences. Through these stories we make ourselves

intelligible to self and to others. Moreover, stories are not merely told once people have experienced their lives, people also live their lives in storied form. Ochberg (1994) in writing about his research on the meaning of work in the lives of middle-aged men, demonstrated that people live out the events and affairs of their lives in storied form. Ochberg (1994) thus suggested that there is no way to disentangle living a life from telling a story.

Because narratives rely on a symbolic system, narrative construction is inherently a social process. Also, suggested Gergen and Gergen, in using linguistic devices narratives always imply an audience, either real or imaginary. As such these stories are products of interacting persons, not products of an autonomous individual mind. Gergen and Gergen (1984) emphasised that narratives are pre-eminently communal products meaning that they are grounded in social interaction and practice. Within a social constructionist framework, narratives are considered as linguistic, cultural resources or constructions open to continuous alteration as interaction proceeds.

Another feature of narratives emphasised by Gergen and Gergen is that they are culturally and historically situated. From a constructionist perspective, narratives sustain, enhance or suppress various forms of action; they also serve social purposes such as self-justification, self-criticism and social solidification. Bruner's (1990) later elaboration of narrative psychology showed how the lives and selves we construct, develop in response not only to the present but also assume meaning from the historical circumstances that gives shape to the culture in which the person is positioned. A related point is that the limits of self-identity are then set by the cultural, historical conventions for acceptable narratives. In other words, constructionism posits that within a specific context the conventions for narrative both create and set the limits of identifying oneself as a human agent. In constructing the narrative the teller uses cultural and historical resources but the narrative is simultaneously constrained by these resources. Narratives, then, both use and are constrained by cultural and historical contexts.

Gergen and Gergen (1984) elaborated their thesis in greater detail by offering a description of the characteristics of narrative. A defining feature, they indicated, is that narratives

permit comprehension of the temporal embeddedness of human activity. Through narrative we are given an account of the person in process. In a story an event is typically located temporally by placing it in a context of preceding and subsequent events. In doing this, connections among life events are constructed and reference is made to the past, the present and the future. Therefore, Gergen and Gergen wrote about narrative as an account of self-relevant events over time. A related aspect is that narratives permit a sense of directionality among events that may otherwise appear as isolated. In short, through the use of narrative events can be structured in a way that firstly, achieves connectedness and coherence and secondly, a sense of movement and directionality through time.

An addition Gergen and Gergen described the components of what they considered to be a successful narrative. They suggested that to succeed as a narrative an account must have a valued endpoint or goalstate that would inform the selection and arrangement of events. In building on this idea, they identified three prototypical narrative forms — a progressive narrative in which there is movement towards the goal, a regressive narrative in which achieving the goal is impeded and a stability narrative where no change occurs. As will be discussed later, the issue of narrative prototypes was subsequently revised by M. Gergen (1997).

Narrative as a locus of theory and research has developed into a burgeoning endeavour. With the development of this area of scholarship, came a variety of views on the characteristics of narrative. Josselson and Lieblich editors of the Sage series on the narrative study of lives recently noted that there are a great many ways to use the term narrative (Lieblich & Josselson, 1994). Because narrative as a field is in progress, they did not regard this as a problem. Definition, they suggested is not the goal, instead creative and intelligent applications of narrative should be encouraged. In the literature narrative as a term tends to be used inclusively to refer to various forms of personal accounts such as biography, autobiography as well as life history. Chase (1995) pointed out that across the varying perspectives about what constitutes narrative; there is agreement that all forms of narrative share a fundamental interest in making sense of experience and in the construction and communication of meaning. Within this consensus though, there are issues of divergence.

A particularly divisive issue is the truth value of narratives. As Gergen (1994a) summarised the debate, many believe that narratives have the potential to bear truth, while others argue that narratives do not reflect truth, but construct it. Clearly, the former view is consistent with an empiricism which would hold that the truth value of narratives is subject to systematic observation, while the latter view is consistent with social constructionism, the framework applicable to the current project. The social constructionist approach holds that narratives do not reflect but create what is understood to be true. A point of agreement across approaches is that narratives are limited though the source of the limitations is disputed. Unlike social constructionism which locates the limitations in the historical, cultural sphere, other approaches variously trace the limitations to cognitive processes or to the events themselves.

Social constructionism's rejection of the traditional view of a core identity constitutes an additional point of debate. A commonly held view is that each person possesses a life story. This, of course, contrasts with the social constructionist notion of self as relational. As Gergen (1994a) expressed it "if selves are realised within social encounters there is good reason to believe that there is more than one story to tell" (p.202). Persons are thus assumed to have access to multiple narratives and in addition, Gergen made a distinction between macronarratives, accounts that span a broad period of time, and micronarratives that refer to events of short duration. Also, he proposed the idea that narratives may be nested, one within the other. Overall then, narrative multiplicity was proposed. Furthermore, from a social constructionist perspective, there is no reason that narratives should be consistent, although it recognises that consistency and stability of self tends to have cultural currency in several societies.

#### **4.6. Narrative as Gendered**

Of particular relevance to this study, is M.Gergen's (1997) extension of her earlier description of the features of narrative to incorporate relations of gender. Through her study on the popular autobiographies of men and women, she became convinced that cultural repertoires of potential stories are deeply gendered. In her 1997 chapter, she describes how

she became increasingly uneasy with her and K.Gergen's earlier descriptions of the form of narrative, especially their ideas on a successful narrative as being composed of a valued endpoint. An important question that informed her rethinking was: whose lives are advantaged by this prototype and who's disadvantaged? Consequently, she posited that each gender acquires for personal use a repertoire of potential life stories relevant to their own gender. Thus her earlier thinking about how culture and history shape the form and contents of our narrative was revised to take account of relations of gender inequality.

Though not directly with reference to gender, K. Gergen (1989) did speak to the issue of the elaboration of self in relation to domination and oppression when he wrote on the means by which voice is given warrant. Given a range of competing social constructions and potentially substantial outcomes, whose construction prevails becomes critically important, noted Gergen. He then argued that certain constructions have attained hegemonic status through the use of threat and force and this is how some people have gained the power of world construction. Consequently, he posed the view that much of history can be written in terms of how various individuals or groups have come to gain or lose voice. At about the same time the Personal Narratives Group (1989) published their collection on feminist theory and narratives which proposed that the narratives of nondominant groups maybe seen as a means of challenging the hegemonic view of intellectual and cultural heritage. In particular, they argued that narrative study is especially suitable for illuminating the construction of gender in society. Evidently, then K.Gergen's (1989) argument resonated well with the feminist theorising expressed by the Personal Narratives Group (1989). Indeed, there is commonality in the concerns about voice and how some voices come to have dominance through specific enactments of power. There are several other points of similarity between the Personal Narratives Group and Gergen and Gergen's (1984) social construction of self as narrative such as an emphasis on the social and historical embeddedness of narratives.

Many other feminist writers have since affirmed the use of narrative as particularly appropriate for the study of gender in society. Examples include Geiger (1986), Cotterill & Letherby (1993), Lieblich and Josselson (1994) and Chase (1995). Hence, there is widespread agreement that through studying the construction of meaning in the form of

narrative, we can examine how social processes related to gender are embedded in the stories as social products. In the field of education, Middleton (1993) in providing a rationale for using life histories showed that the stories we tell — the kinds of stories and the ways they are told- are brought into being within particular contexts of power relations. So when M. Gergen (1997) presented her theme that there is gender specificity in repertoires of stories available to people, she was adding her voice to many other feminist voices who have drawn attention to narrative as a means of studying gender relations.

#### **4.7. Career as Narrative**

There is yet a further area of theory that touches upon the topic of this study; that is career development theory. As a whole the literature on careers focuses on factors influencing career choice, entry and progress, occupational variables such as type of job and outcome, and psychological variables such as job satisfaction and occupational stress. Over the last decade there have been a multitude of empirical studies on women and career development such that Phillips and Imhoff (1997) in reviewing this literature found that it had accumulated so much that a comprehensive review was not feasible. In spite of this growth in the overall number of studies, there has been hardly any attention to the meaning of the concept of career. In the previous chapter this was revealed to be a critical issue in trying to understand the difficulties faced by women academics (e.g. Heward, 1996). According to Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) very few writers in the careers literature have addressed the meaning of the concept of a 'career'. In reviewing the literature, they found that as a concept it appeared to be taken for granted. They reported that the dominant use of 'career' as a construct seems to suggest some progress through a series of occupations or staying in one occupation over time.

Driver (1994) proposed a career concept model in an attempt to take account of differences in the definition of career. Four basic career concepts were delineated:

- steady—state - where career choice is made once for a life-time commitment to an occupation;

- linear — where there is movement in the career as the individual moves up an occupational hierarchy;
- spiral - when the career moves through a series of occupations with each new choice building on the past;
- transitory — continuous career choice marked by change and variety.

In the previous chapter it was argued that the concept of career has been constructed around men and masculinities. This point is strongly endorsed by Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) in their review of the career theory literature. In discussing Driver's four concepts of career, they indicated that the first two concepts of career, steady-state and linear, are most common in the careers literature and that these are the traditional, hierarchical careers that are typical in the lives of many men. Even though the latter two career concepts are not part of the traditional conception, according to Poole and Langan-Fox's assessment, they are not applicable to the reality of the careers of most women as both spiral and transitory still assume a continuity of occupational development.

A framework of career that is compatible with the assumptions of social constructionism and feminism as taken up in this thesis, but relatively recent to the careers literature, is that used by Weiland (1995). Career, he explained, is a construct used by individuals and societies to represent a major segment of experience in the life of the person. Therefore, the very concept of career can be viewed as part of the narrative of self. The linking of career with notions of self is certainly not new, as there is a long history of research which has probed the connection between the self-concept and occupation. A point of departure from the traditional literature was the suggestion that the life history method may be used in the study of careers. In his research, just as in the present study, the focus was academic careers. He argued that the academic career maybe usefully studied through narrative. The features of narrative that render it especially suitable for the study of careers, according to Weiland's thinking, is that story as a form permits both a sense of movement and a sense of coherence and connectedness. Furthermore, Weiland claimed that through narrative the ways in which academic culture becomes represented in the lives of individual academics might be documented.

In the same volume as Weiland, Chase (1995) presented a similar argument in favour of the use of narrative in studying professional work, but in particular, she proposed that narrative is appropriate for the study of women's work experiences. In researching the experiences of women educational leaders, she found that narrative enabled women to integrate two kinds of talk — talk about individual achievement and success along with talk about gender and racial inequalities. These kinds of talk do not usually belong together in American culture, she suggested, as they typically constitute two discursive realms in the lives of women. By using narrative, she found that the women recounted stories about their work histories in ways that positioned them both as highly accomplished professionals and as women who had to deal with sexism and racism in the profession.

Overall the arguments in favour of a conceptualisation of career as socially constructed through narrative best fits the theoretical framework of this study. As this chapter has mapped, the study is framed by insights from feminist post-structuralism. Rather than discovering the facts, what is real, or the truth, feminist post-structuralism is concerned with analysing the construction of meaning to uncover how social processes related to gender become dominant and/or submerged, are produced, reproduced and/or changed. Using social constructionism as an approach, this study aims to examine the narratives of women academics in South Africa to uncover how gender, race and broader social institutions, processes and policies become represented in how they construct themselves as academics. Given the complex interconnectedness of gender and race in the South African social and educational landscape, a remaining task to be dealt with in this chapter is the theorisation of race. Although this has been addressed in part, at this moment a very brief section is included to render the theorisation of race explicit.

#### **4.8. Race as Social Construction**

In keeping with the theoretical framework mapped thus far, this study takes the view that race is a socially constructed, rather than an inherently meaningful, category. Such a perspective is consistent with a growing agreement in the vast literature on race, that "race" is an empty signifier, that is it has no ontological status. In reviewing the literature, Foster (1995) suggested that the understanding of race as empty signification has permitted in

fields such as post-colonial studies and psychology, a conceptualisation of racisms in the plural as historically situated and shifting, and as necessarily relational in the sense of specifying self and other in relations of domination and resistance. This stance on race as multiple, dynamic and relationally produced is consistent with the post-structuralist perspective of this study. Just as the movements of post-modernism and post-structuralism, produced changes in the theorisation of gender in feminist theory and changes in the theorisation of self in psychology, it led to what Foster (1995, 1998) termed "new" views on race and racism.

These views that Foster boundaried as new and emerging, embrace a shift away from earlier essentialist ideas about race. Frankenberg (1993) described two forms of essentialist thinking on race: essentialist racism, which emphasises race difference understood in hierarchical terms of biological, essential inequality and essential sameness, which holds the view that under the skin everyone is the same. A social constructionist perspective on race denotes a break with such essentialist views through its claims that identities and selves are not fixed, nor static but shifting and in flux and socially constituted through language. In support of the notion of race categories as unstable, dynamic and historically specific, authors such as Frankenberg (1993) and Mama (1995) refer to how at different times in history people have moved in and out of categories such as 'non-white'. Frankenberg, for example, pointed to how in the US, Jewish Americans, Italian Americans, and Latinos have at different times and from varying standpoints, been viewed as both white and 'non-white'. Another indication of the instability of racial categorisation is racial naming. South African history provides a rich source of examples, perhaps the most illustrative is the racial category coloured, a peculiarly South African distinction. The Population Registration Act of 1950 legally constituted the category coloured as a person who is not white or native. This category is under continual contestation. In present-day South Africa individuals who during the apartheid years were classified as coloured, variously refer to themselves as black, 'so-called coloured', 'coloured' and coloured. Scrutinising instances of racial naming brings to the fore the idea that race is discursively constructed and that these constructions change over time and space. As Frankenberg uncovered in her study of whiteness, race is not a transhistorical essence. By breaking with the notion of race as fixed essence, post-structuralism opens up spaces for new ways of

theorising the complexities, changing forms, ambiguities and contradictions that mark present-day realities. In choosing to explore race and gender as social constructions expressed through narrative, this study aims to open its analytic lens to examining intersecting articulations between these markers of self without lapsing into essentialism or privileging one axis of difference at the expense of others.

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## 5. METHOD

The separation of chapters into theory, method and analysis is in a sense antithetical to the epistemological orientation of this work, which conceives knowledge as simultaneously about theory, method, analysis and ethics. Nonetheless, these divisions are applied to enhance clarity in the presentation of the study and to conform to the requirements of the task of writing a dissertation. To some extent though, the processes of methodology and method have been already invoked in the foregoing chapters. In locating the study within a feminist post-structuralist perspective, and then elaborating the social construction of self through narrative, the pursuance of what Riessman (1993) called the interpretative turn in the social sciences has already been signalled. The interpretative study of an issue or phenomena is widely noted as the defining feature of qualitative research methods (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall, 1994). Given its theoretical framework and objectives, this is undoubtedly a qualitative study.

### 5.1. Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods of research emerged as an alternative approach to positivist methods only fairly recently in psychology, unlike in many other disciplines of the social sciences and humanities such as anthropology and sociology, where different traditions of qualitative inquiry have been recognised for a relatively long period of time (Banister et al, 1994). Historically academic psychology has privileged the use of quantification and measurement alongside experimental-type methods of investigation (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). Educational research has witnessed a similar trajectory. Howe and Eisenhart (1990) noted that it was only about 20 years ago that qualitative methods emerged in educational research. After being dominated by the identification, operationalisation, measurement and control of variables, a growing volume of educational research now focuses on the study of meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In both psychology and education the emergence of qualitative research led to several years of polarised debate about the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative research. However, from the late 1980s onwards the increase in the number of qualitative studies has been such that authors in these disciplines have acknowledged that qualitative

research now has legitimacy and occupies a space as one of two central approaches to research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994; Lancy, 1993; Punch, 1998; Riessman, 1994).

Typically qualitative research has been defined and explained by juxtaposing it to quantitative methods. Given that the conceptual framework for this study as outlined in the previous chapter, embraces post-structuralist and post-modern critiques of knowledge, a detailed justification for qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research is deemed superfluous and unnecessary. Epistemologically the location of this study within a qualitative paradigm was elucidated in Chapter two. Furthermore, with the growth and increasing sophistication of qualitative methods, the wisdom of defining quantitative and qualitative forms as diametrically opposite has been called into question (Banister et al, 1994). The dichotomous distinction between qualitative-quantitative has been found to be limiting as it leaves little room to represent the nuances and complexities in contemporary social research (Riessman, 1993). Instead, some common issues across qualitative research traditions are sketched below and this is followed by substantive discussion of the assumptions and dilemmas implicated in the selection of the narrative as a focus.

The task of identifying issues common to qualitative research is however, rendered rather difficult by the diversity of methodologies and methods falling within its fold. Several authors have emphasised that qualitative research is not a unified tradition (e.g. Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Riessman, 1993; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994; Punch, 1998). According to Riessman (1993), the term "qualitative" was invented by quantitative researchers to describe nonnumeric data. Yet, as she pointed out, the term refers to many diverse approaches that have some similarities but also differ on many substantive issues. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) thus refer to qualitative research as an umbrella term for several research strategies that share certain broadly defined characteristics.

One of these broadly defined characteristics is the focus on the study of meaning. Across the variety of qualitative approaches there is recognition that the meaning of human

experience is worthy of examination and that research based exclusively on the examination of observable qualities is fundamentally limited. As a consequence of the acceptance of the idea that people are fundamentally self-interpreting and self-defining, qualitative research is concerned primarily with human understanding. Further to this point, there are a variety of views. Another common feature, however, is the rejection of the possibility of objectivity as the ideal stance from which to generate knowledge. Most qualitative researchers work from the assumption that our representations of the world are always mediated and as a result, there is always an interpretative component in research (Banister et al, 1994). Instead of trying to eliminate the influence of the researcher's understanding through detachment, the researcher's perspective is embraced and then addressed as a component of the knowledge generation process.

Banister et al (1994) expressed the view that rather than making claims about objectivity, qualitative research offers a different way of conceptualising the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. They suggested that when we undertake qualitative research, we arrive at the closest we can get to an objective account through an exploration of the ways in which the researcher's subjectivity has informed the definition of the issue under investigation. From this perspective subjectivity may be seen as a resource rather than as a problem to be kept under control. Moreover, Banister et al argued that even when a researcher claims objectivity by undertaking procedures to achieve a position of distance, s/he is indeed producing a subjective account but refusing to acknowledge it as such. The position of distance is a position nevertheless, they argued, albeit unacknowledged.

These debates about the role of interpretation and subjectivity have in many ways raised awareness of the political nature of social research. As Punch (1994) summed it up, politics suffuses all social science research, from the micropolitics of personal relations in a research project, to issues involving research units, universities, other societal institutions and the social context as a whole. But, on the question of the politics of research, feminism has been a particularly potent force. Given that feminism is pivotal in the conceptualisation of this study, before narrative research as a qualitative approach is considered, this chapter briefly focuses on feminist debates on research with specific attention to issues relevant to the current study. As pointed out earlier, a number of the

epistemological issues were covered in the previous chapter, therefore the discussion below will focus more on issues of methodology and method. At this point it is perhaps germane to acknowledge the blurring of terms like methodology and method, a tendency that is widespread in the literature. Harding (1987 in Banister et al, 1994) tried to deal with this by specifying that epistemological position (assumptions about the foundations of knowledge) should be distinguished from methodology (a theoretical analysis defining a research problem and how research should proceed) and this in turn should be distinguished from method (research strategy or technique). Using Harding's definitions, this chapter is mostly about method. Notwithstanding Harding's attempt to achieve clarity, the blurring of terminology continues in the literature. Perhaps, it should not be necessarily viewed as problematic since in qualitative research there are no clear lines of demarcation between epistemologies, methodologies and methods.

## **5.2. Feminist Research**

Feminist thinking has consistently drawn attention to the politics of research. Initially, feminist scholars identified male biases and sexist distortions in research showing how women's experiences had largely been ignored or devalued. Positivism in particular came under attack for analysing women's experiences using male-defined hypotheses, methods and categories. Claims to objectivity were shown to be spurious and the partiality of knowledge that was derived from research findings on all-male samples and then generalised to all humanity was made apparent. Consequently, feminists tended to stress the value of qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research. Although there are feminist researchers who hold the view (known as feminist empiricism) that positivist methods can be reshaped to remove sexist biases and therefore they use quantitative methods when deemed appropriate, they generally still work from the position that research is never apolitical (e.g. Griffin & Phoenix, 1994). Overall, feminist critique has attended to both the forms by which research is produced and the relationships in which it is produced (Banister et al, 1994).

Reflexivity in research has been an issue of particular importance for feminist scholars. The notion of reflexivity broadly refers to the position and role of the researcher both

with reference to the definition and formulation of the research topic and with regard to the research process and the participants. Smith (1994) traced the specific meaning of reflexivity to Mead's conception of the person as self-reflecting. In the research process reflexivity incorporates the capacity of both the researcher and the participants for self-reflection (Smith, 1994). As pointed out in Banister et al (1994) "the research topic, design and process, together with the experience of doing the research are reflected on and critically evaluated throughout" (p.150). From a social constructionist perspective, the participants are endowed with the same capacities for reflection as the researcher; thus all knowledge is produced in social interaction.

Reflexivity as a critique of objectivity is not only widely noted as one of the central concerns of feminist methodological interventions (Banister et al, 1994; Reicher; 1994; Smith; 1994 and Parker, 1994), it is also generally identified as a characteristic feature of qualitative research (Banister et al 1994; Gergen, 1994a; Punch 1998). Although there is a well-developed body of feminist critique of research practices, there is no distinctive feminist methodology. Typically, the literature differentiates three strands of feminist thinking on research — feminist empiricism, standpoint epistemologies and feminist post-modernism or feminist post-structuralism (Banister et al; 1994; Punch 1998). While feminist post-structuralism has been discussed in some detail, and feminist empiricism briefly defined above, standpoint epistemologies generally hold the view that women's experiences are different and thus constitute a particular vantage point from which to view social reality. Across these variations in feminist perspectives on research, there are a number of common themes that are typically associated with feminist research practices. These include a focus on experience, especially with a view to representing those whose experiences have been excluded or marginalised by hegemonic knowledge, a focus on issues of reflexivity, the acceptance of research as political and the adoption of emancipatory goals.

An issue that has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny and debate within feminist research interventions concerns the role and responsibilities of the researcher in the research process, with special reference to relations of power between the researcher and the researched. Feminist intentions to challenge hegemonic knowledge have frequently

resulted in the choice to research those who are oppressed and have been omitted from or silenced by dominant knowledge forms. As a consequence, there has been a tendency to research down rather than up, that is, investigating people who are less powerful than the researcher. In South Africa a whole generation of white women feminists convinced of the need for politically partisan research which would give visibility to the needs and interests of the poor and the racially oppressed, spent most of their time researching poor black women (Robinson, 1994). When black women responded angrily to the ways in which they were represented in the research conducted by white women, many white women felt "confused" and "misunderstood" (Robinson, 1994; p. 198). A lesson to be derived from these angry encounters between black and white feminists in South Africa as well as in other countries like the US and Britain, is that choosing to conduct research on an oppressed and silenced group does not necessarily alter the kinds of knowledge that is produced or the knowledge-power relations in general (Mama, 1995). In fact, as both Mama (1995) and Walford (1994) pointed out, there has been a consistent tendency in psychology, sociology, education and anthropology to investigate downwards. So simply choosing to focus on the less powerful or marginalised is neither uniquely feminist nor necessarily emancipatory. Mama (1995) noted that these types of studies have echoed the unequal relationships in the societies at large in that the researchers, mostly white and male, in the research process have held authority and power and have been able to orchestrate the representations of the "other" less powerful group.

Several alternative ways of doing research have been debated among researchers trying to embrace a feminist methodology. An alternative scenario oft suggested by black women to white women researchers is to conduct within-group research in which researchers study members of their own group. As Robinson (1994) reflected, as a white woman she was accused of never studying white women but constantly appropriating the experiences of black women in the interests of personal advancement in academia. Another alternative scenario is to research upwards. This happens when a researcher of a less powerful group studies members of more powerful groups. Bhavnani (1990), for example, argued that her positioning as an Asian woman in Britain researching white youths gave her theoretical insights that might not have been available to a white man or woman as researcher.

These alternative scenarios, within-group research and researching upwards, tap into a long-standing debate in psychology about the merits of researcher-participant matching. Epistemologies that assume one real truth approach the debate with a concern to identify which sorts of researchers are best suited for obtaining the real picture or truth of the issue from various kinds of participants. In feminist research, in particular from a standpoint perspective, there has been a stress on the importance of women researching women. But this view assumes a unitary experience among women; an assumption already shown to be flawed. Because constructionism assumes that there is no singular truth waiting to be discovered through the right application of the right methods, the debate is dealt with by pointing out that different researchers produce different accounts as all knowledge is socially located. However, the relativism implicated in a feminist poststructuralism that posits multiple truths has been a source of concern for many who seek to do feminist research. As Rose (1994) explained she did not want to lose the epistemic privilege that standpoint theory conferred on the perspectives of the oppressed, but at the same time she felt the pull of the politics and theoretical arguments of the difference debate. For her the process of resolution is achieved in a fusion of standpoint theory with situated knowledge claims. In a similar vein to Rose, many researchers embrace a feminist post-structuralism which reflects a tension between developing alternatives to standpoint accounts and challenging the dominant models that have sought to represent and research women's experiences (Banister et al, 1994). Overall, there are several researchers who argue that feminist post-structuralism, notwithstanding the complexities of treading the tensions, offers the possibility of a more reflexive feminist analysis. For example, Brooks (1997) in researching academic women, chose feminist post-structuralism as a framework because in her view it facilitated ways of understanding the diverse and multiple ways women experience the discourses of power in the academy making it possible to incorporate race, ethnicity, class, age and nationality. In South Africa, too, post-structuralist feminism has been embraced as a framework for recognising the coexistence of multiple and contradictory positions (Hendricks & Lewis, 1994; Zeitkiewicz & Long, 1999).

Besides the debates on power relations that enter the research process through differences of race, gender and class, the power relations set up through the research method itself,

e.g. interviewing, is another level on which feminists have tried to transform knowledge-power relations. Many creative strategies have been used to mitigate and challenge the power relations set up by the research itself. In the broader literature the shift from designating people as subjects to participants or interviewees reflects an attempt to do research 'with' as opposed to 'on' people (Banister et al, 1994). The effort to create non-hierarchical relationships between the researcher and the researched has often resulted in attempts to incorporate participants as co-researchers by engaging in dialogic analytical exchange. An example in Smith's (1994) research on identity change during the transition to motherhood. In this study preliminary analysis of the data was taken to the participants for comments and these comments were then incorporated into the final report. Challenging the power relations between researcher and the researched remains a pervasive theme in the feminist research literature. After many years of working at this challenge, most researchers acknowledge that given the politics of how research is carried out, a complete reversal of the relations of power is unlikely. The researcher is typically positioned inside an institution, the research agenda is often moulded by the availability of funding and for the researcher there are personal motives and gains associated with completing the research. As Frankenberg (1993) noted there is in general a power imbalance between the researcher and the researched in the sense that the researcher sets the agenda, authors and publishes the manuscript and thereby takes both the credit and the blame for the overall result. However, instead of merely seeing the power relationship as unidimensional, it is now generally recognised that the power relations between the researcher and the participants can operate multidimensionally.

In post-apartheid South Africa the need to shift the relations of knowledge production has been given serious attention through several programmatic interventions aimed at capacity building or empowerment. The government-sponsored research foundation, now known as the National Research Foundation, has a directorate specifically devoted to developing research capacity among previously disadvantaged members of the academic community. One of its programmes has as its primary objective the increase in the participation of women, especially black women, in research as producers of knowledge. This programme, the Women-in-Research programme, provides financial support and training for women engaged in research and it also seeks to facilitate the entry of more

women into research. The establishment of this and other similar programmes, was largely the result of a consensus among black and women academics that concerted efforts had to be made to redress the consequences of deliberate strategies which had successfully reserved the domain of knowledge production for white, male citizens. Capacity-building programmes are viewed as a necessary strategy in transforming the history of asymmetrical power relations in South Africa. The genesis and unfolding of this study is linked on many different levels to the various attempts to transform knowledge-power relations in South Africa. The details of this connection will be elucidated later in this chapter when the reflexive focus is explicitly on the researcher, the researched and the research process of this study. At this juncture, the chapter turns to a discussion of narrative research.

### **5.3. Narrative Research**

As explained in the previous chapter, the definition of narrative is a subject of debate. The question of what is narrative is embedded in broader contemporary debates about theory, methodology and politics in scholarly work. In her book on narrative analysis, Riessman (1993) noted that the variety of approaches and analytic distinctions defy summary definition. From the literature it is clear that the study of narrative does not fit neatly within the boundaries of any one scholarly field, rather it appears to be intrinsically interdisciplinary (Riessman, 1993; Casey; 1995). Narrative research is conducted across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history, education and gender studies. In reviewing the field, Casey (1995) observed that contemporary examples of narrative research could not be easily typed by discipline regardless of the authors' affiliation. Given this scenario, the term narrative research is often used as an overarching category for a variety of research practices that focus on the interpretation of first-person accounts of experience. According to Riessman (1993) some researchers define narrative so broadly that it could include just about any interpretative method and then, there are others who use restrictive definitions that assume that all narratives have the same properties. In the interests of developing narrative analysis as a systematic method, Riessman identified some general features that seem to be subscribed to by a majority of scholars using this method.

Firstly, Riessman pointed out that most scholars agree that some level of sequence is a necessary feature of narrative. As already discussed, Gergen and Gergen (1984), for example, delineated a sense of movement and directionality through time as a feature of narrative. Riessman explained that according to this type of definition, a narrative is always responding to the question "and then what happened?". This feature does assume a linear notion of time, which may not be appropriate in all cultural contexts. Instead of sequencing by time, other scholars argue for thematic sequencing — narratives organised episodically (Riessman, 1993). Whatever the specific criteria, there is general agreement that a sense of sequence is a characteristic feature of a narrative. Indeed, it is this feature that renders narrative especially suitable for the study of careers, for as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) proposed, social actors often remember and order their careers as a narrative chronicle marked by key happenings.

Similarly to Riessman (1993), Coffey and Atkinson (1996) based on their reading of the literature made a distinction between narrative and story. They specified that not all narratives are stories in the sense of having protagonists, a plot, events, complications and an ending. Riessman showed that narratives may take a variety of forms. In illustration she mentioned habitual narratives when events happen over and over again, hypothetical narratives which depict events that did not happen, and topic-centred narratives, described as snapshots of past events that are linked thematically. As with Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) work on narratives, this study concentrates on narratives derived from interviews. Thus the form of the narratives to be analysed was to a large extent shaped by the questions posed by the interviewer.

Perhaps the most significant feature of narrative is that it tells not only about how social actors understand past deeds and events, but also how the self is constituted. Riessman emphasised that narrative analysis is about systematically interpreting how people construct meaning — meanings of themselves and meanings of events. Therefore, she proposed that it is especially suitable for studies of subjectivity and identity.

Furthermore, she strongly endorsed the argument of the Personal Narratives Group (1989) that the value of narratives is in their rootedness in subjectivity. A pivotal issue

on which understandings of narrative differ is the nature of the self and subjectivity. From the theoretical perspective of this study, we make sense of ourselves, our relationships and the events in our lives through the construction of narratives. In constructing a narrative, the individual also creates a self, how she or he wants to be known. The self is, therefore, understood as a social construction. But this construction in its reliance on language as a symbolic system is viewed as a communal, social process. Thus the significance of narratives is not seen as confined to the personal, the individual and the private. Casey (1995) credited this strand of narrative research for making an important contribution to redefining the personal as political, a conceptualisation that resonates well with feminism.

Seeing narrative construction as a social act necessarily situates narrative within a historical, cultural context. Riessman (1993) explicated how the political conditions prevalent within a specific historical period may constrain certain events from being narrated to others, but even to ourselves under particular kinds of conditions. As examples she listed conditions of war, torture and sexual crimes. She referred to rape as a particular kind of example — under certain circumstances there may be difficulties in naming such experience. Here Riessman pointed to the value of the political activism as she suggested that social movements can aid individuals in naming their experiences, in connecting with others and in bringing about change. Again, here is a point of connection between feminism and narrative inquiry. Narrative is viewed by several feminist researchers as useful for illuminating the construction of the gendered self and the interconnections between that self and the society. (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). However, there is a great deal of variation in the extent to which social context is included in narrative research (Riessman, 1993). Goodson (1992), for example, criticised much of the research done on teacher's narratives for not sufficiently embracing context in the analysis. Thus the social constructionist idea of the narrated self as pre-eminently a product of social interchange is not typical of narrative research in general. Overall, Casey (1995) suggested that the notion of a problematic most accurately depicts the recent history of narrative inquiry. As she explained, a problematic is internally complex and contradictory and often loosely held together. Moreover, she pointed out that a problematic recognises that problems, differences and contradictions are never really

solved.

As signalled in Chapter Four, one of the points of divergence in narrative inquiry concerns the truth- value of narratives. The Personal Narratives Group (1989: p.261) dealt with the issue as follows: "When talking about themselves, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths." These are truths of meaning and interpretation. Riessman (1993) stressed that narrative researchers, like all qualitative researchers, must come to terms with the fact that they are dealing with linguistic representations of experience — talk, text, interaction and interpretation. Like Gergen and Gergen (1984), she rejected the assumption that language reflects reality. Instead, Riessman explained that all representations of experience are limited and shifting because they arise out of social interaction between people. Texts become meaningful between people as subjects in relations of power in specific historical moments. Therefore Riessman, in the same vein as Gergen (1994), argued that there is no master narrative; rather there are several constructions and several readings. In the words of the Personal Narratives Group (1989): " the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them" (p. 261). From this point of view, tests of verification, reliability or representativeness are irrelevant to narrative studies. Prevailing concepts and procedures for establishing validity rely on realist assumptions that conflict with a social constructionist perspective which emphasises that narratives are not meant to be read as a mirror of what is out there.

This does not mean that rigour and quality are not concerns in narrative analysis or qualitative research, more generally. On the contrary, debates about quality and verification constitute a dynamic, emerging area in qualitative research as a whole; an area that has been recently reviewed by Creswell (1998) who noted that there are multiple perspectives. He distinguished between verification as a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed. Within the variety of approaches he identified three main strands: first, those that try to find

qualitative equivalents that parallel quantitative understandings of validity and reliability; second, researchers who try to reconceptualise the traditional definitions; and third, others that outright dismiss verification checks.

With regard to narrative research, Riessman (1993) followed the second strand by reconceptualising validation as the trustworthiness of our interpretations instead of their truthfulness. She justified this reconceptualisation on the grounds that the former moves the process into the social world, whereas the latter assumes an objective reality. She then delineated at least four criteria that may be applied in narrative work: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence and pragmatic use. According to Riessman (1993) persuasiveness is greatest when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from the participants' accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered. She seemed to have ambivalent views on the relevance of correspondence as a criterion in narrative work. Correspondence refers to member checks or taking the work back to the participants to find out what they think of the analysis. Although she saw that this procedure may sometimes be desirable, she also argued that in the end the interpretations and the work as a whole is the researcher's and she or he must take responsibility for its truths.

The coherence criterion refers to the importance of showing that the interpretation is not simply ad hoc but relates to the overall goals, theory and method of the study. Lastly, the criterion of pragmatic use is the extent to which the particular work becomes the basis for others' work. Riessman pointed out that this criterion, unlike the other three, is future-oriented, and it assumes the socially constructed nature of scientific endeavours. While Riessman's criteria may be used as a guide, authors all acknowledge that there are no recipes and formulas for dealing with the issues of validation and quality in qualitative research. For example, after reviewing the area, Creswell (1998) concluded that given the range of views, consensus is impossible. Instead of a standard protocol, he proposed that all we can achieve is a better understanding of the issues. In the final analysis, Riessman suggested that the best the narrative researcher can do is provide sufficient information for others to determine the trustworthiness of our work. This is what this study seeks to do.

In the domain of educational research "newer" forms of research methodologies such as narrative research, have been welcomed by authors such as Goodson (1992) and Apple (1995) who have suggested that these approaches might be informative in the analyses of complex and politically difficult policy issues. But, Apple (1995) cautioned that understanding the nuances of the new methodological moves and debates may take a considerable amount of study. On a similar note, Casey (1995) assessed that the new strand of narrative research informed by the post-modern and post-structuralist movement, has radically changed educational inquiry. Concerning gender in particular, Casey (1995) expressed the opinion that the new strand of narrative research has made space for new information on women's lives and work, and this information has changed the terms of the discussion in education. Likewise, by adopting a post-structuralist perspective on narrative research, this study seeks to broaden discussions about gender and educational change in a transforming South African society. In the words of Casey (1995) "What better way to grapple with making sense of our rapidly changing world than through the study of stories?" (p.240).

Having outlined the theoretical and methodological framework of this study, the details of the study itself are now described. In doing so, several issues and dilemmas that confront the narrative researcher are addressed. Further decisions on aspects of method are also elucidated.

#### **5.4. The Study**

A consequence of the post-structuralist/post-modern movement and the so-called interpretative turn in methodology is that researchers can no longer approach the writing up of research endeavours as a straightforward task (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Once we embrace the idea that we are dealing with representations of meaning and interpretation, we must accept that in writing up research we are constructing accounts of the subjective worlds of the actors we study. In a sense then, this report is a narrative, a story about doing research on the career narratives of women professors in South Africa. For the most part, the narrative up to this point has conformed to the conventions of thesis

writing. My voice as an author/researcher has been quite detached, hidden from direct view. At this juncture there is a shift in form and voice; the story of how the project was initiated is to be told. My voice as the author/researcher will shift into direct focus and my involvement, as an insider will be made explicit. Throughout the thesis I move between shifting levels of immersion and detachment doing what Ellis and Flaherty (1992) described as tacking back and forth between being a passionate insider and a dispassionate outsider.

#### **5.4.1. The beginning of the project**

Just over two years' ago, I was approached by the South African chapter of the Forum for Women Educationalists in Africa to conduct a research project on their behalf. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is a pan-African non-governmental organisation that seeks to bring together African women ministers of education, women vice-chancellors, and other senior women policy makers who assume leadership for education planning and implementation in their countries. It was founded and registered in Kenya, and it now has branches or chapters in 28 African countries. FAWESA is the acronym for the South African chapter. As a whole, FAWE's mission is to identify and develop innovative strategies and alternatives for addressing the challenges faced by women and girls in education.

By the time I was approached by FAWESA, the organisation had already procured a research grant to compile a scorecard on women and higher education in South Africa. Prior to its official launch in 1997, FAWESA had completed a scorecard on girls in schooling in South Africa (Budlender & Sutherland, 1995). Very simply, the scorecard concept involves a numerical count of the numbers of girls and women compared to boys and men at various levels of the education system. Thus, the research that I was invited to do involved an extension of the scorecard concept so that FAWESA would have covered not only the schooling system, but also the higher education system.

Although I was keen to undertake the project, I was not content to limit the project to a quantitative study. After years of first-hand experience in the South African university system, I knew that the statistics would not reveal much more than what was already

known, namely that women are under-represented. After some discussion with the FAWESA executive committee, they suggested that I submit a proposal outlining my ideas for a qualitative component to the project. The interviews with the women professors to be discussed below formed the substance of the proposal that I presented. In short, FAWESA responded most favourably to my proposal. I agreed to undertake personal responsibility for the study but I also requested that I be permitted to use the interview material for my doctoral research. This request was not only agreed to; I was explicitly encouraged to use the opportunity to further my own development as a woman academic. Thus the project was born.

At this point in the narrative, I try to address two questions by describing fragments of myself, my experience and my life. The two questions are: why was I approached to conduct the research, and why did FAWESA respond so enthusiastically to my request that the research also forms the basis of my doctoral work. I have not discussed these questions with the members of FAWESA, so my efforts to deal with them are based on my personal reflections. The issues raised through engaging with these questions are, in a crucial sense, part of the research. Because I am a woman academic in South Africa, my analysis of the career narratives of women academics is also about myself. I have not reached the level of professor; at the time of collecting the data I was a lecturer. At moments during the interviews, the transcription and the analysis, I compared the narrative to which I was listening with my own story — how has my experience been the same and/or different; what could I learn from working with the narratives of women who had moved up the ranks. These are some of the questions that I have pondered. As Riessman (1993) said, " the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it" (p.v). Therefore, I must reveal how I understand my mark.

#### **5.4.2. The researcher/the author/myself/I**

I believe that FAWESA approached me to conduct the research project because of my historical involvement in gender and education and my identity as a black woman academic at the University of Cape Town (UCT), also the location of FAWESA's office. Since taking up a position as a junior lecturer at the University of Durban-Westville (a historically black university) about ten years' ago, I have been actively involved in the

politics of higher education in South Africa, especially in relation to issues of gender equality. After some years of participation at the branch level, in 1993 I accepted nomination as vice-president of the then Union of Democratic Staff Associations of South Africa (UDUSA). This was an anti-apartheid organisation which focused on the higher education sector, but by the time I assumed office as an executive member the organisation was actively involved in the formulation of education policies in preparation for the post-apartheid period. During that time I participated in numerous workshops and meetings on education policy for a democratic South Africa. In addition to my participation in UDUSA, I was actively involved in feminist politics, most notably through my role as a member of the editorial collective of *Agenda*, the feminist journal.

So by the time FAWESA contacted me, I had a history of involvement in gender and education. Of course, as an academic I also had some research experience, although at the time I felt ambivalent about this part of my experience. I accepted a position as a lecturer in the UCT Department of Psychology after being at the University of Durban-Westville for about six years; initially as a junior lecturer and then as a lecturer. My move was initiated by UCT when I was invited to apply for the position in mid-1994. I believe I was one of several black candidates who were targeted for the position in the interests of changing the race profile of the university staff. I believe I was offered the position because I am black, I have a good academic record and many of the academic staff in the UCT Department were familiar with my research work. I accepted because I felt that it was an opportunity for me to find out whether I could succeed as an academic, in the formally defined sense. Up till then, I had put more energy into the broader politics of gender and education and much less into researching and publishing. This was not unique. As a colleague and I have written (Potgieter & de la Rey; 1997), many black People in academia spent a great proportion of their time engaged in political activism related to the struggle for national liberation. There was a shared sense that the struggle was far more important than the personal gain to be derived by intellectual pursuits per se. Since by the time of the job opportunity at UCT, the country had achieved democracy, I felt the time was right to focus my energies more explicitly on my career by becoming part of an institution renowned for its research output relative to other universities in the country.

Thus in 1995 I entered the ranks of academia at UCT. My efforts in research and publishing since my appointment have been rewarded. In 1997 I was promoted to senior lecturer on the basis of my performance. Usually a doctorate is a requirement for this rank; no doubt the imperative for racial equity played a part. At this time in the political development of South Africa, redressing the imbalances of the past is an imperative. Last week, legislation in favour of employment equity was passed. The groups to be targeted through this legislation are black people, women and disabled people. Efforts to redress past discrimination extend beyond the legislation, however. As indicated earlier, in academia there are a number of capacity development programmes. Developing the capacity of the historically disadvantaged is currently an integral component of many institutional and organisational planning frameworks, policies and strategic objectives. As a black woman I am a potential beneficiary of such initiatives. It is in relation to this context that I believe that the FAWESA support for having me combine their project with my doctoral research should be understood. In making this statement I do not wish to suggest that the individual members of the executive were insincere in offering their support, on the contrary I believe that each woman wholeheartedly supports me in my work. Rather the point that I am conveying is that the support is not based on their knowledge of me as a unique person — my race, my gender, my skills, my activism, my political commitment, all inform their knowledge of me and their responses to me.

I write this dissertation conscious of my identities as an academic, a student, a woman, a black woman, and a wife. I have not secured a sabbatical or study leave period. So I find time to write between teaching, attending meetings, fulfilling community and professional organisational commitments as well as doing domestic chores. Recreational and social activities have been reduced to a minimum. For years I have known that I must do a Ph.D. Although many South African academics reach retirement age without completing a Ph.D., the climate has now become far more competitive. Since the end of apartheid and the years of isolation due to international sanctions and boycotts, there is an increasing emphasis on South Africans becoming globally competitive. Moreover, I have internalised this expectation and I have decided that I must complete the task before the next millennium. Like Middleton (1993) did, in the process of studying other

academic women, I was simultaneously trying to understand myself as a woman academic. Hence, throughout the rest of this dissertation, I will intermittently speak about my self, the researcher, the author. My self-narration will be nested into the larger narrative analysis on the careers of women professors.

#### 5.4.3. The research process

Between July and November 1997 I interviewed 25 woman professors in universities across the country. By the time I began the interviews I had collected the statistical information for the broader FAWESA project. Some of this data is presented in the first chapter. I was able to do this in a fairly short period as that part of the project coincided with a report that I co-authored (de la Rey & Quinlan, 1997) for the Gender Equity Task Team commissioned by the Ministry of Education. I planned the interviews after I had made some progress in reviewing the literature presented in Chapters Two and Three. There are a number of limitations to working as an academic in the southern tip of Africa in country globally positioned as an emerging market, paying off debt incurred by the apartheid regime. Besides the geographical position, severe cuts in state funding of universities means that libraries have had to cutback on orders of journals and books. Even when books are purchased either by the library or by individuals, they are expensive because of the decline in the South African currency relative to the currencies used to sell books. Postage is also expensive, as well as slow and unreliable. Many of the literature sources I have reviewed were not available at the time I planned the interviews; in particular those published in 1996 and later. Most of these sources I obtained when I travelled to Sydney, Australia to read a paper at the Winds of Change conference. Nonetheless, I do not consider not having read these sources before doing the interviews as a major limitation as this is typical of many qualitative studies.

A feature of qualitative research is that the research process is not conceptualised in terms of discrete stages that follow a set sequence. Plans may unfold as the researcher becomes familiar with the participants, the topic and the setting. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have likened the qualitative researcher to a "loosely scheduled traveller" (p.58). Punch (1998) conceptualised structure in the research process as a continuum of possibilities ranging from the extreme of prespecified research questions, tightly

structured design and prestructured data to the other extreme of generally guiding questions, loosely structured design and data not prestructured. He positioned quantitative research at the high structure end of the continuum with qualitative research occupying a much greater range along the continuum. My study is then typical of qualitative research in that some aspects were preplanned but other decisions were made as the research process unfolded.

The decision to use narrative analysis was made during the early stages of interviewing. In terms of my agreement with FAWESA, at the outset I planned to produce a report comprising a thematic analysis together with any recommendations that may emerge from the research. The focus of the FAWESA report would be the content with very little reference to theory. At this time the plans for a doctoral dissertation were rather loose. Since I had already been working from a poststructuralist feminist perspective in my teaching and other research, I knew that this would be the framework within which I would do my doctoral research. However, I had not made a specific decision on the form of the analysis. Since this decision was taken during the course of interviewing, it is fitting that the interviewees and interviews are now described.

#### **5.4.4. Interviewees/participants**

The participants were women who had attained the rank of professor or associate professor at a university in South Africa. At the outset the intention was to focus on women who have had some years of experience in the higher education system and who have had some success in moving up the academic hierarchy. Women professors were identified as a potential pool of participants. University calendars, research reports and web sites were used to identify the names and location of women who were professors. In examining these details, it became apparent that the criteria for promotion to professor varied both within a particular university and across different universities. Moreover, the boundary between the ranks professor and associate professor seemed quite fluid. Discussions with human resource officers indicated that these decisions were often affected by allocations of posts to departments and budget-related factors. The absence of clear-cut criteria to distinguish these ranks, as well as the fact that the overall proportion

of women professors was so small (about four or five per university, with one university having only one professor), prompted a decision to include both professors and associate professors in the sample. Another factor that affected this decision was the issue of confidentiality. Not only is the total number of women professors very small, the entire academic community in South Africa is relatively small. Therefore, I anticipated that preserving confidentiality was going to present a challenge in this study. Enlarging the potential pool of participants by including women professors and associate professors was therefore, a means of dealing with this challenge.

A purposive method of sampling was used in an attempt to include women from a diversity of universities, academic disciplines, race groups, ages and family situations. In qualitative research there are no simple sets of guidelines for determining sample size. The literature on qualitative research methods generally presents decision-making about sample size in terms of a tension between providing an in-depth analysis of the specificities of each case versus skimming over as wide a surface as possible (e.g. Banister et al; 1994). The same applies to narrative studies. Riessman (1993) noting that sample sizes in narrative studies are generally small, presents the issue in relation to a tension between generalisation on the one hand, and close attention to narrative detail, on the other. If the aim is to show variation and to make comparisons across cases, then as Riessman acknowledged, more than one case must be studied. Since this study aimed to show both variation and commonality, several cases had to be included. In considering the issue of sample size the following factors were taken into consideration: the various groupings and sub-groupings of universities in South Africa, the historical salience of four race groups, academic disciplines, relationship and family status and age. The total number of participants was 25 to capture a range of the available experiences present in the contextual variation in the South African university system. Table 4 presents a profile of the sample.

**Table 4:  
Sample Profile**

**Race**

White = 16	Black = 9 (Black = 6, Coloured = 2, Indian = 1)
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**University**

HWU = 14	HBU = 11
English = 6	Urban = 7
Afrikaans = 3	Rural = 3

Bilingual = 2	Special Purpose = 1
Special Purpose = 3	

**Subject Area**

Education	=	4
Anthropology	=	2
Psychology	=	3
Social Work	=	1
English	=	3
Law	=	2
Natural & Allied Sciences	=	4
Commerce	=	3
Medicine & Allied	=	2
Theology	=	1

**Age**

$\bar{X}$ = 50.6 years; Range = 38 - 63 years	
below 40	= 3
40 - 44	= 1
45 - 49	= 5
50- 54	= 8
55 - 59	= 4
60 plus	= 4

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**Age**

$\bar{X}$ = 50.6 years; Range = 38 - 63 years		
below 40	=	3
40 - 44	=	1
45 - 49	=	5
50- 54	=	8
55 - 59	=	4
60 plus	=	4

**Relationship Status**

Married	=	16
Divorced	=	3
Divorced & cohabiting	=	1
Single	=	2
Single but in relationship	=	1
Long-term gay	=	1
Widow	=	1

**Highest Education Level**

Ph.D	=	22
Masters	=	2
Professional only	=	1

**Number of Children**

No. with Children	=	19
No. without Children	=	6
$\bar{X} = 2$ ; highest = 4		

The diversity of the sample was monitored consciously throughout the process of arranging and conducting interviews. A deliberate attempt was made to include black women since race is of particular relevance in the conceptualisation of the project. No reliable statistics aggregating race and gender were available at the time. From the lists that I compiled I identified a rough trend of two black women to every six white women professors. The proportion of black women ( $n=9$ ; 36%) relative to white women  $01=16$ ; 64% in the sample is thus estimated to be higher than in the population of South African women professors at the time of interviewing.

Fourteen participants (56%) were in positions at historically white universities and eleven (44%) were at historically black universities. At least one person from each sub-grouping (see Chapter Two) of universities was included, that is, historically black rural, urban and special purpose universities, and historically white English, Afrikaans, bilingual and special purpose universities. A total of 12 out of the 21 universities were covered. As the 21 universities are spread across the country, the particular selection was

determined by the available budget. Five of the eight regions in which universities are located were covered.

Although the lists revealed that women professors were clustered in subject areas such as education, English, psychology and social work, a conscious attempt was made to include women from male-dominated subject areas. This proved to be almost impossible as in most of these subject areas there were no women professors or associate professors. However, all four women listed as natural and allied sciences were in male-dominated subject areas. This general label, although not completely accurate, was intentionally chosen to conceal the identities of the participants.

The lack of consistency across universities in criteria for academic ranks (as alluded to above), become evident in examining the educational qualifications of the participants. Not all of the 25 participants had a doctoral degree; Masters was the highest qualification for two of the women and one participant only had a Bachelors degree plus a professional qualification. However, the reasons they had been promoted to professorship level became apparent when their publication records and contributions to the profession or community were described.

The youngest woman in the sample was 38 years' old with the oldest being 63 years of age. The mean age was 50.6 years with 50 to 54 years being the most populous age category. Most women were married (n=16; 64%); three were divorced, one was divorced and living with a male partner; two were single; one described herself as a widow; another was single but in a committed relationship and another was in a long-term gay (her description) relationship. Also, most of the participants had children. The average number of children was two with the highest number being four. Of the six women who did not have children, three were married, one was single, one was a widow and one was single and co-habiting.

Describing the participants in terms of broad demographic criteria as I have just done is important, but it also connotes a view of the participants as nameless, faceless objects of study. Further descriptions, of who the interviewees were as individual women, will be

presented in the following chapters when the narratives are examined. At this point, the interviewing process is outlined.

#### **5.4.5. The interviews**

The interviews were oriented around a central multi-part question on the interviewee's career experiences: "I am interested in how and why you decided to enter academia and your experiences of being in a university". For each interview, I suggested a chronological format; an idea I gleaned from Middleton (1993). Even though I had an interview guide, my approach was to ask open-ended questions. The interview guide (appendix 1) comprised nine broad areas of questioning, all related to career experiences in academia. The areas of questioning included: the formation of an ambition to pursue an academic career; family attitudes towards career goals; school and university experiences, trajectory of career development, personal life in relation to academic life, socialisation into professional and academic life; obstacles and challenges; the role of feminism, other women and mentors. The selection of these areas of questioning was informed by my reading of the literature. In the interviews no particular order of themes was followed. All interviews began with the same broad question as stated above. Many probe questions were used such as "What was that like for you?"; "How did you feel at the time?" and "Can you tell me more about that issue?".

I also completed a biographical profile of each participant (appendix 2) which covered information such as contact details, educational qualifications, employment history, age, and relationship status. This was completed by myself as the interview unfolded. At the end of each interview, I spent some minutes filling in any gaps; that is information that had not been revealed during the flow of the interview. In many cases, by the end of the interview the only outstanding items were the age of the interviewee and some of her contact details. At the end of each interview the interviewee was thanked for her time and for sharing her career experiences. I promised to send copies of the FAWESA report to all participants. In the week following the interview, a thank-you letter was posted to each participant (appendix 3).

The interviews typically lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours. With the

permission of the interviewee, the interview was audio-recorded. Each interviewee was informed that the tape recorder would be turned off anytime she so requested. An assurance was given that all names would either be changed or deleted in the transcripts and reports. The issue of confidentiality was discussed with each woman professor. As stated earlier, I was conscious of the smallness of the academic community in South Africa and that in some disciplines there is only one woman professor in the entire country. Although I promised to safeguard confidentiality, I was aware that preserving anonymity would require special measures. I undertook to change the names of all persons and to de-link the person from any identifying details. In reporting the findings, names of universities, disciplines, schools and places are frequently omitted in the interests of preserving confidentiality. Although I assured each participant that I would treat the issue of confidentiality seriously and with caution, taking all the steps that I have outlined, I informed her that there could be no absolute guarantees and that I was asking her to trust me.

All the interviews were arranged by me telephoning the woman professor and asking her to participate in a study about the experiences of women academics. Although I had experience in research interviewing, I felt hesitant to make the first telephone call. I was aware that I would be asking potential interviewees to trust me with personal information. As Frankenberg (1993) commented, interviewing requires one to ask people "for an enormous favour-to give time, and to share personal history, for the most part taking entirely on trust that their time and, more importantly, their words will be treated with respect" (p.23). I was conscious of the complexity of the power relations that may shape their responses to the telephonic request and, if agreed to, the interview itself. Two dimensions of power were salient for me at the time of the telephonic approach: firstly, that in terms of academic rank and status, I would be interviewing upward; and secondly, the power relations of racism.

#### **5.4.6. Relations of power in the interview process**

Many of the women professors I interviewed are well-known public figures who have established reputations based not only on their academic work, but also on their contributions to the wider community. As I have mentioned, at the time of the

interviews, I was a lecturer. When telephoning, I introduced myself by name and I indicated that I was a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at UCT. I stated that I was conducting the research on behalf of FAWESA. During either the initial telephonic conversation or the interview I indicated that it was likely that I would also use the material for my doctoral research. Some women suggested I do this even before I could inform them. Regardless, all of them responded to this idea with encouragement. Thus all of them were informed about the differences in rank. I wondered how they would feel about sharing their personal histories with someone relatively junior.

In "researching up" this study follows a growing trend in education research. Walford (1994) noted that after several years of mainly "researching down" educational research has in recent years shown an increasing trend to research those in leadership and in positions of power. In my study the relations of power seemed highly complex. On one level, it seemed to fit the criteria of "researching up" since the researched were higher in rank and status than the researcher. On another level, the question of whether these women could be considered powerful is arguable. While all the women I interviewed clearly had had some success in moving up the academic hierarchy, the research findings suggested that women in the academy are positioned as marginal and as outsiders. What did become apparent in the course of discussing this project informally with colleagues and friends was the perception by many other women that women professors constitute an elite by virtue of their educational and career achievements.

Race contributed to yet a further level of power relations. Most of the women I interviewed are white. Although earlier in this chapter I identified myself as a black woman, at this point my racial identification merits closer view. In the racially marked social landscape of South Africa, I am both black and coloured. My relationship to the identification of myself as coloured is ambivalent. It is the categorisation into which I was positioned at birth, but it is also the categorisation I reject as a construction imposed upon me by the workings of the apartheid regime. As a young student I adopted the standpoint of black consciousness; defined myself as black rather than coloured, a non-categorisation in the sense that it described someone who was not black and not white. In these terms I positioned myself inside of the struggle for national liberation. But in

everyday life the dominant response to race identification in South Africa is framed by the significance of skin colour and physical features such as hair texture and facial structure. My experiences of how others perceive me in racial terms speaks directly to the arbitrariness of colour and race. In my lifetime, depending on my hair length and colour and in which country I am in, I have been identified as Indian, Latino, Portuguese, Middle Eastern and Mauritian. In South Africa, I am regularly identified as Indian, although all the other categories have been used but less frequently. My experiences are not unique for as Hiazlip (1994) wrote about race in the US "...race and color in America are not interchangeable. From bitter experience, black people have always understood that color and race are exquisitely arbitrary" (p.34).

My embodiment of the arbitrariness of colour and race renders pinpointing the race dynamics of the interviewing process rather complex. From one perspective, it could be argued that when I interviewed white women professors, I was interviewing up in the way that Bhavnani (1990) as an Asian conducted research on white participants. It certainly reverses the dominant trend in South Africa of white women researching black women subjects. As I will discuss in analysing the narratives, race was talked about infrequently in the interviews with white women. But even in the interviews with black women (including the coloured and Indian women), when race was talked about with some frequency, *my* race was not alluded to. Given the historical salience of race in South Africa, and that as an interviewer I was conscious of racial subjectivity, I specify race as a factor in the interviewing process even though I am unable to pinpoint its precise shaping effects. Defining relations of power is always a complex task and in this study it seemed even more complex.

Besides the issues of race and rank, there were the power relations of the interview itself. The terms of participation, that it was voluntary, that the participants could refuse to answer particular questions, that they could request that the tape be turned off or not used at all, that they could discontinue the interview at any time, are typical of any research project using qualitative interviewing. Towards the end of the interview participants were also asked whether they would like to add any further information. At the beginning they were informed that they should feel at liberty to ask any questions of me at any time

during the interview. Many did ask questions about my personal and career history. All of these questions were answered openly and honestly. However, most of the time the interviews followed the traditional pattern of the interviewer posing the questions with the participant providing the responses. In this respect, then, there was a power imbalance.

Overall in this project I try to address the issues in the relationship between myself as researcher and the participants as the researched by doing what many researcher have suggested, making my role in the research process explicit and transparent. To this end, the next section gives an account of how the study took a turn towards narrative analysis.

### **5.5. Interviewing as Narrative**

The conversation exchange of qualitative research interviews often lends itself to considerations in terms of narrative (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Franklin, 1997). Early in the interviewing process, I became aware that my research interview seemed to invite the participants to recount their career experiences in the form of stories. In a similar way to how Riessman (1993) reported that responses "felt" like narratives, as I listened, the telling of the experiences "felt" storylike. My asking the participants to tell me about their career experiences together with my suggestion that we use a chronological format invited the participants to recount their careers as a series of key happenings ordered in some sequence. Thus the interviewees were providing me with a narrative representation of aspects of their lives; as Franklin (1997) detailed, a series of statements that describes and orders a number of actions and/or experiences.

The form and content of the narratives to be analysed in the following chapters were, therefore, strongly shaped by the context and process of the interviews. My understanding of the status of these narratives has been informed by the following comments from Frankenberg (1993): "An interview is not, in any simple sense, the telling of a life so much as it is an incomplete story angled toward my questions and each woman's ever-changing sense of self and of how the world works."(p.41) The narratives to be presented in this study are products of the particular interview context, shaped

## 6. ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES

Analysis inescapably implies representation. With reference to narrative analysis, this point was initially stressed by Riessman (1993) and then later by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). What this means is that analysis is not simply about classifying or categorising data, it is about representing or recounting the experiences of the others. As Coffey and Atkinson (1997) explained, in analysing narratives we do not merely report what we find, we construct accounts of what we encounter in talk, text and interaction. The analytic task requires that the researcher singles out some aspects of the data as worthy of note and others are relegated to the background (Wolcott, 1994). In this process of narrative analysis, the researcher confronts a number of representational decisions. Riessman's advice to the researcher was to be aware of these decisions, as this will ensure that we are more conscious, reflective and cautious about the claims that we make. In reporting on the analysis of the narratives in this chapter and the next, Riessman's advice will be heeded, especially since there are no recipes or formulae to be followed in analysing narratives. How decisions were made in the process of analysis will be woven into the discussion.

In this study the telling of career experiences in the context of the interview, was followed by another level of representation, namely transcription of the audio-recorded talk. As noted by Riessman (1993), like all types of representation, transcription is partial and selective. She further noted that since the interpretative turn in social research, transcriptions are taken more seriously than before because the transparency of language has been dismissed. A key question that I faced concerned the level of detail to be reflected in the transcriptions. Decision-making on this question, however, intersected with a number of other representational decisions. Given the task of analysing 25 narratives, a relatively large sample size for a narrative study, I had to decide what aspects of the narrative data to focus on. Notwithstanding the sample size, researchers always confront this issue for we cannot represent the entirety of the data.

There is a range of approaches to the analysis of narratives. Researchers who have dealt

with a sample size similar to the 25 in this study have tended to either present key substantive themes that cut across all the narratives or they have concentrated on a few key individuals. In Middleton's (1993) book, of the total of 12 interviews, one is presented as a long case study; otherwise she selectively presented a few brief case studies at a time, or developed a collective narrative of the 12 teachers. In Frankenberg's (1993) book summaries of the narratives of each of the 30 women she interviewed are presented in an appendix; in the chapters her interpretation focuses on the narratives of a few women at a time. In representing the narratives of the 25 women professors, I have decided to selectively follow both Middleton's and Frankenberg's examples. In arriving at this decision, I considered Wolcott's (1994) advice that qualitative researchers should avoid an excess of descriptive reportage in favour of a focus that is narrower with a level of detail that is relevant and appropriate. He also advised the researcher to be honest about identifying her/his purposes. One of my purposes is to stay within the upper limit of 80 000 words for doctoral dissertations as determined by the UCT Higher Degrees Committee. A weightier purpose, however, is to report the analysis in a way that shows both variation and commonality in the narratives. A further intention is to write the account so that there is both a focus on the women as individual social actors and a focus on the contextual processes embedded in the narratives. These are the considerations that persuaded me to loosely follow a combination of Middleton's and Frankenberg's models.

Like Frankenberg, a summary of each narrative is presented in an appendix (appendix 4). One of the transcriptions is included in appendix 5 merely to show how the transcriptions were done. These transcriptions are reductions based on hearing the tapes. A decision about the level of detail to be included was based on the enormity of the task of transcribing 25 narratives and knowing that the analysis would primarily pay attention to form and content. On the one hand, I needed to have more than core narratives and on the other hand, I was aware that I would not be focussing on detail such as pauses and pitch changes in the conversation. "Fuller" transcriptions in the way that Riessman (1993) described them would be too full for my purposes. Therefore, my transcriptions appear to be rather "cleaned" (Riessman's term) in the way that many qualitative researchers present. This is the representational decision that I made knowing that whatever the particular decision, the transition from spoken to written text is inevitably limited

(Riessman, 1993). Overall, my strategy for analysis falls somewhere between a sole reliance on core narratives and full attention to poetic features; the two main strategies outlined by Riessman (1993).

### **6.1. Core Narratives**

The 25 core narratives presented in appendix 4 are summaries derived through a process of close listening to the tapes and then repeated readings of the transcriptions. The summaries are presented and numbered in the sequence of the interviews. All the names are fictitious; any resemblance to individuals is entirely unintended. The summaries are core narratives in that they comprise the details that constitute the skeleton of the career trajectory. Core narratives are reductions of the full narratives in which basic content and plot line are contained but numerous parts are deleted, such as descriptions, evaluations and explanations. To illustrate one of the core narratives is presented below:

#### **9. Nosizwe Mthembu, 47 years, black**

Nosizwe Mthembu was born into a family that had two generations of professional women who were either teachers or nurses. After attending a co-ed missionary school, she went to a homeland HBU where she did a professional degree. Thereafter, she worked in the homeland administration. After six years, a male friend persuaded her to apply for a lecturing position at the homeland HBU. She was appointed. After her aunt in the US expressed shock that she was appointed without higher degree qualifications, she enrolled to do her Honours part-time. When this was completed, she did not continue with part-time studies as by this time she was married with two children. For a period she was completely busy with work and childcare responsibilities. After an aborted attempt to do a Masters through distance education, she took unpaid leave to complete her Masters in the UK. On her return she was promoted from junior lecturer to lecturer. Two years later, She was awarded a scholarship to do a Ph.D. in the US. She lived there for three years with her daughter. Her son chose to remain with his father. She was compelled to return when her home burned down and her father died on the very same day. Her husband was very seriously injured in the fire. Despite this, he insisted that she return to the US to complete her Ph.D. She described him as very unusually supportive, especially since he came from a very traditional family and he was not university educated. When she returned with the Ph.D. she was promoted to senior lecturer and then three years later to professor. She described her career as having fallen in her lap.

In the above core narrative derived from the ninth interview only the basic content and plot line is retained. It is sparse on detail, focussing more on the factual showing movement from school to university and then the employment history through to the current professorship status. Although the sequence of happenings is presented, showing how actions and events are strung together to make sense in the narrative, very little of the

affective and other components of these events is included in the core.

In this core narrative from the interview with Nosizwe, there is no information about the details of her childhood and many other aspects of her life. Instead the information was selected on the basis of its direct relevance to the research topic. At the outset her age and race are listed. The contextual history of higher education in South Africa (Chapter 2) and the literature review (Chapter 3) have pointed to the relevance of this information. She was born into a family that had two generations of professional women, showing that she was part of an established family pattern of women having careers. The type of school is identified as a point of differentiation; namely that she did not attend an apartheid, bantu education school. But she did attend a historically black university in line with the higher education policy of the time. Furthermore, as a professional she worked in the homeland administration, signalling that her choices were constrained by apartheid legislation. We read that her move to an academic position was in response to a suggestion by a male friend; it was not self-initiated. Then, when her aunt expressed shock that she was appointed without a postgraduate degree, she enrolled for her Honours degree. The core narrative shows how her actions were linked to the actions of others. Thus Nosizwe began a process of further education until she had a doctoral degree. Sequence is shown in the unfolding of the career over time. As she obtained each higher degree, there was a promotion up the academic hierarchy. Her actions to obtain further certification are depicted as directly leading to positive outcomes. In her quest to obtain these higher degrees, she travelled to the UK and then the US. Each time she returned with a degree. In this way, the core narrative draws attention to how through the life of an individual woman, knowledge paths are enacted from north to south, from the west to the southern tip of Africa. At certain moments, her career progression was threatened by her childcare responsibilities and the key event of her house burning down with the resultant injuries to her husband. But then she recounts how her husband's response permitted her to continue with her career development. We learn that following the successful completion of the Ph.D., she returned to her position with immediate promotion to senior lecturer and then a few years later to professor. Thus, the goal was achieved.

Even though core narratives are reductions, they can be usefully deployed for presenting

the substantive content of a large number of narratives, as is the case here. Commonalities and variations across participants are detectable, even though they are reductions. Although the emphasis is on content, features of narrative such as directionality and movement through time are still evident in the configuration of the core. The analysis and interpretation to be presented will, however, go beyond the core narratives by including quotations and material from the full transcripts.

## **6.2. Progressive Narratives**

Many authors caution researchers about the tendency to read narratives simply for content overlooking other features such as structure, form and function (Riessman, 1993; Coffey & Atkinson, 1994; Ochberg, 1994). Using Gergen and Gergen's (1984) categorisation of prototypical narrative forms, all narratives presented here would fall within the prototype of a progressive narrative, defined as a narrative in which there is progressive movement towards a goal state or valued endpoint. In each case the recounting of the career trajectory conformed to the features of progressive narratives. By asking the women professors to share their career stories using a chronological format, I was in a sense inviting the telling of a progressive narrative. The main line of the plot was shaped by the person's career development over time, recounting the unfolding of her career from her school days to the present time as a university professor. The valued endpoint was the promotion to professorship. Preceding events were described and positioned in relation to how they contributed to or detracted from the forward movement towards the endpoint. At a macronarrative level, in keeping with the form of progressive narrative, events were linked together to convey incremental movement over time. At the level of micronarrative, however, many events were positioned as regressive narratives, that is, incidents or events construed as retreats or digressions along the path to professorship.

### **6.2.1. Micronarratives**

In the case of the narrative of Nosizwe Mthembu, the burning of her home and the death of her father on the same day constituted an event that may be seen as a regressive micronarrative nested within the larger progressive narrative. During the interview,

Nosizwe described it as follows:

*" 2.. I had some tremendous misfortune, Cheryl. My husband was actually burned in our house. The house was completely burnt. Thank goodness he did not die!*

*You were away at the time?*

*Yes and my father died on the very same day that our house was burned So the misfortune actually forced me to come back home and I just did not know how I coped for those three years, because I thought I was finished, it was done! But my husband said: "I will be okay. You go back". So I returned to the States and it was really okay. It brought a few things out and I just focussed on my work and on my daughter and both of us actually succeeded very well".*

In this extract an event that is construed as a potential threat to the attainment of the valued endpoint is described. The burning of the house, the injury of her husband and the death of her father compelled Nosizwe to return home. This was an interruption in her Ph.D. programme. It was an event that threatened her progress on the path to the endpoint of success. As she said, "... *I thought I was finished...*". But then her husband's declaration that he was okay and that she should return to the US allowed her to continue with her career plans. Nosizwe then told how she was able to turn this event around by focussing in a way that allowed both her and her daughter to succeed. Thus the overall directionality - movement forward towards the goal of professorship - is maintained, giving the overall narrative a progressive form.

The sense of movement or direction through time that shapes the narratives became most explicit in the narrative recounted by Helen Hardy (no.6 in appendix 4) when she described a key event by saying "*what I did was I took a complete side step and I moved to (country name)*". The term "*side step*" is used to denote a movement that departs from the forward movement that contains the narrative as a whole. At that point in the narrative she was explaining that when she was one course short of finishing her Ph.D. coursework, her marriage ended. She told how she "*had reached a complete crisis*" and she did not know what to do. She described how she was in a quandary as she was living in her husband's native country and she was confused about whether she should have continued her Ph.D. there, but perhaps in a different town, or whether she should have returned to South Africa. Her next move was a "*side step*" in that she did not pursue any

of these options, instead she moved to another country because she had met a man who lived there. But this relationship only lasted a few months after which she returned to South Africa where she took up a junior lectureship and simultaneously worked on her Ph.D. Thus, she moved closer to the goal of professorship and the progressive form of the narrative is maintained.

Each of the narratives contained such events, construed as threats, retreats or digressions from the overall forward movement of the career trajectory through time towards the goal of professorship. Although the content of the events differed, every narrative told of at least one such event. Many narratives contained more than one regressive micronarrative. Carol Williamson's (no.19) account is an example. After high school she enrolled in medical school. This move was presented as a regressive micronarrative. She explained that she knew almost immediately that she had made a mistake but her father insisted that she completed the first year. Only after this event did she enrol for a degree that set her on the track to her present-day professorship. But then there were other points of digression and threat to her career development. Early in her career she resigned a post with the intention of marrying a man who had moved overseas. After two months this relationship failed. She returned to a junior post. Shortly thereafter she married a man in the same academic department. Then she entered a period that she described as " *a long complicated story*". In short, the head of department did all he could to terminate her employment. Because she could not live with the strain of being victimised, she resigned. But like Nosizwe, she recounted how she used this period to focus on her Ph.D. as well as to obtain a professional qualification. By the time she had achieved this, the head, who had victimised her, was no longer in the university so she could return to the department. At this point she began a period of relatively rapid promotion until she had achieved her current status of senior professor. So in spite of having more than one regressive micronarrative, the overall narrative of her career development retains a progressive form.

Even though at a macro level the narratives of these 25 women professors all adhered to a progressive narrative form, because of the frequent interjection of regressive micronarratives they do not correspond with the standard model of career, namely,

continuous service with regular and steady promotion up the organisational hierarchy as identified by Evens (1994). Instead, their narratives of career are marked by interruptions due to events such as relationship crises, family responsibilities and victimisation as demonstrated in the narratives of Carol Williamson, Helen Hardy and Nosizwe Mthembu. Moreover, like Karp (1985) found among his sample of 24 women academics, some women professors among the 25 in this study only began the pursuit of a career after they had married and had children.

### 6.2.2. Late beginnings

Ann Edgar's narrative is an example of an academic career trajectory with a late beginning. The following extracts from her narrative describe when and how she began her academic career.

*"So after my BA degree I did not know what I wanted to do, I just simply... I had no career. I became a variety of things. I was a translator, I was a typist, I ended up in journalism and I worked here in (city) on the (magazine's name) and then I got married and then I went to live in (region). My spouse was a professional person working for himself so I got the security bug and I realised that if he got ill, we had no income. So I thought that I must qualify further. I have always liked books and things so I chose (discipline) simply because I could do it as a post-graduate diploma and I could do it part-time.*

*Did you have children at the time?*

*No, not at the time I was doing that. Then I became interested in (subject) and I started to study part-time and I had a series of miscarriages. I adopted a child and it is a whole long painful part of my life but eventually it was quite clear to me that I could not go on studying, having miscarriages and then having a baby and doing all that stuff. So what I did was - I just simply did half-day jobs. I had a series of rather interesting half-day jobs working for interesting people.*

*... Then in 1970 odd when my youngest child was about three, I took her to nursery school. So in other words I was working part-time and I was rearing kids. I started with a friend of mine to write study guides ...*

*... So a friend of mine and I got together and we started to publish study guides. Then we had to form a non-profit making company because we had to sell them to cover our printing expenses, which we first paid out of our pocket money and the thing just took off... After I had been doing that for a number of years, I thought to myself one morning, I really must get a little respectable. Why don't I go and study and do a diploma and then I can sort of have more authority when I write these guides. So I went down to the university to see a professor that I knew there.... Anyway by the time I left there that morning I had*

*agreed to start another degree. When I got home I did not know what I had done... I started my part-time studies. My children were at school. I used to work about 20 hours a week and I did not know when I started if I could get the wheels going again.*

*What age were you then?*

*About 40 odd It had all gone rusty and I think the extraordinary sense of making it, of actually starting to study, getting back my assignments, seeing that I had A's for everything was very nice and I was also gripped by the subject.*

*I found what I wanted to do after I was 40. All my life I had never been sure and then I found it and once I found it, I just cruised it."*

The form and content of the above extracts reveal that in Ann's case her career only assumed a progressive form once she started university studies again at about age 40. Prior to this point no steady forward movement is evident in her narrative of her working life. For her there was no smooth movement from school to university to career. Until about age 40 when she begins another degree, her working life is marked by fragmentation, that does not in anyway resemble the forward movement typical of a progressive narrative. However, from this point on, as she clearly indicates by saying with reference to her academic career "*once I found it, I just cruised it*", there was an overall steady upward movement to the position of professor.

The narratives of many of the other women who began their academic careers in their 30s and 40s reflect that the first academic appointment was typically preceded by periods spent working, teaching being the most frequently mentioned prior occupation. Ten of the 25 core narratives reflect a period of teaching in a school prior to the first academic appointment. In some cases such as Nthombi Mbokazi (no.24) the time spent teaching was of short duration; after a year she left to attend university. Others spent several years as a teacher. Explanations for the movement into teaching were woven into each narrative. For Beverley Peters (no. 11) the explanation was that doing teaching meant access to a government-funded bursary whereas Helen Hardy explained it by noting that it seemed to be expected of her as her mother and all her aunts were teachers. The social-historical embeddedness of the explanations for teaching in these self-narratives was made most explicit in the narrative of Victoria Makgetla (no.8). who described a time of apartheid education when black girls, who were able to complete high school, went into

either teaching or nursing, as there were few options available to them. For these ten women the dominance of the social discourses that collectively justified teaching as a career for women meant that in a similar vein to Ann Edgar, they only found out what they wanted to do later in their lives.

The late beginnings and regressive micronarratives that characterise the narratives in this study confirm the trends reported in the literature review chapter. As authors like Karp (1985) and Heward (1996) noted women's careers frequently do not follow the anticipated standard pattern of uninterrupted service but this is not because they do not desire career success. Rather, the analysis of the narratives show that progressive movement in the career is achieved in spite of the late beginnings and key events that disrupt the smoothness of the movement over time.

### **6.2.3. Ties to the narratives of others**

In terms of content, the most frequent regressive micro-narratives were accounts of divorce and relationship problems. In addition to Helen Hardy, divorce constituted a regressive micronarrative in the accounts of Daphne Swartz (no. 2), Susan Smith (no. 7), Pauline Johnson (no.16) and Desiree Jones (no. 20). Although not a divorce, ending relationships featured as potential threats in the narratives of Carol Williamson (no. 19) and Gwen Dickenson (no. 12). Here there is confirmation of the finding reported by Karp (1985) that the stories of women academics, unlike men academics, tend to be tied to the stories of others, typically their husbands and children. Even if it was not a divorce or the ending of a relationship, the specific turns and developments in the narratives of the career were largely tied to the lives of others, in particular husbands, lovers and children.

In addition to her divorce, a daughter's illness constituted another micronarrative nested in the account of Daphne Swartz. She explained that the reason she moved from one city to another was that her younger daughter was an allergy sufferer and the move was beneficial for her daughter's health. But she used the opportunity of the move to improve her qualifications as the city she moved to was the location of the HBU intended for people of her racial classification. At a later point in her narrative, she told how many

years later she almost gave up a scholarship because the donor wanted her to leave for the US two weeks before her grandson was to be born. Her comment " *I have a relationship with my children next to none*" underscored the extent to which her narrative was tied to the narratives of her two daughters.

Nearly all the movements reflected in Susan Smith's career narrative were in response to the moves of others, primarily husbands and lovers. Initially she attended a HWU where her father was an academic. After she completed her first degree, she followed her parents who had by that time moved to England. When she clashed with a tutor, she quit the Masters programme in which she was enrolled. She then travelled to Europe where she met a man who she married. In her role as housewife, she became depressed. Following the advice of her husband, she enrolled to do a post-graduate certificate in teaching. The marriage ended. A short time later her lover, who was doing a Ph.D., persuaded her to do a Masters. She did this at the university where he was employed in his chosen discipline. She then continued with her Ph.D. After a period of doing research because she could not find an academic job, a foreign national male friend offered her a fellowship. This led to a lectureship in his home country. Because she was not happy there, she moved back to South Africa where she obtained a position at a historically white university. A period of hard work and active involvement in politics followed. During this time she also made progress up the academic hierarchy. Then she decided to take a sabbatical in another country so that she could meet with a lover, an academic who lived in that country. Because she decided to live with him there, she resigned her position in South Africa. They married and she spent her time by doing another degree, but she hated not having any status. So they both moved to South Africa, where after some time, this marriage ended when he had an affair. At the time of the interview she was single and a professor at a HWU. She hoped to remain in her current position until retirement. Towards the end of the interview, she reflected that one's job is the reliable part of one's life and relationships are not.

In a similar vein to Susan, explicit connections between career moves and the movements of husbands and lovers featured in the narratives of several of the other women professors. An example not already mentioned is Mary-Ann Taylor (no.4). In her

narrative, Mary-Ann explicitly drew this link when after using the pronoun "we" for most of the interview, she said, "*It was very much his career as long as I taught*". Here she was referring to her teaching at a high school. Indeed, it was only when there were financial difficulties resulting from her husband not being able to work due to injuries he sustained in a serious car accident, that she applied for an academic position. Only from this point onwards did her career assume a significance apart from his life and work. The narratives of women professors like Mary-Ann reveal how women shape their professional lives in relation to the lives of husbands, lovers and children. Thus these career narratives are not simply chronicles of the individual actions of the protagonist but of the actions of others as well. Of special significance, is that these are gendered narratives. A recurrent trend is that the actions of male others, as husbands and lovers, played a pivotal part in shaping the movements and key events in the career narratives of these women protagonists. As M. Gergen's (1997) analysis showed, in women's stories the career is often secondary to affiliative relationships whereas in men's stories their careers assume a centrality such that they seem to sacrifice their lives to careers. As she noted, this is not to say that women do not desire success in their careers but they do not seem to make the career itself the ultimate endpoint.

### **63. Dramatic engagement**

The telling of micronarratives within the progressive macronarrative contributed to an overall a sense of narrative drama. M. Gergen and K. Gergen (1984) noted that narratives of daily life convey dramatic impact in the same way that theatrical productions create feelings of arousal and tension in an audience. Micronarratives, which threatened the overall progression of the career, served such a purpose. A point of high drama was created in the narrative of Nosizwe Mthembu when she described the burning of her house, the resultant serious injuries to her husband, compounded by her father's death on the very same day. A sense of tension is conveyed by the portrayal of this as a turning event — will she give up her Ph.D. studies, or will she continue in spite of these events? There is a build of dramatic tension that is subsequently dissipated by the actions of her husband when he supports her continuing her studies.

Recounting the career history as a progressive narrative punctuated with key turning points

had the effect of enhancing the dramatic engagement of the narratives. Mary-Ann Taylor's chronicle of how she succeeded in obtaining her first academic appointment is reproduced below to illustrate how she created dramatic tension by interweaving strands of the account of her husband's car accident into this micronarrative:

*"...at the time my husband's case had come to court. The psychological warfare! (and there is no other word for it) that went on in court was absolutely appalling! You know, here was an innocent victim where a car hit another car which hit him and they made him out to be... they treated him almost as though he were at fault. So I came for an interview in the middle of August, addressed the Dean as "Y our honour" (laughter) because I was now used to the court situation. I was exhausted, absolutely exhausted! Fortunately my parents were very supportive and then came to hold the fort. My mother was of course, was a great inspiration to me. She went to Wits and did Chemistry in those years, so she had always been my first inspiration. If anyone could have blown an interview, I had done that! However, for one reason or another, I'm not sure why, the decision was taken and I got the post."*

This extract, ostensibly about her first academic appointment, is interspersed with details of the court case that ensued from her husband's car accident. The telling of these two events by interweaving them enhances the fact that they occurred virtually at the same time and this contributes to the build up of dramatic momentum. In her narrative she draws attention to how for her the boundaries between these events were fluid. As noted earlier, her narrative was tied to the actions of her husband. In this extract it is clear that for her the emotions of the courtroom drama in which her husband was involved, were not separable from the event of her job interview. This is cogently brought to the fore in her account of how she addressed the Dean as if he were the magistrate. After her description of the harsh *"psychological warfare"* of the courtroom, the erroneous reference to the Dean as *"Y our Honour"* lightens mood of the narrative by introducing momentary comic relief signalled by her laughter. But this comic interjection is very brief as she then moves to describe how exhausted she was at the time. Her repetition of *"exhausted"* this time with the qualifier *"absolutely"* adds a strong sense of emphasis. At this point she brings in the role of her parents as actors in the narrative. Her choice of phrase *" to hold the fort"* echoes and reinforces the warfare metaphor that she used earlier in the account, thus further contributing to the dramatic tension in the account of her first academic appointment. The role of her mother as a source of inspiration is signalled here together with an insertion of information that serves to demarcate her mother as atypical in the realm of academic

achievement for women. After this build up, she discloses that she had "blown" the interview. At this point the story threatens to take a tragic turn, but then she ends with a positive outcome — she was offered the position. So a near tragic event is revealed to have had a happy outcome. Yet, the tension of the narrative as a whole is carried through with her declaration that she was appointed "*for one reason or another, I'm not sure why*". Was it luck, did they feel sorry for her, was it her talent - these questions are left hanging, thus maintaining the sense of drama that sustains the narrative as a whole.

Although aspects of the narratives such as form and structure can be analysed separately from the content, as I have done here, as is evident in the extract from Mary-Ann's narrative, these aspects cannot be neatly distinguished. The dramatic features work together with the content to convey narrative meaning. The seamless interconnectedness between her life and her husband's is revealed both through the content itself and through the narrative form that shapes the content. The narrative reveals a person whose life events are embedded in the life events of another person. Again, here is confirmation of M. Gergen's (1997) contention that for women career successes and failures are mingled with issues of affiliative significance and consequently, as she argued, the narrative threads tend to be complexly woven. Given that the job interview is so connected to the negative events in the life of her husband, it is not surprising that the outcome is treated with a sense of ambivalence.

Another means of studying both form and content is by examining the use of figurative language. Mary-Ann's use of the terms "*warfare*" and "*fort*" have been included in the foregoing analysis of dramatic engagement in her narrative. The use of figurative language is given further attention in the next sub-section.

#### **6.4. Metaphor and Meaning**

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggested that metaphor could be a useful means for examining how individuals and groups organise and express their experiences. In referring to metaphor they included all forms of figurative speech such as similes, analogies and imagery. In terms of data analysis they suggested that metaphors may be particularly revealing if they are considered in terms of cultural context as they may help identify

values, shared knowledge and cultural domains that are familiar to the members of a given group.

Metaphor was used liberally throughout the narratives to describe the career, academic life, the self, and family experiences. The career was frequently likened to a path that had to be carved. Victoria Makgetla (no.8) explained that when she first enrolled for university studies, it was not because at that stage she had "*carved a career path*". This came later when her husband was travelling away from home, as she revealed in the following extract:

*" My husband was establishing his own career. He was going away most of the time and because of that I did find time to focus on my career. In a way it was like **he was carving his own career** and also it gave me time **to carve my own career.**"* (bold added)

Victoria's career was in the social sciences. Another social scientist, Susan Smith also used the metaphor of a career as a path which is sometimes "*laid out for you*" and sometimes not. She suggested that for social scientists the path is not laid out and there to be followed. Instead, she explained that:

*"You make your own career as a social scientist whereas in these more traditional professions, professional careers, the path is laid out for you and you simply go along it. As a social scientist, you are not nurtured You have to fight your own battles and make your own way and the competition is huge when you look at the number of people who come into it and how few of them in the end make it and do their PhD."*

The extract resonates with the view expressed by Victoria. The career is viewed a path that has to be made or "*carved*" by the self "*Path*" conveys a linear conceptualisation of career that was reinforced across the narratives by numerous references to "*steps*" that had to be taken along the way. Doing a doctorate was seen as "*a stepping stone*" by Beverley Peters and in a similar vein to Helen Hardy, who spoke of a "*side step*", Beverley talked about a period when she had to take "*a step back*". In addition to steps, the career path was also represented as potentially involving a "*stumbling block*", "*a bad patch*" and a "*hurdle*". The reference to steps suggests that the career is not merely a linear path but that it comprises an upward route that has to be climbed. This use of metaphor to describe the concept of career is consistent with the dominant use of career described in the literature. It fits Driver's (1994) definition of a linear conceptualisation of career, noted by Poole and

Langan-Fox (1997) to be in common use. Therefore, the use of this metaphor by several of the participants can be said to highlight the social relatedness of narrative.

As seen in Susan's extract, the process of making a career was represented as likely to involve battles that have to be fought by the self, as an individual. As Susan said: *"You have to fight your own battles"*. This was not an isolated view; it was shared by many of the women professors who used similar imagery. In the very first interview Ann Edgar reflected: *"so I have battled and I have made many mistakes"*. The likening of the process of developing a career to a "battle" was reinforced by numerous associated images of fighting. Palesa Mapilo in talking about her promotion to professor and then member of the university executive team, recounted how she found out that *"You are left to fend for yourself"*. Earlier in her narrative, she used similar imagery of battle when she told how at a time when the head of the department had left, she had to *"remain manning the fort"*.

Although Victoria Makgetla, did not use the term 'battle', she repeatedly described how *"carving her career"* was a *"struggle"*. In her case it was a struggle rendered more difficult by the restrictions of apartheid. She recounted how she *"really had a struggle at the time"* because as a black person there was nowhere she could train in her chosen profession. It took three years before she was admitted by one of the universities. Another point of struggle in her narrative was around promotion. She said:

*"When you sought promotion, **it was like a big fight**. It was like you were creating tensions for yourself. You felt as though you were better off sitting as a lecturer where you were because there was such tension about promotions and all that and you did not want to compromise your relationship". (bold added)*

As a consequence she described herself *"as brave enough to apply"* for promotion. In contrast to Victoria whose application had a positive outcome, an initial attempt towards upward mobility by Elaine Shezi (no.14) was rejected. In talking about her emotional responses at the time she said: *"it felt like a slap in the face"*. These images of battle and fighting were also echoed in many of the expressions participants' used to describe how they coped with the stresses of developing their careers as well as with the demands of their family lives. Mary-Ann Taylor spoke of a time when *"I was killing myself at that stage"*

*trying to get through all those difficult things*" and other times when *"it was a very tricky tightrope to walk"*, but she was able to get through with *"no skin off my nose"*.

Figurative language was also to describe how participants coped with the battle-like demands of their academic lives. One of the strategies mentioned in Daisy du Preez's (no.22) narrative was *"keeping my own nose scrupulously clean"*. This was said to be necessary because of the potential threat of sabotage by colleagues. This emerged in several narratives for example, Rani Ramraj talked about how she could not trust many colleagues because *"behind one's back, they say something else"*. In a similar vein, Gwen Dickenson reflected that her success did not come without *"a lot of criticism and back-biting"*. Thus the overall picture of academic careers conveyed by the women professors through their use of metaphor is that it is filled with potential danger and that to succeed one has to be prepared to struggle.

In contrast with the masculine connotations of the image of battle, interspersed across the narratives were a number of images that may be seen as stereotypically feminine, such as flowers and food-related imagery. Two of the participants used flower images to represent themselves. Daisy du Preez likened her character to the flower, *impatiens*. Susan Smith used the image of a flower to describe what she was not; *"I am not a shy, retiring flower"* she exclaimed. Then, there were frequent references to how these professors as teachers often felt a deep sense of satisfaction when they saw students *"blossom"* under their guidance. Metaphors associated with food and food preparation were used in several different contexts. Ann Edgar in explaining her reasons for studying again after her children were all at school as something she did *"just to keep the pot boiling more than anything else"*. Susan Smith when talking about the women's lobby group of which she was chairperson, depicted the strategy they used to gain maternity leave rights as something they *"cooked up"*. Then there was Mary-Ann Taylor who described a time when she was *"literally juggling eggs"*.

These two sets of images- the masculine connotations of the image of battle and then the feminine connotations of cooking and flowers - provoke examination at a level deeper than merely noting their occurrence. The narrative context in which these differing sets of

images were used seemed to provide a clue for further interpretation. All the images of battle referred to the process of developing an academic career, whereas the flowers and cooking-type images pertained directly to self and the doings of the self. This distinction in the usage of the two sets of images seems to be consistent with the research literature's description of the institutional culture of universities as masculinist and the conceptualisation of career as a gendered concept that favours particular constructions of masculinity. In using the images of battle and struggle, these women professors point to an organisational culture that is seemingly experienced by the feminine self as hostile and filled with potential tensions. Against this setting, the story of the achievement of success was then recounted by many in ways that revealed some type of moral truism or lessons for living.

### **6.5. Success Stories and Moral Tales**

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) noted that one of the functional properties of success stories is that they may convey a moralistic tale which often comprises a sad or unfortunate aspect that serves as a caution of how to avoid such events. In this respect narratives may serve a moral evaluative function. The moral fable is a tradition in both western and African stories and its social function is generally to serve as a collective lesson of what not to do or how not to be. As the discussion on micronarratives has shown, to achieve success in their academic careers, the participants endured hardships, they made sacrifices and they had to confront challenges. All the narratives contained an evaluative aspect, typically made explicit towards the end of the interview, that served the purpose of telling others what to do or what not to do if they wished to achieve career success in academia.

Lessons on how to deal with relationships in relation to the imperatives of career featured prominently as moral tales. The narratives of the married women contained lessons on how to deal with dual demands of career and marriage. Rani Ramraj's narrative (no. 10) is illustrative. The lesson in her narrative was about the importance of keeping a good balance. In the following extract she described how she kept this balance:

*"...a lot of structuring and a lot of planning and trying to get help with the things you don't personally have to do. ...I was not good at things like typing, but I would not sit there and waste hours learning to type. I would rather get someone to do the typing for me...So I was*

*not under pressure. I was not short-changing either my family life or the academic. I kept a good balance."*

Ann Crosby's (no. 17) lesson on what to do was to get married and have children at a relatively later age. After stating that she married when she was 30 and had her first child at age 35 and the second at 38 years old, she explained that:

*"It is a help in that you have an established persona and you have an established life and it is easier for you then to understand how to flex it and to find and see what you need to do in order to cope."*

In contrast, a lesson in the narrative of Susan Smith who had made several career moves in response to the moves of husbands and lovers was on what not to do. She cautioned that *"one's job is the reliable part of one's life and relationships are not and therefore, one does not give up one's job in order to be with one person"*. This lesson was echoed by Gwen Dickenson who offered the following: *"I think that it must be as a result of difficult male female relationships that I now don't trust anyone except myself and my career."* Both these women who were over 55 years old and single at the time of the interview, had had experiences of multiple romantic relationships. In both cases too, a marriage had ended in divorce. Despite their explicit articulation of the value of giving centrality to the career as opposed to the transience of relationships, both these women followed these comments with remarks that validated the significance of relationships. Gwen subsequently remarked that *"careers don't last very long"* because *"you retire and then nobody wants you hanging around"*. At the end of Susan's interview, in response to my question as to whether we may have missed any relevant details, she reflectively noted that *"men have not been unhelpful"*, thus in some sense affirming the importance of her relationships.

The role of the supportive husband and partner in the achievement of success constituted another form of moral point conveyed in several narratives. Sophia Dawson (no. 21) expressed this moral point most cogently. With reference to her husband's role she emphasised that *"You can't reach anything in your career if you don't have support at home. This is how I achieved what I achieved"*. This point was also made by Margaret Parsons (no. 25) in reference to her woman partner when she suggested that *"... if it was not for her support, I don't think I would have done it"*. These extracts again demonstrate

the centrality of relationships in the self-narratives of these women professors. Their relationships with significant others are represented as integral to self-construction. A lesson conveyed in the success tale of Mary-Ann Taylor brought the interconnectedness between career success and relationship for women into sharp focus. As is evident in the extract below, rather than seeing herself as a separate, independent entity, she constructed a new entity, the family.

*" All the projects that we have been involved in, my husband and myself become family projects; solving the problems, lets keep ourselves entertained, lets all learn how to cook lets see what we can do to help around the house. All three children are superb cooks, better than I am in fact, because they have more interest in food than I do. They felt they were committed to an end that we were all going to enjoy. If we helped mummy get her career, these degrees, we will all benefit in the long run. So I think those things; it does help. You know getting your family to believe in you and you believing in them."*

A defining feature of these narratives as success stories is the overcoming of difficulties and adversities. This feature of success stories was noted by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) in their analysis of narratives derived from interviews with graduate students in anthropology. This theme is contained in many of the narrative extracts already quoted in this chapter, including the one above where Mary-Ann explicitly explains how she persuaded her family that if they made the effort to do the household chores, they would benefit later when she succeeded in obtaining her degrees. K. Gergen (1994a) observed that many societies place strong value on progressive narratives that speak to how difficult choices have to be made and hardships endured in order to achieve positive change. As revealed in several of the micronarratives, facing difficult situations and then turning them around in ways that led to positive outcomes constituted a recurrent theme in the participants' narratives. Besides the relationship crises and family difficulties already discussed, the capacity to compel oneself to work extremely hard was reiterated across the narratives. To illustrate, I have selected a sample from some of the narratives:

*"I would ration myself. I would allow myself 10 pages of a novel every night before I went to sleep; that was it, that was my entertainment. It was just brute hard work "*

*"It was a nightmare. I didn't let sleep worry me. I didn't even think about it"*

*"I worked hard. I always had a book I learnt new study methods".*

*"I would work flat out all day from six in the morning until five o'clock".*

Implicit in these accounts is the evaluation that if one is prepared to sacrifice and work hard, then success will ensue. In addition to moral evaluation, the narratives fulfilled another key function, namely, identity construction. Like many aspects of narrative, the various functional properties are not completely separable. Several of the extracts used to discuss the moral function of the narratives simultaneously convey constructions of identity. Rani's extract, for example, not only imparts a lesson on how to successfully balance career and family; it also depicts her as a good wife and mother. Identity construction as a function of the narratives is addressed in the next chapter since it constitutes a substantial analytic section, but before moving on a further function of these narratives as progressive narratives is discussed.

#### **6.6. Linking Past, Present and Future**

K. Gergen (1994a) drew attention to how narratives may serve to unite the past with the present and signify future trajectories. Furthermore, with regard to progressive narratives he proposed that to construct one's past as a success story implies a future of continued advancement. While this ostensibly applied to many of the 25 narratives in this study, for some it was not a straightforward case of anticipated future advancement.

The narratives which seemingly did not confirm Gergen's proposal all displayed indications of what Karp (1985) termed an exiting consciousness, that is, thoughts about retiring. A key difference between the exiting consciousness described in Karp's study and the accounts in this study revolves around the connections to the broader policy context. A segment from the narrative of Ann Edgar is demonstrative:

*"...I am stressed at the moment because of what is happening in the whole tertiary education sector ...I see some of it as an exciting challenge. I see a great deal of it as problematic. I don't think that the White Paper has been pulled through. I have huge reservations about the market-oriented Australia, New Zealand, North American economic jargon applied to academia. Uncritically, unthinkingly, like it is. And of course, subjects like (her subject) are the bottom of the pile and my colleagues all over the country are being shut down and we are being faced with the same kinds of... There is talk now that everybody over 55, which is a polite way of saying 2 or 3 of us, must leave. I meant to*

*retire when I was 65. I was very angry about that in the beginning and that has added to my stress."*

The above narrative renders visible the impact of current higher education policy changes in South Africa. Through her account Ann draws attention to how her expectations for the future have been disrupted by broader contextual policy initiatives. The narrative makes connections between international educational policy directives, policy changes in South Africa and her career. At this point the narrative gives visibility to the shaping effects of policy developments on the academic careers of individual women. At the level of form, the continued advancement implied by the overall progressive narrative is negated. Yet, later during the course of the interview a sense of continued forward movement resurfaces when Ann in response to my question *"Anything I might have missed?"* replied:

*"If I stop teaching I shall go on.... I am three years overdue with (name of publisher) for a book, of which I have three chapters drafted. I will finish that to go around women's issues. I will certainly go on".*

In this extract there is promise for the future. Her articulated plan to write a book backed by the insertion of an identified publisher gives substance to the sense of future promise. It conveys the idea that there will be value added to her future career even if she is compelled to retire from her university position. Her repetition of *"go on"* further contributes to the sense of continued forward movement. Thus, the progressive form of the overall narrative is sustained. A narrative that seemingly did not confirm Gergen's proposal is revealed to do so after all.

Those narratives that did ostensibly denote future trajectories of continued advancement identified a number of different avenues for further career development. Two, who were planning to retire within the next 12 months, described how they were looking forward to using their roles within community organisations and professional bodies to make further contributions. Publishing was identified by several women professors as a means for furthering their career development. Others talked about the possibility of moving into positions of administrative and executive management. Regardless of the specific direction, the possibility of progressive change was signalled.

## 6.7. Overview

The analysis presented in this chapter has focused on how form and content jointly shape the narratives to convey information about the lives of the 25 women professors. Narrative features, such as sequence, directionality and movement have been examined and this analysis has shown that the career lines of these women have generally not followed the standard linear model of career. Although all the narratives were shown to follow a progressive form, the frequent occurrences of regressive micronarratives nested in the larger narratives, drew attention to late beginnings and interruptions to the development of the career trajectory. Moreover, this analysis revealed that the career stories of these women were closely tied to the stories of husbands, lovers and children, thus confirming M. Gergen's (1997) observations that the career successes and failures of women are typically interwoven with stories of their affiliative relationships with others.

In turning to an examination of form and content through other features such as figurative language, the analysis showed that there was a shared representation of academic life as battle to be fought, once again confirming what has been noted in the literature, namely, that the culture of universities is typically hostile and unfriendly to women. Finally, the chapter paid attention to some of the functional features of the narratives, notably how narratives serve to connect the past with the present and signify the future, and how narratives may serve a moral evaluative function. This latter aspect in particular pointed to the ways in which the self had to be reconstituted in response to the multiple imperatives of career and affiliative relationships, thus reinforcing the finding that the story of career achievement for women is tied to facets of identity such as wife and mother. Identity construction as a function of the narratives is a key issue taken up in the next chapter.

## 7. ACADEMIC SELVES, GENDER AND RACE

One of the most significant features of narrative, as was noted in Chapters 4 and 5, is that it is through narrative that the self is realised. This chapter specifically examines the narratives in terms of how experiences of academic life were constructed around issues of self, subjectivity and identity. In line with the focus of the study, the chapter will pay attention especially to how the career narratives of the women professors may or may not be, sometimes and other times not, differentially tied to locations of gender, race and class in the South African context. It begins with the identities brought to the fore in the extracts cited in the previous chapter, which revealed a self gendered as woman struggling with conflicting constructions of being an academic, a wife and a mother. The chapter then turns to the question of how these 25 women became academics, casting an analytic lens on accounts of family background, education history and economic class. Thereafter, attention is given to narrative constructions of academia examining how individual courses of action through first appointments, promotion and academic work itself, are given form in relation to organisational and social processes.

### 7.1. Academics, Wives and Mothers

Tensions between the identities of being an academic and being a mother and a wife permeated the narratives in this study. As revealed in the previous chapter, in the narratives of Rani Ramraj, Mary-Ann Taylor and several others, balancing the duality of demands from the domestic sphere, on the one hand, with the demands of professional and academic life, on the other, was constituted as a pervasive challenge in their lives. Fulfilling the two sets of demands was portrayed in some narratives as a battle to be fought on two fronts. An example was Ann Edgar who explained that on the work front there are *"the many men who I have battled against and still do"*, and then on the home front with reference to being a mother, she said *"I don't think it is easy to rear kids today ... So I have battled and I have made many mistakes and I have to battle a lot with my children."* Thus, performing as an academic and performing as a mother and wife was revealed to be conflictual and difficult.

The narratives powerfully confirmed Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) reference to the co-existence of two sets of norms about the role of women. In elaborating the two sets of norms, they borrowed from Heilbrun's (1988) distinction between two narrative forms for women — the marriage plot and the quest plot. The marriage plot is seen as defining the old norms which dictate that a women's proper goal is marriage and children, whereas the quest plot refers to the new norms which permit openness of opportunity and individual equality. In a similar vein, Davies (1992) analysed women's subjectivities through the place of story and uncovered that 'the romantic story line' is popularly used by women to interpret and make sense of their lives. Her explication of the romantic story line is virtually synonymous with Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) 'marriage plot' except that she explicitly adopted a feminist poststructuralist theoretical strategy. She argued that the terms set by the romantic story line are enabled through the lived realities of the male/female, masculine/feminism dualisms, and its dominance is such that oppressive subject positions are taken up as seemingly natural choices signifying the essential self. But, as already indicated, imperatives set by the romantic story line or marriage plot are in tension with the imperatives of being an academic, and sometimes a direct contradiction becomes visible.

The tensions between the romantic story line/marriage plot and the quest plot was cogently rendered visible in the narrative of Susan Smith when she told of how she resigned her academic position in South Africa in order to marry a man who lived in another country. To be with him, she became a student again. Then when she discovered that she hated not having the status of an academic, she became aware of how problematic her decision had been. As Davies (1992) specified, the recognition of the story line as problematic opens up the possibility of refusing it. Susan's recognition of the limitations of the story line of her life produced her awareness *"that one's job is the reliable part of one's life and relationships are not"*.

Ambivalence and contradiction interspersed with satisfaction featured in the accounts of relationships and marriage, which was distinguished from the subjective experiences of being a mother. Phumzile Ngubane, at age 39 one of the youngest women in the sample,

drew attention to the distinction between being a mother and being a wife when she said:

*"...where my family is concerned, my partner as well as the children, because these are two distinct parties that you are dealing with. What you do with the children...don't necessarily think that it is the same time that you have with your partner".*

The discussion will now examine these aspects of subjective experience separately but only briefly as several substantive points have already been given analytic attention here and in the previous chapter.

### **7.1.1. Lovers and wives**

**Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) emphasised that the marriage plot applies to all women, married and unmarried alike, because it defines what women *should* want and desire.** Their argument certainly applied to the narrative of Elaine Shezi (no. 14). She was 54 years old at the time of the interview, with two children and had never been married. When I asked whether it had been her intention not to marry, she replied " *I don't think not marrying has ever been any girl's intention. No, it was not my intention, it just happened that way*". In this response she makes an explicit statement about the importance of marriage to a girl; in her view every girl wants to be married and it is inconceivable that a girl may intentionally choose not to be married. Following Davies's (1992) argument, Elaine Shezi internalised the story line as natural and given.

In further testimony to the pervasiveness of the romantic story line or marriage plot there were the narratives of women who described their experiences of serial relationships. They typically entered another relationship after the previous one had failed in the hope that it would work out more successfully. In the previous chapter beginnings and endings of relationships were shown to have fragmented and disrupted academic lives. The related sense of tension, contradiction and ambivalence was, however, not only evident in the narratives of serial relationships; but also in the representations of long-term marriages.

The meanings of being married and the impact thereof on career development was constituted in various ways; for some women marriage constituted "*a major hurdle*" in their career development, whereas others claimed marriage as a facilitative factor. But,

these were not clear-cut categories of representation; criss-crossing within and between these representations were threads of ambivalence and contradiction.

The two participants who were married to academic men both described their relationships as facilitative of their career development. One of them explained that her husband was instrumental in getting her through her first publication and the other described how through her husband she gained access to important collegial networks. However, there were notes of ambivalence in these accounts as shown in the following example:

*"I had to do a lot of entertaining for him when he was dean, but that did not worry me particularly. I quite liked that and I was then senior in the Faculty anyway and so all the people I had to entertain on his behalf were my colleagues anyway so it was no real sweat in any sense. I really had the best of both worlds..."*

On the one hand the woman is clearly positioned in a subordinate role where she has to service the needs of her academic husband by *"entertaining for him"*, but then on the other hand, she is positioned as his equal as the guests were also her colleagues. What seems to be most apparent here is a self-justification function of the narrative. In constructing the account, the narrator attempts to persuade her audience (both herself and myself, as the interviewer) that she really enjoyed and benefited from performing her duties as a wife and moreover, that it facilitated her identity as an academic. Thus she concludes that she *"really had the best of both worlds"*. Here we read an account indicative of how narrative as self-justification may serve a social function, as explicated by M. Gergen and K. Gergen (1984). In constructing her identity as a wife as an experience that *"was no real sweat in any sense"* and was even enjoyable, the so-called marriage plot or story line remains intact, confirming Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) observation that women internalise gender differentials.

Ambivalence and contradiction were also evident in the narratives of married women who had been married to the same man from a young age. For example, even though Victoria Makgetla described her husband as very supportive of her career, nested in her narrative was the account of how difficult it was for her when many years earlier she had decided to resume studying. She explained that being a full-time professional, a part-time student and

a wife was hindered by her husband who *"If I was busy concentrating, he would come along and ask for a cup of tea or something"*. Although she said he supported her as a social worker, he believed that she had done enough insofar as her career development. At the time he did not see the need for her to continue studying. According to him she had gone far enough as a married woman with a career. At this point her account revealed how women's efforts to take up positions in opposition to traditional feminine subject positions may be curtailed by the discursive surveillance of others, in this case a husband. Moreover, when she in response reflected *"maybe I was not paying attention to family matters"*, the narrative rendered visible the extent to which the traditional story lines for women are taken up as part of the subjectivity of the person.

Then, Victoria recounted how within the boundaries of the marriage she was able to develop herself as an academic. She explained

*"I think that what helped me do the Ph.D. in such a short time was that, in a way, I was feeling in a vacuum. I think my family at that time...my husband was establishing his own career. He was going away most of the time and because of that I did find a lot of time to focus on my career. In a way it was like he was carving his own career and it gave me time to carve mine. It was better because I had to have weekends because on weekdays I worked. When I look at it now, at that time it was like we were not married, we were really crossing paths and that experience I would not like to repeat again. I would really have loved to do that Ph.D. with a much more supportive, marital relationship, without sacrificing anything "*

Positive and negative elements are interwoven in the above extract. Her husband being away from home is represented as an opportunity for her to develop her own career, but then it is an experience that Victoria would not like to repeat. She reveals a longing for an experience where doing a Ph.D. may have been combined with a supportive marriage. This is a construction of her ideal — career and marriage in harmony.

Discursive surveillance also seemed to be applicable to a micronarrative recounted by Gwen Dickenson regarding the time when she divorced her husband. She explained how she faced sanction from her parents and her woman mentor when she gave up being a married woman to become a divorced woman. Their reactions were described in the following terms:

*"I will tell you quite genuinely that my parents were very upset when I got divorced"*

and then with regard to her mentor:

*"(Name of mentor) always advocated marriage along with a career. She had never indicated... and she always put marriage first and in fact it was very interesting that when I got divorced, she was very, very critical. She was furious with me because I had small children by then and she was terribly critical of me getting divorced and for breaking up a marriage, so there was those sorts of values."*

Here we see how constructions of self are constituted through social interchange, and more specifically how gender operates as social agreement. When Gwen becomes a divorced woman, the negative reactions of the people close to her suggest that she has broken the social agreement that for a woman being married is preferable to being divorced, especially when she is also a mother of small children. Furthermore, she also broke the social agreement that women should put marriage first before career.

Nosizwe Mthembu's narrative was distinctive with respect to how she depicted being married. In contrast to many of the other narratives, she conveyed a sense of satisfaction in her story of marriage. She described her experience of being married by saying of her husband *"He is very unusual"*. Nosizwe explained that although he came from a rural and very traditional African background, right from the beginning of their marriage, he did not want to follow any of the traditions, which placed women in subservience to their husbands. Throughout her career, he encouraged her to study further even though it meant long periods away from home. Moreover, in these times, he cared for the children. Also, unusual in the sample of 25 women, is that he followed her when she had to relocate because of a career move. Consequently, in her narrative marriage was constituted as satisfying and supportive of her career development.

Also distinctive among the 25 narratives is the account of the one woman involved in a same-sex relationship. Interestingly, she represented her long-term relationship with a woman as a heterosexual marriage. During the interview she declared *"I am gay and I have a wife"*. She explained how having a wife meant that she had a lot of free time *"not having to worry about my clean t-shirts, my jeans and food and whatever else."* In this respect she

differed from the rest of the women in the sample, the majority of whom were positioned as the wives. By framing her relationship in the terms set by heterosexuality, she discursively constituted herself as the husband. Consequently, descriptions of tension and contradiction between relationship and career were absent from her narrative which focused heavily on her academic life. In the context of the other 24 narratives, this narrative cast the relation between woman and wife as discontinuous and unstable.

In short, constructions of marriage and relationships varied yet, the romantic story line featured in shaping narratives of marriage and intimate relationships. No coherence emerged in relation to age and race; younger and older women, black and white women talked similarly and differently about themselves as partners and wives. Sexual identity was a differentiating factor, however, and this showed the connection between woman and wife to be assumed rather than given.

### **7.1.2. Mothers and motherhood**

Unlike being a wife, being a mother was consistently represented as difficult, irrespective of marital status and whether the woman had children or not. Three of the five women who did not have children talked about a conscious, planned decision not to have children in order to avoid the conflict of the dual identities of career woman and mother. Daisy du Preez accounted for her choice as follows:

*"We each have our own careers and it was a question that we settled before we got married. I think it is a major, major thing that people should decide and I think it only works if both members of a couple actually have the same point of view. I don't believe that children are necessary to the fulfillment of the marriage. I don't".*

Although in this extract Daisy portrays her decision not to have children in rational, intentional terms, her comments shared almost immediately thereafter presented another dimension to the decision. She said:

*"I think one of the reasons for my wanting to avoid having children was that I was terrified that I might be the same kind of mother to my children as my mother was to me, and that is not a good thing".*

This connection she makes between her mother as a 'bad mother' and her fear of being a bad mother echoes the observation made by Harris (1995) and Kaltreider (1997) that the emotional consequences of the choices women are forced to make are strongly shaped by earlier psychological experiences in the family, especially in relation to the mother. From a narrative perspective, M.Gergen (1997) posited that each gender acquires for personal use a repertoire of potential life stories relevant to their own and the understanding of self is then filtered through these stories. What seems to be captured in the above extract is that Daisy's version of her own mother as a mother is the filter through which she constructs meaning about herself as a potential mother.

The self-relevance of stories of one's own mother was not restricted to women who had made a choice against being a mother. Inserted into Ann Edgar's story of how she battled to rear her children, was a construction of her own mother as "*not a great role model as a mother*". Like Walker (1999) noted in her study, women with children and women who had rejected motherhood in favour of their careers, spoke equally of the emotional conflict surrounding this issue. Thus a decision that at one moment is constructed as a rational choice at the very next moment is reconstructed as deeply emotionally-based.

The ways in which parental identity is defined differentially for women and men was made evident across many of the narratives. Kaltreider's (1997) observation that husbands and wives are differentially willing to accommodate themselves to each other's careers was firmly supported. In illustration, I once again refer to the narrative of Ann Edgar who justified the differential parental responsibilities of her husband and herself as follows:

*"I think I was socialised into multiple roles from the time I can remember. It is the way my spouse functions. His socialisation was being like that. He will be helpful around here and so on, but he has a one-track mind I cannot be one-track minded "*

In this extract, Ann clearly acknowledges the impact of gender-typed socialisation. Yet, in her narrative there were indications of a willingness to endorse the situation. This was not an isolated position, instead it was shared across several narratives. Another example was Lynn Abrahams who described her husband as a "*participating partner*". Yet, the talk about childcare reflected an unevenness in how they each adjusted their working lives to

accommodate their parental responsibilities. In the interview Lynn described how she regularly wakes up at four in the morning to do academic work so that by the time her child wakes up at 6.45 am, she is free to take care of her and then drive her to school. There was no similar description of how her husband arranged his working schedule to accommodate childcare. Instead, the expectation conveyed was that he would fill in for her only when she was not available to fulfil the parenting role. Later in the interview Lynn explicitly endorsed the traditional role for women as the parent primarily responsible for childcare when she said:

*"Now in 1997 there is this notion about gender equity and parenting. Its not so. I think as much as you may have a very participating partner, there is a difference in the way men and women perceive their roles as parents. I do think there is a gender difference ...I take more time to try and play an active role in her life."*

The invocation of a discourse of difference to account for the imbalance in parental responsibility between herself as woman and her husband as man, is another indication of the self-justification function of narrative. That it coincides with the social configuration of gender and parenting is not accidental, but an illustration of how the social is spoken into existence through the personal. The extent to which her husband participated in the care of their child seemed to be minimised further when she explained that her mother lived with them and she helped *"a great deal"*.

The involvement of their mothers was also seen to have lightened the load for Elaine Shezi and Gwen Dickenson. As a single mother Elaine Shezi coped by having her two children live away from her with her mother in a rural area. Gwen Dickenson, in spite of having a husband who she described as taking an equal role in childcare, also attributed her coping with what she saw as *"a difficult issue"* to the supportive role of her mother. She explained that:

*"... my mother was very helpful and supportive. I had a mother living in the same town who used to come and look after the kids in the afternoon if I could not get back although I used to try and get back at 3.30 or whatever it was. But there were sometimes when there were meetings, particularly research committee meetings ..."*

This extract reveals how being a successful woman academic and a good mother is also

enabled by the involvement of other women who are prepared to take up responsibilities in the domestic sphere, thus allowing the gender differential to continue largely unchallenged. For many others the involvement of other women took the form of paid domestic help. Although the use of paid domestic labour is suggestive of middle class positioning, historically in South Africa the political economy as shaped by the combined influences of colonialism, apartheid, capitalism and patriarchy, has produced a large pool of black women engaged in domestic labour at cheap rates, so that even working class households have had domestic workers. It is only over the last year that domestic workers as a sector have been included within the ambit of labour legislation and minimum wages have still to be set.

With reference to the tensions of being a wife and mother, race was not evident as a distinguishing marker. As Walker (1998) found, both black and white women academics shouldered the responsibility for household labour and childcare showing that the conflicts and tensions conveyed across the narratives are reflective of how the social organisation of gender becomes represented in self-narratives as personal and particular. The consistent representation of motherhood as a struggle may be viewed as a manifestation of the unequal gendered division of labour, how this is represented at the institutional level and very specifically, in the lack of childcare facilities in South Africa. A recent report indicated that few higher education institutions have childcare facilities for staff and students, and of the available facilities only one would admit infants of less than one-year-old (de la Rey & Quinlan, 1997).

The ways in which differential and unequal gender roles are authorised by long-standing traditions, social conventions and social arrangements was given visibility in the unfolding of the narratives. The organisational workings of universities in particular was highlighted. In her narrative Gwen Dickenson alluded to how the scheduling of meetings, especially meetings that are crucial to academic career advancement, generally favour men who do not have to contend with the responsibilities of childcare. This frequently forces women into making tough choices between performing as an academic and performing as a mother. An incident recounted by one of the participants after the tape-recorder was switched off accentuated the severity of the subjective tensions of being forced to make

these choices. The participant named a specific event that was scheduled on the same night as her child's school concert. She explained that the function was of considerable importance but she decided to attend the concert. However, she was secretive about the reason for her non-attendance, as she believed that it would not be viewed as sufficiently credible, and moreover, she feared that it would count against her in the future.

Although all the women in their narratives explicitly acknowledged the tensions, conflicts and contradictions entailed in being multiply positioned as academic, wife and mother, none of the narratives spoke directly to the possibility of social changes in relation to redefining parental responsibilities, restructuring institutional arrangements or the institution of heterosexual marriage. Instead there was a great deal of talk about finding ways to manage the self so as to successfully deal with career and family demands. This was partially covered in the last chapter in the subsection on success stories and moral tales where the importance of keeping a good balance and other lessons for successful coping were discussed. This discussion is continued here in terms of the implications for the constitution of the self.

### **7.1.3. Shifting self-constructions, making it natural**

A key question informing the focus of this study was how do those few women who have succeeded in moving up the academic hierarchy in universities make sense of their experiences in ways that enable them to succeed. In the face of the tensions, conflicts, ambivalence and contradiction that permeated the narratives about being at the nexus of multiple subjectivities, a focal analytic point revolves around the question of how these women professors were able to reconstitute themselves in ways that permitted them to not only remain in academia but to succeed in the system.

Researchers such as Aisenberg and Harrington (1988), Kaltreider (1997) and Walker (1998) have in varying ways identified shifts in self-construction as integral to women's responses to the tensions generated by the duality of being mother/wife and academic. Presenting themselves as fortunate, extremely hardworking and as particular types of persons were some of the subjective responses evident in the narratives. Two extracts are listed hereafter in illustration:

Carol Williamson:

*"I can't say that it was a great sacrifice because I don't particularly like being in the company of children, so it is not that I have sacrificed my family life for my career, my own interests prefer to be writing than looking after children."*

Phumzile Ngubane:

*"I mean I don't like gardening, I don't like fixing things. If I liked fixing things and I didn't like cooking or doing other tasks I think it would be difficult. ...So I think its what works for you."*

In telling the story of how she deals with the imperatives of being a mother and an academic, Carol presents herself as not really the type of person that enjoys children, preferring instead to concentrate on her work, whereas Phumzile explains that it works for her because she is the type of person who enjoys traditionally feminine activities. These extracts reveal how the self is reconstructed so that dealing with the tensions becomes cast as natural and consistent with the essential self. In many of the other narratives the word "lucky" was used frequently to describe how the narrator coped with the potential tensions, for example, Theresa Lawrence reflected *"I was just lucky. I was healthy, I had healthy children, I had good domestic help and I had a supportive husband."*

In addition to the above, there was the construction of self as able to perform multiple tasks. The example of Ann Edgar who presented herself as someone who was socialised into performing multiple roles has already been quoted. Another example was Phumzile Ngubane who described herself as being able to do *"101 things"* unlike her husband who did not have this ability. In addition to the ability to perform multiple tasks, being a hardworking person was a recurrent theme as was presented in the previous chapter. In some cases, the capacity for hard work assumed an almost omnipotent sense confirming the observations made by Kaltreider (1997) and previously by Apter (1993), that many professional women present with a powerful, omnipotent sense of self. There were suggestions of this in Gwen Dickenson's narrative when she described herself by saying: *"I mean I have a tendency to work 24 hours a day any way and that was socialised into me"*. Then there were similar hints of omnipotence in the narrative of Mary-Ann Taylor

who portrayed herself as a juggler of exceptional skill when she talked about *"the nine eggs that I normally have in the air"* and again when she claimed *"I don't let sleep worry me. I don't even think about it."*

The self -constructions of these 25 women professors as exceptional can be located in the broader educational context of gender as depicted by the statistics presented in Chapter 2. Gwen Dickenson alluded to a self- awareness about being exceptional in the following account from her narrative:

*"I look around and I seek out young researchers and young women and I put them consistently on committees and I don't think we'll ever break this because not everyone has a run of luck like I had and there is no way that you... You actually have a responsibility to do that and where women are getting to the point where they are getting divorced and the relationships break up because of career you actually need to support them hugely..."*

There are several issues in this account that will be analysed later in this chapter; but at this juncture the focus is on the question: how did each of these women become part of the exceptional few? In the interviews I specifically asked the women to describe how they became academics. The next section analyses their narrative responses by scrutinising their individual courses of action in terms of relations of gender, race, and class, drawing out points of difference and points of commonality.

## **7.2. Becoming an Academic**

### **7.2.1. Family, education and career**

Almost all the women reflected that from their school days they knew that they would enrol in some form of tertiary education and then have a career. The influence of parents, relatives and women in the surrounding community was cited. The reported influence took two forms — references were made to direct messages about career choices, especially from parents, and/ or to adults who had careers and therefore, provided role models. Examples included:

Elaine Shezi:

*"I wanted a career from the beginning... One of my sisters was a nurse and in the area,*

*there were teachers who were sort of models."*

Margaret Parsons:

*"Well, my mother ...My mother does have a degree and she wanted me to be a medical doctor."*

Nosizwe Mthembu:

*"I suppose I was born in the context that always had women who were professional people. My mother was a nurse; my aunts were in education, so I always had that background. Even my grandmother had been a teacher; my paternal grandmother had been a teacher."*

Helen Hardy:

*" I think for me my mother was a teacher, my aunt was a teacher and so it was always expected that I would go to (the local) training college."*

These reflections resonate strongly with the observations made by Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) that relationships and roles in the home can be viewed as "the mechanism through which occupational socialisation of young people occurs, and which eventually lead to values and expectations of self and others about what are appropriate activities for men and women both inside and outside the home" (p.36). Carol Williamson's narrative on how her career choice evolved spoke directly to the issue of what her parents considered gender — appropriate for girls. She explained:

*"I mean my father used to insist... There were three girls and one boy in my family and my father used to say it is more important for the women. He wanted us all to have professions. He thought that this was very important for a woman to have a profession so she would never be dependent on a man and so from an early age it was drilled into me that that was what they wanted "*

In this instance, her father shaped her choice so that she would not be compelled to fulfil the traditional gender role for women, so in this sense her father's notion of gender-appropriate may be considered as oppositional to the old norms for women. Victoria Makgetla also presented her father as a man whose regard for his daughters broke with traditional notions of gender-appropriate behaviour. She noted that her father was the *"type of person who, if I had passed at school, he was sure to slaughter a sheep or something"* and he did this regardless of gender thus departing from a tradition of placing more value

on sons.

But, for black women like Victoria, making sense of the unfolding of the career choice was linked not only to the social organisation of gender but also to the shaping effects of apartheid policy. The following extract from Victoria's narrative shows how the influence of the parent was framed by the impact of apartheid:

*"I think for me the influence definitely came from my parents, especially my father, because if you look at the parents at the time, there was a grouping of parents who were very much used to call... exempted You know people who were exempted. The people who had some specific ground in terms of land acquisition. Also in terms of their status in the community and you know it was also a time before bantu education. Before bantu education lots of girls were sent to become teachers. So in my own home, my father had a strong influence because he sent all the girls to be trained as teachers.*

In her account her father's desire for his daughters to become teachers is tied to the status of the family within the community. As one of the few black families who under apartheid laws was allowed to own land, they occupied a privileged position. In telling the story she suggests that her father's ambition for his daughters was fitting for a black family of that status in that time. Race, gender and class are closely interwoven in the shaping of this narrative.

A consciousness about the impact of apartheid was also evident when the interviewees talked about the schools they attended. Like Nosizwe Mthembu, none of the black women professors had attended apartheid-style bantu education schools. In sending them to missionary schools, church schools and in one case, a private school in a neighbouring country, their parents had made a deliberate choice in opposition to apartheid education. Here there is clear indication of how within the rigidity of the apartheid system, black families made choices indicative of resistance. But it is doubtful whether such a choice was equally available to all black families as the families described in these narratives may be distinguished by their material circumstances. Phumzile Ngubane who had attended a private school in a neighbouring country, had parents who were both medical doctors. As already noted, Victoria Makgetla described her father as one of the few black farmers who owned land under apartheid. Many of the black women had at least one

parent who was a teacher or a nurse. Thus, as a group these women came from families that were positioned as the black middle class.

But being middle class did not buffer them from the apartheid system. While there were narrow —range choices to be made regarding the type of black school when it came to university enrolment apartheid policy left hardly any room for choice by black families. Opportunities to high quality university education were rigidly structured by racial relationships of exclusion and privilege. However, in the narratives there were differences in levels of awareness of the centrality of race in shaping access to education. For the most part, in the same vein as Walker (1998) uncovered, the benefits from privileged racial positioning were unacknowledged in the narratives of the white women, unlike in the narratives of black women where there was a pattern of awareness of the discriminatory effects of race albeit that there were differences in how this was represented subjectively.

For all the black women there was a consciousness that growing up during the apartheid years meant that career choices were restricted not only through gender discrimination but also through race. They recalled that during the apartheid years, nursing and teaching were the only two careers available to black women. Attempts to pursue careers other than these, were often thwarted by the very limited number of universities open to black women and men under apartheid and the narrow range of courses offered by these universities. While working as a social worker, one of the participants became very interested in clinical psychology. She described how difficult it was: *"I really had a struggle because there was nowhere where I could train. It was a time when we had to get permission. It took me three years trying all the universities to be admitted"* Eventually she was accepted by the university designated for mixed race people.

The narratives of most of the black women made it clear that during the decades of apartheid when they entered university for the first time, there was no real choice;. In line with the higher education policy of that time, each attended the university designated for her racial and ethnic group. There were two exceptions, Phumzile Ngubane and Lynn Abrahams, and in both cases the narratives described a choice made in opposition to

apartheid education policy. Phumzile, who had attended a private school in a neighbouring country, in recounting her move into university talked only about the option of enrolling in a foreign university. When she could not gain entry into a university in a neighbouring country, she applied to a US university where she was accepted. Thus for Phumzile the choice against apartheid education meant a protracted period of voluntary exile to the extent that at 39 years of age most of her life had been spent outside the country of her birth.

Although Lynn Abrahams was adamant that she did not want the inferior education offered by the university designated for coloured people, a foreign university was not considered at all. In the unfolding of her narrative, she revealed that the discipline in which she was positioned was not her first choice as a young woman. Instead, she explained that it was an expedient choice within the framework of apartheid laws. Choosing the particular discipline meant entry to a historically white university and access to education of a better quality.

In contrast, in the white women's accounts of schooling, university choice and career, there were almost no references to the racial structuring of access to education. Although the narratives of the white women also revealed a narrow range of career choices for them as young women, their accounts of choosing a career exclusively pointed to the attitudes of socialisation agents such as parents and family members as constraining factors, unlike the black, coloured and Indian women who all explicitly talked about the discriminatory impact of legislated racism in addition to the influence of socialisation agents.

Similarly, in nearly all the white women's accounts of their schooling and family background, race was not named at all. An exception was Carol Williamson who described the school she attended in both class and race terms. She called it as a school *"for rich white girls"*. Although they did not refer to race, several white women did, however, articulate economic class as an axis of difference among whites as a group. The pattern that emerged was that class differences were articulated when the schooling experience differed from what was perceived as desirable for white, middle-class girls.

This was illustrated in Desiree Jones' account:

*"∴ Quite a rough school to start with. It was a new school and had quite a skollie element in it, which was very good for me because it broadened my horizons, which had been quite protected My parents wanted to send me to an all girls' school. My mother said she would go and teach at (name of school) in order to get me in and I was not interested "*

Similarly, Daisy du Preez reflected that she " *wanted to go to an all girls school and there was just not money for that*". These accounts suggest that attendance at a private all girls' school was viewed as desirable for a young white girl growing up in South Africa. A departure from this type of schooling was specifically addressed and accounted for in the narratives of the three white women who did not attend such schools. Otherwise, attendance at a private girls' school was merely named in response to my question about schooling without a spontaneous offering of any further explanation, with the exception of Carol Williamson as already specified. The extent to which private girls schools were seen as desirable among white South Africans was made most explicit in the narrative of Beverley Peters. She described her parents as working class but said that her father, in particular, had aspirations that she would be university-educated. Although she did not articulate any connection, in the light of the trends for the white women in the sample it is noteworthy that for the final two years of her schooling she was transferred to a girls' school.

In sum, with respect to schooling the analysis of the narratives brings to the fore the ways in which race intersected with class and gender to shape the choices that parents made for their children. For black parents selecting a school was based on the desire to avoid the negative effects of a schooling system shaped by racist education policies, whereas white parents' choices seemed to be based on class and gender. Similarly, there were contrasting accounts of university choice. In the white women's accounts there were no references to how racial positioning might have impacted on their choice of university. Rather, the accounts of why a particular university were framed completely by family and personal imperatives such as the chosen university was the nearest, or that the fees would be minimal because a parent worked at the university. In this respect, the narratives in this study repeat the pattern identified by Frankenberg (1993) and Walker

(1998) that much of the structuring effects of racism are not remarked upon in the narratives of white women.

Although the analysis starkly illuminates the ways in which the racial polarisation of apartheid shaped the self narratives of these women professors, gender as a shaping practice in career development was also made apparent. Almost 50 percent of the sample, both black and white, started out expecting a life of teaching, marriage and children. In this next section, the analysis turns to how they diverged from this by entering academia as lecturers.

### 7.2.2. Entry into academia

As noted above, most of the women reflected that from a young age they knew that school would be followed by some form of tertiary education and then they would have a career of some sort. There were only two exceptions to the pattern of school followed directly by enrolment at a tertiary institution. One was Ann Crosby who explained that even though she was always among the top three achievers at school and her father wanted her to attend university, she did not do so because it was against the wishes of her boyfriend at the time. So instead of university enrolment, she obtained employment as an administrative clerk. However, soon after she enrolled as a student at a distance learning university by which time the relationship with boyfriend had ended. The second was Daisy du Preez, one of the older white women in the sample. In her narrative she reported that she had *"absolutely no idea what to do"* during the closing months of her schooling. She was awarded a scholarship to attend university but she did not accept it because she did not want to leave her widowed mother. Fortunately, one of her teachers encouraged her to respond to a recruitment drive by a local company, and thus she successfully began a career in a male-dominated profession. All her university education was subsequently attained by correspondence.

For most teaching was the intended career. In South Africa two routes to becoming a teacher are typical, either through a teacher's training college or through a university degree followed by a professional diploma. Two of the 10 who became teachers initially enrolled at teacher's training colleges. There was Daphne Swartz who began her academic career after many years of teaching in a school and there was Nthombi

Mbokazi whose parents insisted that she enroll in a college instead of in a university. She explained that her mother viewed the nearby historically black university as too risky because "*students went there, got themselves involved in trouble, riots and things, and then had to leave without a qualification.*" The college was viewed as a safer option showing that for this black family student resistance was perceived as an obstacle to the career advancement of their daughter. However, after a year of teaching, their daughter resigned to attend university.

For six women, Phumzile Ngubane, Gwen Dickenson, Carol Williamson, Desiree Jones, Sophia Dawson and Cathy Daniels, the initial entry into university led directly to being an academic without any intervening periods of outside work, travelling and/or being a housewife. It is notable that only one of these woman is black and she began her academic career while she lived outside South Africa. Gwen Dickenson, the oldest among the six, was the only woman in the sample of 25 who had a mentor. Her mentor took an active role in developing her career to the extent that she persuaded Gwen's parents that their daughter should be permitted to continue with postgraduate studies. This relationship continued such that Gwen's first academic appointment was as a leave replacement for her mentor. Although Desiree Jones and Sophia Dawson did not name anyone as a mentor, they did attribute their continuation into academia to the influence of specific male lecturers. Desiree Jones, for example, ended up in her discipline as a result of direct intervention from a lecturer who suggested that she study further. Until then it had not occurred to her in spite of her outstanding academic performance.

Among the older women, black and white, the impetus for career direction after the attainment of the first degree was typically attributed to an external source or was perceived as "*accidental*". Of the six above-named women, the three younger ones (two were 39 years and one was 41 years old) differed in that they did not account for their career direction in terms of the influence of other persons, instead they talked about how they made their own choices. In Phumzile Ngubane's narrative, for example, she talked about how she "*started reading up about different fields of study*" to inform her career direction. There was a clear pattern with respect to age and impetus for career direction echoing the findings reported by Lie (1990) that women of different age groups had

distinguishable life experiences due to changes in ideological and contextual influences. Although Kim Booysen, the youngest women in the sample, did not move directly into an academic career, all the movements in her working life were accounted for with reference to her own desires and needs. In contrast, the specific turns and developments in the career trajectories of the older women professors were either framed as responses to suggestions by others as to what they should do or were accounted for by statements such as *"I simply fell into it"* and *"It was not planned at all"*. An example was Nosizwe Mthembu who related how she entered academia while she was working as a social services professional:

*"At the end of my sixth year (of work) I had an encounter with a gentleman who said that there was a post at the (university name). 'Have you thought about it' he asked. I said 'No, I have not given it any thought.' I mean lecturing at the (university name)! And he said 'Apply, you have the potential'"*.

She applied and was offered the position. The impact of an external source on career development also emerged in the accounts of promotion, an issue to be discussed in the next section.

### **7.2.3. First appointments and moving up the hierarchy**

First academic appointments were typically short-term contracts as junior lecturers. The disparities in the South African higher education system were made apparent in the differences in qualification upon first appointment. For some the first academic appointment came even before a postgraduate degree, yet others were similarly appointed as junior lecturers having completed doctoral degrees. Helen Hardy was someone who was appointed as a junior lecturer even though she was better qualified than many colleagues who were ranked as lecturers. In reflecting on her initial appointment during the interview, she explained that at the time she was so *"grateful"* that she did not think of questioning the rank. Being *"grateful"* was how the participants typically constituted their feelings about the first appointment signaling an initial lack of self-entitlement.

Consideration of the first appointments in terms of the racial structuring of the South African university system manifested a more complex configuration compared to the

equivalent analysis of student enrolment. For five of the white women the first full-time academic appointment was at a historically black university with all these appointments occurring during the early to mid 1980s. At the time of the interviews, each of these women was still employed at the same institution. For all, except one of the black women, the first academic appointment was at the historically black university designated for her ethnic group. The exception was Lynn Abrahams, the coloured woman, who had as a student enrolled at the very same historically white university at which she was subsequently appointed. This pattern illustrates that for white women there was more flexibility in the university system in the 1980s when it came to applications for academic appointments. Although at the time of interviewing another two black women were in positions at historically white universities, these appointments had only been made in 1995 and 1996 and in both cases, the women were in posts that were specifically earmarked for equity purposes.

Across the narratives, regardless of race, the importance of learning the system after entry was communicated. Mary-Ann Taylor described herself as once having been *"the definitive wet behind the ears academic"* and Helen Hardy talked about feeling like *"a babe in the woods"*. In telling their stories about their first appointment and first promotion, the dangers of being a naïve academic were retrospectively elucidated. Some reflected on how they remained at the level of junior lecturer for lengthy periods even after they had improved their qualifications. In many cases the first promotion only occurred when someone else, typically a male colleague, suggested that they apply. Later promotions were more likely to be self-initiated through a process of application for promotion. In the accounts of promotion three themes emerged, namely, the importance of learning the system, dealing with the difficulty of competing with colleagues and developing a sense of self-entitlement. Susan Smith was explicit in describing the benefits of knowing the system:

*"Yes, however I very quickly realised that I had been appointed too low, but I accepted it because I wanted to come back (to SA). I did not have all that much teaching experience, although I had the Ph.D., but Ph.D.s were not that common at that time at (university). So then a senior lectureship came up at (another university) and I absolutely...I would have gone. I would have taken it up but I was only 18 months into my job at (university), I had not completed my probation, so it was quite cheeky but I was offered the job at*

*(other university), so I went to my professor and said "Here is a letter offering me a senior lectureship". They immediately got together and I was promoted to senior lectureship.*

*So you turned down the other offer?*

*By then I had also got quite involved in the university politics and was quite sussed about how you dealt with the institution, because I came from (university) having been on the staff association..."*

In this extract Susan Smith discloses how she was able to use her knowledge of the system to move up the hierarchy. For others, however, knowing the system brought an awareness that sometimes inhibited their sense of access to promotion. For Helen Hardy learning the system meant an awareness that she could not trust her colleagues. When she initially applied for promotion, the outcome was *"very unhappy, unpleasant, awful"*. She elucidated by saying, *"I think for me the main issue is trusting the men in senior positions that said you will definitely get promoted, you deserve it and then finding out that it did not happen."* In the process she also discovered that there *"is tremendous competition in the university"* and that for her this was experienced as *"difficult and awful, especially when you are against your own colleagues"*. The competitiveness among colleagues was similarly described with distaste by participants such as Victoria Makgetla who noted that *"You felt better off sitting as a lecturer where you were because there was such tension about promotions and all that and you did not want to compromise your relationship"*. Adjectives such as *"ugly"* and *"awful"* were repeatedly used across the narratives to describe feelings about competitiveness.

These constructions of what Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) called "the rules of the game" confirm the trends in their research and the trends identified by others such as Nicholson (1996), that many women struggle with the individual competitiveness around which organisational hierarchies are typically structured. These authors have argued that for many women engaging directly and actively in competition is experienced as difficult because in doing so they risk a construction of themselves as ambitious and, as Nicholson (1996) noted, being ambitious is inimical to traditional constructions of femininity. The connection between the difficulty of competitiveness and self-construction was made explicit in Helen Hardy's narrative when she explained: *"For me*

*the competitiveness was very difficult because I don't think of myself as a competitive person, but obviously on some levels I must be otherwise I would still be teaching at (school's name).*" There is a sense of tentativeness here about the representation of self as competitive. This was similarly conveyed in the accounts of ambition where there was a reluctance to claim a construction of the self as ambitious. Daisy du Preez resolutely claimed *"I have never been ambitious, you know. It is a strange thing to say, but I have never been ambitious."* Ann Crosby in recalling the day she enrolled at university did not disown the self as ambitious, but there was a sense of reluctance as conveyed here:

*"I remember looking at the queues at fresher's week at the various tables where they were asking for information and the queue behind the Arts Faculty was incredibly long and full of women, and the queue behind the Science Faculty was incredibly long and full of men. I thought that this was probably the place I should go, not in an undifferentiated mass of women, so there was obviously some kind of ambition somewhere but it was not formulated in any kind of way".*

During the earlier part of this interview, Ann Crosby proclaimed that she did not *"recall ever having an ambition"* yet as the narrative of her career unfolded there was an emergent claiming of the self as ambitious. At another point in the narrative directly after she described how she had distinguished herself by virtue of being the first woman to hold a particular portfolio, she accounted for it by saying: *"I had no ambitions at all except to do something that would be challenging and that might distinguish me, I suppose ..."* This simultaneous play of wanting to distinguish herself and yet not representing herself as ambitious, resonates with Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) proposition that the process of becoming a professional produces for many women, a sense of internal conflict that is indicative of a transformation in self-construction. In this case there is seemingly a change from a construction of the self as not ambitious to ambitious. Similarly, in Helen Hardy's account of her career advancement there is a shift that entails that an acceptance of the self as competitive. Reconstituting the self as ambitious and competitive is presented as problematic for some women, as shown in these narratives, because it requires a transformation of self that is inconsistent with dominant constructions of femininity. For women being ambitious and competitive is to risk being unfeminine for as Brownmiller (1984) made clear, these are not considered to be feminine traits.

In making sense of their careers all the participants made connections between the self, a consciousness about institutional politics and career advancement. For some the consciousness about institutional politics was tied to a painful, difficult experience. The case of Helen Hardy has already been described. She had to deal with the pain of a rejected application for promotion after believing her colleagues that she was ranked first on the list. Yet, for others the consciousness evolved in ways that were not linked to pain. For Gwen Dickenson, her mentor's advice and assistance ensured that she was well versed in how to move up the ranks such that in telling her story of promotion she was able to say with ease that *"it did not seem unusual"* and *"you know they were all sort of at the right period"*. Then when one of the promotions did not seem to happen at the right time, she applied to another university as a strategy to achieve what she wanted. For her there was no micronarrative about the pain of being a naïve academic. Beverley Peters too, avoided the pain of being a nave academic by having been advised by peers who *"had been at the university a long time, so they knew how universities worked"*.

The analysis of these accounts of moving up the ranks reveal differences in the positioning of academic women in relation to institutional politics. Having a mentor, receiving advice from peers and actively participating in a staff association were represented as facilitative factors in getting to know the system and then ensuring success for the academic self. In the narratives where there was an absence of such facilitative factors, there was talk of the pain of being a naive academic and the difficulties of the process of learning the system. Some women made clear connections between successful learning of the system and shifts in self-construction. Success in moving up the ranks meant an acceptance of the self as ambitious and competitive. While some expressed ambivalence about seeing themselves in these terms, there was no ambivalence about the importance of a perception of self as entitled. Overcoming initial feelings of being grateful for the position and learning that one could and should apply for promotion were consistently noted as essential to career advancement.

### 7.3. Academic Work

Once appointed in an academic post, one is generally expected to perform in three areas of work — teaching, research and administration — and performance in these areas of competency are typically used as indicators for promotion. How these activities were subjectively represented in the narratives is the issue to be addressed in this final section of the chapter.

In her narrative Carol Williamson gave a description of how academic work has evolved and increased over her years of work. She elucidated as follows:

*"I certainly feel over the years I have devoted more and more and more time to my job. In the beginning...partly because in the early 80s teaching was not such a big thing at (university) and so teaching did not occupy so much of your time and then the administration was non-existent. People did not have any conception of administration really. As long as the Department kept running, that was about it. So, when you add to the research the huge teaching demands and the huge administrative demands, it's really huge".*

Carol's description of the changing nature of academic work matched what Sachs and Blackmore (1998) termed the "do-everything professor". They argued that the new definition of academic work requires a near obsessional commitment and a dual identity, which straddles a tension between a managed self and self- management. Carol's narrative captured this tension when she talked about the consequences of the growing academic workload for the self.

*"I must say I don't have much of a sort of personal life, I suppose. I will work most weekends. I find it an incredibly demanding life. People have this idea that we just sit around, but actually there can be few careers that can be like this where every minute...I think I feel it is when I am not working I feel guilty actually and I feel I could always be sitting at my computer and doing something more. Perhaps I am particularly driven, I don't know, but it seems to me that there are so many conflicting obligations and if you are going to do any research it has to be in your spare time basically. So person life...for instance, I have not had a holiday — one day out of (city) in the last 18 months".*

In this extract Carol reveals an awareness of what the consequences of the growing academic workload have been for her. As Sachs and Blackmore (1998) suggested, in response to the new work demands, greater control over self is required and the self has

to be managed. In order to be successful in the new circumstances, Carol has had to reduce her recreation time to virtually none and she has to deal with constant feelings of guilt associated with not doing enough. In addition, Carol's narrative exposes a lack of support and acknowledgement for the amount of effort that is required, for as she notes *"People have this idea that we just sit around"*. Although she did not mention it in this specific part of her narrative, another demand on her time is that she is also a mother and a wife. However, at a different point, as was alluded to earlier in this chapter, she did articulate the difficulties of *"dealing with a small child and trying to publish and be productive at the same time"*. Thus, there are gendered implications of having to be a *"do-everything professor"* with greater consequences for women who bear the additional burdens of childcare and domestic labour.

But, as she herself speculated, not all women share her concerns about the changing and increasing workload for academics. Carol noted that there is a great deal of diversity across the university system and across individuals, so the demands on women professors are likely to vary accordingly. This was confirmed by the analysis of the narratives. There were some participants such as Helen Hardy who similarly articulated a concern about the expansion of academic work. In her words *"its been very difficult because everything is added on...you teach, you do research, now you must do committee work ja, you know, its not as if someone says 'Okay, we'll take your tutorials, you've just got to keep adding on."* But, in contrast to Carol and Helen, Nosizwe Mthembu, for example, disclosed that she had published only one paper and that she had *"not dealt deeply into real academic work which is publishing"*. Thus, Nosizwe's revelation corroborated Carol's statement about the diversity across universities with respect to variations in performance indicators.

Although Carol disclosed that research constituted the area of work that she enjoyed most, in apparent contradiction, the subjective sense of enjoyment did not translate into a subjective experience of ease and comfort in doing the concomitant activities. Later in her account when she was talking through some of the challenges and obstacles she faced, she named *"the difficulty of doing research"*. On this issue, there was little diversity. Almost all the women professors interpreted the activities of research and

publication as a difficult area, in contrast to teaching, which was generally represented as an area of enormous job satisfaction. Each of the areas of academic work are now discussed separately in line with the separation that was made by the participants' themselves in their narratives.

### 7.3.1. Teaching

Teaching as a component of academic work was represented positively in several narratives. Theresa Lawrence, for example, directly stated that teaching is her preferred area of work. So too with Margaret Parsons who confessed to hating the application of the discipline in which she was located and also to doing very little research in that field. But, she said she remained in it because of the teaching. "What we teach is beautiful", she explained. It was the similar for Desiree Jones who noted that she would "*drop anything to read*" her students' work. She elaborated by saying that:

*"I love reading my students' papers. I guess I like seeing the picture coming together. I will drop everything for that. My student's can't believe it; I give them back their chapter or thesis the next day having read the whole thing from cover to cover".*

In some of accounts of teaching there were indications of the correspondence between mothering and relationships with students as identified by Nicolson (1996). Ann Edgar's account was an example, but with a particularly South African flavour.

*"Well I love my students almost without reserve, all of them. I have one or two I am not so fond of but most of them I like extremely much. My African students have been calling me Mama for years, which I first did not understand but now I realise it is a compliment. I love teaching. That is what I really believe the gift that I have is to teach more than anything else."*

A mothering relationship is hinted at both by her declaration of love for the students and by their response in calling her "Mama", but there is a racial dimension too in this account. Ann uses "African" as a racial signifier to communicate that her love for students extends across racial boundaries, thus reinforcing the representation of herself as a gifted teacher. Race also appeared as a marker in Margaret Parson's account of teaching when she referred to "my African students". She, like Ann Edgar, was positioned at a historically black university. Another narrative in which race was denoted

in reference to students was that of Sophia Johnson who was also at a historically black university. However, in her account race manifested through the discourse of community. She repeatedly used the terms "*community problems*" and "*support problems*" to explain how she assisted the students. The story unfolded as follows:

*"It was a great challenge for me to start working at this place because my former students before I started at (university name) were completely different ... Now these students, especially when I started in 1984, were really... you had to start from school — from primary school level because they could not write, they could not read, let alone (discipline). The basic skills were not there ... I threw myself into community problems and support problems for my students."*

In their narratives, Margaret Parsons and Sophia Johnson represented themselves as teachers who were able to transform black students who were depicted as in greater need of skills than would ordinarily be the case with students. "*(T)hey cry for help*" was how Sophia Johnson phrased it and for her the response was constructed as personal sacrifice — if she had not spent her time on what she called "*community problems*", she would "*have had three times as many publications*", according to her reckoning. However, each of them claimed results which were depicted as a source of satisfaction for them as teachers. In the words of Margaret Parsons, "*Just give them tools and they blossom*", and Sophia Johnson, "*it is very pleasing that the students were grateful ... it was very pleasing to see how the students improved*".

Thus the meaning of teaching in these narratives is tied to the particularities of the history of the South African higher education system where there are white women academics at historically black universities teaching black students who have been the victims of poor quality apartheid education. In the narrative of Margaret Parsons there was a consciousness that her activities as a teacher were located in and informed by her responses to the larger political and social context. Her story of the circumstances of how she came to teach at that particular historically black university is quoted below, continuing from the point where she had just recounted that she had been awarded a post doctoral fellowship:

*"I went there (foreign country) for a year because I actually thought that I was going to leave this country. I did not see much of a future for any of us here. However, while I was*

*there I met some ex- (university name) peoples who said to me that if you work within the system you perpetuate the system and all sorts of junk like that, and I did not see that they were doing anything for South Africa. So I thought to myself since they keep telling me that education is government-structured and depending on what flavour you are you get so much education. I though bugger this! So I came back, because as far as I was concerned, a (professional) is controlled by (professional council) and we all have standards which we must uphold and I could not honestly see how anybody could persuade me that university would be different for anybody of any other race group."*

As shown in this quotation her reason for being at that particular university is constructed in missionary terms. She presents herself as starting out her teaching career with the conscious intention of proving that there was no race discrimination in university education. Her use of words such as "junk" and "flavour" are indicative of her dismissive attitude towards racial injustices. Then, later in the narrative she again made a connection between her teaching and the national context when she remarked "*whenever I look at my African students, I think that the future of the country is in very good hands*". In her story her attitude to teaching made the difference. She explicated her approach as follows:

*"The idea I came here with was that I had been treated very shoddily as a student. I was a number. If I had an opinion, it was not even valid, because I was a student. I thought to myself there must be another way of doing it and the students became people..."*

Here we see how the meaning given to the self is bound up with the interpretation of the political and social conditions of the time. Margaret's racial positioning as a white South African allows her to adopt a dismissive stance towards the impact of apartheid education. She has not been positioned as a victim of discrimination. At the same time it permits her to see herself as in control of a solution. She conveys herself as someone who was able to transform education practice by redefining students as humans, as people. Her narrative illustrates how the personal is imbued by the social and how the meaning of the social is simultaneously personal.

### **7.3.2. Research activities**

Unlike teaching, research was not as popularly represented in positive terms. The two areas of academic work were in several narratives, presented as in competition with each other and although teaching was largely portrayed as the enjoyable activity, there was a

sense that research was as Nosizwe phrased it "*the real academic work*". Gwen Dickenson was direct about the priority of research over teaching as a determinant of academic advancement. She stated that she had "*made conscious plans about keeping in research*" even though she enjoyed teaching.

Writing, publishing and presenting papers were the activities associated with doing research. Although there was diversity in the representation of writing as an activity; for most women it constituted a challenge to be confronted. Dealing with this challenge was related to a number of personal constructs. For Nosizwe, her avoidance of writing and publishing papers was tied to her perception of herself as afraid of rejection. Thus in her words it was "*a challenge*" that she was going to confront. Gwen Dickenson, who had a long list of publications, acknowledged the advice that she had from her mentor, but she also identified confidence and an ability to take criticism as important. Carol Williamson, another well-published academic among the 25 professors, identified two factors that assisted her- firstly, the introduction of word processing and secondly, a shift in self-perception from "*somebody just playing at it*" to "*an academic*". Issues of self-perception also emerged in the narrative experiences of presenting papers at conferences. Elaine Shezi, for example, reflected that presenting papers at conferences is not easy for her mostly because of a lack of confidence in her work.

Self-doubt, insecurity and a lack of self-confidence have been frequently reported in the research literature on academic women. Aisenberg and Harrington (1998) noted that self-doubt was a major problem for women in developing a voice of authority and it often manifested as difficulties with writing, silence in public spaces and general underassertiveness. Moreover, they reported that a salient point about the insecurity is that it appears to be unrelated to the abilities and experiences of the subject. This point was indeed confirmed by one of the most productive professors in the sample in terms of the number of books and journal articles she had published. She disclosed that she still did not sleep the night before a public lecture or conference presentation and that she typically coped by taking a sleeping tablet the night before.

Respondents in Kettle's (1996) study identified the institutional culture of universities as a major contributing factor to the self-guilt and lack of self-confidence experienced by many senior women. In the narratives in this study institutional culture as a barrier for women was named specifically with reference to participation in committees, an activity that falls within the broad definition of administrative contribution to the university.

### **7.3.3. Committee activities**

Committee membership is viewed as an important means of contributing to the life of the university (Brooks, 1997). In addition, participation in committees is typically used as a criterion for promotion as Helen Hardy discovered when she initially applied for promotion to professorship. The reason cited for her lack of success at that time was that she had not been on enough committees. As Brooks (1997) noted, membership and participation in committees can signify an important set of factors for academic women, including visibility, role modelling, decision-making, equity and representation. But, there are also a number of negative aspects to committee work for women academics as was indicated in the narratives.

Helen Hardy's narrative with respect to committees illustrated two of the negative factors identified in Brooks' (1997) research. Firstly, that committee membership is an additional area of work for women already struggling with the burden of teaching, research, childcare and domestic labour. As the quotation from Helen's narrative (cited above) emphasised women have to *"just keep adding on"*. Secondly, involvement in departmental, low level committee work does not count when candidacy for promotion is considered. Helen described how dismayed she was to discover that the work she had done on curriculum development via involvement in departmental committees was not considered as committee work for promotion purposes. Thus, she then realised that she had *"gone the wrong route"* and so she subsequently became involved in higher-level committees.

Since women are concentrated in the lower academic ranks, a further negative factor for women is that membership of higher-level university committees is often restricted to the professorial level (Walker, 1997), thus they are excluded in structural terms. However, in

recent years there has been pressure to ensure equity in representation on committees. As a consequence of the changing socio-political context, there is a growing consciousness within educational institutions of the need for equity in gender and race representation. Given the small pool of women at senior levels, it was not surprising to discover that at the subjective level this was experienced as a complex issue involving both opportunities for the individual to contribute to change but also several side effects. Ann Edgar explicated her experience as follows:

*"I think that the drawbacks are, and the thing that has exhausted me and that I have still not resolved for myself is the tokens. It is being invited to conferences, being invited to make contributions to books and things because you are a well-known woman."*

*"What are the drawbacks?"*

*"Well, that you are being used as a token to make their all male things look a bit better because they have a woman or two in it and I think that is wrong and I have refused certain things on those grounds. I have refused to go to certain things. If you want to invite me as a (discipline noun), and I will decide how I am going to do it. Don't tell me to come talk about women's things. I always do talk about women's things but I want to be able to choose the grounds on which I go there. I think that is a drawback and the other is burnout. I get invited all the time to do things. I have to say no to more than half the things in order to harbour my own energy and to watch myself and I think these are the disadvantages."*

For Ann being one of very few senior women in her discipline frequently places her in the position of being a token; meaning that she sees herself as included merely to give legitimacy to male practices. In this narrative extract she depicts how she shifts between taking up this subject position and resisting it. There are times when she resists by refusing invitations because an acceptance would mean being taking up a position as a token and also being fixed into a speaking position in which she can speak only about *women's things*". As she informs us, she always speaks as a woman but she rejects being restricted to speaking only as a woman and not as an academic. Ann Edgar's account captures Acker's (1994) observation that women in the academy may be simultaneously invisible and extra-visible. As one of few senior women in her field, Ann occupies a position of extra-visibility; the numerous invitations are indicative of this. But, at the same time she is rendered invisible as an academic as she is only asked to

speak as a woman about " *women 's things*". In order to cope with these complexities of being so positioned, Ann explains that she has to manage herself to avoid burnout; she declines about half the invitations.

Being heavily drawn upon for committee membership and other academic activities is not unique to senior women in South Africa, however. It emerged as an issue in the research conducted by Brooks (1997) on women's experiences of the academy in the UK and New Zealand thus giving support to Blackmore's argument (1993) that the exploitative relationships of the past no longer command legitimacy in post-colonial times. What proved to be unique about the narratives in this study is how this is read in relation to both gender and race. This was best illustrated in the narrative of Phumzile Ngubane who articulated the demands she experienced as a woman and as a black person. Various extracts are listed in illustration:

*"I think sometimes when you are a black woman there is a tendency for people to expect you to do miracles. To do more than your share so as to speak of what you are supposed to be doing and it is a challenge, because on the one hand, you are torn between letting go of what it is that is to be done. Even though you feel it is necessary for someone, for a woman or a black person to do it, you know just as part of that struggle and balancing that with your own limitations as a human being, to say I don't have to do everything. I am sure there are other people who can do something, or even if I don't do it, the world won't come to an end. So I think that is one of the challenges that one faces."*

*"I think, initially, your first instinct is "Wow, there hasn't been a woman or there hasn't been too many women or black people doing xyz, let me give it a shot so that I can get the process going. But after a while, as I say, you have to balance that ...between that and your own interest and what adds value to your own growth, where you feel it is absolutely necessary for you to participate and you can add value."*

Evident in these extracts is the demand that she experiences to participate in various activities. Unlike Ann Edgar, Phumzile constructs and reconstructs the demands in relation to three subject positions - her gender, her race and her humanity. As a black woman she feels compelled to take up the challenges of being one of the first women or black people, but at the same time she feels that as a human being her capacities are limited. Her subjective experience of the burden of the demands is conveyed by her use of the term "*miracle*". In the process, she feels "*torn*" by trying to fulfil the expectations of the dual identity, gender and race. In spite of the sense of heavy burden, however, she

acknowledges the possibilities for change. There are changes to be initiated and value to be added.

In the many narratives about committees the ways in which women may resist and also produce alternate meanings was brought to the fore. Although there was widespread recognition that institutional cultures of universities are masculinist and racist, its changing and varying manifestations were also acknowledged as significant in opening up spaces for change. Taking up these spaces was portrayed as complex, involving both acceptance and resistance as well as careful self-management to avoid burnout. In concluding this section I quote Beverley Peters who succinctly conveyed the complex ways in which meanings of participation in committees may be negotiated:

*"I find the masculinist culture within the university, within the faculty extremely tiring. I always feel like I am the other, so that when you are talking there is not the sense of affirmation when you are saying something. Now I know that if I am chairing a meeting, I will ensure, or try as far as I can — I'm sure I don't do it very well- but I will make sure that the women in the room have space to talk and when I watch what happens to the various deans or so on that we have, that are all male, and how I see people shut out ...Its about hierarchies and it is about male and female. It is about black and white"*

#### **7.4. Overview**

After the focus on form in the previous chapter, this chapter moved to a closer examination of the content of the narratives. The main concern was the narrative construction of academic experience in relation to gender and race. Continuing the discussion at the end of the last chapter, the first issue to be addressed was constructions of academic life from the subjective positionings of wives and mothers.

Performing as an academic and as a wife and mother was revealed to be conflictual and difficult. Narrative representations of being multiply positioned as academics, mothers and wives were shown to be variations of existing story lines, popularly used by women to live out their lives. In the unfolding of the narratives the story line that establishes marriage and children as the proper goal for women was found to be in conflict with a

story line that places career as an important goal for women. Consequently, tension, ambivalence and contradiction featured across and within narratives.

Two narrative strategies seemed to be used in order to reduce the cogency of the tensions and contradictions of being positioned at the nexus of multiple subjectivities. One strategy involved shifts in self-construction that redefined the tensions so that it seemed natural and consistent with an essential self. Presenting the self as having an ability to manage multiple tasks and framing traditionally feminine tasks as enjoyable were two examples of how the self was reconstituted. Referring to luck to explain how the contradictions were managed was a second narrative strategy.

In counterpoint to the rest of the narratives, attention was drawn to the single narrative in which speaker discursively positioned herself as married with a wife. In the context of the narratives as a whole, this narrative highlighted the taken-for-granted aspects of the connection between woman, mother and wife. This woman professor discursively positioned herself as a husband and this was seemingly carried through her narrative as, unlike the rest of the women, there was an absence of talk about the difficulties of balancing relationship and career.

The chapter then turned to an examination of how these 25 women became academics within a context of gender discrimination and apartheid that would have marked South African society when they were growing up. Intersections of race, class and gender were uncovered as shaping factors in the stories of how these women got to be academics. The narratives of the black women without exception showed a consciousness of the ways in which race discrimination had limited their access to educational opportunities. With only one exception, the narratives of white women were silent on how their access to education had been shaped by a positioning of racial privilege. The racial polarisation of apartheid policy was starkly evident in the self- narratives of schooling and university education. But, gender was also apparent as a shaping factor, most sharply in the revelation that about half of the total number of women, black and white, started their working lives expecting a life of teaching, marriage and children. Only six women began

an academic career directly from university and of these only one was black and her academic career began when she lived outside South Africa.

With regard to impetus for career direction, age emerged as a distinguishing marker. Among older women career direction was attributed to the influence of an external source, whereas among the younger women constructions of impetus for career direction focused on choices made by the self.

The analysis of first academic appointments highlighted the disparities across the university system in South Africa. Some women were appointed as junior lecturers having completed a doctoral degree whereas as others were similarly appointed without even a postgraduate degree. First appointments also pointed to greater fluidity in the system for white women compared to black women. Several white women took up appointments in historically black universities with no similar trend for black women.

Nonetheless, according to the narrative analysis gaining entry was easier than moving up the hierarchy. Across the narratives there was a repeated reference to the importance of learning the system in order to attain promotion. A reconstruction of self from a naïve academic to an ambitious, competitive individual fully informed of the system was conveyed as necessary for success. In making sense of their movements through the system, connections between the self, a consciousness of institutional politics and career advancement were explicitly stated.

Finally, the chapter examined subjective representations of academic work. An increase in the expanse of academic work in recent years was noted. In terms of the analysis this was presented as confirmation of the "do-everything-professor" demanded by new market-driven higher education policies. The gendered implications of this growth were also discussed. But, the narratives were diverse in this regard, as many women professors did not voice similar concerns. Instead, the diversity across the system was again signalled through the acknowledgement of some women that they had not really engaged in research.

Of the three areas of academic work — research, teaching and administration teaching was most popularly represented as a source of job satisfaction. Research was constituted as a more challenging area of work that involved issues of self-perception such as confidence and self-doubt. Constructions of administrative work centered on committee participation and in these accounts there was direct reference to the masculinist and racist culture of universities. Here the narratives revealed that at times women accommodate and at other times they identify spaces for resistance.

Overall, the analysis presented in this chapter pointed to commonalities and differences in the constructions of the self and academia. Race, class, age, sexual orientation, relationship status and family status were among the markers of difference and commonality. But, these were neither fixed nor consistent in signifying difference. At times women were divided by race and at other places they were connected through motherhood as subjective positioning. Working from the theoretical stance that narratives are socially and historically situated, changes in South African societal formations and processes were woven into the analysis to make sense of what was common and different and when and why there was variation or not.

## 8. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, GENDER AND FEMINISM

The scope of this, the final chapter of analysis of the narratives, is limited to an examination of the participants' understandings of gender and feminism. Expressed differently, the question to be addressed is: how did they explicitly and consciously articulate the relevance of gender in their academic lives? The research literature on successful career women shows that gender is positioned variously and differently within their constructions of themselves and their experiences (Marshall, 1984; White et al 1992; Nicolson, 1996). In spite of the evidence that women as a group are disadvantaged in professions, there are many successful women who claim that gender is not relevant in their lives, but there are also others who claim gender as highly salient. This chapter examines the self-relevance of gender in the narratives of the women professors.

The literature review also showed that most women in senior positions have been found to eschew feminism (e.g. Nicolson, 1996) . This is another focal issue in this chapter. The chapter discusses representations of feminism in the narratives and furthermore, it considers how these representations may embody aspects of the general historical development of feminism in South Africa.

### 8.1. Gender Consciousness and the Construction of Career Success

Narrative representations of gender in this study followed the overall trend reported by Nicolson (1996) — for some women gender was acknowledged as salient and significant but for others gender was constructed as an issue of little or no relevance to their careers. Concomitantly, some identified instances of gender discrimination and others claimed an experience unaffected by the discriminatory effects of gender. There was a lack of shared experience among the women professors around issues of gender and gender discrimination in the university system.

Margaret Parsons was adamant that her career success had been achieved independently of gender. Her views are captured in the following extracts:

*"I have never thought of myself as a woman. When the (media name) phoned me up and said "We are nominating you for the woman of the year award", I said "Goodness me". Then they told me I was the only woman who was head of (name) in the country and so forth."*

Although Margaret claimed that her sense of herself had always been 'gender-free', she simultaneously acknowledged that she *"see(s) it happening"*, that *"women have a rough time."* So although she recognised the reality of gender discrimination, Margaret's narrative positioned her beyond its reach through her claim that she had never perceived herself in gendered terms. This, in conjunction with the reference to Margaret Parsons in the previous chapter where it was noted that she discursively positioned herself as a husband in a relationship of marriage, illuminates the complexities of gender and gender identity by pointing to gender as multidimensional, unstable and shifting

But, Margaret's construction of the self-relevance of gender was not unique among the narratives. The youngest woman in the sample, Kim Booysen, similarly constructed her sense of herself as 'gender-free'. While she displayed an awareness that *"I was, in most classes, the only woman"*, she also reported that she *"never had the feeling of being different"*. A seemingly contradictory stance on gender was also conveyed in the narrative of Daisy du Preez who declared *"I just don't see gender issues"* yet in telling the story of her childhood she accounted for her mother's preferential treatment of her brother by citing his gender as a factor.

Each of these women thus seem to hold contradictory views on the significance of gender in their careers— on the one hand they acknowledge the relevance of gender as an issue, yet on the other hand, they distance themselves from it. As ready noted, this pattern is not unique, as it has been reported in the literature. Distancing the self from gender and sexism was evident in the larger proportion of the narratives, but in different ways. Therefore, there was commonality in the tendency to position the self beyond the reaches of gender issues, but there were variations in how this was achieved in their narratives.

In Daisy du Preez's narrative not seeing gender issues was consistent with her construction of herself as someone who does not see problems. This was narrated as follows:

*"When you reflect on your career have there been any obstacles in particular that you faced? There was that earlier part about money..."*

*I never saw that as a problem either. I think because I don't see many problems. I always seem to; well maybe its just that I think there is a solution to everything Life was not easy as a child but I think there is a solution to everything and I think that is why I am largely unsympathetic to anybody who says "I can't". "*

In Daisy's terms, gender was among one of the problems that she did not see, thus her statement *"I just don't see gender issues"*. In her narrative her construction of gender was therefore consistent with her self-presentation, thus permitting a unitary sense of self. However, as pointed out earlier, her narrative was internally contradictory on the issue of gender Kim Booyesen's strategy with regard to gender was achieved through a claim of sameness, so that even though she noted that she was the only woman among her peers, she declared that she had *"never had the feeling of being different"*. These are two examples of how distancing of self from gender was achieved via different narrative strategies.

By claiming that gender had no relevance in their career development, these women are able to create a sense of reality that seemingly persuades them that their success had been achieved on merit alone. Daisy du Preez made this construction explicit when she stated that she had reached her level of success because *"I happened to be the best person for the job at the time. I don't believe it was because I was a woman"*.

A minority among the 25 women clearly claimed gender as self-relevant in their career success. Again, there were differences in how gender was constituted as significant. Beverley Peters constructed her gender as a woman as directly relevant to her career success when she explained her decision to apply for promotion to professorship. She told of how angry she was feeling at the time, as there had been a series of events that

seemed to suggest that women were being undervalued. She then continued the account as follows:

*"I thought that in a way on principle I am going to apply for this thing and so they have to deal with me as a senior woman and see what they are actually going to do with me. That feeling of anger rather than anything made me do it."*

In contrast to the narratives referred to above, this narrative is explicit about the self-relevance of gender in the achievement of success. In continuing her story, Beverley said that when she discovered that she was one of three who was successful out of the 10 who applied, she felt affirmed because, even though the management declared that their decision was based solely on merit, she knew that it was significant in gender terms.

Cathy Daniels in a similar and yet different vein also acknowledged the self-relevance of gender in her career experiences as shown below:

*"I think one has to have a strong sense of identity."*

*"Explain a little"*

*"Who you are. There are times when I've gone through feeling marginal and what you have to do is realise that you have something to say and perhaps its worth saying it and standing up for what you believe in. I think if nothing else, I have become respected for that and also to have a strong sense of responsibility. To be responsible, to know that you are going to do the task, whatever task, particularly as a woman. I hear cases of people, and women have often said, 'Leave it to a man, he can do a better job.'"*

Gender is integral to Cathy's construction of herself as a successful academic; her desire to be responsible, for example, was constituted as particularly significant for her as a woman in order to counteract gender-related stereotypes. In constructing the self-relevance of gender in these terms, Cathy's narrative was typical of responses that affirmed the significance of gender to career success. For those who saw gender as relevant to their success, being a woman meant consciously behaving in ways that disconfirmed stereotypes and constituting oneself so as to purposefully counteract the marginality of women.

Stereotyping, as well as other forms of gender discrimination, was named in several narratives, but experiences thereof did not necessarily translate into an acceptance of gender as relevant to career success.

## 8.2. Naming Discrimination

Even though some of the women told of events and times in their careers when they were subjected to negative treatment that impeded their progress, they rejected a construction of the events as gender-related. Desiree Jones described in some detail how at some point in her career she *"had a very rough time"* because a man in her discipline tried, in her words, *"to hinder my progress because I was his only real competition"*. After she recounted the details of their *"clashes"*, I asked her directly whether she thought that it was in any way related to gender. She unhesitatingly replied by stating *"(Name) is a chauvinist but I don't think he is a chauvinist against women scientists; he is just a general chauvinist. So I think the fact that I was a woman scientist really had nothing to do with it ..."*. In making sense of this period in her career, Desiree explicitly distances herself from the suggestion that she may have been a victim of gender discrimination.

But, just as there were different positions on the significance of gender across the narratives, there were different positions within the same narrative. The shifting process of construction was most sharply depicted in the narrative of Carol Williamson. At two different places in the narrative she offered two differing interpretations of the same events. In making sense of the time when both she and her husband were in the same academic department and she was victimised by the head because he said *"you can't have husband and wife in the same department"*, she at one point explained that: *"He just wanted me out of the Department and it turned out he behaved badly to women all over the place, in similar ways for many years"* and then at another point she reconstructed her interpretation as follows:

*"It was... I don't know whether it was because of being a woman, although that was part of it. Well, he had bad relationships with women, but that was his psychological problems rather than political, if you know what I mean. It was not sexism. It was not that. It was that he could not relate properly to women unless they were in a very inferior*

*position and he could exercise power over them and they were willing to have power exercised over them. So I don't know to what extent one calls that having problems as a woman. I think it was more having problems with a psychologically disturbed person."*

The fluidity of the construction is captured in the above extract. In making sense of her experience she shifts between framing the events as sexism and attributing what happened to the psychological state of the person. She is transparent about her struggle to fix the meaning of what happened. The audience is made aware of the discursive process through which she moves from framing the events as sexism to attributing it to individual psychological disturbance. Here we see an embodiment of how levels of awareness of gender and sexism are not fixed but changing. Changes in gender consciousness and gender discrimination over time were manifest in some of the other narratives too, such as Ann Edgar's and Gwen Dickenson's. Each of them named an incident that had occurred several years previously as an experience of gender discrimination but said that they had not defined it as such at the time.

Unlike the above examples, some forms of discrimination were named with certainty, especially when the consequences were material. A list of these is presented hereafter:

- appointment on a lower salary scale compared to equivalently qualified male colleagues
- preference for males in appointments and promotions
- discrimination in benefits such as housing subsidies and medical insurance
- married women designated as ineligible for permanent appointment
- being compelled to use research leave because of limited maternity leave
- gender stereotyping
- gender segregated laboratory work.

Differences due to the policy context, age and race were significant in shaping the specific experiences of discrimination. Many experiences of discrimination identified in the narratives were specific to particular policies that were implemented in former years. For example, the older women who were appointed as teachers and lecturers in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s spoke of being disadvantaged by a policy that prevented

married women being appointed on a permanent basis. Gender discrimination in benefits and leave was outlawed far more recently after the new South African Constitution came into effect in 1996. In all likelihood, many of the other forms of gender discrimination in the list are still being experienced by academic women, for example, no research has been done in South Africa to investigate whether there is gender discrimination in how academics are positioned within salary scales. With regard to preferential treatment for men in appointments and promotions, although the Constitution outlawed discrimination, equity legislation providing for affirmative action was passed only this year.

For many black women gender discrimination was not separable from race. Lynn Abrahams talked about her experiences of being one of three black women students in a historically white medical school during the late 1960s. This part of her narrative is reproduced to illustrate how gender and race were interwoven in producing discrimination:

*"We were three black women and so we were different. I think the first kind of issue of difference was when we had to go into a separate anatomy lab.*

*On what grounds?*

*On the grounds that women could not - dissect male bodies with other men and also for us we could not dissect white bodies, so that we had to dissect black female bodies."*

This extract renders visible the intersection of gender and race discrimination as it affected the subjective experiences of Lynn as a black woman during the apartheid years. However, representations of a consciousness of both gender and race were not restricted to subjective representations of experiences during apartheid. A similar consciousness emerged in accounts of professional relationships during the present post-apartheid period, but only in relation to changes in the university system.

### 8.3. University Context, Race and Gender Consciousness

With reference to the present post-apartheid period, Phumzile Ngubane articulated that for her there is a consciousness around being a woman and being black. She described it as:

*"not something that you are conscious of all the time, sometimes it just hits you that among all these people, I am the only woman and I am the only black person, something is wrong here."*

Lynn Abrahams, also displayed a dual consciousness of gender and race when she depicted her current situation as follows:

*"I think there may have been some, and probably still is, some of my older colleagues, maybe, who think that ... its not simply a gender issue. It also comes in the wake of political transformation, where I think a lot of my colleagues are still white and have difficulties with what they may regard as affirmative action. I don't let that bother me."*

What distinguished these two narratives from the narratives of most of the other black women in which a similar consciousness around both gender and race was absent, was that these two women were professors in historically white universities. This is not to imply a causative relationship, however, as Elaine Shezi was similarly positioned in a HWU but she did not articulate a similar awareness. At the time of the interview Elaine had only been in her position a few months; maybe after being there for a longer period her narrative would display a similar dual consciousness of race and gender.

The suggested pattern in relation to university context and subjectivity was also informed by my analysis of the narratives of white women positioned at historically black universities. There was Beverley Peters, a white woman at a historically black university who elucidated her subjective positioning in the following terms:

*"Because what happens as a white woman is that you own a sense of oppression as a woman in the university where you are continually feeling either silenced or the other so that you actually just accept that its okay let's talk about black oppression and let's ignore gender, so I think that it is a real challenge to know how to do that, and to find a balance so that it is not given some sort of simplistic hierarchy... "*

And then there was Ann Edgar, also a white woman at a historically black university, who reflected on the challenge of having to deal with " *all the race things here as well*" and " *a huge amount of trickiness amongst women towards me as a white woman*".

Like the narratives of Phumzile Ngubane and Lynn Abrahams, both these extracts reveal a subjective awareness that gender and race are connected in shaping their experiences of university life. All these accounts point to particularities of university context. As a black woman at a historically white university, Phumzile finds herself in situations where she has an experience of something being " *wrong*"; she finds herself in the position of being a solo on two fronts — as a woman and as a black person. In contrast, at the historically black university, Beverley feels silenced as a woman, but then she also feels silenced when race oppression is talked about. She constituted her present experience as a challenge that involved:

*"knowing how to deal with race and gender questions and how the intersection of those or not and how you as a white woman, how do I respond to certain kinds of things, and the debates about affirmative action... and the notions of hierarchies and privilege"*.

In contrast to the rest of her narrative where she showed fluency of expression, this account reads as a number of phrases strung together as fragments. At this point her use of language itself, seems to convey the overall sense of discomfort she feels in relation to the narrative content. A similar sense of discomfort and unease was conveyed by Ann Edgar in her use of the word " *trickiness*". For both of them, there is a sense of unease associated with talking about race difference.

Based on her own experiences, Holland —Muter (1995) observed that among white South African women talk about race has been limited to talk about blackness, with an absence of talk about whiteness and race privilege. Her observation seemed to be confirmed by the narratives in this study. As was pointed out in the last chapter, consciousness of race discrimination was evident in all the black women's narratives, but race was largely unacknowledged in the narratives of white women. All the black women clearly positioned themselves as subject to the race oppression of apartheid policy, whereas

nearly all the white women did not articulate a consciousness of race privilege. The latter may be regarded as reflective of a broader social process that has not engaged with the social construction of whiteness.

What distinguished Beverley Peters and Ann. Edgar was that each of them brought to the fore an awareness that race, conjointly with gender is relevant in the shaping of their current professional relationships. In their explicit acknowledgement of race as a signifier of self in relation to other, their narratives departed from the narratives of the other white women. The representation of race as 'tricky' and challenging speaks to the general absence of talk about race differences amongst South African women. The explosive public debates where black women have criticised white women for objectifying black women in their research and for their failure to address their own racism, have not produced any meaningful dialogue about difference. Instead, as Holland-Muter (1995) noted, the response of white women has generally been to turn inwards, only discussing these issues within the confines of safe houses and spaces. Not surprisingly then, race is represented as challenging and tricky.

In thinking through the question why these two women, what factors in their narratives distinguished them from the other white women, two factors seemed to be relevant — firstly, their positioning in a historically black university and secondly, each of them had long histories of identifying with feminism. Again, this is not to imply that these were causative factors in producing this race-gender consciousness, but merely that these factors coincided in their narratives. Constructions of feminism itself, and in relation to race difference, is explored in greater detail in the next section which will further cast light upon the issues raised here.

#### **8.4. Constructions of Feminism**

Feminism was claimed by only four of the women professors although it was mentioned in other narratives too. This section examines the varying constructions of feminism and what these constructions convey about the development and status of feminism in South Africa.

#### 8.4.1. Claiming feminism

Claiming feminism took two narrative forms. Firstly, feminism was used as a statement of identity. Ann Edgar stated *"I was born a feminist before there was a word for it"*; Susan Smith described how she became *"a full-on feminist"* through her involvement with the staff association; and Beverley Peters talked about relationships with women colleagues in terms of a shared identity as feminists. Secondly, feminism was used to describe academic work. For Ann Edgar feminism was not only an identity statement but also a description of her academic work, whereas Helen Hardy did not claim feminism as an identity statement but referred to her work as feminist.

There were differing accounts of how each of these women came to embrace feminism. Ann Edgar traced her identification with feminism to her childhood experiences of being subjected to her father's domineering behaviour and her perceptions of her own mother's life. Her story of how she came to be a feminist unfolded as she was describing her return to studying at the age of 40:

*"...I had this idea that I wanted to write something about women and the text. I must tell you that I was born a feminist before there was a word for it."*

*"From little?"*

*"From little. Because I grew up in a house that was totally male-oriented and in which I was hopelessly discriminated against as a little girl. I stood on the margins looking in."*

*"And your mom?"*

*"Oppressed and me angry and always at war with my father ..."*

Ann's account of how she came to be a feminist echoes a trend uncovered by Middleton (1993) that all 12 feminist teachers who she studied perceived their mothers as having been unhappy and frustrated. Ann leaves little doubt that for her feminism constitutes a discourse of resistance against male oppression, the effects of which she initially experienced as a little girl at home through the behaviour of her father.

The other three women came into contact with feminism when they lived and studied in the US and Britain. Helen Hardy recounted her initial contact with feminism as follows:

*"I think that year in America was very important."  
"In what way?"*

*"I think in going there I discovered feminism but I mean I know it was liberal in many ways, but it was still like finding religion. It was more a problem with a name; it had a name so people could talk about it as opposed to hear about it. I had kept thinking what is wrong with me and what's wrong with my attitude, what's wrong I am not able to pinpoint it, I am not able to analyse it."*

The year in America that Helen Hardy refers to here is the year that she was depressed. According to her account, discovering feminism gave her a framework for understanding her lived experiences and like religion, the possibility of liberation. Again, as Middleton (1993) uncovered, feminism can offer women the beginnings of an analysis of why they experience contradictions in their lives. Feminism also gave Susan Smith a framework for understanding her relationship problems. Her story was that she became interested in feminist issues when her marriage was breaking up

Of what significance is it that feminism was claimed by only four of the 25 women professors? Moreover, that all of them are white and that in nearly all cases their contact with feminism was outside South Africa, in the US and Britain? In the literature senior professional women have been noted for their rejection of feminism (Nicolson, 1996) so finding only four professors identifying with feminism is not atypical. Apfelbaum's (1993) comparative study on women in leadership positions in Norway and France pointed to the importance of looking to political and cultural context in developing an understanding of the variations in feminist consciousness. Following Apfelbaum's thinking, an understanding of the representation of feminism in these narratives must be rooted in an examination of the political and cultural context of feminism in South Africa.

#### **8.4.2. Representations of feminism in South Africa**

In each of the four narratives in which feminism was claimed as self-relevant, feminism

was constituted as a framework for analysing the life experiences of the person herself. In none of the narratives was feminism represented as a political movement rooted in collective action or in a women's movement. Apfelbaum (1993) reported that among Norwegian women, unlike their French counterparts, there was consensual recognition of feminism as a means to fight for the integration of women in the public arena. The South African women resembled the French in that there was an absence of such a conceptualisation of feminism. Instead, among the four South African women professors there was an almost exclusive focus on a feminism defined in terms of individual experience. To a large extent, these narratives may be read as an embodiment of the development and status of feminism in South Africa.

Earlier in this thesis, it was pointed out that feminism only gained visibility in South Africa in the 1980s and initially there was an almost exclusive reliance on feminisms developed in North America and Britain. The four women who in their narratives claimed feminism as self-relevant were part of this early development of feminism in South Africa. The insertion of feminism in their academic work all occurred during the mid- 1980s, the time when feminism first trickled into social analysis in South Africa. Helen Hardy described what it was like when she delivered her first conference presentation.

*"My first conference was (name of association) and it was very tough."*

*"In what way?"*

*"I gave a feminist paper and it went into a black hole."*

*"Nobody responded?"*

*"Nobody responded except my supervisor and he felt sorry for me. It was really awful."*

*"At what stage was that?"*

*"At, no, no, I think it was 1984. And it was very, very difficult for me. It has changed; after that we used to have feminist readers in the conference and then in fact we had a feminist day and that was much more supportive and much more positive than that first experience."*

This is an account of how difficult it was to be doing feminist work at a time when there was no network of feminist colleagues. Ann Edgar also noted that she read the first feminist paper in her discipline in South Africa, but her conference experience was far more positive than Helen's. Susan Smith was instrumental in establishing the first women's group at the university where she was a senior lecturer at the time. Thus, each of these women was embedded in the early development of feminism in South Africa in the 1980s.

That for the most part their initial contact with feminism was in the US and Britain is another manifestation of how the general development of feminism in South Africa is embedded in these narratives. The intersection of spatial politics of knowledge (north-south) with the politics of race difference (white-black) and how this became mapped into local South African feminist debates is captured in these narratives. Thus, the charge by many black women that feminism was imported by white academic feminists is given credence through an analysis of these life narratives.

#### 8.4.3. Spatial politics and difference

Although travel to the US and Britain featured in the narratives of black participants, there were differences in the subjective representations of these experiences. Firstly, for all the black women, the primary motivation for travel to these countries was to improve their education and in most cases the travel was sponsored by a foreign funding agency. White women gave a variety of reasons for their travel to the North, including moving to marry someone who lived there, joining their parents who had moved there, and moving away from the political climate of South Africa. Education per se was scarcely listed as a primary motivation. Contrastingly, for black women the time spent in the host country was very focused on obtaining the relevant qualification, with less time spent on general exploration. A further factor that emerged in their accounts was related to racism.

Nosizwe Mthembu described her experience of being in the US in the following terms:

*"I went with my daughter. My son, for one reason or the other, did not want to come with us and I thank God now, knowing what I know about African males in that particular country and the racism in the United States, and being a single woman there."*

Palesa Mapilo similarly encountered racism in the US:

*"It was not easy. (Name) was a private university. Being the only black in that programme, it was tough. I used to say that I stuck out like a sore thumb because I was different in all respects. Yes, they are aware of black people, but I was a black person with a difference. I had short hair, I dressed differently. It was not easy but the end result of that experience was putting my prejudices into perspective. When I marched out of that programme I was consciously aware of the fact that putting people into a bag and labelling them is wrong."*

Thus, for these women dealing with the racism in the host country seemingly overshadowed the entire experience of living there. Being black would have also positioned them in a different relation to northern feminism compared to their white counterparts from South Africa. How race and racism have divided feminism in the North has been well-documented (e.g. Golden & Shreve; 1995). But, there was no uniformity among black women in their subjective representation of travel experiences.

For Victoria Makgetla the experience of travelling to the US was associated with a sense of liberation. She explained:

*"I came back I felt so liberated in mind and spirit and my whole psyche. Somehow there was something quite oppressive, very insidious, which happens to you by virtue of your colour and by virtue of being female. Something that you can't put your finger on; something which you can't notice. But when I went overseas for the first time, it was like a big unveiling of that particular sense and in a sense I became a different person and I also noticed it in the way I related to people ..."*

Phumzile Ngubane similarly associated living in the US with a greater sense of liberation compared to living in South Africa where she felt that *"your consciousness of women and races is much more heightened."*

Therefore, even though there was coherence among the black women in their motivation for travel, there was no similar coherence in their subjective representations of the experience itself. For some racism was a dominant feature of living in the US, yet for others being outside the borders of apartheid was associated with a sense of liberation. What was similar was that none of the black women mentioned contact with feminism in

relation to being in the US and Britain. Rather than mentioning feminism at all, there was talk about women's issues.

#### 8.4.4. Women's issues

As mentioned earlier, although not claimed as self-relevant, feminism was referred to in other narratives. In these instances, feminism was a reference point against which the narrator positioned herself. Theresa Lawrence's narrative embodied this positioning:

*"I think really the basic sense of what is fair and right, so I was never strident...strident is feminist. I liked being a woman, I was very comfortable with myself fortunately and I think that it was fortunate. I had a good self-image so... I enjoyed being a woman but I felt it unfair that there was gender discrimination, just in the same way that I felt it unfair that there should be discrimination on racial grounds..."*

Like Apfelbaum (1993) observed among the French women in her sample, feminism may be mentioned in a negative sense to deny any connection. This applies to Theresa's narrative in which feminism is associated with being strident and this she implies in her very next sentence, is not womanly. Thus feminism is a reference point from which she distances herself as a woman. By implication she constitutes a feminist as a woman who is not comfortable with her gender identity. This association manifested in other narratives too. For example, Lynn Abrahams stated that she has *"an aversion for women who are men"* and Pauline Johnson said that she tried not to be *"like those women who behave like men."* A perception that feminism appeals only to women who are uncomfortable about their femininity and gender has been documented across national boundaries (Nicolson, 1996). In these narratives feminism seemed to carry negative connotations from which these women sought to distance themselves. Yet, they simultaneously expressed a concern with women's issues and the equality of women and men.

In an article entitled "Don't call me a feminist", Benjamin (1995), a university lecturer at the time, spelt out her reluctance to identify with feminism in the South African context. While acknowledging the role of race in the divide between women who identify with feminism and those who don't, she also stated that several other factors had influenced her decision to reject feminism. At the centre of these factors was a perception that

feminists are mainly graduates, well-read, white, English-speaking women. This was the central image from which she wished to dissociate herself, thus preferring to call herself a gender activist. In arguing for the use of the term gender activist, she maintained that unlike feminism, it is inclusive of men who advocate gender equality and as a label it is unlikely to lead to a diminishment of one's influence as is usually the case with being called a feminist. Although the particular configuration of Benjamin's argument was uniquely South African, many of the elements have been documented across national boundaries (e.g. hooks, 1982, 1984; Nicolson, 1996). Gender activist as a term is now widely used by South African women and men, with feminism in limited use in spite of efforts by some women, including a few black women to reclaim it (e.g. Kadalie, 1995).

In the narratives the taking up of "*women's issues*" was associated with a rejection of confrontation and militancy in keeping with the perception of being comfortable with being womanly, as expressed by Theresa Lawrence. This association was made in the narrative of Pauline Johnson who described herself "*passionately involved in women's issues and women's studies*". In accounting for her success, she identified her non-confrontational style as an important contributing factor. She elucidated her style further by saying that she tried not to take sides, to give criticism constructively and to be flexible always as this "*can get you places.*" Her narrative on personal style of interaction contrasted with that of Ann Edgar who described her interpersonal style as follows:

*"I come across strong but I have learned to stand up for my rights and I have had to learn survival skills, not only as a feminist (discipline) but since I was a child, so it is engrained in me, I suppose."*

These differing interpersonal styles seemed to produce differing results. Pauline saw herself as a well-liked a person, whereas Ann described hers as "*quite a lonely path*".

Across the narratives as a whole, feminism and women's issues were positioned as competing discourses, with feminism being constituted as more militant and less womanly in its opposition to gender inequalities. In contrast, the taking up of women's

issues was represented as less conflictual, more constructive and consistent with dominant notions of womanliness.

Amongst her Norwegian sample of women leaders Apfelbaum (1993) observed a sense of gender solidarity that was absent among their French counterparts who, instead tended to fly solo. Many women professors in this study spoke regretfully and longingly about an absence of a sense of solidarity among South African women academics. This is the final concern of this chapter.

## 8.5. Gender Solidarity

The following selection of quotations gives a sense of how the narratives portrayed the relationships among women academics:

*"There was a core of men who supported me and who believed in what I was doing, more than some women, I might add."*

*"I have a supportive academic relationship but it is nothing to do with being a woman somehow... I don't think we support each other academically as women."*

*"We don't believe in our own sex."*

*"My experience with other women; it was very hard, very negative. If you compare the men and the women, I would say that I got more support from the men".*

The overall message communicated in these quotations is that there is a lack of gender solidarity and support among women academics. This is not to suggest that there was no perceived need for support as several women explicitly expressed such a need. For many the absence of meaningful friendships and support networks, resulted in a sense of loneliness and isolation.

### 8.5.1. Competition

Competitiveness was named as a factor that militated against relationships based on co-operation and mutual support. Several forms of competition were identified. As already mentioned there was competition for promotion. Rani Ramraj, Gwen Dickenson and

Victoria Makgetla were among those who explicitly mentioned this form of competition. Rani explained that she felt the effects of the absence of support from women colleagues at some times more than others. This is her account:

*"I think that at particular times we felt it more than others, especially when you are trying to achieve; when you are trying to go up the ladder — put it that way, then the other women would see it as competition. They would try to do things to bring you down. It is something like one woman does not want you to succeed more than they are."*

Rani's account points to the significance of career stage as a factor that shapes experiences of competition. There was a sense that during the stage when women are vying for promotion, competitive behaviour is experienced at its fiercest. This was also conveyed in the narrative of Gwen Dickenson who said that *"There is obviously competition and there is that rivalry, especially in the time when one is making one's career."*

Victoria Makgetla described the relationships among herself and two women colleagues in the department as very superficial instead of supportive and this she attributed to the competition among them, especially with regard to promotion. A distinction between superficial and meaningfully supportive relationships was also made in the narrative of Carol Williamson with reference to networking. She distanced herself from *"that networking"*, which produces superficial relationships, and said that what she wanted was to *"really discuss"* her academic experiences.

Mary-Ann Taylor identified competition for good masters and doctoral students as a reason for an absence of supportive relationships. She explained that she was aware that her colleagues criticised her for taking on many students. Yet another form of competition was named by Susan Smith while she was recounting an experience when she clashed with a woman tutor while she was a student in a foreign country.

*"She had a very distinguished career. She had done fieldwork in Africa. She had toughed it out with the men. I don't know what it was. It is possible that she did not like pretty women. There is a problem about that. (Name) who was a professor here told me about 10 years ago that she had known me as a young girl and she had completely written me off because she said I was far too pretty to be intelligent..."*

In thinking through the clash she had with the woman tutor, Susan calls upon another experience where her visibility as a "pretty woman" was brought to her attention as "problem" that negatively impacted on relationships with women colleagues. The "problem" was constructed as women not liking pretty women. Implicit in this account is an awareness that sexuality is a dimension of gender relations in academia. Although it is not named as such, heterosexuality and the privileging of the male gaze and the ways in which this impacts upon relationships among women academics is woven into this account of the difficulties women experience in being supportive of each other.

### 8.5.2. Loneliness and isolation

Loneliness and isolation were constituted as consequences of competition. Desiree Jones depicted a life-long experience of not having close women friends when she was asked about the advice she would give to aspirant young women academics. She said:

*"You will be viewed as different at school. I never really had close girl friends at school. I could not be friendly with the girls in my school because they were kind of wet blankets. They were doing (things) because they had to and they were quite drab. I was the only one who was outgoing and sporty and stuff. Because I was not with them, I was outside and you can never at school be as close as a friend of a boy as you can with a girl, so I was a bit lonely."*

*"Anyway that you could have avoided that?"*

*"I can't imagine and also then.... In a way they almost resented the fact that I was on top of the class and then I think what was almost worse was that I started doing better than them on the hockey field and I got selected for provincial trials and things like that, and that was a heavy blow and they clearly resented that."*

On a brief methodological note, the question of what advice the participant would give to similar others very rapidly turned to a narrative about self, as was the case here. The second person pronoun immediately after the first sentence changes to the first person. In this extract Desiree Jones portrays a life of loneliness; of being distant from her same-gender peers. Envy and jealousy arising out of her excelling both in the classroom and in the sports field are identified as the main reason for the absence of girlfriends in her life. A crucial element in the loneliness is the awareness of the self as different from other girls.

That these women were different and exceptional in gender terms was evident from the fact that many of them were positioned as solos in their various disciplines and academic departments. "An oddity" was how Ann Crosby referred to herself as the lone woman in her field of study. This sense of being different and unusual, however, was not necessarily linked to a gendered analysis of academic life. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many women disclaimed the self-relevance of gender. Desiree Jones and Ann Crosby were among the women who negated gender as relevant to their experiences. The duality and ambivalence of occupying solo status was illuminated in the narrative of Kim Booyesen when in talking through the absence of close collegial relationships in her life she noted firstly, that there were no other women with whom she could connect and secondly, that there were gains to be derived from this:

*"...the fact that it is such a small field, in a sense, made it easier, for me. I think that if I had decided on a career in history or something like that, where there are lots of people competing for jobs in the academic world that might have been a completely different situation. I am definitely not denying that there has been discrimination but in my case I have been lucky I have not had any problems."*

The ambivalence of the positioning of the woman solo is made apparent in the above account. On the positive side, being the only woman in the field makes it easier as there is less competition for jobs, but on the negative side there is the loneliness and sense of isolation in being the solo woman. It is likely that the consciousness of the positive aspects emerged in Kim's narrative because as a younger woman she would be more aware of access to jobs than the older women who were anticipating the end of their careers. For example, in the narrative of Ann Edgar, an older woman who revealed an exiting consciousness, there was a cogent sense that being positioned as a solo at the forefront was associated with a lack of support and loneliness, as revealed in the following account:

*"...there has been a huge piece of loneliness in this thing. My life has been very short on support systems, because, and I am not blaming myself entirely, if you are right up at the front, if you are the one who is breaking ground, then it is much more difficult to have support systems and I think that those coming behind me, I can see that there is much*

*more sisterhood, if there is such a thing, but this sharing conversation and dialogue and collegiality and all that sort of thing."*

Ann's subjective experience of loneliness was echoed by Palesa Mapilo who said that maybe she expected a lot but she soon discovered that *"You are left alone. You are left to fend for yourself. "*

What is the likelihood that it will be or can be different for other women, in particular those who come after the pathbreakers, as speculated by Ann Edgar? An obstacle may be the structuring of academic life itself. The gender inequalities accompanied by the individualistic structuring of academia may mean that women will continue to look at other women as rivals in competition for the scarce resources available to women as a group. As revealed in the literature review, success in academic careers depends upon the individual's capacity to build up a personal reputation that will position oneself as better than other academics in the field. Thus academia conforms to the world of status as identified by Tannen (1993). She argued that in a world of status, independence is primary and differences are highlighted to achieve the desired goals. She further argued that this is inimical to intimacy, which is achieved in a world of connection where individuals minimise differences and try to reach consensus.

One of the narratives pointed to a way of handling competitive circumstances without fracturing relationships. It was an account of how two women working the same department both applied for the same professorship position. The relevant section of the narrative is reproduced below:

*"That was a very strange experience. I thought that it was going to be very uncomfortable and we were really friends. She is a bit older than I am, but we had worked together in I think 1983-4, very closely when we were doing work with the students. So when this opportunity came up I said she will be the obvious choice to be selected for the position, but I wanted it known that I wanted to compete for it as well, even if it meant not getting it, but making them aware that I was there, qualified and ready to take up that particular promotion. So I went to her. A lot of people don't believe what I did. I went to her and I said: "Look, I know that you know that this particular position has come up and I know that you are applying for it. I just want to let you know that I am applying for it as well." I told her that I was not competing with her but with*

*myself knowing what I am capable of doing and what I am not capable of doing. And I let her know that if she got the position, I would be as loyal as any other person. I would not actually fight with her or be rebellious or anything. So we talked about it and left it at that particular level. And I must say that our working relationship continued. She treats me as a colleague and she consults with me now and again on issues of policy, like new curricula and stuff like that. We are working well together."*

Even though this was not the intimate, supportive friendship that many participants seemed to desire, it did point to a way of dealing with competition without completely fracturing the working relationship.

Apfelbaum's (1993) comparative study of Norwegian and French women in leadership positions pointed to the importance of a feminist movement in shaping a construction of career identities that acknowledges connectedness and solidarity among women. The absence of such a movement in South Africa lessens the possibilities for connection among academic women. As outlined in Chapter Four, feminism in South Africa is marked by fragmentation and division. The lack of meaningful dialogue on issues of difference contributes to a continuing sense of division. The representation of race difference as tricky and challenging in the narratives of Ann Edgar and Beverley Peters attests to the continuance of a fragmented and divided feminism.

### **8.5.3. Inner strength and support**

Given the lack of gender solidarity, the loneliness and isolation, turning inwards was depicted as a means of coping. Across the narratives there was much talk about strategies of self-management to enable a sense of coping in the face of obstacles and challenges.

This is embodied in the following extract:

*"...it takes enormous commitment to survive in the system and you have to be prepared to...you have to be a survivor and you have to be prepared to put up with the knocks and still carry on. So I think it goes back to what you think about yourself fundamentally. Whether you like yourself what you feel about yourself and whether you think what you believe in is important and what you are doing is important because in the final analysis that is one of the few things you can...that is the resource that you have to keep drawing from. Because when you are bruised, you have to believe in yourself and what you are doing and you have to have a support structure that can affirm you in whatever way, which may or may not be part of the place where you work..."*

The content of this extract is reminiscent of the representation of academic life as a battle to be fought as was discussed in the first of the three chapters on analysis. Here the inner self is constructed as the primary resource to be drawn on when the battle has resulted in bruising. Belief in the self, self-confidence and commitment are the characteristics that are jointly constituted as the required inner strength. Across the narratives there was a sharedness in the identification of the importance of self-confidence, self-esteem and inner resilience.

But, in addition, the extract points to an external support structure as crucial. There is an acknowledgment that this may not be available in the work environment, therefore the possibility of support systems outside of work is alluded to. Indeed, several women professors named external sources of support. Religion featured most prominently as an external source of support. Daphne Swartz noted: *"I am a Christian. I am a born-again Christian. I live Christ; God is real to me. He was all I had"* Daisy du Preez also revealed that *"I am a Christian believer"* and that she had the *"deepest gratitude to God"*. So too did Cathy Daniels and a few others. Instead of religion others named meditation, yoga and tai chi as important in maintaining a sense of coping.

## 8.6. Overview

The central task of this chapter was to analyse the representations of gender consciousness and feminism in the narratives of the 25 women professors. While some women claimed gender as self-relevant, others positioned their career success beyond the reach of gender although they acknowledged the reality of gender discrimination. Similarly, even though negative events in the development of the career were described, a construction of these events as gender-related was often rejected. Thus, there were varying positions on the self-relevance of gender in the construction of career success. Nonetheless, many instances of gender discrimination were identified and described. In the case of black women the narratives revealed that during the apartheid years there were times when gender discrimination was interwoven with race discrimination.

With reference to the current higher education context, the impact of the historical division of universities along racial lines was given visibility in the narratives of women who are positioned as members of a racial minority on a particular campus. Both race and gender were salient in the self-constructions of black women professors in historically white universities and white women professors at historically black universities. This dual salience was not evident in self-constructions where women were located in a university context that positioned them as members of a racial majority. A cautionary note was sounded, however, as there were narratives that did not conform to this pattern.

Narrative representations of feminism were analysed from the perspective of how they reflected the historical development and status of feminism in South Africa. The analysis revealed that the four narratives which claimed feminism as self-relevant embodied the intersection of race difference and spatial politics as it shaped the development of feminism in South Africa during the 1980s. Juxtaposed against the discourse of feminism was the discourse of women's issues; the latter being constructed as an oppositional discourse that is less militant and less strident than the former.

An absence of a sense of gender solidarity permeated the narratives as a whole and competitiveness was named as a factor that militated against the development of relationships of mutual support and co-operation. Loneliness and isolation were constituted as the consequences of the competitiveness that divided women academics. Turning inwards to rely on resources of self-confidence and commitment was depicted as a means of coping. With regard to external sources of support, religion featured most prominently.

The analysis then attempted to show how the structuring of academia itself, in particular in terms of the gender imbalances and individualism, contributed to the overall sense of loneliness and isolation and furthermore, impedes the possibilities for gender solidarity in the present and future. In this regard, the absence of a feminist movement and the continued lack of meaningful dialogue on issues of difference among women, were also

pointed to as factors that lesson the possibilities for connection among women academics in South Africa.

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## **9. SUMMARY, ELABORATION AND REFLECTION**

This final chapter will reconstruct in summary form what the analysis, as presented in the previous three chapters, has revealed about the subjective experiences of the women professors who were interviewed in this study. The chapter will include an elaboration of the analysis, drawing upon ideas in the literature, reframing these ideas in the light of the present findings, and pointing to new ideas that have emerged in this study. In addition, the chapter will include critical reflection on how the study was produced, its achievements and its implications for further study and social change.

### **9.1. Summarising the Narrative Analysis**

Overall the analysis presented in the previous three chapters has shifted between a prime focus on the narratives of individual social actors and the identification of recurrent patterns of events and descriptions across the narratives as a whole. Furthermore, working from the theoretical understanding that narratives are products of social interchange, the analysis has sought to draw attention to how the narratives embody contextually relevant social and historical processes, with particular attention to relations of gender. Thus, the narratives of the 25 women professors were shown to reflect the legacy of apartheid, the gendered organisation of social institutions such as marriage and family, how this articulated with the gendered organisation of academia, and the historical development and status of feminism in South Africa. These reflections of how the narratives embodied the social context made it clear that there are no straightforward patterns of commonality among women professors in South Africa. The history of racial division in particular, along with other axes of difference such as class and age, has inhibited any development of a singular gender-based collective narrative.

Through the use of narrative the ways in which the historical stratification of the university system in South Africa is given form at the level of the individual life course was brought to the fore. For example, the sense of isolation and loneliness conveyed in

the narratives of self is underpinned by the numerical under-representation of women in universities as described in the second chapter. But, the narratives of self did not only give form to gender stratification; race as an axis of difference was also rendered visible. The stratification between the historically black universities and the historically white universities, also described in Chapter Two, was made apparent in the analysis of the educational histories and first academic appointments of the participants. Moreover, the continuance of the legacy of apartheid education was seen in the self-constructions of black and white women positioned in universities where they form part of a racial minority. In revealing how the racial stratification of the university system intersects with gender in shaping subjective experiences of career, this study has elaborated on the knowledge developed through past research. Except for the study by Walker (1998, 1999), knowledge about the impact of apartheid on universities has been based mostly on quantitative indices of access, throughput, promotion and output. The same may be said about knowledge on the impact of gender discrimination on universities in South Africa, and as was pointed out in Chapter Two, race and gender have largely been treated as separate spheres of analysis. Although Walker's study (1998, 1999) made inroads into uncovering subjective representations of race and gender, it was limited to one historically black university campus. By ensuring that the sample accommodated variations in the national university system, this study has explored new territory.

While the narratives left little doubt that gender and race matter in the shaping of subjective representations of academia, neither race nor gender manifested as unitary and fixed. Patterns of commonality were accompanied by differentiation and variation. Interpretation of the narratives relied on close analytic attention to patterns of commonality and how and when there was differentiation. Consequently, the discussion of the narrative analysis has generated an account that is complex and multidimensional and often contradictory. Re-presenting the analysis succinctly is thus a difficult task, nonetheless what follows is an attempt to combine commonality with difference towards showing how this study both confirmed existing knowledge and generated new ideas.

The differential and sometimes contingent relevance of gender, race and class was pointed to in the analysis of how these 25 women became academics. The role of the

family and surrounding community was cited in the accounts of how the women had developed career aspirations in confirmation of Poole and Langan-Fox's (1997) observations about the significance of the home in achieving gender-specific occupational socialisation. An added dimension in these accounts involved the impact of apartheid policy. Black women recounted how their occupational socialisation, access to schooling and university education had been fashioned within the limits set by apartheid policy. In the accounts of white women connections between racial identity, and educational experiences were largely unspoken. There was a point of convergence across race, however, in the frequency of teaching as the initial career experience.

Of the 25 only six women went into academia directly from an experience of being a university student. That only one of these six was black and moreover, that her initial entry into academia had occurred outside the national boundaries of South Africa was noted as illustrative of the under-representation of black women in academia in South Africa. With regard to attribution of impetus for career direction, age emerged as a point of commonality and difference with older women making external attributions or framing their career direction as accidental, whereas younger women used choice as a construct to explain career direction.

On the importance of learning the system after entry into academia, there was uniformity across the narratives. Learning the system was linked to a reconstitution of self that was conveyed as necessary for the achievement of upward mobility in academia. To move up the academic hierarchy, the naive self had to be transformed into a self that was openly ambitious and competitive. In several narratives this was depicted as problematic. This was interpreted by referring to the literature, which has shown that ambition and competitiveness are inimical to dominant constructions of femininity.

The need for self-management emerged in the accounts of academic work. Analytic attention to the use of figurative language revealed a shared representation of academic life as a battle to be fought. The narratives further revealed that success is understood to come about as a result of a preparedness to struggle and an ability to manage the self in the face of several threats including sabotage by colleagues. Regardless of the specific

university or disciplinary location, the culture of the culture of universities in South Africa was therefore depicted as hostile to women. This finding echoes the reports of many studies conducted across national contexts (e.g. Brooks).

Descriptions of how academic work has increased in recent years provided confirmation of what Sachs and Blackmore (1998) termed the "do-everything professor". In many narratives the life of an academic was portrayed as highly demanding and in order to fulfil increasing obligations, rigorous self-management was seen to be required. Narrative representations of three areas of academic work - research, teaching and administration-were analysed. Teaching was popularly represented as a source of job satisfaction with research generally constituted as a challenging area of work that involved issues of self-perception and self-confidence. Constructions of administrative work fore-grounded committee activities and in these accounts there were direct references to the masculinist and racist culture of universities. Some participants revealed a consciousness that in the current context where the dominance of white males is increasingly viewed as illegitimate, there is a growing demand on them as women and as black women to participate in committees. The narratives pointed to multiple responses to this perceived demand — individuals sometimes complied, sometimes refused and sometimes complied and then tried to use the space to produce changes in dominant meanings.

Subjective representations of academic work also illuminated the diversity across universities in South Africa and how this becomes embodied in the lives of individual academics. While some professors articulated their concerns about keeping up their research output in the context of an expansion of academic work, others disclosed that they had not done much research and had very few publications. Clear lines of differentiation were not readily discernible because the diversity occurred both within and between clusters of universities, and followed no consistent racial, age or disciplinary lines.

The gendered implications of performing as an academic pervaded the narratives at the level of both form and content. While all the narratives of career followed a progressive

form, the analysis showed that the career lines of most of the participants did not follow the standard linear model of career. The frequency of regressive micronarratives nested in the larger progressive narrative drew attention to late beginnings and interruptions to the development of the career trajectory. Closer inspection revealed that these regressive micronarratives were interconnected with the stories of husbands, lovers and children. M. Gergen's (1997) observation that the career successes and failures of women are typically interwoven with stories of their affiliative relationships with others was thus confirmed.

Narrative representations of being multiply positioned as academics, wives, lovers and mothers in many respects conformed to the story lines popularly used by women to live out their lives as identified by Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) and Davies (1992). These popular story lines typically denote marriage and motherhood as the proper goals for women, but in the narratives this plot was identified along with a second story line which recognises career as an important goal for women. The co-existence of these two story lines was captured in the tension, ambivalence and contradictions that permeated the accounts of having to perform multiple tasks.

The difference between being a wife and having a wife was highlighted in a narrative, which departed from the rest with respect to sexual identity. In the context of the other 24 narratives, the identification of self as gay and having a wife drew attention to the fluidity of gender identity and its co-contingency with sexuality. Having a wife was portrayed as a circumstance that enabled performance in the academic realm as well as the availability of free time. In contrast, depictions of being a wife were filled with ambivalences and contradictions.

Unlike the narrative representations of being a wife which were often contradictory, being a mother was uniformly represented as difficult, irrespective of marital and parental status. Moreover, women who had rejected motherhood spoke equivalently of the emotional conflict surrounding this issue. The narratives cogently reflected the ways in which parental identity is defined differentially for women and men. Even when men were described as participating partners, the details made it clear that this participation

was much more limited compared to the woman's role. Therefore, like the literature reports for most western countries (e.g. Mackinnon, 1997), the combination of motherhood and career is similarly an enormous challenge for South African women. In the unfolding of the narratives it became clear that differential gender roles and expectations in relation to career, marriage and parenthood are authorised and monitored by the continuation of long-standing traditions, social conventions and structural arrangements. The ways in which the organisational processes of universities favour men and masculinity was highlighted. Also, it was noted that the experience of combining motherhood and career as conflictual is underpinned by the absence of policies and facilities for childcare provision.

The analysis then addressed the question of how these women professors made sense of their experiences in ways that enabled them to not only remain in academia but also to achieve some success in the university system. Three aspects of the narratives were used to cast light upon this question. Firstly, attention was given to how their responses to the tensions of being multiply positioned as academic, mother and wife were framed as shifts in self-construction which rendered the situation natural and consistent with an essential self. A second type of response involved references to luck and being lucky and thirdly, the analysis looked at the narratives as success stories, which communicated moral tales.

As success stories a defining feature of the narratives was how they were fashioned around the overcoming of difficulties and adversities. Coping with the dual imperatives of career and family featured in many narratives as a set of difficulties to be overcome. In the telling of how these difficulties were confronted and then turned around to produce positive outcomes, there were many moral tales that incorporated lessons on how to successfully balance career and family.

Another type of moral tale was the idea that if one is prepared to work hard and make sacrifices, then success will ensue. The sense of individualism that was implicit in these accounts resurfaced in the analysis of gender consciousness and representations of feminism. A sense of shared experience as women and a sense of gender solidarity was largely absent from the narratives. A dominant construction was that gender had little or

no relevance to career success. But, on this issue narratives were found to be internally contradictory. While gender was frequently acknowledged as significant, at the same time it was not claimed as self-relevant.

Perhaps not surprising then, feminism was claimed by only four women professors. In other narratives in which feminism was mentioned, it signified a reference point from which the self could be distinguished. Positioned in contradistinction to being a feminist, there was the taking up of women's issues which was associated with being comfortable with oneself as a woman and a non-confrontational style. These representations of feminism were analysed in terms of the historical development of feminism in South Africa as elucidated in Chapter Four.

The four narratives which claimed feminism as self-relevant were analysed as both embedded within and embodying the development of feminism in South Africa during the 1980s. The four women were each positioned at the forefront of the insertion of feminism in their respective disciplines. That these were the narratives of white women who encountered feminism in the north and then embraced it as a personally meaningful framework, was noted to be an embodiment of the spatial politics and race differences that have fractured feminism in South Africa. Thus, these narratives have given visibility to how broader debates of difference in feminism have resonance at the level of personal life history, and herein lies a key achievement of this study.

## **9.2. Notes on Elaboration and Reflection**

The interpretation of experience is widely acknowledged as the aim of narrative research (e.g. Josselson & Lieblich, 1995). This study has fulfilled that aim in offering an interpretation of the experiences of women professors in South Africa. Theoretically, it has been positioned within the move away from universalist tendencies of explaining human experience toward an orientation that views experience as contextualised and particular. In seeking an approach that openly engages with the problematic of experience and difference, this study turned to post-structuralism. As such it encountered

many epistemological and methodological challenges associated with post-structuralist critique. Prime among these have been questions of what it means to contextualise research, to embrace an anti-essentialist conception of subjectivity and to reject a notion of self as autonomous and unitary.

The analysis of the narratives in trying to denote difference and commonality has moved within a tension between the specific and the general. Reissman (1993) noted that this tension is typical of narrative studies. The analytic attention to the specific has permitted a representation of the participants as individual persons engaged in a process of interpretation. In addition, by using fictitious names as opposed to numbers and then tracking each of these narratives through the three analytic chapters, a sense of the participants as active, interpreting subjects has been conveyed. Furthermore, by paying attention to differences between and within narratives and pointing to internal contradictions and ambivalences, the study has illuminated a notion of self as multiple, contradictory and changing. At the same time, however, the analysis has sought to show how the narratives also reflect what is contextually general by pointing to connections across narratives. It has engaged the tension between the general and the specific by adopting a view of narrative as a social process that is historically and culturally situated. Thus, the meanings and selves portrayed in the narratives were examined in relation to the historical and social circumstances of South African society.

Taking these theoretical reflections into account, the analysis has produced a complex and diverse representation of the subjective experiences of women professors in South Africa. The narratives generated in the interviews with a sample of women professors in universities across the country indicated that women interpret academia in diverse ways through multiple and intersecting positionings of gender, race, age, sexuality and class, thus confirming the contention that gender matters, but the manifestations of how it matters is filtered through other axes of difference that have relevance within a particular context. A view of gender as dynamic, not static, constantly in process has been conveyed, thereby pointing to the limitations of essentialist understandings of what it means to be a woman.

While there have been many calls to acknowledge difference among women in South Africa, there have been few attempts to closely examine the subjective manifestations of these differences. Similarly, statements about the impact of apartheid are made with regularity across all sectors of South African life, especially with regard to education, but few systematic studies have been conducted. This study has contributed to knowledge about the differences among women academics in South Africa through an analysis that has given visibility to how the lives of individuals are embedded in and shaped by the racist legacy of South Africa. Their stories of access to education, how they entered academia, how they moved up the hierarchy, the difficulties they face and how they interpret academic work were all shown to vary in relation to differences of race, age, relationship status, parental status and career stage. Moreover, the importance of historicising the present was affirmed. The events of the past were shown to play a significant role in how the participants constructed their career trajectories and how they currently understand their own location and their relationships with others. The varied narratives of what it means to be a woman professor in the late 1990s in South Africa, were seen to be subject to the shaping effects of past policies and the effects of how the present was constructed through the lens of the past.

But, as already noted, neither gender nor race nor any of the other markers of difference were unitary or fixed in constituting subjectivity. As Acker (1992) pointed out, constructions and reconstructions of gender in organisations are continually shifting in how they limit the actions of particular individuals at particular times. This was cogently captured in the analysis of the participants' constructions of gender and gender discrimination. Altogether, the narratives attested to the complexity of gender in academia. Universities in South Africa were represented as complex and diverse organisations that are gendered in multiple and dynamic ways.

Furthermore, the narratives on motherhood clearly indicated that the gendering of universities is produced and reproduced in articulation with the gendered organisation of the family in society. Applying Acker's (1992) argument with respect to organisations in general, the analysis has drawn attention to how the structuring of universities assumes that academics can adhere to organisational rules and arrangements as if they all had

wives to attend to obligations of family and household. The use of a narrative approach enabled, as Chase (1995) suggested, the telling of experiences of aspects of self that are typically culturally constructed as distinct and separate, as private and as public. In telling their stories the women professors gave visibility to the interconnectedness of their subjective experiences as academics, as mothers and as wives, albeit that the interconnectedness manifested in tensions, ambivalences and contradictions. The analysis then focused on the discursive processes through which nonambiguity is claimed, examining how the self is reconstituted so that the binaries of gender are cast as natural and consistent with an essential self. In so doing, the study pointed to how purportedly natural categories are socially and historically produced and how subjectivities are constructed within situated matrices of social interchange.

In uncovering the shifting processes of gender constructions within this complex matrix of relations, this study challenges the relevance of any binary model of change which, as Yeatman (1993) explicated, sees one group in opposition to another. Trying to achieve change by focussing on gender alone will not address the complex experiences of women in academia. Rather, the shifting relations among women and men, blacks and whites, in the current climate of social transformation point to the need for a complex change agenda. The narratives gave exposure to the limitations of feminism in South Africa as it developed in the 1980s indicating the need for a reassessment of feminist politics. The multiplicity of the accounts have endorsed the critique of the universalising tendencies of western feminist theorising as channelled into South Africa in the 1980s mostly by white women, as well as the critique of the essentialising tendencies of strands of black feminism.

Instead, the study has drawn attention to the need for a revisioning of feminist theorising in line with feminist, post-colonialist, anti-racist critiques. With regard to higher education, this reformulation of feminist theorising will have to take account of the new patterns of policy development which have been summarised as the three "Rs" in the latest *Agenda, 4I* (1999) — redeployment, reskilling and retrenchment. The challenge that emerges embraces the importance of addressing questions about the intersection of gender with several axes of difference as they relate to the changing policy context in

South Africa. Within the particular historical circumstances that confront South Africa at the present juncture, we need to address specific questions that pertain to government initiatives towards equity - for example, what is the likely impact of these initiatives in a macroeconomic context that simultaneously seeks to curtail state expenditure on social services? Undoubtedly we can glean much from insights derived from the analysis of the role of the state in relation to gender politics in other national contexts. An example is the work of Yates (1993) in Australia. But our readings of the commonalities of globalisation must take account of how these are refracted through the particularities of national discourses on gender and overall how these discourses become embodied in the lives of particular persons as women and men, as black and white, as young and old. As Arnot (1993) argued: "Reassessing feminist politics in relation to education therefore clearly involves a complex narrative. It involves identifying different feminist visions, different strategies and tactics, and different types of research." (pp3-4)

In sum, this study is a complex narrative that confirms many old narratives and generates directions for new and increasingly varied narratives on the subjective experiences of women academics in South Africa. However, as acknowledged in the chapter on method, this report is in itself a narrative, my story about doing research on the career narratives of women professors in South Africa. The final section of this chapter directly engages the implications of my positioning as author of this narrative.

### **9.3. Reflections on my Story**

One of the fissures within feminism in South Africa has been a concern about authorship as briefly outlined earlier in this thesis. Although the manifestations of the debates about authorship as they have occurred in South Africa may have had a distinctive local flavour, it is a concern that has emerged within feminism more generally. Arnot (1993) reflected that as consequence of the concern with authorship, feminist educationalists have become increasingly aware of the complex construction of their own work, their own struggles and their own subjectivities. Throughout the writing of this thesis I have been aware of my own positioning as an academic as a feature of this work. The discussion on myself as the researcher in Chapter Five made some aspects of my

subjective positioning explicit — my race, my gender, my relation to activism, teaching and theory. All of these aspects of myself have been relevant in the shaping of this project. Less featured, but also relevant to this critical reflection, are details of my disciplinary location.

Arnot (1993) noted that on the whole academics working within universities have made contributions to education that are more theoretical than practical. While recognising that there is no easy separation between theory and practice, the contribution of this project has been similarly angled more towards theory and as such it cannot speak directly to notions of best practices, for example. The research question and theoretical-methodological approach were shaped by my experiences and the background to the study, as described in the chapter on method. The study has also been shaped by my disciplinary location within psychology. This is perhaps especially evident in the presentation of the theoretical framework which relied heavily on literature that has been produced within the disciplinary boundaries of psychology. As scholars such as Acker (1994) have pointed out, different disciplines bring different perspectives to the analysis of social phenomena. If I were positioned in sociology, for example, I might have put a different "gloss" on the narratives, to use Acker's term (1994; p.157).

The construction of this work bears my mark as author, both implicitly and explicitly. As Reissman (1993) noted, this is always the case with narrative work. My personal narrative is implicated in the writing, reading and interpretation processes that have fashioned this work. There is wide variation among narrative researchers with regard to how they deal with their subjective selves in the research process. In presenting the narratives of participants, some rely almost solely on direct quotations with minimal commentary by the researcher. Then there are researchers who use very few direct quotations in favour of paraphrasing narratives in the third person. I opted for a combination of direct quotations and analytic commentary. My interpretive statements are woven into the analysis linking the different elements and pointing to ways of understanding. Hence, my authorial voice has been privileged. I have also veered between fracturing the narratives by selectively presenting quotations and paying attention to sequence and features of narrative form. These are the challenges of using a

methodological approach that is a subject of conceptual debate. As explained in Chapter Five, there is no one method. Whatever the approach, whether it explicitly privileges the researcher's authority or not, all forms of representation are limited for as Riessman (1993) noted, "a writer cannot tell all" (p.14).

Also noteworthy is that the analysis of the narratives as presented in this work has involved expansion and reduction. Features and sections from the whole narratives were selected thereby involving a reduction, but there was expansion in that interpretative elements were added using the literature and my knowledge of the context. Throughout the process my concern as a researcher has been to capture the complexity of the subjective experiences of the women professors while at the same time trying to ensure rigour and quality in the application of the method. Given the debates about the meaning of quality and rigour in qualitative research and the general acknowledgement that every text is open to a variety of readings, my attempt at rigour and quality has relied on my endeavour to be aware of the representational decisions that I made and to be open about these decisions.

There are difficult issues to be confronted in the process of doing narrative research. Rather than gloss over them, this work has tried to engage these challenges directly. As stated several times, researchers have dealt with these issues in diverse ways. Future research will in all likelihood point to even more ways of dealing with the challenges of doing narrative research (Casey, 1995).

#### **9.4. Concluding Remarks**

In writing a conclusion to a work that has argued that interpretation and meaning are dynamic processes continually in flux is to invite further contradiction. The recognition that "all texts stand on moving ground" implies that this narrative is open-ended (Riessman, 1993 p.15). So rather than the fixity connoted by the noun conclusion, I have chosen the more fluid connotations of "concluding remarks".

In adopting an approach that rejects the pursuit of certain knowledge, there is no neat set of conclusions to be drawn from this study. Instead, it has elaborated the complexities of gender in academia as revealed through an analysis of the career narratives of a sample of women professors in South Africa. In its explorations of subjectivity as historically and socially constituted through language, it has shown that there is no one story of being a woman academic in South Africa in the 1990s. The subjective experiences reveal that gender is not a single barrier or set of barriers, but that experiences of being gendered as woman are refracted through several other axes of difference that are always in process within and against particular historical and social conditions. The implications of recognising gender in this way are complex. Many challenges have been pointed to in the discussion of the narratives. Overall, the importance of theorising difference has been affirmed. A significant ongoing tension for feminist theorising revolves around the question of how to work towards gender justice while simultaneously moving away from a one dimensional, universalising and essentialising view of gender. As Arnot (1993), Acker (1994) and several others have pointed out, our scholarship has to become more sophisticated and as researchers we have to become comfortable with the notion that our analyses are always in process and constantly in need of modification.

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**APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide**

University of Cape Town

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Formation of an ambition to pursue an academic career
2. Family attitudes towards career goals
3. School and university experiences
4. Trajectory of career development
5. Personal life in relation to academic life
6. Socialisation into academic and professional life
7. Mentors
8. Relationships with women colleagues
9. Obstacles and challenges

University of Cape Town

**APPENDIX 2: Biographical Profile**

University of Cape Town

**PARTICIPANT PROFILE**

**DATE** ..... **TIME**.....

**PLACE** .....

**PARTICIPANT NO.** .....

**NAME:**.....

**CONTACT DETAILS: TEL**.....

**FAX:**.....

**EMAIL**.....

**ADDRESS**.....

.....

.....

.....

**CURRENT POSITION:** prof, assoc prof, snr lecturer, lecturer  
**HOD**

**DEPT/DISCIPLINE**.....

**UNIVERSITY**.....

**EDUCATION HISTORY:**

**HIGH SCHOOL**

.....

**COED/GIRLS**.....

**DEGREES**

**INSTITUTION**

**BEGIN - END**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**RELATIONSHIP STATUS:**

**PRESENT**.....

**PAST**.....

**CHILDREN: NUMBER** .....

**AGES**

.....  
.....  
.....

**PARENTS OCCUPATION:**

**MOTHER**.....

**FATHER**.....

**DOB/AGE:**.....

**BIRTH ORDER**.....

**ANY OTHER RELEVANT DETAILS:**

.....  
.....  
.....

**CAREER HISTORY**

**Work outside of/prior to university:**

.....  
.....  
.....

**First appointment at university:**

.....  
.....

**junior lecturer from..... to .....**

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**lecturer from.....to.....**

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**senior lecturer from.....to.....**

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University of Cape Town

**assoc professor from .....to.....**

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**professor from.....to.....**

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.....

.....

University of Cape Town

**APPENDIX 3: Thank you letter**

University of Cape Town

25 September 1997

Professor xxxxxxxx  
Department of xxxxxxxx  
University of xxxxxx

Dear Professor xxxxxx,

Thank you most sincerely for allowing me the opportunity of interviewing you. I deeply appreciated your sense of openness and honesty.

I assure you that I will keep all the information confidential. As I explained, I will contact you should I wish to use a quotation that may be identifying in any way. However, I expect that I will only be writing reports and hopefully, a thesis during the course of next year.

The research is progressing very well at present and to date all the women I have contacted have kindly agreed to an interview.

Thank you once again and I wish you further success in your career.

Sincerely

Cheryl de la Rey

Tel: 021 650 3427 (w) 021 531 9682 (h)

Fax: 021 689 7572

[e-mail: cdlr@psipsy.uct.ac.za](mailto:cdlr@psipsy.uct.ac.za)

All names presented here are fictitious; any resemblance to individuals is entirely unintended.

### **1. Ann Edgar; 62 years, white.**

Ann Edgar's father was a professional man who dominated the household. She described herself as being born a feminist partly because she always felt marginal as a girl; always at war with her father. When she was 11 her family left South Africa to live in Europe for two years. After a brief return to South Africa, they then lived in another country where she finished her schooling at age 15. Most of her schooling was at a girls' school. After her schooling, her father brought her back to South Africa where he enrolled her in an Afrikaans university. She graduated with a BA degree. Then she did a variety of jobs until she married and moved cities with her husband. By studying part-time she obtained a diploma. She thereafter continued studying part-time but had to stop because she had a series of miscarriages. She then had three children. Once the children were at school, she again studied part-time. In her early forties at the time, she continued her studies until she completed her doctorate. She did part-time university teaching while doing her higher degrees. Due to a change in her husband's career, they then moved cities. After a short period of part-time teaching, she obtained a permanent position at an urban historically black university (HBU). She was promoted to professorship fairly quickly. At the time of the interview, she was very angry with the university, as it appeared that she would have to retire prematurely due to cost-cutting exercises. She felt that she was being discriminated against on the basis of her age and that she was being treated unfairly as she was one of the top researchers at the university. She also talked about having to deal with "the race thing". She predicted that if she had to stop teaching she would continue with her writing.

### **2. Daphne Swartz, 63 years, coloured**

Daphne Swartz's mother died when she was five years' old. Her father, who had a small business, remarried. She did not like her stepmother, but she was close to her father whom she admired. Daphne obtained a teaching diploma, became a schoolteacher, married and had two children. She then divorced, and moved cities with her children. In the new larger city, she enrolled at an urban HBU as a part-time student. While teaching full-time, she completed a BA., Honours and Master's degree. By that time she had moved from teaching at a school to a teachers' training college. A few years later, she obtained a position in the same HBU where she had studied. She began a Ph.D. but was forced to give it up because of her daughter's illness. At about age 50, she obtained a scholarship to do a second Masters degree in the US. Although she was later accepted into the Ph.D. programme, she did not complete it. Initially, she it was not possible because the university which employed her would not agree to the lengthy sabbatical. Then, when they did, there were financial problems. She was due to retire at the end of 1997. She saw herself as continuing her work with various educational agencies and

offering her services in the church. Her overall sense was that all her life shortage of money had been a concern, but that God had been good to her.

### **3. Lynn Abrahams, 50 years, coloured**

Lynn Abrahams' father was a school principal and her mother was a teacher. When she was at school her brother, who was a doctor died. She, too, studied medicine. After working in the public hospital system, she obtained a university position (English HWU). About 14 years later, she assumed a professorship position. In the intervening period she married and had one child at age 40. She explained that unlike her colleagues of a similar age, she was still dealing with childcare duties. She described her husband as busy, but as they lived with her mother, she was a source of help. Lynn did not have a doctoral degree; she explained that she had just not pursued it actively. Overall, she felt that if she were starting her career again, she would not choose medicine as she found it constraining with no room for creativity. The reason she had done medicine was that she did not wish to study at the racially- designated university, which offered inferior education. By choosing medicine, she could gain access to a white university that offered a better education.

### **4. Mary-Ann Taylor, 53 years, white**

Mary-Ann Taylor's both parents were professionals. Her mother was university-educated. From age eight, Mary-Ann knew that she was going to be a teacher. She attended a girls' high school. After university (English HWU), she became a teacher. At the end of the first year of teaching, Mary-Ann married a teacher. They then moved to a neighbouring country. After teaching there for some time, they moved to England so that her husband could study further. The first of three children was born. They moved back to the neighbouring country where she taught in a boys' school. Two more children were born. They later moved to South Africa where her husband accepted a teaching post. Because the principal would not have husband and wife teaching at the same school, she studied further while teaching part-time. She obtained a position at a distance learning university and continued her studies. Then her husband had a serious car accident, which led to financial difficulties, as he could not work. By that time Mary-Ann had a Masters degree. She obtained a full-time lectureship at an Afrikaans HWU. A few years thereafter she completed her doctorate, and was promoted to senior lecturer and then professorship. Mary-Ann talked much about how she and her husband complimented each other and how they coped by dealing with everything from the perspective of a family project.

### **5. Phumzile Ngubane, 39 years, black**

Phumzile's both parents were medical doctors. She explained that she always expected to have a career because all the women around her had careers. She went to a private school in a neighbouring country, as it was the time of apartheid education. In her final year of school, she planned on enrolling for a science degree and then doing medicine. However, she was not accepted in the universities in the neighbouring countries. Because there were so many South African exiles, they had a quota for South African student

enrolments. Fortunately, a family friend, who was teaching at a US university, persuaded her to study in the US where she completed her doctoral degree. Phumzile began teaching while she was completing her dissertation. She married and had her first child in the US. By the time she returned to South Africa in the early 1990s, she had tenure as an associate professor in the US. She had also had another child. When she returned to South Africa, she took up a post doing policy and government related work. By the time of the interview, she had moved into a position at an Afrikaans HWU. One of the reasons for this change was that she wanted more flexibility in time management in order to spend more time with her children. She talked about the demands of being a black woman, wanting to make a contribution to the country and yet having to be a mother and a wife.

#### **6. Helen Hardy, 46 years, white**

Helen Hardy always expected to be a teacher; her mother and her aunt were teachers. Her father was a professional, but not a teacher. She attended a girls' school. Because she loved English so much, she went to university (HWU). She did a teaching diploma after completing a bachelor's degree. At that point her parents were in a car accident, therefore from university she went back home where she taught for a year. Like many other family members did, she then spent a year working overseas. When she returned to South Africa, she taught again, for four years. Then she married a foreign academic who was doing research in South Africa. They moved to his home country. Until she obtained work in a bookstore, she felt she was underemployed doing jobs like waitressing. She then enrolled to do a Masters' degree and she taught writing skills at the same time. She continued with a Ph.D. but did not complete as her marriage ended and she was in crisis. She left the US for another country, had a love affair there, but it only lasted a few months. Thereafter, she returned to South Africa where she took up a junior teaching position at an English HWU. She simultaneously did her Ph.D. Once she completed, she obtained a position at an urban HBU. Her only child was born and she married. Starting as a junior lecturer, it took about 8 years for her to reach professorship. There was one prior application for promotion to professorship that was refused. She explained that there are aspects of her work that she really loves, but other aspects that she hates.

#### **7. Susan Smith, 55 years, white**

Susan Smith's father was an academic and her mother was in business management. Susan attended a girls' school. There was an assumption that all family members would study at university. As a student (English HWU), she was active in politics, serving a term as a member of the Student's Representative Council. By the time she graduated with a BA, her parents had moved to England. She followed them and enrolled for a master's degree there. She left the course because she had a clash with her tutor, a woman. She believed that this might have been due to jealousy, as she (Susan) was pretty. A related incident happened later in her career. After leaving university, she worked as a market researcher. She gave this up to do au pair work in Europe. There she met her husband. They returned to England. As a housewife, she became depressed. Following her husband's advice, she obtained a job doing research, but she had to give

this up when they moved house. She then enrolled to do a post-graduate certificate in teaching. While she was doing this, her marriage ended. By this time they had two children, who stayed with their father. It was also a time when she was developing an interest in feminism. A lover, who was doing a Ph.D., persuaded her to do a master's. She did this and then continued with her Ph.D. When she qualified, she could not find an academic job, so she did research. Then a foreign national friend offered her a fellowship. This led to a lectureship in his country but she was not happy there. She obtained a position at an English HWU in South Africa. She took an active role in politics both inside and outside the campus and this contributed to her movement up the hierarchy. She took a sabbatical in a foreign country so that she could be with a lover, an academic. She decided to join him there and spend her time doing another degree, but she hated not having any status. They married and both moved to South Africa. This marriage ended. At the time of the interview she was single and a professor at an English HWU. She hoped to remain in her current position until retirement. Upon reflection she felt that one's job is the reliable part of one's life and relationships are not.

#### **8. Victoria Makgetla, 51 years, black**

Victoria Makgetla's father was one of the few black farmers who owned land under apartheid. Her family enjoyed high status in the community. She described her father as an ambitious man who pressurised his children into becoming educated. Victoria attended a missionary girls' school for blacks. She then went to university (a homeland HBU), where she qualified as a professional. Thereafter, she worked for a social services agency. She married a man she met at university. Two years' later she began studying through distance education, working at the same time. She completed her Honours degree. Victoria then decided to pursue another profession by doing masters in that field. She struggled to get into a university. After three years, the university designated for Indians accepted her. She resigned her job and did the masters degree. She was appointed as a lecturer at a homeland HBU. After seven years she resigned to take up a position at an urban HBU, where she had begun a Ph. D. When it was completed, she was promoted to senior lecturer and then professor about five years thereafter. At the time of the interview, she was seconded to a position in government. She had had one child who had died. Although she said that her husband was supportive, initially when she resumed studies he did not see the need for her to do so. She saw herself as a strong person who tried not to disappoint her father.

#### **9. Nosizwe Mthembu, 47 years, black**

Nosizwe Mthembu was born into a family that had two generations of professional women who were either teachers or nurses. After attending a co-ed missionary school, she went to a homeland HBU where she did a professional degree. Thereafter, she worked in the homeland administration. After six years, a male friend persuaded her to apply for a lecturing position at the homeland HBU. She was appointed. After her aunt in the US expressed shock that she was appointed without higher degree qualifications, she enrolled to do her Honours part-time. When this was completed, she attended to childcare responsibilities. By this time she was married with two children. After an aborted attempt

to complete a masters through distance education, she took unpaid leave to complete her masters in Britain. On her return she was promoted from junior lecturer to lecturer. Two years' later, she was awarded a scholarship to do a Ph.D. in the US. She lived there for three years with her daughter. Her son chose to remain with his father. She was compelled to return when her home burned down and her father died on the very same day. Her husband was very seriously injured in the fire. Despite this, he insisted that she return to the US to complete her Ph.D. She described him as very unusually supportive, especially since he came from a very traditional family and he was not university educated. When she returned with the Ph.D. she was promoted to senior lecturer and then three years later to professor. She described her career as having fallen in her lap.

#### **10. Rani Ramraj, 51 years, Indian**

Rani Ramraj's mother was a businesswoman and single parent from age 28 when Rani's father died. She had high aspirations for her three daughters. After completing high school, Rani enrolled to do a BA at the racially-designated HBU. Although she wished to continue with Honours, at her mother's wish she did a teaching diploma. As soon as she completed, she married and began teaching. After three years she resigned to become a housewife. She had three children. During the first six years of marriage, she followed tradition by living with her in-laws. She described this as a time of no freedom. When her children were at school, she did her Honours part-time. This was followed by the masters and part-time lecturing at the same time. When she obtained the masters, she was appointed to a full-time position as a junior lecturer. A year later she was a lecturer. Three years later she began a Ph.D. that was completed five years thereafter. Promotion to senior lecturer followed. Six years later she succeeded in promotion to professorship. This was preceded by an earlier unsuccessful application that she described as a very negative event. Overall she believed that she had coped because she had succeeded in finding a balance between work, home and family.

#### **11. Beverley Peters, 48 years, white**

Beverley Peters completed her final two years of high school at a girl's school. She enrolled at an English HWU where her mother worked as a secretary. At university, she distinguished herself in sport. As intended, she qualified as a teacher. While she was teaching, she married a professional. They then decided to travel, but in order to make money they moved to a neighbouring country where her husband worked for a mining company. During this time she developed an education programme for the black workers. This marked a shift for her both in terms of her career and in her political thinking. They then travelled. On their return to South Africa, Beverley undertook short-term research at a HBU. This led to the establishment of a NGO of which she became the director. After three years, she did a Masters degree in the UK. On her return she again did a short-term research project at the HBU. Following the advice of women peers, she then did a Ph.D. at an English HWU. She was then appointed as a director of a unit at the HBU. A few years' later she was promoted to professor. At the time of the interview her husband was also a professor. They did not have any children, something she regretted. She described herself as having an ability to have a vision and then make it happen. Challenges she

described were the masculinist culture of the university and how as a white woman she could respond to race and gender questions.

### **12. Gwen Dickenson, 57 years, white.**

Gwen attended a girls' school. From young she knew that she would go to university. She enrolled at an English HWU with the intention of becoming a teacher, but she became fascinated with a particular discipline that had a large component of women academics. One of them became her mentor. Her mentor persuaded her parents that she should continue studying after her first degree and she also organised a bursary for Gwen. After completing her Honours, she did her Master's and also began teaching as a leave replacement when her mentor took a sabbatical. After four years, she was appointed as a lecturer on the permanent staff. She married a man who was an academic at the same university. They worked on their Ph.D.s together. When he was appointed dean, as his wife she did a lot of entertaining, but she enjoyed this task, as many of the visitors were also her colleagues. They had two children, but they subsequently divorced. Early in her career, Gwen intentionally chose to pursue a research track, refusing to be on teaching committees or be head of department. At the time of the interview she held a powerful research portfolio. Taking this position had meant ending a relationship with a man who opposed her decision. As a result of painful experiences, she described herself as not trusting anybody except herself and her career, she said careers do not last long as one has to retire.

### **13. Palesa Mapilo, 53 years, black**

Palesa Mapilo attended a private Catholic school. Both her parents as well as several other family members were teachers. Her parents died when she was a teenager leaving her in the care of an aunt. Following the end of schooling, she enrolled at a homeland HBU. In her second year of study, she left to have a baby. She returned to university to complete her degree. Then she became a teacher. She left South Africa to teach in a neighbouring country. Due to nationalisation, her services were terminated. Palesa succeeded in obtaining a scholarship to do a masters in the US. When this was completed, she returned to South Africa where she was appointed to a position in the homeland administration. She did a Ph.D. at an English HWU. This was followed by a position at a homeland HBU. At the time of the interview, she was a professor at an English HWU. Her husband had just died. She had two adult daughters. Palesa ascribed her career to self-discipline more than any other factor.

### **14. Elaine Shezi, 54 years, black**

Elaine Shezi spent her last two years of schooling at a missionary school for girls. She wanted to be a medical doctor but this was not possible because of poor results in maths. She then attended a homeland HBU where she qualified as a teacher. Her first position was at a private school for girls. After two years of teaching she began studying part-time. When she obtained a Honours, she obtained a position at a college. She then did a Masters. This led to a university position at a HBU as a senior lecturer.

After five years she left the university to complete a doctorate in the US. On her return to South Africa she was recruited to a professorship at a special purpose HWU. She had two children and she was single. She described herself as a part-time mother, as her children had always lived apart from her with her mother in a rural area.

**15. Theresa Lawrence, 60 years, white**

Theresa always wanted to be a medical doctor but there was no Maths teacher at the convent girl's school she attended. So she qualified to teach instead, doing her degree at an English HWU. After four years of teaching, she married and when she became pregnant she resigned. When she had two children, she began to study part-time for a professional degree. In her final year she also began to lecture part-time at this university. While she was doing the higher degree, she was appointed to the permanent lecturing staff. Nine months later she was promoted to senior lecturer. She gained her professorship while she was doing her Ph.D. which took a relatively long time. At the time of the interview, she was considering retirement in a year or two. Theresa described herself as having been lucky — all the circumstances were good for her. Although stereotyping had sometimes been a problem, she said that she had often let it go without confrontation.

**16. Pauline Johnson, 50 years, white**

After attending a girls' school, Pauline Johnson enrolled at an English HWU. She had decided on teaching as this was a means of obtaining a much needed bursary. She was an only child and her mother was a single parent. She taught for a while before doing her Honours degree. At the time of the interview she was married for the second time and had four children. After the first marriage she did a masters and lectured at the same time. This led to a permanent position as a lecturer. She was promoted to a senior lectureship after five years. She then completed a Ph.D. and was promoted to professor. Her second husband was an academic in the same discipline as herself Pauline described how he had assisted her in preparing publications. She described herself as a flexible person whose style was not to be confrontational. She avoided taking sides. This, she said, can get one places.

**17. Ann Crosby, 57 years, white**

Anne's mother always worked because she had to. Her father wanted her to go to university but she did not because her boyfriend at the time did not approve. When she completed schooling at a girls' school, she did administrative work in a government department. She distinguished herself at work. When the relationship ended, she decided to study. She attended an English HWU full-time. On seeing the registration queues, she decided that she would join the queue with mostly men. Thus she did a natural sciences degree. When the Sharpeville protests happened, she decided to leave the country for England. There she worked as a journalist, the first woman in the company. After three years she returned to South Africa and taught at an English HWU for six months. This was followed by a position at a woman's magazine where she later became editor. After 8

years she left to do a higher degree. She was then appointed as a lecturer. Over a period of 18 years she worked her way up the ranks to professorship. At the time of the interview she was contemplating retirement, a prospect she described as frightening. She had married at age 30 and had two children in her late 30s. She believed that marrying and having children at a later age was helpful, as she had already had an established persona.

#### **18. Kim Booysen, 38 years, white**

At 38 Kim was the youngest participant. She had started school younger than the norm. This she thought was a problem as she was average at school. Both her parents were academics and she grew up in a university town. Almost everyone in her class went to university. She did a science degree at the local HWU and then continued with her Honours. She was the only girl in her class but she never felt strange about this. After Honours she worked for a year for the organisation that had granted her a bursary. She then completed her masters. She returned to work for the same organisation and at the same time enrolled for a Ph.D. A few months later, she took leave to travel overseas. When she returned she resigned from her job and became a full-time student. However, she was then appointed as a lecturer. The Ph.D. took about nine years, as she had to change her topic. When she completed, she was promoted to senior lecturer and two years later she was promoted to professorship when she indicated that she might accept a post at an overseas university. She was single with no children. Even though she was in a male-dominated field, she argued that it was important not to see oneself as different.

#### **19. Carol Williamson, 41 years, white**

Carol described the school she attended as a highly privileged private, church school for white girls. Her father, a doctor, wanted all his children to have professions, especially the girls so they would not have to depend on a man. So she went to medical school but immediately knew that she had made a mistake. At her father's insistence, she completed the year and then moved into the arts faculty at the same HWU. After completing the degree, she did a post-graduate degree at Oxford. Thereafter, she returned to South Africa to take up six-month junior lectureship at a HWU. Although the post was renewed, she resigned to marry a man who had moved overseas. The relationship failed after two months. Although she was offered a better position at another HWU, she returned to a junior contract post at the HWU from which she had resigned because of a relationship with a man in the department there. Shortly after, the Head attempted to terminate her employment because he did not want a couple in his department. She fought the termination, but her position was made intolerable. After a near breakdown, she resigned. She then registered to do another professional degree while also doing a doctorate. In the middle of this she had a baby. In the meantime, the professor who had victimised her was removed from the headship, so she then returned to the department in a permanent position as a junior lecturer. Within a ten-year period she moved to the most senior level of professorship. At 41 years she did not see herself as moving from this position. Carol described academic life as incredibly demanding but enjoyable; she especially enjoyed writing.

## **20. Desiree Jones, 50 years, white**

Desiree Jones attended a co-ed school where she enjoyed having boys as friends. She did science courses, was active in sport and became head girl. Her father had a university education, and was very successful in the private sector. Her mother resigned from teaching when she married. After school, Desiree did a science degree at a HWU. One of her lecturers persuaded her to continue studying rather than going into teaching as she had planned. She did a masters degree in the UK. On her return, she did a Ph.D. at a HWU in a record time. She then lectured for six months before getting married and taking up a fellowship in the US. Her husband was an academic at the US university. After two years she returned to South Africa to take up an offer at a HWU. She moved up the ranks relatively quickly. After a research position at an institute, she moved to another HWU. In the intervening period she had had a clash with a male peer. In spite of this difficult period, she saw her career as "plain sailing". Along the way she got divorced. At the time of the interview she was single. She had not had children because her husband had made it clear that he would not assist to allow her to pursue a career.

## **21. Sophia Dawson, 45 years, white**

During the interview I discovered that Sophia Dawson was born in an eastern European country, however, she had been living in South Africa for about 13 years. While she was doing her Ph.D. in her country, she was contacted by her former Head of Department, who invited her to accept a lectureship at a new HBU. She moved to South Africa with her husband. In her home country she had grown up in a middle class family. Her father had wanted her to be a medical doctor but she could not bear the idea of dealing with cadavers. After high school, she went to university to study science. She fell in love with a professor and pursued the discipline that he taught. While doing the Ph.D. she was a tutor. In South Africa she was appointed as a Senior Lecturer. After 10 years, Sophia was promoted to professor. She described her work as a challenge because the students enter the HBU without the required skills. The additional teaching they require detracted from her research time, she said. However, she enjoyed seeing improvements in the students. She found the HBU a bit stagnating and unstimulating, but she did not wish to move, as she disliked change. Knowing the place also created feelings of security and confidence in her. She and her husband had no children because they felt they would not be good with them. She described having a good home life as important to career development.

## **22. Daisy du Preez, 60 years, white**

Daisy's father died when she was young. Although her mother was a teacher, money was always short. Daisy attended a co-ed school. Even though she excelled at school, she did not have any plans to attend university. She refused a bursary as she did not wish to leave her mother to attend a university in another town. A class teacher encouraged her to apply for a job as an articled pupil in a male-dominated profession. She succeeded. She obtained her professional qualification by studying part-time. When the local university opened a department in her field, she was invited to apply for a position. She was

appointed as a lecturer. After 13 years she was promoted to senior lecturer. Shortly thereafter, she applied for a professorship and succeeded. Although she did not study any " further, she was active in the profession and in producing publications. She was married. Before the marriage she and her husband decided not to have children. Daisy described herself as someone who does not see problems, but solutions. She had never experienced any form of discrimination. She explained that her Christian beliefs helped her on a daily basis. All her life she had worked hard because she was terrified of failing.

### **23. Cathy Daniels, 39 years, white**

Cathy went to a girl's school. Her mother was a secretary and her father, an engineer. At school she knew that she would go to university but she was undecided about what to study. She chose a science degree. From the bachelor's degree she continued until she completed her master's. While doing the master's, she married. She also taught part-time in the university and this led to a full-time position. She had one child. Because there was no maternity leave, she had to use her research leave. She believed that this set her back in her career. When her daughter was five, she began her Ph.D. She said although her husband was supportive, she did most of the childcare. Her husband was self-employed and not university-educated. She would have had more children, but she said that God had made another choice. She then committed herself to her career development. At the time of the interview, she had just been promoted to professorship. She saw herself as moving on to head of department in the short-term. Cathy believed that a strong sense of identity is important. In retrospect, she felt that she should have set her goals a lot sooner in her life.

### **24. Nthombi Mbokazi, 45 years, black**

At high school level Nthombi Mbokazi attended a boarding school for girls run by the church. Then she went to a teacher's training college. Although she hated it, her mother did not want her to attend the nearby HBU as she perceived it as too risky due to the political protests by the students. When she qualified, she taught. One year later she resigned and enrolled at the HBU. She enjoyed it and developed a deep admiration for the academics. After the first degree, she did her honours. Nthombi was appointed as a contract junior lecturer but it was an unpleasant experience. Her colleagues treated her as a junior and she was lonely. She then left to work for at a research institute. A year later she was granted a scholarship to study in the US. She returned with a Ph.D. and took up a position at a HWU as a lecturer. She resigned to do a post-doctoral fellowship overseas. When she returned, she obtained a position as a senior lecturer at a HBU. After six years she was promoted to professor. She achieved a high profile within the university and community. She felt that some colleagues were jealous that she was admired by the male principal and dean and they had contributed to rumours that were damaging to her reputation. At the time of the interview she was involved in a relationship and was considering a move to live with her partner. She had no children.

## **25. Margaret Parsons, 51 years, white**

Margaret attended a poor school. Although only five, she was placed in a class with seven-year olds. She excelled and so they moved her up a grade. Her mother had a degree and her father was a skilled worker. Her mother wanted her to be a medical doctor. She enrolled for a professional degree at a HWU, working initially as her parents did not have money. From the second year onwards she obtained bursaries. She continued studying through until she completed a Ph.D. She then went overseas on a post-doctoral fellowship thinking that she would leave the country permanently. There she met politically-minded South Africans. She returned to prove that university could not be different for anybody of another race. She became a lecturer at a HBU. Two years thereafter she was promoted to senior lecturer when she complained that less qualified colleagues were earning more than she was. Four years later she successfully applied for a professorship. She said that she had not experienced any problems in her career, also she had never thought of herself as a woman. At the time of the interview, she saw herself as taking a back seat as she was planning to retire at 55. She described herself as gay and having a wife. She also had two adult children.

University of Cape Town

**Cheryl de la Rey interviewing Professor Ann Edgar  
in her home**

(note: parts of the transcript have been deleted to conceal the identity of the person)

C: There will be some information that I will ask you and I then write it down, but mostly I will reply on the tape and then transcribe it afterwards.

A: Okay, am I close enough to your tape?

C: You could come a little closer.

A: Okay.

C: I would need to

A: Okay you ask me the questions.

C: Let's begin with your schooling. What schools did you attend?

A: I went to an all-girls school for my formative years. This is not the whole truth because I did not go to school in this country. But where I was for the last three years at school, it was only a girls' school.

C: The other thing I want to get a picture of are of your degrees and when did you start and when did you end?

A: Hum...

C: More or less.

A: I got a B. degree in subject and subject in 1954.

C: That took you the normal time - you did not break your studies?

A: No. I got a diploma in xxxx in 1961 and B. xxx in 1983, Hons in 1985 - I had to get four degrees. 1983 a B, 1984 Honours, 1985 Masters and 1990 a Doctorate.

C: Is it called a PhD?

A: No, it is called a xxx.

C: After your education which of the degrees were done in South Africa and which we done internationally?

A: They were all done in South Africa. My doctorate's research I did in xxx but the degree was done here.

C: But you have been abroad?

A: Yes, oh yes.

C: At the moment married?

A: Yes.

C: Any dependent children?

A: Yes. XXX.

C: I don't know whether XXX mentioned it but I taught her this year.

A: No. But I do know that and as a matter of fact ... Can I put this off for a second?

TAPE OFF

TAPE ON

A: That is my dependent child. She has become that again.

C: So one dependent. Any other children?

A: Yes, two.

C: And those are adults.

A: Yes, well so is Name.

C: Can I ask you about your parents? Were they intellectual? What was your mother's occupation?

A: My mother did not have a university degree but ja...only because her father died and she could not go. My father had a degree. He was a professional person.

C: And your age more or less?

A: Jeepers I am so proud of it. I am 62, no more or less. I have earned it, every bit of it.

- C: Are there any other relevant details - demographic information that you think has influenced your career?
- A: I think so. I was born in city name. I went to school here until I was 11 and then I went to school in foreign country for 2 years, then I came back here briefly for a year or so and then I went to the foreign country and I finished my school there. But what I think is important is that I had an absolutely excellent school education there.
- C: In foreign country?
- A: In foreign country. At an English private so, so much so that when I came back here and did my first degree, just on the strength of what I had been taught at school. I did not do anything academically. I was far too young. I was 15 when I wrote matric and was far too young. I think was important the excellent schooling that I had.
- C: That is interesting.
- A: I was exceptionally young but I had to do it - but that is another long story. I did the name of examination for Matric.
- C: Is that when you started out wanting to be a (name of profession), but it will come up because my next issue....
- A: Okay, we will talk about it when it comes.
- C: Yes, I am kind of working out how some people decide that this what they want to do, to assume an academic career....
- A: That is what you want me to talk about?
- C: Yes.
- A: Okay. I think I am going to be a bit of a disappointment to you here. In a way [tape catching very badly throughout this interview - parts cannot be heard].... and
- C: I want to interrupt you because it is voice-activated, so when you look up...
- A: So I must look at it.
- C: If you want to stop it?
- A: I have to look at you?
- C: It only responds to your voice.

A: Alright. Smart. I did a B.degree in subject and subject simply because they were my two best subjects in school and I was too young and I did not know what else I wanted to do. All I wanted to do was to get away from home and my father brought me from overseas and put me into (name of University) which was quite a culture shock. I managed afterwards and one of the criteria was I had to pass name of subject which I scraped through. So after my B.degree degree I did not know what I wanted to do. I just simply... I had no career. I became a variety of things. I was a translator, I was a typist, I ended up in journalism and I worked here in (city name) on the (name of magazine). And then I got married and then I went to live in the (name of province) and my spouse was a professional person working for himself. So I got the security bug and I realised that if he got ill we had no income, so I thought that I must qualify further. I have always liked books and things so I chose course name simply because I could do it as a post-graduate diploma and I could do it part-time through name of university which was exactly what I did.

C: Did you have children at the time?

A: No, not at the time I was doing that. Then I became interested in (discipline name) and I started to do study it through (university name). And I had a series of miscarriages and I adopted a child and it is whole long painful part of my life that eventually it was quite clear to me that I could not go on studying, having miscarriages and then having a baby and doing all that stuff So what I did was - I just simply did half-day jobs. I had a series of rather interesting half-day jobs working for interesting people.

C: Were any of them remotely involved in academic....

A: No particularly, no. They were really just to keep the pot boiling more than anything else and also to just get me out of the house a bit. I had no particular interest in (subject name) certainly not in (aspect of subject). I was always interested but not in anything specific. Then in 1970 odd when my youngest child, that is name, was about three, I took her to nursery school. So in other words I was working part-time and I was rearing kids. I started with a friend of mine to write study guides for groups of women who wanted to read (name of text). Now, I can only tell you that when I say it I say it with a sense of shame knowing what I know today, but it was kind of gutspah, a cheek that you have when you know nothing. But I had been doing study with groups of women and I had become fascinated in the dynamics of what happened when a group of women got around a table from various backgrounds and started to look at this text and say "what does it mean, what does it mean for me?" And I became so fascinated in that, that I stayed in it and then I started to see that there was good ways and bad ways of doing it and I was very interested in ?? study. So a friend of mine got together and we started to publish study guides, then we had to form a non-profit making company because we had to sell them to cover our printing expenses, which we first paid out of our pocket money and the thing just took off.

C: And what kept you going through that? What was your motivation?

A: Fascination with this book and this text which I have not grown up with and so if you come to these things as an adult and you don't know all these stories from childhood, they have a freshness that has never left me and what fascinated me is what happened between the text and the life of the person. There is something happening there.

After I had been doing that for a number of years, I thought to myself one morning, I really must get a little respectable. Why don't I go and study and do a diploma in (discipline) and then I can sort of have more authority when I write these guides. So I went down to (university name) to see a Professor that I knew there and I said to him "I want to come and do a diploma in (discipline) and I want to do it because I am involved in these group studies." And he said to me "What are you going to do with that diploma?" "I just feel respectable". So then he said "Don't you want to write something about it. You are obviously so fascinated about what goes on here." Then I thought it would be nice to write something about it. And then he said "Then you have to write a thesis about it". And I said "How can I write a thesis about (discipline), I have a B.A. degree." So he said "just start another degree". Anyway by the time I left there that morning I had agreed to start another degree. When I got home I did not know what I had done, because I needed 30 modules. They gave me an exemption from 6 only, so I had to do 24 modules.

C: That is a whole degree.

A: It is a whole degree. And I started my part-time studies. My children were at school. I used to work about 20 hours a week and I did not know when I started if I could get the wheels going again.

C: What age were you then?

A: About 40 odd. It had all gone rusty and I think the extraordinary sense of making it, of actually starting to study, getting back my assignments, seeing that I had A's for everything was very nice and I also gripped by the subject.

C: The actual content?

A: The content and I had this idea that I wanted to write something about women and the text. I must tell you that I was born a feminist before there was a word for it.

C: From little?

A: From little. Because I grew up in a house that was totally male-orientated and in which I was hopelessly discriminated against as a little girl. I stood on the margins looking in.

- C: And your Mom.
- A: Oppressed and me angry and always at war with my father....
- C: And also with your mother?
- A: Also in a way but far less openly because I was always protecting her which is very bad.
- C: What is ?? in the family?
- A: I was the eldest of my mother's children and the eldest of the second marriage and I think the intellectual thing then started.... I started to wake up and it gripped me and the further I went, the more sure I was that I wanted to explore the patriarchal nature of (discipline) and I wanted to relate it to (lifestyle) because in the mean time I had myself become a (group member) and I wanted to explore that from a critical women's perspective but I had never heard of feminism really.
- C: Really?
- A: (School of thought) was just around then and then I picked up a book - two books (names of books). And I read them and that was it. In 1983 I read what I believe is the first feminist (discipline) paper at a conference. As a student I was asked to come and read a paper and I did a paper on - a critique of women's role and it went well. And then I wrote my Masters on that later in 1985.
- C: Can I ask you, how did you manage with the two children - or was it three?
- A: Three.
- C: Three and you were working to do the degree in such a quick time.
- A: It was a record time. They had never before given somebody a B. degree. and a B.(Hons) on the same day and I got both degrees and they refused to give me the one. So I put my foot down and I said that I would make a big stink, so I had to go and sit on the one side for the one and when I got it, I had to go and sit on the other side. I think I really got .... I lit up. I found what I wanted to do after I was 40. All my life I had never been sure and then I found it and once I had found it, I just cruised it. I worked hard, I worked 20 hours a week. I never drove; you know how you drive kids around. I always had a book. I learnt new study methods; I learnt to use my right brain and not just my left brain, which by the way, the logic part of it which you mentioned earlier I was reared in this male household and one of the only ways.... one of the many ways I devised to survive was to be smarter than the men in terms of logic, so I learnt very early on how to conduct a logical argument, so logic was not my problem. I was familiar with that. What I had not been allowed to

do was to develop my own creativity and I began to discover that in (discipline). I began to discover that in thinking about things from the angle at which I was looking at them - all sorts of exciting things were happening.

So I did my Masters on women in (discipline) and I went straight into my Doctorate and that was tough going because the years in which I was doing my Doctorate we had a major change in our life. I better say these things because some way or the other they are important, my spouse had been XXXXX and he resigned which was an unusual thing to do and he walked out. And they took away everything from us - no pension, nothing. So we walked out in our 50's so to speak. There was nothing and he came down here and he started the XXXX and then I had to stay there to work out my contract, because I had had a sabbatical. Sorry, what I did not say was that I had started to teach there.

C: When did you start?

A: I started to do part-time lecturing after I had done my Honours and after I had got my Masters they gave me a lectureship. That was full-time.

C: Can I just take you back? That paper that you presented at a conference as a student that must have been quite significant. Students were not normally invited?

A: No, but it was because my colleagues were aware of the fact and they organised the conference. The men did but they were aware already that I was becoming interested in feminist (discipline) and they did not know anybody else who was doing it so I guess they wanted.... The theme of the conference was also around sexism and racism I think, so they wanted something from a sexist attitude.

C: Anyone you would regard as a mentor?

A: I would not be where I am today if it had not been for a handful of men who have supported me. I have had many men who I have battled against and still do.

C: But there was a core?

A: There was a core of men who supported me and who believed in what I was doing. More than some women I might add.

C: That is one of things that I want to ask you about.

A: Well, we will get to that. I am not sure where I am now.

C: You had your sabbatical.

A: I had my sabbatical and you know at a university when you take a sabbatical you ...

C: You have to work...

A: So (name of husband) came down here and lived in a little tiny flat and I lived with friends because our house was sold and I lived with friends up there and worked my time in for (university name) and then came down here and then lectured part-time at (university name) while I was working on my Doctorate.

C: Did you have children with you?

A: Yes, but they were at university. So they were sorted out.

C: And the Doctorate happened quickly as well.

A: Yes, I worked hard.

C: Most people take 5 to 8 years.

A: I worked really hard for that.

C: Are there anything that you or other people would find useful - other women, other men?

A: Well, I did a descriptive exploratory study and empirical research. The reason that I became interested in the (organisation) is because I looked everywhere for women in the (organisation) who were active for liberation. I worked with a concept called X)OO( and I could not find any. So in the end I had to go outside into (organisation) which I had known, which I had been a member of for some time was the only bunch of women that I could find who were involved in XXXX. So I did, quite similar to what you are doing now - interviewing loosely structured interviews, with a tape recorder and listening to them for hours. Spending hours transcribing them - you have all my sympathy. It took months and months and months trying to ascertain what it was that drove them to do what they were doing, because they like me, were middle class white women and I did not know.... Many middle class white women in South Africa stayed middle class white women and did not do anything about wanting to change the injustices of the time and here were these women, women like me and yet doing it. So I have been fascinated to find out what they were doing and then to think about it from a feminist (discipline) perspective. It took a lot of time but

C: I will come back to

A: Now you want to know about my career and how that went. I taught part-time at (university) and the moment I got here I applied for a job to (another university). They asked me to come for an interview and I was interviewed in the Senate Chamber in which there are about 40 men. The old hall of the old whatever it was.

You know, that one on the campus. There were 40 men in that room and they fired questions at me and then they froze the post.

C: On what grounds?

A: I still don't know on what grounds it was frozen. They froze about 6 or 8 posts in that year. That was also the year when the cut backs were really hurting because there were (number) students at the (university) and the subsidy was marked at (number), so it was a very lean time and I continued to teach part-time at (university) and I worked full-time for the rest of the time at an institute that was started by (name of person) here. I worked for him on (topic). I loved that work. And then after about - it must have been in 1990, I heard that they were unfreezing the post, they were going to advertise it again and I sent in the application again. I took out the old one, I tippexed out the date and I sent it. I thought "ek gan nie nog mooite maak nit." You can take me or leave me and about a week after I sent it, I ran into (name of manager) and I said to him He said to me "Did you apply for the job?" and I said "Yes I applied for the job but I want to tell you now I am not going for another interview with your people." So he smiled and I thought "Oh well I have probably shot myself". Anyway they phoned me up and offered me the job.

C: Good.

A: So I started to work there then and I started as a senior lecturer but the area in which I did my doctorate is classified as (field of study) and there is no other woman in South Africa...

C: Qualified in that....

A: Qualified in that area and I worked under a Professor and I had barely been there when he decided to retire the year after I started. I did not think at all of applying for the professorship which is interesting and the reason I thought of it was not because I did not think I was good enough or anything like that. I did not want all the schlep that goes with being a Professor. I wanted to continue teaching, which is my first love, researching and writing which is my second love and not have all the administrative duties that go with it, or the meetings. It is a nightmare! So I did not think of applying.

C: And you are now Head of Department.

A: Yes, I am Head of Department. If I had not threatened to resign I would have been Dean as well and I don't want to do those kinds of jobs. That is not my interest. I have very little academic career left and I certainly don't want to spend it administratively. Pressure was brought to bear on me to apply and I think in the end I was persuaded for reasons - I am not sure really how good they are but I also knew who the other applicants were and this I will deny if you put into your thing. I did

not want to work under any of them and they were all men I had worked with and in the end they only chose 2 of us for interviews and...

C: The other one was a man?

A: Yes, the other one was a man and I went for my interview. For the Professorship there was 33 people sitting around the table. There was a rep from (university), a representative from (university), (name), the two Vice-Rectors, the Dean of Research, various Professors and Deans and other academics and it is a long time since I enjoyed myself so much. I enjoyed every bit of it. The only thing that was disconcerting was in the middle of the interview the students decided to have a demonstration about something so they started to sing and toyi toyi outside the door and I could not hear myself but I enjoyed it. I just felt that you need to know what I am going to do and I am going to tell you what I am going to do and I am going to tell you how I think about it and what I envisage for what I want to do and if you don't like it that's fine by me because if I can't do that I don't want the job anyway and it gave me enormous freedom and I mean I was told an hour later that I had the job. So, I guess I fell into it all.

C: Okay you have pretty much covered your career path but in your university experiences is there something we missed that you think was particularly influential either in your advancement or in holding you back.

A: When I applied for the lectureship at (university), in the end there were 2 people short listed - myself and a colleague of mine, a man who had worked with me. We had exactly the same qualifications. We both had a B degree, we both at that stage had our Masters degree. I had got all my degrees with distinctions, he had not. I had already published 2 or 3 articles, he had published nothing and he got the job because "he was the breadwinner".

C: And were you informed that?

A: I was told that by a friend of mine, who was on the selection committee, told me informally, who was furious and who had argued about that. So I did experience that sort of thing. I did not experience problems when I finally got to the Professorship, I think because I had such freedom about it and I just felt that I was going to go for what I wanted but I have worked in the (region). There are three departments and I am the only permanent appointment at all three. I don't go to any meetings or anywhere that I am not usually in a minority. Occasionally I meet .... I have a colleague in (name of university) and I have one or two at (name of university) who I see, and XXX

C: When you were appointed as the Professorship, how many full women professors were there?

- A: You know I don't know. When you were talking this evening I realised I have no idea but I am a full professor. I never went through the associate route.
- C: I know now that for 1995 there were 5. I think it is still 5 at (university name).
- A: It might be 4 next year because they might be putting people like me out to graze and that's another thing I will tell you about when we get to it.
- C: I want to ask you about anything else about your socialisation into academic and professional life. By socialisation I mean the going to conferences, applying for research money, the mentorship or lack thereof, fellowships.... Is there anything unusual or different that bothered you or you found useful?
- A: So you want the positive and the negative. I said about the mentorship I had. I have never applied to the (funding agency) for money and I have not got it. So I have been held always by that. I have learnt how to write grants but I have been given financial assistance so that has not been a problem.
- C: What about your first publication?
- A: In a journal. I had no trouble at all. In fact if I only wrote I would take another two years to do all the things that I have been asked to do. So I know that is a problem for some women to get published. I have not actually had that and I think it is simply because there are so few of us in the field and the smarter boys are now knowing that they are sexist and they don't want to look sexist. I think the drawbacks are, and the thing that has exhausted me and that I have still not resolved for myself is the tokens. It is that being invited to conferences, being invited to make contributions to books and things because you are a well-known woman.
- C: What are the drawbacks?
- A: Well, that you are being used as a token to make their all-male things look a bit better because they have a woman or two in it and I think that is wrong and I have refused certain things on those grounds. I have refused to go to certain things. "If you want to invite me, invite me as an academic, and I will decide how I am going to do it. Don't tell me to come and talk about women's things". I always do talk about women's things but I want to be able to choose the grounds on which I go there and I think that is a drawback and the other is burn out. I get invited all the time to do things. I have to say "no" to more than half the things in order to harbour my own energy and to watch myself and I think those are disadvantages.
- C: What about your students. The fact that you are the only woman?
- A: Well I love my students almost without reserve all of them. I have one or two I am not so fond of but most of them I like extremely much. My African students have been calling me Mama for years, which I first did not understand, but now I realise it

is a compliment. I love teaching. That is what I really believe the gift that I have is to teach more than anything else. So I think if you love teaching you are lucky to be in academia because it is a wonderful job and I like (university) because I like working with people who battled the way they have and have got where they have and I get huge satisfaction from that.

C: Do they also come to you for informal advice?

A: Yes. I find the women students come to me with their stories and some of it is really ?? I did a course on women's issues in (name) and I take rape as part of a life of to many people who are students of mine and I begin to pick up these things. I don't react to them ever in class but they come and see me. So it gets heavy. I did not actually foresee that it would be as heavy as it is and in that course for instance, I teach a whole two straight lectures on (name of topic). I talk about issues of (name of topics) to students who find it quite difficult. And yet my classes are all over-subscribed. So whatever I am doing, I am answering some need and I get a lot of satisfaction from it. I have also been given wonderful opportunities. I can't say that the barriers are more subtle and I will talk about them in a moment but on the surface I have got money, I have gone to conferences, I was invited to teach at (foreign university) for a year. I spent a whole year and my university gave me unpaid leave and I came back and a year later they gave me my sabbatical again. So they have not been mean to me about that sort of things.

C: What are the subtle ones?

A: The subtle ones. The subtle ones are with my colleagues. The not so subtle things is their language. Most of that has come right now. They have got pretty sensitive about their language. But I told a colleague of mine the other day, I examine for (names of universities)... I experience that as discriminatory. It has nothing to do with my competence, which they all acknowledge but there is something at work there. I think they also find me intimidating, and I am aware of that. I know I come across strong but I have had to learn to stand up for my rights and I have had to learn survival skills, not only as a feminist but since I was a child, so it is kind of engrained in me I suppose and I do believe that life is more than survival of the fittest. In the end it is better than not being. Sometimes it has been painful for me - very painful, but the other things are more in their ... I don't get invited in and I am the only woman there.

C: Are you friends with any of your colleagues in that you see each other outside of ....?

A: Socialising - not really much. I have two colleagues that I have dinner with. Two or three and we have had dinner with them. I feel okay.

C: Personal life in relation to academic life?

- A: I think I was socialised into multiple roles from the time I can remember. It is the way my spouse functions. His socialisation was being like that. He will be helpful around here and so on but he is one track mind. I cannot be one track minded. I am involved with my children to this day - their lives and mine and they pop in and out and I hear everything and some of it is painful and you go through all the downs with them and all the aggression and I don't think it is easy to rear kids today and I did not have a great role model as a mother, so I have battled and I have made many mistakes and I have had to battle a lot out my children.
- C: Can I ask you a question? In terms of your mother - when you were growing up did you think you wanted to be like her or was it more of the opposite - that I don't want to be like that?
- A: Probably the opposite. I tend to be temperamentally more like my father - everyone tells me and I think there is something in that, but I certainly was not going to be the woman who was going to run the home and my father was proud of the fact that he never made a bed and ?? I?? Very little. [tapes slurs off - obviously not talking to machine]
- C: But talk about the stress and how you have managed?
- A: At times better than other times. I am stressed at the moment because of what is happening in the whole of tertiary education.
- C: The restructuring?
- A: I see some of it as an exciting challenge. I see a great deal of it as very problematic. I don't think the white paper has been pulled through. I have huge reservations about the market-oriented Australia, New Zealand, North American economic jargon applied to academia. Uncritically, unthinkingly like it is. And of course subjects like mine are the bottom of the pile and my colleagues all over the country are being shut down and we are being faced with the same kinds of... There is talk now that everybody over 55 (which is a light way of saying that 2 or 3 of us) must leave. I meant to retire when I was 65 because I have tenure until then. I was very angry about that in the beginning and that has added to my stress. I actually feel okay about it now. The way things are going I am not sure. I shall miss the teaching tremendously but a great deal of the other stuff I don't really want to be part of
- C: Has there (at the institutional level) been any discussions by or from or among younger colleagues who won't be affected in a way that can support/retain people who are older than 55 because of their experience, because you will be losing intellectual leadership?
- A: None. I think all that everybody is looking at is their own jobs, and I understand that and I understand many of my younger colleagues have got mortgages, they have children and that sort of thing but it is a great pity. I am now at a place where I have

worked very hard to be where I am now where the things now are flowing and I know what I am doing and ... Silly things. There are two of us in my faculty - two maybe even a third - he is coming, who are among the top publishers at (university name) in terms of refereed journals. I must have earned that university hundreds of thousands of rands already with my publications of which I have never seen a cent. I have got more doctoral and masters students working under me, except for one other colleague in the entire faculty.

C: And there is no acknowledgement?

A: So I was very angry about all that, because there is a lack of justice in it and I find it also insulting to be discriminated against in terms of my age when I stay away sick, I work longer hours than most people, I produce the goods, I am doing okay.

C: When I was asking about colleagues - what about the management?

A: I can't go on record telling you what I think of it. No much.

C: So there is no debate, no calling in people one to one, looking at.... Looking at it.

A: No transparency, no consultation. Everything that that university has stood for is gone.

C: Other women specifically - the notion of sisterhood? Have you had any support, lack of support?

A: Yes, the lot. Okay let me start with the good things. I have wonderful support from colleagues outside the country who have read my work, who know what I am doing. I have had very nice support from a few e mail colleagues inside the country.

C: But they are not in your discipline?

A: Yes, in my discipline. I am talking only about (discipline) now. I have an interest of course in (area of work) and so I know a few people in that world and that is nice. I don't think I am a threat to anybody there and we talk about things and that is very pleasant and all very affirming. I have had viciousness but then she is a problem person. She is a problem person to everybody.

C: A female colleague?

A: . Yes, from a female colleague. She was even moved sideways out of her department and so on. I have had all the struggles that I should expect to have if you are the oldest (because I am), if you are the one out there in the front. The younger women find that - my objective was to try to help the younger women because somebody has got to take over. I am pushing off one of these days. So I have a number of younger women who I have been trying to mentor. Those that are not amongst

those, who don't know me well or who have not studied with me or something like that, tend to I think not know me or everything and I think one has to deal with all the race things here as well. There is a huge amount of trickiness amongst women towards me as a white women. Black women don't want to call themselves feminists, some of the Black women. Some of them do, some of them don't call themselves feminists. Some of themselves have gone wholesale into calling themselves womanists which is what African American women call themselves. I have been critical of that because I say you don't have the same conditions. You don't have the same experience. You have to deal with colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, African culture and religion and all that stuff. They have got to deal with the middle passage, slavery, African American women writers. I see two different things but... So that has been tricky. They have felt .... It is the black/white thing and it is how ...

C: What about white women?

A: Well the one that I have had a lot of trouble with is a white woman. I have had very nice support from some of my colleagues in (other disciplines) who are feminists. Our common bonds are our feminist interests and then there is the thing called the ( a group) which was started here. It was started by a woman who comes from (name of country). We had a local chapter and we were a minority of white women. The object of it was that women should write and publish, so I have to tell you about it because it goes with your thing and it is operating all over Africa. So we met for about 2 years and we started by sharing our stories and then we started by trying to write our stories and they were going to be collected together and form a book. The moment it got to the writing the black women voted out.

C: On what grounds?

A: I can only speculate and I think that they felt awkward about the writing and some of them have never come back again. They liked to have parties but the actual work they did not want to do.

C: Can I just hold you on that. I have read in American literature women talk about problems with ?? I know you said publishing ?? Is there any other context ....

END OF SIDE I

START OF SIDE 2

A: And there were 50 women and I did my paper, I chatted... I find it very difficult. I am aware of the fact that I have had all this education which many of them have not done. I am aware of the fact that I am over articulate. There are very bright and very articulate women in Kenya and in Uganda, and Tanzania and Nigeria who goes to these things, and they are writing and they are talking and when I get together

with them I don't have any problem but it is a question of different training and I think ... I don't want to monopolise these things; for the others that are still struggling to find their voice because I have also struggled to find my voice and I can remember what it was like when I was nervous about speaking because I have not the confidence, I have not seen ... I kept falling into the pitfalls and I had to learn along the way, so I know how they feel. So I don't want to be intimidating and I suppose that I am over-aware of the fact that I could be.

C: Can I ask you to look at this list? Is there anything around those themes that we have missed?

A: I don't think that I have finished about personal life. I think that I should say something about stress. I do get very stressed. I don't get stressed about teaching, but I get stressed about endless planning. We get used in our faculty in way that sometimes makes me cross. The one who will look as though she knows what she is talking about - even though I may not know what I am talking about, so I tend to be put onto these things, particularly now with this fight for survival, so I am finding it very stressful at the moment and I actually believe that a lot of what we are doing is ?? I think that some of it has got.... I think at the (university name) we teach very critical analytically good, relevant, contextual work and to hand that over to conservatives to train those people would seem to me to be a recipe for disaster ?? of moral, ethics and that kind of ....

C: Are they proposing to close the department?

A: They are cutting a lot and merging us and have got a totally wrong idea of what we are doing. So I do experience stress and that stress

C: Do you have any way in which you try to manage it?

A: Yes. I walk on the mountain, I do yoga and I also try to take care of my health and I try to go away.

C: Any other issues, other obstacles, other ...?

A: In this restructure that we are going through at my university, I think gender is not a priority. I think another big challenge is that in post-modernism and particularly in Europe today there is a generation for instance there is a whole generation of young women now who were trained as feminist (discipline name) and who now prefer doing feminism and all that sort of thing or gender studies, but doing the (discipline) bit - they don't think it is necessary. And I think this is part of the dialectical tension between the kind of discourses of post-modern...

[fades fades and makes bleeping sounds a lot during this side of tape???

and in that sense I stand with my legs in both of these, because I do use post-modern categories in analysis and so on but I do really believe that this idea that liberation was not really part of the post-modern

C: We talked briefly about your start and your children. Have they been supportive overall or has that been an issue?

A: I think I have been by and large fortunate. My parents are both dead now. My mother's greatest fear was that I might become a spinster. My father I think could not really quite figure out what I was doing but hostile. My spouse I think has had to do a lot of re-negotiating with me about our lives, although when he married me I was, for my time, a liberated sort of young woman. I had no feminist consciousness that I could articulate. That has grown over the years and he has had to deal with that. I mean we have been married nearly 40 years, so that is a lot of negotiating and I don't think that has been easy, but he has supported me totally when I started to go back to study, as much as he possibly could and I would say that he is pretty supportive. I mean, you know I get ?? at times but by a large I think that is quite I think my children if you scratch them would probably say it is fine, but they do complain sometimes "that you are too busy, or you are too tired, you must stop this job - its wearing you out" you know that sort of stuff.

C: Anything that I missed, that you would like to say about the future. I know it is unclear, but ...?

A: If I stop teaching I shall go on .... I am 3 years overdue with (publisher) for a book, of which I have 3 chapters drafted. I will finish that to go around women's issues. I will certainly go on.

C: Anything else?

A: I have a funny .... Maybe this as just a parting shot. I told you I was angry about the injustice. I am still angry about some of these because I think in the end those young people who I am so passionate about are going to be short-changed. Not just us. It is the whole education thing. I think there are some exciting respects. I think there has to be down sizing and all that stuff - I understand what that means - resources are limited. But I have a sense that I don't feel so personally angry about it anymore. I have quite excited sense about how my life is going to be. It is going to take a new turn. I don't know what it is going to be, I don't know what I am going to do, I am not even looking for something to do as yet and this has got nothing to do with having faith of any kind. It has to do with the fact of the way it has been thus far. I have gone and knocked on doors here, and they have never opened and I got hauled backwards through something I have never seen before, and I have a feeling that is going to happen again and I certainly will go on working, because my spouse's job keeps him away 6 months of year for the next 7 years. I am not somebody that can go and play bridge. I love bridge by the way, but I can't play it all day. I need a job. What it is going to be I don't know. So let's see what happens. If I am put out to

graze maybe there will be nice green meadows somewhere with new kinds of flowers and buttercups in them that I have not seen.

C: Absolutely last thing. If you think back on your whole life and if you had to do it again as a young woman, what would you do different?

A: In terms of my studies and academic?

C: Yes, in terms of your career. You are looking at yourself and you are now giving the younger you advice.

A: I did not believe in myself. I did not. I would say to my younger self "you are rather smart". I am not trying to be over modest. I knew I was smart, but I had allowed this stereotyping of my upbringing and the patriarchal mind set that surrounded me, despite all my anger and resistance, to shape me too much and I did not believe enough in my ability. I did fine at school and I went to university I just cruised it. I just made sure ... and I wasted a lot of time in not knowing where I was going. I can see it was a development thing too, but my advice would be to believe in yourself and to find a way and it is still a lonely one. More people with my feminist interest (there are women who have been at it for so much longer) but there has been a huge piece of loneliness in this thing. My life has been very short on support systems, because (and I am not blaming myself entirely) If you are right up at the front, if you are the one who is breaking the ground, then it is much more difficult to have support systems and I think that those that are just coming behind me, I can see there is much more sisterhood so-called, if there is such a thing, but this sharing and conversation and dialogue, collegiality and all that sort of thing. Mine has been quite a lonely path and looking back on that I think it has been limiting too.

C: Earlier on you said you would have started sooner?

A: Oh yes. A huge ?? who ?? are prepared for that kind of route which means that you explore what is going on inside yourself, examination, critical self-examination and I don't mean this in a destructive way, I mean a way of discovering who you are is so important in making the right connections to the context in which you work in and my journey of self-discovery which I guess I have been involved in for a long time, but I started too late to make the connections between what I was finding inside myself in terms of what I wanted and that is why I got into academics late, because I am actually an academic.

C: I can hear that.

A: And I did not make the necessary connections and I can see ... I watch it with my children. I can see how (name) is finally starting to gel as a person in which she is making the connections between who she is, what she is finding out about herself and what she wants to do out here.. It is necessary for growth and we have to do that

inner work in order to make the outer connections. I don't know if I am making sense.

C: It is making sense, but while you were talking I was thinking that I should actually rephrase the question and ask you what is it that you think you have done right? It occurred to me that that is what you have done..

A: I think that what I have done right is that I have not let go of the inner journey, even  
And in that respect I am very grateful to my children because they have really kept me at ?? and that challenge is of course ?? all the rejection, all the stuff that you go through particularly with daughters is very hard. My son ... in some ways it is much more complicated but I think that my children have gone on forcing me into that, and I have a huge sense of gratitude. It is getting the whole thing together.

C: Thank you.

A: You are welcome. Can I offer you something now.

C: No. I will write you a letter giving you all my contacts and so on because this is probably only going to get written up a year later, so in the meantime...

A: Because I am going to go to bed soon. I am probably going to think of something that was actually relevant to something.

C: I would like to hear.

A: I will E-mail.

C: If you make a note of it and get it to me.

A: I will put it on E-mail.