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Identity constructions of black South African female students

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community-based Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

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Bonolo O. Mophosho

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Abstract

A viewpoint of the intersectional and complex nature of identity is seen to be integral to the understanding of the identities of black female students. *'Identity constructions of black South African female students'* is an exploratory study with a view to understand the identities of black South African women in institutions of higher learning and education. The study investigated the experiences of 16 female South African black students; with a focus on their race category, gender as well as class subject positions. The study is placed within the context of the Historically White University (HWU) and was specifically conducted in a HWU situated in Johannesburg. The students' articulations of their university experiences were explored qualitatively, within three focus group discussions through an open-ended interview guideline. Results show that their education is accounted for as a significant influence in their subjectivity given the social mobility it grants as the women's experience of self shifts as does their position in society. Furthermore it was found that with the cultural capital attained through education, notions of class, racial and gender identities are affected and a multiplicity of identities exists as a result.

(**Keywords**: identity, intersectionality, black feminism, critical race theory, black female students, higher education, post-apartheid South Africa)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Background

Inequality and prejudice characterised South Africa's higher education system for much of the country's history (Mabokela, 2000). Throughout the apartheid regime quality and tertiary-level education had been limited to white students "as Coloureds and Asians (were) very largely, and Africans almost wholly, excluded from skilled occupations" (Macquarrie, 1960, p. 172). Historically, black[1] people have suffered the most in educational disadvantage in comparison to white, Indian and Coloured, South Africans (Mabokela, 2001). Thus, education was one of the many facets of South African society that served to perpetuate the segregationist ideologies of the regime. The hierarchical structure has served not only to separate, but also to instigate unequal development of the different race categories[2].

The position of black women in the context of institutions of higher learning and education was of particular interest in this study. More specifically; as the experiences of black women students in South Africa, within the Historically White University (HWU) context, continue to be under-researched (Williams, 2001). Whilst being marginalised, in many cases, black women were and to some extent are still faced with pressures of being perceived as being representatives of an entire race category (Madsen & Mabokela, 2000) and having to prove their worth. Above that, for many the experience is of being subjected to scrutiny of their competence to succeed with regards to participation within the university context (academically, in social relations and

[1] The use of the category of 'black' was not intended to re-inscribe the essentialist asymmetries of South Africa's past but to use it with the awareness of how asymmetries continue to be socially constructed and reflective of South African and global social relations (Stevens, Swart & Franchi, 2006).

[2] The discourses or meanings attached to 'race' were particularly significant for this study. However, these have been continuously transformed by the political tone of a society (Machery & Faucher, 2005). 'Race' was viewed as a social construct as opposed to a scientific essence. The power of 'race' was nonetheless acknowledged as "a critical point of voluntary and involuntary identification" (Dolby, 2001, p. 118). The term 'race category' is, therefore, used.

otherwise). Ultimately such pressures and experiences form an integral part of identity construction for individuals generally and specifically for black women.

South Africa's past has had "large scale identity effects" (Hook, 2003, pg. 114). In particular, black identity manifested as a subject-position rife with ambivalence and conflict. Being defined in terms of whiteness, which continued to be in a position of privilege, post-apartheid 'blackness' continued to be viewed as in a position of "wanting" (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). Despite the assumption that self-perceptions were transformed in the context of liberation from oppression (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006) the continued markers of the effects of South Africa's past have contributed to ambivalence. Racial inequality has persisted concurrently as white South Africans advantage does with regards to economic activities (Southall, 2004). Historically, economic development in South Africa largely benefited the white minority with the goal to ensure and sustain its supremacy (Johnstone, 1970) and this legacy has remained. Almost two decades after the end of the apartheid regime South Africa's national census in 2011 found white people's income to be six times more than that of the majority of black people's (Statistics South Africa, 2011). As Dolby (2001) noted, the current generation can neither be entirely defined by, nor be completely free of apartheid. The acknowledgement of race category as a point of identification has necessitated a recognition of the effect of past and present South African socio-historic contextual factors (Dolby, 2001).

Significantly, the HWU context itself is seen as reflective of the disparities of post-apartheid South Africa. For example, as Mabokela & Mawila (2004) assert with regards to higher levels within the academy; full participation of black women is marred resulting in persisting under representation particularly at the level of lecturers and scholars at post-graduate level (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004). Parallel to this is that black women continue to be located at the bottom of social hierarchies as they strive for economic, racial and gender-based equality. Black women struggle the most, economically, in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2011), further indicating that the historical differences instituted by apartheid are still evident (McKay & de la Rey, 2006). The racial subjugation of the apartheid regime, in addition to its patriarchal nature, served to place black women in "second class citizenship" (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004, p. 397).

This study attempts to, whilst exploring identity construction of black female students, highlight the interaction between the following constructs; subject position, socio-historical context and identity. The interaction between these three variables is significantly influenced by access to social, economic and cultural resources (Cole & Omari, 2003; Aries & Seider, 2007). Bourdieu (1986) refers to these dimensions as Cultural Capital, Social Capital, Economic Capital and Symbolic Capital. It is the more symbolic as opposed to tangible privileges of a society. Attaining education can be particularly enhancing of the predisposition for this access. Moreover, through education, social mobility can be achieved; in shifting one from a position of being oppressed, disadvantaged economically and socially (Cole & Omari, 2003, Jetten, Iyer, Tsivrikos & Young, 2008). The interest is in these shifts, in the experience of access and the possible ambivalences.

Education is the most trusted avenue for social mobility as it allows for access to economic capital and advantages through better and more favourable employment opportunities (Cole & Omari, 2003; Jetten et al, 2008). This penchant for mobility is particularly implicative for the position of black women. The discourses within the educational setting and within society about black women attaining education have grave implications on these subjects and their subjectivity. Through this study the researcher presented and highlighted the idea that the effect of this on individual's experiences, subject-positions and identity constructions has not been sufficiently explored. As bell hooks notes, "oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their history" (as cited in Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 34).

Democratic South Africa provided opportunities, such as access to higher education, which through upward mobility alleviates elements of oppression (Cole & Omari, 2003). Education presented individuals with capital for advancement as opportunities in political, social and economic realms of society are made accessible through its attainment. Achieving higher education was thus seen as a vehicle for mobility significant to individuals' subject-positions in society. It was viewed as important to understand the resulting identity constructions in light of this. Is this experience liberating? Are there any costs or tensions? This study therefore explored

how black women students navigated the institution of higher learning and education, the capital and mobility education grants and how it may have shaped their identities. This perspective was enhanced by an acknowledgement that educational attainment significantly impacts identity construction through the manifestation of different forms of capital.

2. Research Rationale

A great challenge facing the South African system of higher learning and education was in shifting from one of inequality to one that embraces diversity. The inclusion of black students has steadily increased since 1983 when HWUs were permitted by the apartheid government to admit black students. Based on current demographics at the University of the Witwatersrand as an example, Africans comprise 53.85% of the student population and females constitute 52.76% (University of the Witwatersrand, 2011). Despite the steady increase in the admission of black students nonetheless, exclusion and racial disparity continue to occur covertly. This is multi-layered and has an impact on a multitude of aspects for these individuals. Significant to this study is the impact on identity constructions.

The viewpoint of this study was that the examination of identities in South Africa in particular, necessitated a socio-historic contextualisation. This was achieved with an understanding that identity was not "free-floating" but moulded significantly by socio-historic context, by "social relations of power, by ideology and by historical patterns of privilege" (Hook, 2003, p. 108). The university, as an educational social medium, held (and continues to hold) the directive to prepare all students for 'meaningful participation' in the academic, economic, political and social spheres of South African society (Mabokela, 2000). Therefore, it was critical to examine the patterns within this context as well as the institutional cultures which produced students' subject-positions and consequently their position in society and their identities (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004).

The enduring consequences of South Africa's past at the level of identity were furthermore illuminated through an intersectionality perspective (Distiller & Steyn, 2004). In identity inquisitions the understanding of the intersectionality of race category, class, gender and other constructs is significant. Black women in particular have been silenced by a "triple oppression";

on grounds of race category, gender as well as class (Kiguwa, 2001, Mama, 1995). Shedding light on their experiences, therefore, served to challenge the forces of capitalism, racism and sexism in South Africa "so that a new social order can emerge" (hooks, 1986, p. 126).
The experiences of black women in society at large have remained an unexplored area (Williams, 2001) particularly with regards to African, and South African, women. The dearth in literature was further evident in that much of the literature on the experience of black females was based on African-Americans. The experience of African women, given the widely differing contexts and socio-historical factors, continues to need more attention (Mama, 1995) as this scarcity of knowledge of their experiences has further served to oppress the African woman.

The relevance of exploring notions of identity as espoused by black female students within the South African context, with cognizance of the lingering effects of the patriarchal apartheid regime (Hocoy, 1999), enables one- through the method of critical research and analysis, to create continued awareness of the need for the advocacy around this issue. The consciousness-raising achieved through group discussion with similar others (Mama, 1995) was thus of significance in this research. The focus group discussions created a space where black women could have a voice and thus served as a liberating conscientisation tool in this regard. Through this participatory, collective knowledge production, the emancipation goal of critical race theory and black feminism was pursued.

The disjuncture in institutional discourses of HWUs as spoken to by Walker (2005), is significant to black women students' identities as identity was seen as informed by discursive conditions within particular contexts (Dolby, 2001). The effect of these on black students' university experience was considered noteworthy to their sense of belonging to the environment and thus their sense of self within it. Existing research showed a lack of knowledge on how the disjuncture between the 'rainbow' nation discourse, the mandate of the constitution, and institutional, social (and otherwise) realities manifested in identity. In exploring the process of how identity constructions manifested in a socio-historic context, the processes that individuals made use of to negotiate this may also be illuminated.

3. Research Aim

The overarching aim of this research study was to explore and understand constructions of identity of black women students within a South African HWU context 18 years post-apartheid. The sub-aim of this study was to achieve an understanding of the constitution of the subject-positions of black women students through exploring how groups of students made meaning of their university and other social experiences.

3.1 Research Objectives

This study examined the following objectives within the research aim:

- To explore how black female students construct their identities within the context of 'race', class and gender;
- To, through the experiences of black female South African students, explore the intersectionality of identity particularly in the complexities of the identity of black women;
- To explore how their subject-positions are informed by the discourses available in the HWU and the post-apartheid socio-historic context; and
- To explore their experiences of social mobility and illuminate how Cultural and Social, Capital resultantly manifest in their identity constructions.

3.2 Research Questions

1. How do black female students construct their identities?
    a.) How do they speak about their identities as black females?
    b.) What other identities do they speak about?
2. How are black female students' identities affected by the HWU context and the South African post-apartheid context at large?
3. How are black female students' identity constructions influenced by the social mobility and/or the capital attained of their education?

4. Chapter Organisation

Chapter 2, the Literature review, discussed in detail the key constructs of identity construction, and how the forms of capital according to Bourdieu (1986), indicative of a group's power and status within society, manifest within the process. Firstly a discussion of the theoretical framework of the study is presented. The theories of social constructionism, critical race theory and black feminism framed this study. This discussion was followed by a review of pertinent literature with regards to identity. The concepts of intersectionality and that of subject-positions and subjectivity were explored as further theoretical tenets of the study. The "triple jeopardy" identity of black women was then explored, followed by a discussion on discourses within the HWU. Then education as an indicator and catalyst of social mobility and the impacts they have on identity are discussed. Lastly, Bourdieu's forms of capital- with specific focus on the concept of cultural capital specifically as a key construct, are unpacked.

Chapter 3 discussed the research design and the method of the study. The research aim, objectives and questions were outlined first, followed by a discussion of the research design and data collection process. A profile of the research participants was discussed and then the research sampling, data collection and analysis procedures were delineated. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the trustworthiness of qualitative research and the researcher's reflections.

Chapter 4 reported on the findings of this study. The chapter provided an exploration of the themes derived from the focus group discussions.

Chapter 5 was the concluding chapter. A summary of the findings of the study were presented as well as these in light of other relevant literature. This was followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research in this area.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

1. Introduction

This chapter covered pertinent aspects to this study of identity which was explored through drawing on various theorists who engaged with the construct, including that of intersectionality in identity. This was then addressed further by exploring subject-positions and subjectivity, followed by a review of literature on the "triple jeopardy identity" of black females that included an understanding of their oppressed positions with regard to race category, gender and class subjectivities. The significance of the HWU context is related, as the discourses within the context are discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the relationship between education, social mobility and identity. Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital were seen as integral to the process of how educational attainments influence the process of identity construction for black women. Consequently, the concept of cultural capital was reviewed in depth. Firstly, however, the conceptual framework was discussed.

2. Conceptual Framework

A qualitative researcher ought to state her theoretical orientation in order to explicitly state the bias in light of which the findings will be interpreted (Hill & Thomas, 2000). This is important for the purpose of credibility, as well as enhanced insight for the reader. This study was guided by the theories of social constructionism, critical race theory and black feminism. Through social constructionism, identity was understood to be socially constructed (Gergen 2011). Thus, this framework allowed for a perspective that acknowledged the impact of social, cultural and historical factors on identities.

The assumption of social constructionism is that discourses communicated in contexts influence identity construction. This is evident when looking through a lens that considers social, cultural and historical factors (Gergen, 2011). A critical stance was taken too, in drawing on conclusions

from the perspectives of critical race theory, feminism as well as black feminism. These frameworks endorsed a critique of the hegemony of society, allowing for a stance that acknowledged the power of dominant groups which was seen as significant to the position of black women.

2.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is based on the premise that reality is constructed through interaction between human beings and their world. Meaning is interpreted in a social context and thus the knowledge that results is sourced from the perspective and position of an individual within that context. Social constructionism takes the position of a critical view of knowledge that is taken for granted as fundamental truth (Burr, 1995, as cited in McKay, 1997).

The social origin of knowledge emphasises that it is through this relationship; that between meaning and social context as well as the human interaction with this, that "knowledge, reason, emotion, morality is produced" (Gergen, 2011, p. 109). Bourdieu's (1986) view is that a group's knowledge is cultural capital; rooted in and defined by the power afforded to the group by external social factors. These assert a group's status in society. An individual encompasses their identity through an engagement with these social factors. It is through these processes, not in the individual's own mind, that historical, cultural knowledge is known (Gergen, 2011). Thus the individual's engagement with social factors is integral. Research based on a social constructionist framework seeks to illuminate the processes that people use to understand and articulate their world and themselves (Hill & Thomas, 2000).

The significance of language is thus significant to explore. Within social constructionism language is central as it is a form of social interaction that transmits social knowledge (Burr, 1995, as cited in McKay, 1997). In communication it is through "frameworks of meaning", that are organised socially, that what is allowed and not allowed to be said and thought is relayed (Walker, 2005, p. 134). Discourses are the frameworks of meaning. They are created by images and metaphors in spoken interactions, which construct objects and subjects in particular ways (McKay, 1997). Discourse is particularly significant in the understanding of identity as an individual navigates discourse in locating themselves in their subject-positions. Identity is thus

produced, or constructed, in relation to discourses of a particular context. This is both an individual and social, in interaction, process.

For this study the discourses or meanings attached to race categories are particularly significant. These are continuously transformed by the political tone of a society (Machery & Faucher, 2005). Therefore, it should follow that 'race' ought to be understood as an "unstable and decentred complex of social meanings" as opposed to being fixed (Omi & Winant, 2002 as cited in Machery & Faucher 2005, p. 1209). Social constructionists are anti-essentialist - not believing that there is fixed, unchanging essences or "essential natures" of events or people (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998), and thus encompasses the understanding of the multiplicity of identities in that 'race' is:

> "The negotiated interaction between societal phenomenons of categorisation based on physical markers (such as skin colour and facial features) and a personal phenomenon of identity" (Hill & Thomas, 2000, p. 193)

Acknowledging the instability of racial identities thus leads to an acceptance of the possibility of change. This can be achievable despite the power that 'race' holds in South Africa as it continues to be "a critical point of voluntary and involuntary identification" (Dolby, 2001, p. 118; Soudien, 2001).

According to Smedley (1998) 'race' is a cultural invention of modern times that emerged as the dominant form of identity in societies where it functions to stratify the social system. It is through the meshing of racial categories with existing hierarchies in "class and status" that the apartheid system achieved a strong imprinting of racial relations in the subjective experience of them (Posel, 2001, p. 58). One view is that the power and control infused in the normalisation of race categories ensured that the system prevailed over decades despite its "contradictions, uncertainties, irrationalities, and lapses of control" (Posel, 2001, p. 88).

Berger (1992) asserted that the postmodern perspective in challenging the stable and rigid understandings of categories of 'race' provides an "emphasis on fluidity" which is necessary (p.

285). His overview, using a case history of South Africa, showed the changing nature of the interaction between the constructs as well as their fluidity being in relation to the state and also political movements of the times (Berger, 1992). Posel (2001) looked at the construct of 'race', specifically and revealed how the construct of 'race' was integral to the apartheid regimes constructing of policy and practice following the implementation of apartheid laws in 1948. She examined how the concept of 'race' was used by the National Party government as a socio-legal construct instead of being based on biological, essential elements. Posel stated that this made for the "overwhelming racialization of South African society" that still persists today (Posel, 2001. p. 88).

Social constructionism, being anti-essentialist, is allied with the post-modernist perspective that there is no ultimate truth (Burr, 1995). It is necessary to consider that as society moulds and shifts then so does the knowledge produced through its social processes and thus, ultimately group and individual identities.

Judith Butler purported that "identity is an *effect* of discursive practices" (Butler, 1990). Certain "cultural resources" are available to individuals - through discourses that shape their views as well as identities (Hook, 2003). On the other hand Burr (1995) maintained that as a result, different selves manifest in different contexts. He further argued for the notion of agency, as the idea that individuals can construct social change. In line with this argument Gergen (1989) highlighted the concept of a "discourse user" as individuals have the capacity to defy oppressed positions through producing their own identity constructions. This assertion relates to the constructs addressed in this particular study pertaining to the identity constructions of black female students functioning within the context of an HWU. Agency is acknowledged, as is the women's active involvement within the discourses within this context, in foregrounding their experiences and their articulation of them.

Gergen (1985) specified that a social constructionist orientation includes the acknowledgement of the impact of historical and cultural contextual factors; that social processes are the means through which knowledge is transmitted, and that knowledge is in itself action. Social constructionism acknowledges that external social factors, coupled with the active engagement

of the individual, influences the construction of reality (Hill & Thomas, 2000). The focus of this study is thus on black women's expressions of their own sense of self; in their race category, gender and class identity conceptions, this coupled with an acknowledgement of the context of the HWU as well as that of South African society at large.

This research is in response to the assumption of much of the research of the identities of black individuals of a homogenous "blackness" construct in identity; for example, Durrheim and Mtose's (2006) study of the articulations of university students (both black and white and male and female) of "blackness" in the new South Africa. The notion of a socially constructed nature of 'race' and identity should lead to a more fluid conceptualisation of such constructs and the inextricable implication of each strand of identity in any other. This is achieved in adjoining the parallel goals of both CRT and feminism. Healing the wounds of patriarchy and racial subjugation (hooks, 1995); this investigation served to raise consciousness of the women who participated of their own shared experiences and the effect of socio-historic aspects on this and their resultant identity constructions.

2.2 Black Feminism

Black feminism aims to give voice to the experience of black women in reflecting on the varying forms of subjugation they have experienced (Hill-Collins, 1990). Black feminism emphasises the exploration and expression of black women's' experiences in the creation of knowledge (Few, Stephens & Rose-Arnett, 2003). This view holds that the needs of black women are distinct because of their racial and gender oppression. This body of thought aims to emancipate and empower black women and in so doing challenge their oppression (Hill-Collins, 1990).

Black feminism can be seen as a merging of the theories of Critical Race Theory (CRT) with feminism (Few, Stephens & Rose-Arnett, 2003).

2.2.1 Feminism

Movements of feminism address the misrepresentation or lack of representation of women in society (Butler, 1990). It provides a forum and legitimacy for the expression of women's voices

(Walkerdine, 1985). The aim is to adequately represent women and challenge that which subverts women's positions in society; politically, culturally and otherwise (Butler, 1990). bell hooks defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2000 as cited in Lamothe 2005, p. 2267). Feminism sees the need for women to heal from the "psychological wounds" resulting from this subjugation (hooks, 1995). These conceptualisations also underpinned in this study.

The contest of feminism is against the patriarchal subjugation of women, with the purpose of showing, through critical consciousness, that "patriarchy promotes pathological behaviour in both genders and our wounded psyches (have) to be attended to" (hooks, 1995, p. 265.). Butler (1990) further asserts that in order to achieve these goals it is imperative not only to represent women but also to critique how the very category of "women" and the produced "subject" or position of women is perpetuated. The subject-position of women is defined, legitimised and perpetuated through discourse transmitted through a society's language and politics. A critical stance is necessary to critique these mechanisms and this leads to the emancipation of women from them (Butler, 1990).

In the field of psychology, the voice of black women has been lost in white patriarchal perspectives. Feminism in the past has not accounted for the varying forms of prejudice that divide women and thus, has not fully grappled with the experiences of black women (hooks, 1986). The movement failed to critique white privilege in its one-dimensional focus on patriarchy. On the other hand, Afro-centric paradigms have failed to sufficiently critique male privilege, and here the factor of gender oppression has been largely omitted (Blue, 2001). Masculinity continues to be privileged in the production of knowledge and specifically in academe; moreover the African university as a "deeply subversive symbol of the colonial-era" prizes a certain kind of masculinity (Barnes, 2007, p. 8). The importance of evaluating how gender and race category intersect was thus also raised as crucial for the liberation of black women (Blue, 2001). hooks (2000) argued that the direction of feminist thought was shifted by a paradigm interlocking gender, race category and class. The importance of evaluating how gender and race category intersect is raised as crucial for the liberation of black women (Blue, 2001).

Through black feminism, an activist perspective is brought to bear on research that seeks knowledge - organically from the black women themselves as experts of their experience, with consciousness in gaining understanding of this experience and empowerment being a driver for social change (Few, Stephens & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). This is achieved in adjoining the parallel goals of both CRT and feminism. This study will be steered by this mandate. As bell hooks (1989) noted:

> Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their history (as cited in Hill-Collins 1990, p. 34).

2.2.2 Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from a need to address issues of 'race' and racism and the role they played in American law. Rooted in a disdain for the perpetuation of oppressive structures in society, CRT pursued the goal of transformation by giving voice to the experiences and stories of oppressed peoples (Yosso, 2005). CRT was the vehicle that implemented this aspiration by seeking to understand and reassure those submitted to racism (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006) and challenging dominant attitudes and stories of the "majority" in the context of history.

CRT challenges social constructions, particularly how racial power relations are constructed. At the level of identity, this framework is particularly useful in that it recognises how 'race' and racism transfuses through other categories in society such as gender, sexuality, and class. The basic tenet is that racism is common-place to all society and a phenomenon that most non-white people must endure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The theory ascertains that 'race' is socially transfused with meaning rather than being natural (Crenshaw, 1991).

As asserted by a social constructionist framework, 'Race' is a concept that is socially constructed in context (Machery & Faucher, 2005; Smedley, 1998). This is as the content of people's concept of 'race' is, in fact, explained by our social environment. 'Race' is said to not reflect actual biological, physical human variations but rather the social meanings that have been imposed on

those variations (Smedley, 1998). However, historically 'race' has rather been conceived as and reduced to an essentialised discourse (Soudien, 2002).

CRT has a liberatory vision in that whilst the permanence of racism is acknowledged, this recognition parallels a drive to change and end it (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). CRT emphasises the need to give voice to the experiences of racial oppression and aims to emancipate those affected (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The experiential knowledge of those affected by racism is sought to this end (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

> "CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Colour as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalised groups that often go unrecognised and unacknowledged." (Yosso, 2005, p. 69)

The theory allows for a centring of the knowledge of marginalised peoples. As this knowledge is, due to the hegemonic structures of society, invaluable and of the "Outsider", the goal is to claim it as legitimate. The "presence and voices" of people subjected to racism is asserted. The goal is empowerment and resistance to the placing of this knowledge on the margins (Yosso, 2005, p. 70).

An analysis of racism is seen to equip the enquiry of class relationships by magnifying the function of racism in capitalist society (hooks, 2000). Using the CRT lens ensures an acknowledgement of how racism intersects with other forms of subjugation to affect the lives and experiences of black people. Furthermore, the theory necessitates clarity around the difference in experience between black and white people due to this. The stance is that a "silence" on this difference limits the propensity for social justice. Dialogue on the experiences of oppression and subordination is seen as crucial (Yosso, 2005).

CRT further calls for a method of study that elicits "the descriptive, communicative and potentially transformative power of diverse stories and counter stories" (Delgado, 1989, as cited in Walker, 2005, p. 131). Essentially CRT mandates that the "experiential knowledge" of black people be acknowledged (Walker, 2005, p. 132). Black Feminism also, informed by CRT, calls for this. Through uncovering the stories and counter-stories of subjects in society, it is sought that the structures and constructions, particularly those of exclusion and oppression, be exposed and a relocation of power sought (Delgado, 1989, as cited in Walker, 2005).

These paradigms then adhere to the directive of critical research whereby the goal is to not only understand phenomena but moreover for understanding to be used as a tool in the on-going process of societal transformation. Furthermore, the goals of "self-reflection, mutual learning, participation and empowerment" are sought to be achieved (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002, p. 720).

3. Theoretical Tenets of the Study

3.1 Intersectionality in Identity

The concept of intersectionality is largely employed in black feminist theory (Davis, 2008). Kimberle Crenshaw initially coined the term in her critique of the negation of feminist thought of the experiences of black women (Crenshaw, 1989 as cited in Davis, 2008). She used the term, in particular, in discussions of black women's employment in the U.S.A (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The concept has become significantly useful in inquisitions of how particular people are positioned as different and also marginalised (Staunæs, 2003). As described by Distiller & Steyn (2004):

> "…it is more accurate to conceptualise the self as a matrix, a complex, shifting and interconnected series of strands" (p. 4).

Many theorists and researchers abide to the necessity of understanding identity as multiple and continuously in "motion". Individuals continuously negotiate and renegotiate their identity as part of the various and different social categories to which they belong (Distiller & Steyn, 2004).

Moreover, and particularly significant to this study is the concept of how particular subject-positions of identity intersect. Intersectionality has been defined as "the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination" (Davis, 2008, p. 67). The concept of intersectionality can illuminate, in particular, how certain subject-positions are multiply impacted by oppression, as in the case of black women due to sexism and racism combined. Power relations in multiple positions, such as that of the position of black females, can be taken into account (Davis, 2008).

Distiller and Steyn (2004) speak to the necessity of an intersectional perspective of identity, particularly in the South African context. This is as South Africa's past created a society that is segregated along not only racial lines but also along class, gender and others as well. It is important to not look at these constructs separately but as intricately connected and linked in people's positions and identities in South African society. This is significantly so, with the position of black women in society due to the "triple oppression" (Kiguwa, 2001). In black feminist theory the concept of intersectionality has been particularly useful (Davis, 2008).

Seeing identity as intersectional assists in diverging from the "binary" to more complex views of identity (Nash, 2008). Nash (2008) speaks to how intersectionality is a concept that has allowed for an understanding of the intersection of race category and gender and therefore of the identities that lie within the "overlapping margins of race and gender discourse", acknowledging how these constructs coexist and interact. Intersectionality allows for an acknowledgement of diversity within each of these categories- by focusing on identities that "contest" these categorisations. The priority is to give voice to those who have been left out of feminist or anti-racist movements, thereby contesting "essentialism and exclusion" (Nash, 2008, p. 89).

Nash (2008), however, also challenges the concept of intersectionality; calling for a clearer conceptualising of the construct. The concept seems to be an overarching concept used, with a lacking dissection of what it encompasses. Also challenged is the over-reliance on the black woman subject as the "quintessential intersectional subject" (Nash, 2008, p. 89). However, the concept allows for a multi-faceted account and understanding of the experiences of black women. Furthermore, this approach assists in transcending "static" conceptualisations of identity

(Davis, 2008). Feminist theory and anti-racist theory separately did not account for this as they have attended to women and black people respectively (Crenshaw, 1991). There has been a gap left in not locating the experiences and needs of black women especially. Thus, the corollary is the adjoining of CRT and feminism and the heralding of black feminist tenets that is central to this study.

The concept of intersectionality is a call to enlighten on societies injustices of society; to illuminate the experiences of the subjugated. This is termed "Looking to the bottom" in critical race theory- which is drawing on the point of views, of society, of those who are marginalised (Matsuda, 1987 as cited in Nash, 2008).

A self-critical reflective stance is necessary when acknowledging intersectionality as the importance of position is indicated. The researcher must account for her own intersectional position as this serves the deconstruction process. This, as well as an acknowledgement of the situated nature of knowledge and its construction, is important particularly for feminist inquisition. In identity research, intersectionality allows for a necessary interrogation of the researchers own "blind spots" and uses them for critical analysis (Davis, 2008). The researcher must consider what aspects of her subjectivity cause an overlooking of certain material found. An inclusion of insight into this allows for better understanding of research participants experiences as well as a higher propensity for empowerment by giving voice to silenced phenomena.

Berger (1992), through a historical analysis of South Africa, discussed how race category, class and gender have intersected over particular socio-historic periods. Through this he explores the "danger" in the assumption of essence, showing how the constructs of 'race', class and gender have been unstable, despite being accepted as given. The shifts and changes in these constructs, their meaning, and the resultant segregation of society along them, show how they are indeed not essential or static. The concept of intersectionality acknowledges the socially constructed nature of these constructs, and is further in agreement with the postmodern move towards understanding identity as multiple and shifting (Davis, 2008).

Distiller and Steyn (2004) purported that given South Africa's history, identity concepts of gender, class and others such as sexuality and ethnicity are unavoidably 'raced'. Furthermore, it still remains that most South Africans still define themselves and others according to 'race' (Distiller & Steyn, 2004). Much of the research on the identities of black individuals, however, seems to assume a homogenous 'blackness' construct in identity. The idea of the socially constructed nature of 'race' and identity should lead to a more fluid conceptualisation of such constructs. Therefore, it is maintained that each strand of identity has an unavoidable implication on other strands of identity. Hence, gender and class identity is connected to conceptions of 'race' identity and affects the relationships between different identities (Distiller & Steyn, 2004).

3.2 Subject-positions & Subjectivity

The various constructs of an individual's identity all co-exist within the individual. Each are defined and expressed depending on the individual's subject-position (Walkerdine, 1985). Butler (1990), informed by Foucault's postulations, puts forth that subjectivity be seen as an effect of subject-positions communicated through discourse. Subjectivity is the person's conceptualisations of their self, their subject-positions, and their existence within contexts. Discourses, inherent in contexts, delineate "rules" of what is regarded as normative, which subject-positions are privileged and which are excluded or regarded as deviant (Atkins, 2005).

As social subjects, the contexts in which we find ourselves inform our subjectivity. Subjectivity, as a continuum of identities, is thus "dynamic and multiple" and "often contradictory" as opposed to rational (Mama, 1995, p. 69). Both personal and social factors are involved in the process of identity construction (Walker, 2005). It is necessary to consider the relationship between the self and the social context and the resultant interconnected nature of multiple identities (for example, racial, ethnic, class and gender) in individuals' subjectivity. A possibility of a fragmentation of self exists too as contradictions in the subject-positions available to the individual occur (Walkerdine, 1985).

Wetherell (2008) argues that subjectivity has been conceptualised as "the private self" in comparison to the "publicly defined 'identity" (p. 22). The argument is that qualitative research has moved beyond a necessity to define the two separately. Mama (1995) carried this through in

using “subjectivities” and “identities” interchangeably. In the context of this research the concept of subjectivity allowed for the concept of an agentic functioning of identity. Subjectivity was seen to speak to an individual’s perception of their position in relationships, in their world. It allows for the individual’s, in this case the black women students’, voice in their perception of self and their reality. It is their experience, and therefore their answer to the question “who am I?” in each of their differing positions. According to Wetherell (2008) however, the concept of subjectivity has in the past over emphasised interior processes. As Mama (1995) conceptualizes subjectivity- the root to understanding identity being the individual’s understanding and articulations of their experiences, so is it sought in this research. It is the interlinking of societal elements such as discourse with the individual’s internal experience as well as outward expression of self. The individual’s articulation of this is centralised.

Wetherell (2008) is of the opinion that the concept of ‘subjectivity’ is limiting being of the view that the concept of subjectivity induces “old dichotomies”. The stance is that the endeavour to understand identification is complex, due to it being all- encompassing; including the social and psychological. He does, however, assert that the concept does encapsulate a necessary acknowledgement of a process of internalisation of “narrative and fantasy” of the individuals’ experience of their world (Wetherell, 2008).

The binary concept of identity and subjectivity as opposed to each other has largely been that of understanding identity as an individual’s belonging to a group whereas subjectivity being the internal “self”, the “acting, thinking, feeling being” (Venn, 2006 as cited in Wetherell, 2008, p. 75).

> Subjectivity evokes the set of processes by which a subject or self is constituted. This self, he suggests, is ‘‘the product of an interiorization of attitudes, values, expectations, memories, dispositions, instantiated in inter-subjective relations and activities that, through historically specific self-reflective practices of recognition, constitute a particular named person, a singularity’’ (Venn, 2006 as cited in Wetherell, 2008, p.75)

According to Venn, thus, 'identity' delineates the possibilities of self that there are for the individual in the group identity and roles within this, whilst, subjectivity speaks to how the individual internalises (values, attitudes, norms) and inhabits those subjectively. The stance is that this thinking is a throwback to the postulations of Tajfel and the Social Identity Theory which distinguished between the social and the personal (Wetherell, 2008).

Narratives are significant, as Brah & Phoenix (2004) illustrated as multiple facets of one's various identities are simultaneously "articulated" (as cited in Wetherell, 2008). As this research aims to advocate for a move away from the "taken-for-grantedness of identity" (Wetherell, 2008, p. 76) and concepts of 'race', gender and other categories as fixed, a more fluid conceptualisation is asserted. Through the accentuation of the complexities of black women's conceptualisations and relatedly their articulation of their experiences this fluidity- whilst simultaneously challenging static notions of identity, is brought to the fore. This exploration of identity, through individual's 'articulation' of their experiences; being the "route to identity" (Mama, 1995), was prioritised.

The term "Identity construction" is used to describe the "linguistic exchange and social performance" involved in the experience of subjectivity (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387). Identity construction is the communication of one's subjectivity, or subjectivities, which is ordered to fit the status quo of a particular context. The process is informed by the individual's subjectivities, which are positions in discourse (Mama, 1995). The subjective experiences and definitions of constructs such as femininity for example (constructed by discursive socio-historic factors), make for one's gender identity. These are informed by social norms and expectations (Cerulo, 1997). Therefore subjects and subjectivities are somewhat governed by these norms and expectations; communicated through discourse as they dictate what, for example, femininity is. Subjects use their positions in discourse to inform their subjectivity.

Tajfel's (1978) Social Identity Theory refers to common identification to a particular collective (as cited in Stryker & Burk, 2000). Often, however, these become common attributes that are essentialised as characteristic of the group (Cerulo, 1997). Post-modernism posits a challenge to this, also transgressing the notion of "unified group experiences" (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387).

Discursive practices of a time are seen to determine and articulate particular subject-positions (Atkins, 2005). These, inherent within socio-historic contexts, serve as coordinates guiding one's constructions of self (Kiguwa, 2001). The possibilities for identity formation are as a result subject to "discursive conditions" of a particular context (Dolby, 2001, p. 114). Identity is thus constantly subject to change in relation to these.

Subjectivity is where techniques of domination and techniques of the self meet. Through discursive practices discipline is endorsed as it is through discourse; the symbolic structure of language, that power is executed. This is purported to be the source of gendered subjects in particular. According to Hollway (1989), gendered subjectivity in particular is of a nature that is dynamic, of multiplicity and produced relationally (as cited in Kiguwa, 2001). Women derive their identity externally, the source of definition being the available discourses in their changing environments. Butler (1990) purported that the very mechanisms of language structure society in binary ways cementing what is truth and falsities. She asserts that even representing 'women' falls into this effect; reproducing and reiterating sexual biases (as cited in Atkins, 2005). Disciplinary power is engrossed into an individual's life through the reiteration of social norms and "rules" (Atkins, 2005).

Atkins (2005) argued that, as informed by Foucault's propositions, techniques of the self- one of four that characterise societies' discursive nature, are that through which the subject understands herself. Through these techniques the subject locates herself within the discursive matrix of contexts. The individual's taking on subject-positions within certain social discourses is mediated by these techniques. Agency is, therefore, attained in this way.

The subject, through techniques of the self, chooses the manner in which they perform the discursively imposed requirements of certain positions. In line with this is Butler's (1990) notion that gender identity in particular is performative. Informed by contextual elements, gender identity is thus "a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Butler (1988) states it as one "*doing"* gender. Thus, the process is not completely void of the individual as there are requirements of the individual to "do" this. The role of discourses in this process is that they provide the individual with knowledge and rationale for their actions (Atkins, 2005).

4. The 'Triple Jeopardy' Identity

The importance of research and theoretical models that incorporate the intersectionality of 'race', class and gender is significant for research into the experience of black women. This has been endorsed by many black feminists (Motsemme, 2003). Black women being of the "second sex" and the "last race" are at the bottom of the totem pole of society from each angle of social categorisation and thus, each aspect of their identity (Blue, 2001). It is in this matrix of multiple forms of oppression and subjugation that black women must find their senses of self. Within this, black women must negotiate the various "isms" faced, such as racism and sexism; being jeopardised for their race category as well as their gender (Williams, 2001). The concept of "triple oppression" rose as further augmenting gender and racial subjugation is that of class (Kiguwa, 2001; Mama, 1995).

Black women have been subjected to racial as well as sexist subjugation and thus have experienced the discrimination and deprivation of both (Collier-Thomas, 1982). Furthermore, women are generally not seen to independently occupy class positions, but rather that this is dependent on the structures, relations and men around them (Payne & Abbott, 1990). The intersection of these multiple forms of oppression adds a particular element to a black woman's identity. An acknowledgement of the diversity within gender in the movement of feminism and that within race categories in the anti-racist movement is brought through illuminating the various forms of oppression within the subject-position of a black female in society. Transcendence beyond the bounds of this position in society, for example through the liberation in education, is thus a distinct process for women with significant implications for subjectivity.

In the stance of black feminism the dearth of literature on the experience of black women should be addressed in seeking emancipation from "triple oppression" (Kiguwa, 2001, Mama, 1995). Black women's experiences of racism, therefore, ought to be acknowledged along with their experiences of sexism and poverty. These constructs are intricately related and that ought to be examined in an inquisition into identity, rather than separating one from another (Blue, 2001).

Identification for black females is a particularly arduous process as the "prevailing discourses in society" to which their identification is connected (Hill & Thomas, 2000, p. 194), as well as the groups to which they belong, have elements of marginalisation and inferiority (Few, Stephens, Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Identity construction for black women subjectivity is thus inclusive of a process of a "struggle" as finding the self is within in a matrix of multiple positions of oppression and subjugation.

Forms of oppression that are perpetrated by dominant social groups within social orders become more diffuse throughout the social fabric, and are ultimately translated into oppression amongst the oppressed themselves (Bulhan, 1985 as cited in Stevens, 1998 p. 207). For black women a struggle occurs against the images of black people in addition to black women specifically. Social phenomena such as racial stereotypes, that serve to justify oppressive systems, impact individual-level conceptualisations of self. Internalised oppression is a factor seen to plague black racial identity perpetually as a result. The "stigma of blackness" is how black identity is not able to be cut loose of internalised oppression because of the enduring images of blackness in society (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006, p.156). Hook encapsulates this process as "internalis[ing] the coloniser's stereotypes as a means of knowing self" (Hook, 2003, pg. 116).

Oppression is an element that cannot not be addressed when looking into black identity and moreover, specifically when looking into black women's identity. For a black woman, in particular, the position in society is significantly intricate because she is of the "bottom and the last" (Kiguwa, 2001; Mama, 1995). How she experiences the world as a woman, and how she experiences the world as black is both within the bounds of subjugation and subordination. It is cardinal for black identity research in general to acknowledge the lingering effects of oppression, even post liberation (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). For one, as is the case in South Africa, we see that structurally racist practices continue institutionally despite democratic reform (King, 2001 & Asmal, 2003 as cited in Walker, 2005), and secondly because at the level of identity the oppressed sense of self persists trans-generationally (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006).

Contemporary feminist thought embarks on, in the breath of intersectionality, an understanding of class, 'race' as well as gender effects (King, 1988, as cited in Davis, 2008). Looking at these

seats of identity enhances an appreciation of the vulnerability, marginalisation and subordination of black women with the advent of each of them. A move is required towards a view that the interaction of class, 'race' and gender, in the "social and material realities of women's lives" produces particular power relations (Davis, 2008, p. 71) that cannot be ignored.

> "Black women, who are oppressed on all sides of those equations, are left without the luxury to ignore any one aspect of race, class, gender, or sexuality in favour for another" (Blue, 2001, p. 121).

As identification is the locating of self within a "matrix of symbolic similarities and differences" (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006, pg. 156) and is connected to the discursive conditions within a society (Hill & Thomas, 2006), the assuming of the image of black inferiority is repeated and perpetuated as is the discourse of white supremacy (Fanon, 1986, as cited in Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). Bulhan (1980) spoke of the phenomenon of "cultural in-betweenity". This is a dual reality that is the life of the oppressed in that they perpetually live in relation to the oppressor (Bulhan, 1980). "Cultural in-betweenity" is integral to the model of black racial (or oppressed groups) identities. It is theorised as defences that are built up in response to oppression. These are proposed as stages of capitulation, revitalisation and radicalisation (1985, as cited in Stevens & Lockhart, 2003). Capitulation refers to assimilation into dominant culture and the rejection of one's own. Revitalisation is the reversal of this in a rejection of the dominant culture and "romanticism" of the indigenous. Thirdly, radicalisation is the commitment to change and rejection of the oppressive system (Stevens & Lockhart, 2003).

> In a society deeply marked by its racialised past but also striving to make a different present and a new future, young people are likely to make complicated and more or less conscious investments in choosing some subject-positions over others, in becoming and being one kind of person rather than another (Walker, 2005, p. 133).

Durrheim and Mtose (2006) denounced that black identity has been conceived and theorised in academic literature in a way that has alleged three key elements. These are of psychological inferiority, political minority and the repetition, multiplicity and conflict of identity. The

psychological inferiority is said to be an internalisation of the inferiority of the blackness and resultantly a "preference for whiteness" (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006, pg. 154). According to Durrheim and Mtose (2006) the images of blackness and whiteness are defined in terms of each other, with blackness viewed in a position of "wanting" whilst that of whiteness is of privilege. In their study of university students' articulations of the constructions of black and white, they found that "being black was a troubled subject position" rife with ambivalence and conflict (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006, p. 157).

Self-perceptions are assumed to transform in the context of liberation from oppression (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). This is not the case, however, according to much of the literature in post-colonial studies (hooks, 2004 as cited in Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). The continued inequality, particularly economically, in post-colonial/apartheid contexts, perpetuate the oppressed subject-position. Furthermore, in the post-colonial context, the post-apartheid context consists of understandings and constructs of 'race' and racism that was present in apartheid times (Hook, 2003). It is found that "colonial subjects" continue to be economically marginalised and continue to carry "the stigma of blackness" (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006, p.156). In post-colonial contexts, the subjugation of the black subject to racially categorised experiences persists. The "wanting" position of the black subjects is perpetuated as blacks continue to be the least privileged group, economically and otherwise.

The concept of internalised oppression noted with regards to black racial identity thus has a significant manifestation in the case of the identities of black women. In this light, Blue (2001) purports that black women must contend with stereotypical images that permeate through society. These include the "stereotyped images of mammies, maids, sexual deviants, exotic others, single mothers, welfare abusers, and super women" (Blue, 2001, p. 121). These images result in repetition of the stigmatised identity as they are internalised as the terms that the stigmatised themselves use to define themselves. Black women themselves are socialised to comply with these subjugating images, and submit to and fulfil the status quo. These "historical patterns of stereotyping" cast particular roles for black women to comply with (Potgieter & Moleko, 2004). Thus the oppression is perpetuated through the social fabric of society in this manner (hooks, 1986).

5. Discourses of the HWU Context

The HWU is seen to be a representation of the phenomenon of oppressive practices within the context of liberation. It is an institution that previously adhered to the segregation propositions of the past regime and that then committed to reform and transformation, however, inherent in the practices within it exist insidious exclusionary tactics. King (2001) alludes to varying degrees of this- from extreme leftist racism such as abuse at previously Afrikaans universities, to covert gate-keeping e.g. financial limitations. Walker (2005) too, as she explored the narratives of black students in lieu of "contradictions of institutional discourses" as well as how race category impacts how students make friends. The HWU experience was integral to understanding how black women students subjectively experience their position in society, in education and its effect on their subjective experiences and concepts of self.

Soudien (2001) professed that there are three significant discourses within educational settings that inform the construction of identities (as cited in Walker, 2005). These are named official, formal and informal discourses. This framework asserts a need to look into the lived and expressed educational experiences of black female students as situated and interactive in context as well as personal and relational (Walker, 2005).

Official discourses are that which are communicated by those in power in a particular socio-historic period. This would be the apartheid regime in the past and the current dispensation of the new South Africa. The formal discourses are those of institutions (i.e. what the institution commits itself to as a community). Informal discourses are the seats of social interaction between relations within cultural, social and leisure interests (Soudien, 2001). The nature of the apartheid regimes infiltration into the educational arena has resulted in an intricate enmeshing of these three which has a significant impact on subjects within this setting. The HWU in particular is an educational context that perpetuates discourses of South Africa's past, although in covert ways. The discourses of racial exclusion and subjugation continue to be communicated. This has significant impact on the subjectivities of individuals within these.

Woods (2001) found continued racial disparities in the HWU in her study at Wits University in the early 1990s; black and white students barely mixed and "feelings of alienation among black

students" were a significant indicator of continuing racial exclusion (Woods, 2001, p. 97). Exclusionary practices have persisted in the twenty-first century at HWUs as Walker (2005) reported in her exploration of student narratives and institutional discourse at an Afrikaans-medium university. In 2003, complaints of racist victimisation occurred as a group of white students assaulted a black student in a university residence. In addition, apparent "no-go" areas delineated for black students, including a corridor in one of the residences with a painting of the old South African flag (Walker, 2005), was found. Walker described a "minimisation discourse" that the University responded with to racist practices that allowed for the re-inscription of the power of 'race', and thus colluded with it (Walker, 2005, p. 137).

In this instance, the HWU evidently perpetuated racial exclusion through institutional contradictions in discourse, which was observed when black students were formally admitted to student populations, but concurrently were subtly or rather covertly excluded (Walker, 2005). For example, King (2001) has found that as costs continued to rise in light of diminishing sources of funding, many students struggled to find a sense of security about their place in the institution. Thus, racism in the institution was still systemic as discriminatory practices continued to be supported by many HWUs' institutional structures. The HWU was seen as a space that continued not to have accomplished the ideal of being a completely non-sexist and non-racist environment (Mabokela, 2000).

Potgieter & Moleko (2004) put forward that black women are 'shut out' by processes in higher education institutions. This is because the institutions validate only "Eurocentric, masculinist knowledge". Through the use of interviews of twenty-seven women they explored experiences of disparities between various groups in higher education, due to the lack of implementation of "transformative policy initiatives". They investigated how black women's careers at HWUs are resultantly affected (Potgieter & Moleko, 2004, as cited in Jackson, 2005). In *Hear Our Voices* (Mabokela & Magubane, 2004), the book in which this study is presented, the authors presented explore how racist and sexist practices intersect and resultantly affect black women's experiences in institutions of higher education. Jackson in her review of the book describes the sense that the experience is "alienating, disempowering, and dismissive if left un-interrogated and unchallenged" (Jackson, 2005, p. 105).

The institutional culture of the domain is significant as this is made up of the values, social ideals and beliefs that members within them share (Smircich, 1983 as cited in Mabokela & Mawila, 2004). The symbols, rituals, myths and language of the institution are included and with these the culture informs how people ought to behave within a particular context. This creates social constructions that revolve around shared meaning (Tierney & Rhoads, 2000 as cited in Mabokela & Mawila, 2004) and are central to possibilities for successfully navigating the institution.

King (2001) found that the contextual specificities of the South African university require the student to relinquish their cultural identities in order to succeed. In many HWUs students' low success rates are equated with their inadequacy in adjusting to and moulding to standards required within the university setting (King, 2001). Students continue to be 'othered' as culturally subordinate groups despite inclusion and transformation efforts (King, 2001).

Long and Zietkiewicz (2006), in their study, looked specifically at black women students identity. The study explored, through their narratives, how the students navigate their university lives as well as their home lives and how this influences identity. It was found that a conflict of identity arose as family and culture discourses competed with those of the university setting. Their finding was that a fragmented self is to be expected as "an explosion of possibilities of self" erupts given the broadened horizons of opportunities derived from a tertiary education (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006). With the intersectionality perspective of this present study, a curiosity was unearthed in questioning what of the women's subject-positions results in this. This study attended to this in looking at the women's experiences with regards to their race category, gender and class subject-positions in interaction. This is in addition to an acknowledgement of the socio-historic contextual specificities of the HWU context and South African society.

Research in the South African university context has often suggested that women continue to have both positive and negative experiences of university (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004; Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006; Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). This is due to a number of factors. The complexity of competing, and contradictory, discourses within South African institutions themselves has a significant impact on the subjects navigating the contexts. These are of the

inclusion policies paired with the exclusionary realities that exist within them (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004). Students' experiences within these contexts are thus nuanced and multifaceted.

In 2003, Mr Kader Asmal, the then Minister of Higher Education, illuminated the disjuncture between the mandate set out by South Africa's constitution and what is occurring in reality (Walker, 2005). Despite the aim of transformation policies for all people to "feel at home in higher education", this has not been the case as the educational space continued to be marred by the discourses of the past (Asmal & James 2003, as cited in Walker, 2005, p. 135). These discourses, deeply rooted in education systems, have significant consequences as delineated by Abdi (1999):

> "Colonial and apartheid education systems were, by themselves, among the strongest tools of identity deformation and subjugation and were designed to assure the permanency of the established (and at convenience modified) status quo" (p. 155).

South Africa's transition to a new democratic dispensation required a redefinition of being for South African society as well as South African individuals (Stevens & Lockhart, 2003). Therefore the discursive disjuncture in HWU contexts, in particular, was significant as this context persisted to be a space within which institutional and social practices were not reflective of policy. The disjuncture was seen too in the discourse of national redress, empowerment and the 'rainbow' nation, paired with continued racial economic inequality reflective of South Africa's past (Walker, 2005). This is simultaneously as black women continue to strive for the substantiation of redress and equality as their plight continues due to the fact that they are the most affected and evidently those who struggle the most, economically, in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2011). This is significant to the experience of black women students of their position in society and consequentially their identities.

6. Education, Social Mobility and Identity

As an educated black female, one must grapple with the concept of transitioning past the bounds of being the "second" and of the "last" in their mobility across socially prescribed race category

and gender roles and subject-positions (Kiguwa, 2001). Mobility for black women is thus a significant and particular process of transition and resultant self-redefinition. Transcendence beyond oppression through mobility is a distinct process with significant implications for subjectivity. Upward mobility in society brings tensions and this is particularly so at the level of identity (Cole & Omari, 2003; Jetten et al, 2008; Jones, 2003). Studies of mobility of black individuals through education often show how this results in being "caught between two cultures in which their membership is contingent, challenged, and problematic" (Cole & Omari, 2003, p. 793).

There is a distinctive complexity about this position; being black and educated. There is something to moving beyond boundaries and limits previously set out for one's race category, particularly because many others continue to struggle (Cole & Omari, 2003). Class was one significant element to acknowledge as the movement beyond the boundaries is that of entering into a higher class of society. This is a position in society that belonged to and, according to many, still is owned by the white minority (Durrheim & Mtose, 2006). Being black delineates that this position is not one that is inherited. It is worked for, earned, attained through education (Cole & Omari, 2003; Jetten et al, 2008). Bourdieu (1986) calls this, that which is attained; cultural capital. 'Race's', or groups in society, who have the other forms of capital as Bourdieu (1986) purports, attain cultural capital 'naturally'. As a member of a group of a lower status (the lowest; black and woman) capital is not inherent. Attaining educational credentials therefore propels one into a position in society that is in some ways alien.

The Social Identity Theory speaks to social mobility, whereby an individual "through hard work" etc. can attain a certain status in society (Augostinos & Walker, 1995). The stance however is that because the 'exited' group's status is static a full "exiting" is not really possible. Identity is for this reason in this study seen as multiple and mouldable as opposed to static as in the Social Identity Theory. This research sees identity as informed by discourses of society- e.g. the racists and patriarchal apartheid regime, as well as an individual's position within the discourses currently and their interaction with their world.

Attaining status in society for a black woman creates a double bind position. Cole and Omari (2003) speak to the phenomenon of an educated black individual who is simultaneously of a higher class (through cultural capital, better employment opportunities etc.) and of the lowest – through their continued interaction with people of their race category. In addition to this is continued experience with racism, and discourses about what it is to be black in South Africa. Cole & Omari (2003), Jetten et al (2008) and Omi & Winant (2002) explored the experiences of educated African Americans of social mobility. This does not fully represent what the experience is in the South African context. Long & Zietkiewizc's (2006) study illuminated how for a young black South African women, a distinct phenomenon is experienced as she can embody various selves through her university experience paired with the self of her background. Durrheim &Mtose (2006) explored black students (male & female) identities in relation to each other and fellow white students.

The South African tertiary experience is thus dense and multifaceted. Furthermore, there are specific experiences that impact on students' subjectivity that are linked to attaining cultural capital, and social mobility. South African black people still largely inhabit the lower class of society, thus social mobility is a distinctive exiting process. Another significant element is language. Cultural capital being a habitus within the language of the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1986)- which is demanded of students by the educational institution, a particular shift in identity results for black South African students in having to adopt it. This is an element that is absent, or perhaps is less distinct, in the American context.

In the South African context, education is viewed by many as the most viable vehicle to upward mobility, the achievement of which enhances the propensity to challenge racial and class-based oppression (Cole & Omari, 2003). Being that upward mobility has implications for an individual's status in society, a re-evaluation of one's subject-position in the social stratification process occurs and the result is a need for a re-conceptualisation of self, as changes in an individual's social category occur so too does their self-perception or definition (Jetten et al, 2008). Attaining education grants access to better employment opportunities, lifestyle choices and other opportunities of improving one's life (Jetten et al, 2008). This is thus a significant avenue of social mobility, and that which is integral to identity as one's subject-position shifts.

Long & Zietkiewicz (2006) found the process to include an opportunity of transcendence beyond traditional black female roles.

Steele (1997) professed a particular requirement of identity in order for academic success. This is that an individual must regard academic achievement as part of their personal identity. For this to occur, "interests, skills, resources and opportunities to prosper" as a result of their achievement must be attainable in or through the academic domain (Steele, 1997, pg. 613). A sense of belonging as well as the availability of role models in the domain is thus of great importance. According to Bulhan's model of "cultural in-betweenity", educated Africans having been "acculturated", "westernised", or "detribalised" are seen as to be in the stage of capitulation (1985, as cited in Stevens & Lockhart, 2003). Inherent in this state is a sense of alienation (Bulhan, 1980).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) highlighted the psychological consequences of racial identification in educational contexts (as cited in Howard, 2000). They conceived the idea of "the burden of acting White" as the experience of black youth of America of a social pressure to not excel academically for threat of being seen as not being "authentically Black" (Ogbu, 2004). The finding was that a desire to maintain racial identity and a pressure of solidarity to fellow black students lead to academic failure of African-American students (Howard, 2000).

In America in the late 1980's, Fordham (1988) suggested that black individuals have to deny belonging to their race category in order to achieve academically. In an ethnographic study of six black high school students, she found that those youth who sought to achieve in school seemed to have abandoned their race category and culture to do so. She indicates that this is usually not a voluntary act but a choice encouraged by society and by educators. Black youth are often told to leave racial and cultural patterns behind when they enter school if they wish to succeed (Fordham, 1988).

Social class becomes a significant construct of identity particularly for upwardly mobile people (Aries & Seider, 2007). Sense of self is affected as a renegotiation of identities occurs and social class becomes an important identity domain to explore (Aries & Seider, 2007). The salience of

class in articulations of self is increased by educational attainment in particular, or in the transition from working class to academe (Jones, 2003).

As students, particularly black female students, a tension exists in the position between 'being' and 'becoming'. A difficulty arises in assuring "a sense of continuity" between the two (Aries & Seider, 2007). The identity of individuals who have been upwardly mobile is affected by both their past and present class positions (Jones, 2003). Often, black individuals carry the responsibility of having to "give back to less fortunate members of the race" and thus continue to be involved with the lower class they exited (Cole & Omari, 2003, p.790). Black individuals in particular, thus continue to be "straddling two worlds" despite their mobility (Necherman, Carter & Lee, 1999, as cited in Cole & Omari, 2003, p. 790). Class is embedded in one's history and therefore also continues being lived in the present. Thus, coupled with alienation from one's background, family and past is a lacking sense of belonging to the new world as individuals must contend with a social environment that may be in many ways different to the one left behind (Aries & Seider, 2007). Class background has been found to be significant in the psychological experience of university due to this sense of alienation (Ostrove, 2003). Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of capital, discussed below, are valuable in illuminating how this is the case.

7. Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of Cultural Capital is one avenue of how social class can be incorporated into identity (as cited in Aries & Seider, 2007). Firstly, capital is understood as the power that a particular group holds society (Bourdieu, 1986). The combined sources of a group's capital make for the strength of their status in society. In addition to Cultural Capital is; Social Capital, Economic Capital and Symbolic Capital. Social capital is generated socially within the networks between family and society. Economic capital is wealth, and Symbolic Capital is individual status and prestige through personal qualities. This is therefore the various aspects of the group's status, which make it above others, combined.

Cultural capital is defined as the "knowledge of high culture and educational attainment" (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 153). It is symbolic as opposed to wealth, possessions etc. that are

material (Bourdieu, 1986). The elements of one's group status in class are thus evident through capital and cultural capital is that which the individual claims ownership of. Through educational attainment an individual attains this sense of ownership to capital and thus claims a subject-position of power in society. The attainment of educational credentials for individuals of a group with lowered status in a society's hierarchy is for this reason particularly significant. Education can grant capital, in spite of a lacking Social, Economic or Symbolic Capital of the individual's group.

Groups with a foundation of the other forms of capital have an advantage in the very attainment of Cultural Capital. This is as yielding benefits from ones Cultural Capital; educational attainments or qualifications, depends on one's social capital (being social connections; family etc.) and the cultural capital previously invested by this network of connections (Bourdieu, 1986). Social Capital is thus the capital networks of investment; in relationships and connections, which ascertains a group's power and status within society. The benefits of one's education are therefore more easily accessed when one is of a background/group that has an existing established capital network. Given that Social capital is largely inherited rather than acquired, it can be postulated that groups previously advantaged through history will have an advantage in this regard (Bourdieu, 1986). As a result cultural capital is seldom possessed by the lower class of society (Dumais, 2002). Cultural capital is seen essentially as the knowledge of culture that belongs to the upper class. It is a resource of power as it ascertains the perpetuation of supremacy in status in society (Dumais, 2002).

Within the context of social inequality, the knowledge of, or that belongs to, the middle and upper dominant class is seen as most valuable (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, as cited in Yosso, 2005). This is most evident in education. The educational environments require of the student this knowledge in order to succeed. However, education is the avenue through which mobility is attained, in the case of one not being born into a family of "valuable" knowledge. Social inequalities are often reproduced, therefore, as a lack of cultural capital leads to a struggle in succeeding in educational environments (Yosso, 2005).

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural reproduction ascertains that children of middle class families achieve educational credentials easier due to the cultural capital they possess (as cited in Sullivan, 2001). Through habitus, children who have more cultural capital feel more comfortable in educational environments (Dumais, 2002). An individual's place in the class system informs their educational habitus. Habitus is one's knowledge of and fluency with the requirements of the context. Habitus delineates the elements of the individual; their identity, that they are to invest in their educational attainments and their level of expectation of success (Dumais, 2002).

The owning of social capital in society- which is the inherent benefits of networks and relationships in sectors of power, delineates the ease of attaining cultural capital. Groups with social capital have a lineage of connections that create and perpetuate opportunities for continued economic, and otherwise, success. Power and supremacy is retained this way (Dumais, 2002). As cultural capital is seen as the knowledge of culture that belongs to the upper class, those of the lower class- without social capital struggle to attain it- or do not inherently have a 'right' to it. Cultural Capital is the familiarity with the dominant culture- "the ability to use and understand 'educated' language" (Sullivan, 2001, p. 3). It is difficult for those of a lower class to achieve in educational systems because of this.

> "By doing away with giving explicitly what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture" (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Sullivan, 2001, p. 3)

As found by Long & Zietkiewicz, (2006); the conflict in identity rises for black children in education as they must mould to the expectations of this environment, by so doing declaring and being ridded of the cultural knowledge of their upbringings and family backgrounds. The educational system communicates, through its expectations of a certain kind of knowledge- cultural capital of the dominant class that their knowledge is of a lower status. Similarly, Dolby (2001) explored in South African learners' constructions of identity in the post-apartheid schooling experience. The youth's narratives where unpacked in seeking to understand identities

and cultures in the new South African school context. The structure of the "Model C" school was delved into as a seat of multiple process of definition and redefinition of selves and cultures as schools transformed in their policies as well as racial composition of student body.

Having social capital; a higher status in society, means that you are of a group that affords you accumulation of educational achievements. Children of these groups perpetually continue to be advantaged. Tramonte & Williams (2010) speak to Bourdieu's concept of social reproduction- being the "socialisation of individuals" of differing social classes (p. 202). This process informs the children of what is "comfortable or natural" (habitus). Habitus also speaks to the occupational expectations of women vs. men. Possibilities available to certain groups result in gendered forms of cultural capital. It is that which is expected and seen as of this group. Groups of higher status in society thus have more ownership of cultural capital and resultantly education. Institutions control this as certain codes of behaviour are rewarded and expected; re-instilling the power of higher-status groups (Tramonte & Williams, 2010).

Educational systems continue to "transmit" and "reward" the culture of the dominant class (Dumais, 2002). The social class of the family determines their ability to pass down certain knowledge; cultural capital. Bourdieu (1989) further postulates that the educational system of societies rewards the culture of the dominant class. The system prefers certain competences and styles; expecting them but not affording them. This is the gateway to social mobility (Dumais, 2002).

A student must, in order to succeed in the educational context, have the ability to internalise the dominant culture. Therefore in order to gain and attain Cultural Capital, one is required to assume aspects of the dominant class. However, social class denotes the accessibility of this as capital is passed down through the family and related connections (Dumais, 2002). Social Capital is linked to this concept as it is that which is invested by an individual's family background (Bourdieu, 1986). This is established through time and attained through networks of privilege. Thus, whilst those from working class origins may attain a sense of alienation in the transition to academe, those from the upper-class retain a sense of these domains being "theirs" and established to maintain their position (Ostrove, 2003). An educational system can as a result

reinforce differences in cultural capital, leaving little opportunity for social mobility (Dumais, 2002).

A concept of "deficit thinking" describes the phenomenon of blaming the families or backgrounds of students for their non-seamless assimilation to educational environments and for poor performance. This thinking is a perspective that defines elements of the families or backgrounds as "deficit". Often these are labelled as a lack of knowledge of "normative cultural knowledge and skills", or a lack of parental support or value of education (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). The outcome of this thinking is the view that what is required is an instilling in students a knowledge that is of capital value- determined by the hegemony of society (Yosso, 2005). It is thus necessary in such an inquest into the subjectivities of individuals, in and through their educational experiences, that this hegemony be challenged.

As Yosso (2005) asserts, in light of the tenets of Critical Race Theory;

> CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity (p. 73).

8. Conclusion

This review has conveyed the intricateness of identity and specifically black women's identities in surveying various aspects deemed as integral to understanding that of black women students. Cardinal to this is the frameworks of social constructionism, critical race theory and black feminism. These delineated the viewpoint of identities and subjectivity as complex and multi-faceted. This framework allowed for an acknowledgement of and consciousness of broader societal elements that influence subjects, as well as their interaction with discourses in the contexts in which they find themselves. This founded the seeking of an understanding of the women's identities.

Adopting a viewpoint of the intersectional and complex nature of identity, this study explores how social mobility, resulting from educational access, affects constructions of identity for black women. Noting the socially constructed nature of the categories of class, 'race' and gender, the multiplicity of identities as a result of these varying subject-positions is unearthed. Black women's expressions of their own sense of self, coupled with an acknowledgement of the context of the HWU, and of the 'raced' and gendered nature of South African society at large, are prioritised.

The concept of cultural capital further illuminates the intricacies of identities and subjectivities in society. Shown to be significant to individuals, particularly educational, experiences the concept allows for an illumination of everyday interactions between people and the contexts within which these occur. This discussion located the symbolic, intangible, resources established through historical patterns and thus transposes the focus beyond merely the categories of race, class and gender.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Method

This research project sought to use the focus group forum as a means of gathering data on the construction of women's identities within their talk about experiences of the higher education context. The focus group dynamics served to enhance the production of knowledge, shared amongst the group members. Knowledge attained was derived organically from the interaction of the women, the illumination of their shared subject-positions, and their resultant identity constructions through the process. This chapter served to outline how this was conducted. First, the research aim, objectives and questions were outlined. Following this, the research procedure and the method of analysis employed were highlighted. The chapter concluded with the researcher personal reflections on the research process.

1. Research Aim

The overarching aim of this research study was to explore and understand constructions of identity of black women students within a South African HWU context 18 years post-apartheid. The sub-aim of this study was to achieve an understanding of the constitution of the subject-positions of black women students through exploring how groups of students made meaning of their university and other social experiences.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study examined the following objectives within the research aim:

- To explore how black female students construct their identities within the context of 'race', class and gender;
- To, through the experiences of black female South African students, explore the intersectionality of identity particularly in the complexities of the identity of black women;
- To explore how their subject-positions are informed by the discourses available in the HWU and the post-apartheid socio-historic context; and

- To explore their experiences of social mobility and illuminate how Cultural and Social, Capital resultantly manifest in their identity constructions.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do black female students construct their identities?
    a.) How do they speak about their identities as black females?
    b.) What other identities do they speak about?
2. How are black female students' identities affected by the HWU context and the South African post-apartheid context at large?
3. How are black female students' identity constructions influenced by the social mobility and/or the capital attained of their education?

2. Research Design

This study utilised an exploratory study design that was consistent with a qualitative approach. The study aimed to explore the students' articulations of their identity constructions and how mobility, resulting from educational access, affects class, racial and gender identity. Qualitative research has been shown to best address questions oriented towards "exploration, discovery and inductive knowledge" (Few, Stephens & Rose-Arnett, 2003, p. 206) as it allowed for methods of inquisition that can unearth a depth of material from relatively small samples. This design was best suited for this research as the aim was to explore the created meanings of black, female students' identities in relation to their education. Furthermore, the design allowed for a phenomenological approach whereby women's experiences were prioritised, as well as agreed that "reality is constructed" through individual and collective processes (Few et al, 2003).

Focus group discussions were the method of investigation. With a group of 16 women, the aim was not to generalise the students' perceptions to a greater population but to explore their personal experiences in depth in order to attain a deeper understanding of the fluid and multiple nature of their identities. Depth was attained by looking at the women's experiences "in their own right" (Mama, 1995, p.80). Comparing the experiences between the women as opposed to in relation to other race categories or males further served this mandate (Mama, 1995).

The study adopted both the interpretive and critical paradigms as an approach. The focus of the study was on the subjective meaning-making of individuals, but also acknowledged that understanding the effects of the social context of the South African HWU was necessary. The study thus sought to give voice to the women's self-articulated identities, viewed by the researcher as potentially silenced beforehand and also to lift the veil on how this was informed by South African socio-historic factors.

3. Data Collection

The main means of data collection in this research was the use of focus group discussions. To further enhance the findings, observations of each of the discussions were made and noted by the researcher. In addition to this were the researcher's reflections throughout the research process which were documented to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings.

Three focus groups of five, seven and four women respectively, were conducted. The discussions focused on the women's educational experiences within the HWU context, the mobility their education grants, and the social ramifications of this positioning. The ways in which the participants constructed their identities, how they conceptualised their sense of selves (in terms of race category, class and gender) and how education has impacted on this, were examined. The researcher asked open-ended and semi-structured questions, following an interview guideline. Through a brief introduction and a vignette being given to the participants to read, the topic of the women's position as black and female in an HWU in South Africa was fore grounded as the focus for the discussion.

Focus group discussion have been found to be particularly useful for exploring knowledge and experiences as it capitalises on the group interaction and communication between participants in order to generate data (Kitzinger, 1995). This setting was particularly valuable to draw on as an empowerment tool, in that a forum was provided for the women to share their knowledge. The group dynamics allowed for a processing of individual experiences and thoughts, together with other black women, thus raising conscious awareness of their experiences (Few, Stephens & Rouse-Arnett, 2003).

Fontana & Fey (1994) asserted that the advantages of focus groups as a method of data collection were numerous, including "being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, (and) stimulating to respondents…" (as cited in MacDougall & Fudge, 2001, p. 118). The richness of data was enhanced by the nature of group interaction that occurred in focus group discussions. The group dynamics yielded a greater depth of information compared to individual interviews as a result of these dynamics.

Mama (1995) has reflected that focus group discussions have allowed for more authentic social relations than individual interviews. In an individual interview, although "rapport" was sought in the interaction, a level of detachment was generally required of the interviewer to allow for "objectivity" (Oakley, 1981, as cited in Mama, 1995). On the other hand, in the focus group forum, the participants' discussion and interaction with each other was prioritised. In comparison, the individual interview has been shown to create a power dynamic where the interviewee was disempowered (Mama, 1995).

Furthermore, the group dynamics of a group discussion "aid recall and elaboration" (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002, p. 727). Focus group discussions have been found to help individuals clarify and explore their views, as an exploration of what people think, as well as how they think and why, was facilitated (Kitzinger, 1995). The focus group discussions provided information often inaccessible when using other methods. Shared and common knowledge was tapped into by looking into this "everyday form of communication", and the consensus and dissent amongst the group members surfaced. The possible loss in the face of this advantage, however, was the possibility of silencing voices of dissent amongst dominating consensus (Kitzinger, 1995). The space being provided for the exploration of the women's shared and varied subject-positions, however, allowed for difference to be illuminated as the various constructs of identity manifest through social interaction. Homogenous perspectives of black female identity were thus transgressed.

Focus groups have also been shown to provide information about how knowledge or experiences were articulated within a given context (Kitzinger, 1995). Most significant for this study was the

empowering value of focus group discussions. Talking with other people, within these contexts, sharing the same experiences could cause shifts in perspectives. The combining of an empowerment value within research such as this is integral. This allows for the empowering of participants through their input. The distinction, through this method, between the researcher and the researched is challenged (Brydon-Miller, 1997).

Such empowerment is specifically valuable within communities of oppressed groups. Through their active participation, the root of oppression is addressed "with the goal of achieving positive social change" (Brydon-Miller, 1997, p. 661). In addition to this, it was sought that participants learn and transform (are conscientised) through the process. The focus group proved essential in this element of the research as participants' active contribution to this was integral to the research.

4. Participants

The students were sampled within the Johannesburg-based HWU setting across different disciplines. Each focus group consisted of between 4 and 7 participants. This number was suitable as too large a group would not allow for sufficient participation of all of individuals involved. A small sample was best for research of this nature, so as to allow for a rich texture of insight into the participants' experiences. The size of the sample was suitable for the focus group discussions and this being an in-depth exploration of this group's perceptions and experiences, generalizability was not sought.

The study thus made use of purposive sampling as specific criteria were required for participation. The inclusion criteria for the sample were that students be black, female, South African and preferably above first-year level in the institution. The sample was limited to black women only as they have a "shared historical reality" (Few et al, 2003, 206). This was integral to the achieving of the research aims and objectives. As defined by the Employment Equity Act (1998) "black people is a generic term which means Africans, Coloureds and Indians" (South Africa 1998, as cited in Christopher, 2002, p. 406.). Although racial categories were viewed as constructs, "rather than descriptions of essences" (Posel, 2001, p. 87) the marginality derived from their racial identity made for shared experiences.

The initial aim was for the groups to comprise of African black students. A difficulty arose however, due to the nature of snowball sampling, with implementing this. The groups became more inclusive, as the researcher discovered that through referrals and networks used for sampling that the groups included coloured and mixed-race students as well. The description of a race category as "Coloured" has over centuries, and states, in South Africa, moulded and changed significantly (Christopher, 2002). The women in the group described themselves as coloured, and "half-white; half black", respectively. Similarly, due to networks, two of the focus groups had participants studying at different universities. These where two other HWUs; one of Johannesburg, the other of Pretoria.

One of the three groups contained a mixture of African black, coloured and mixed-race students, whilst the rest were comprised of African black students. Two of the focus groups consisted of an amalgamation of undergraduate and post-graduate students and the final focus group consisted of post-graduates only.

The first focus group had two post-graduate students, one Honours and one Masters. The Honours student was studying Politics, and the Masters student was studying an Arts degree. The rest of the group consisted of three second-year students, one student straddling first and second year, and one third-year student. All of them were located in the Humanities Faculty. The second focus group had four second-year students, one studying an LLB, one studying Psychology and two studying IT. The fifth member of this group was a third-year Somatology student. The last focus group consisted of four post-graduate, Honours, students in Media, Journalism and Psychology.

Several participants spoke to coming from poor backgrounds- both of rural and urban/township homes. There was, too, a representation of some more privileged participants. There were differences, thus, in class experiences as well as previous schooling; with some participants having attended schools of the previously deemed "Model C", and others of less privileged schools. The total number of participants across all three of the focus group discussions was 16.

5. Procedure

As part of the proposal submission procedure, ethical clearance for the study was sought and attained from the University of the Witwatersrand (See Appendix E). The research processes was then embarked upon as follows.

Invitations to participate were handed out to black female students (Appendix A). These students were from varying faculties. The researcher made use of recruitment efforts where key locations, such as computer labs and libraries, to invite participants. This network was used to access other black female students. Using the snowball pattern, the students were asked to recommend (or pass on the invitations to) other black female students who would be interested in participating. The invitation included details of the research, its aims and the procedures, and an invitation to participate.

Interested students were asked to provide their contact details, and were then contacted about the logistical details of the focus group. Suitable and convenient times for the discussions were set and communicated to the participants. The focus groups were held at a convenient location for participants, two being on the university campus and one at a residence off-campus.

At each focus group the researcher provided participants with consent forms required for their participation (Appendix B). The interviews were recorded and thus a separate consent form for the recording was also provided (Appendix C). Each focus group lasted approximately 1.5 hours, with the discussion being led by the researcher following a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D).

The focus group forum where, through interaction with other black women, the students' identities were spoken sought for an organic discovery of knowledge of black female identity in the HWU context. The questions in the guide aimed to encourage discussion around the participants' subjective experience of their identity constructions as black women, their education, and how their education influences these constructions.

A vignette was used to build rapport and kick-start the discussion. This allowed for a less personal and threatening way to explore sensitive topics. It served to allow participants to warm up to each other and open up to sharing their thoughts with each other (Barter & Renold, 1999). The vignette served to get participants thinking about the experience of black women in higher education. A series of questions pertaining to their own experiences and how they may relate to that in the vignette then followed. The use of vignettes has been found to be a "valuable technique" in exploring people's perceptions and beliefs (Barter & Renold, 1999). It has also been deemed a useful tool in gaining knowledge of people's lives (Hughes & Hubby, 2002.)

The questions began with an enquiry into whether the participants could relate to the story in the vignette and then narrowed down to their own specific experiences. With a focus on their education, their university experience and how this affects their lives, subject-positions in society and social relationships, the questions sought to lead participants through an exploratory process of sharing and unearthing their identity constructions.

6. Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used in analysing the discussion material. Thematic content has been shown to be a foundational method for qualitative analysis. This method described data through identifying, analysing and reporting patterns found in data. Meaning was derived from "thematised" and accordingly analysed data, granting a rich and detailed account (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Systematic description of the data was sought through thematic analysis. This was achieved by a development of categories, "derived inductively from the data itself" (Fossey, et al, 2002). A grounded theory element was inherent in thematic analysis as theory attained from the data was used to reformulate, or re-illuminate pre-existing theory (Fossey, et al, 2002).

Thematic analysis was deemed best suited for this study as it prioritised the participant's voice. This phenomenological approach enhanced the method's ability to give precedence to idiosyncratic experiences and expressions of these. The researcher sought to present "an account" of the women's experiences. Their interaction, expressions and knowledge was

prioritised to be represented. As “experiences are the route to identity” (Mama, 1995, p. 81), the themes derived of what they expressed of them illuminated their identity constructions.

With the social constructionist focus of this study, an acknowledgement of how these accounts are “discursively positioned” was upheld (Hollway, 1989; Weedon, 1987, as cited in Mama, 1995, p.81). However, the emphasis of this study was on the women’s experiences as opposed to assigning them to factors outside of their control, which a process of discourse analysis would potentially have resulted in. The organic production of knowledge, sought from the use of focus group discussions, was sourced from the prioritisation of the women’s articulations. Gergen’s (1989) concept of the “discourse user” was brought to the fore as the women’s identity construction processes were granted agentic power.

It was acknowledged that discourses impact the women’s identities and subjectivities; however the focus of the inquisition was on these women’s experiences of the discourses. The concept of capital and how it translates in everyday societal, and specifically educational, experiences was used to understand how discourse positions the women.

In deriving the themes, first the transcripts of the focus group discussions were read. In this process important aspects that came through were noted. These were themes that the researcher found as pertinent to the women’s experiences of their education, and their subject-positions in the HWU and South African society. Twenty of these themes arose at first. The researcher then sorted and assigned (coded) what was said by participants into each theme. Each transcript of the focus groups resultantly had notes of emergent themes, under which quotes (identified by the line number in the transcript) were allocated.

The coding process was particularly significant as it enabled the emergence of similar data, assisting in the picking up of patterns and relationships between codes (Fossey, et al, 2002). On reflection of the initial themes, the process was felt necessary to be repeated. A consideration of group dynamics such as forms of consensus, deviant expressions, and changes of mind was included. Kitzinger (1995) described the necessity for “deviant case analysis”. It is necessary for the researcher to note expressions that do not follow consensus of the group discussions, or that

which is in the researchers "blind spot". The researcher thus also made note of "minority views" and views that may not have fit in with theory (Kitzinger, 1995). With a more open outlook, additional themes were derived reaching 34. Again under each of these, quotes were assigned. As patterns emerged, similar themes were grouped together. Five overarching themes resulted.

7. Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research

Trustworthiness of qualitative research was necessary in order to assure the rigour of the process. It was considered the "standards of quality" required of qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). A number of ways in which a qualitative researcher can assert the trustworthiness of the research have been found. Shenton (2004) proposed that ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative data involves four elements. These were credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, 1981, as cited in Shenton, 2004).

Ensuring credibility implied that the research provided a true account of the phenomena under investigation (Shenton, 2004). This was achieved by using research methods that have been proven credible in previous studies, and through an adequate understanding and knowledge of the participants and the culture of the context they were located in. In the present study, the researcher asserted that using focus groups was a valuable method, as various other studies such as Durrheim & Mtose (2006) and Mama (1995) have productively employed this method. As proven valuable in these studies, the use of multiple groups also aided credibility. The engagement with three separate focus groups which included black, female students allowed for a familiarity with the group context. This was also enhanced by the researcher's own knowledge and understanding, as a black female student herself.

Credibility was further enhanced as participants were allowed the opportunity to refuse participation, which also assisted in encouraging honesty. This was supported by the researcher's communication of the importance of the honesty with regards to their personal experience, in building rapport at the beginning of each discussion (Shenton, 2004). The feedback from the participants about the process also enhanced the credibility of the discussions. An authenticity of the discussions was proved by the participant's reflections at the end of each focus group in their

reflections of the process. Their expressions of how finding common ground in the articulation of their personal experiences of their identities as educated Black women and the liberatory aspect of being conscientised, illuminated this. In a sense this feedback discussion served as a form of "member-checking", being another form of enhancing trustworthiness of the data (Fossey, et al, 2002).

Due to the nature of qualitative research (with a small number of participants or environments), it is harder to prove that the findings can be transferred to other similar contexts and populations (Shenton, 2004). According to Shenton (2004) what was required of the researcher was transparency regarding;

a) The number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based;
b) Any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data;
c) The number of participants involved in the fieldwork;
d) The data collection methods that were employed;
e) The number and length of the data collection sessions;
f) The time period over which the data was collected.

(Shenton, 2004, p. 70)

The reader on the basis of the information given ought to determine how far the findings can be transferred. In order to do so, readers require a "thick description" by the researcher of the findings to be able to ascertain the transferability of the findings (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). To ensure this "thick description" (Shenton, 2004), the researcher was in consensus with Morrow (2005) who asserted that the key to trustworthiness of qualitative data was sufficiency of data and data immersion. With over eight hours of transcribed focus group discussions, the three groups provided abundant material. The researcher also spent much time listening to the recordings whilst reading the transcriptions in order to ensure accuracy as well as to familiarise herself with the data. The researcher's observations and personal reflections ("field notes') further enhanced the "thickness" of the data. This included that of group dynamics and significant themes or louder voices in each group. Thus, the researcher's observations, reflections and interpretations of the group discussion processes enhanced the information unearthed (Fossey, et al, 2002) and aided the transferability of the findings (Shenton, 2004).

Ensuring dependability required that the researcher be thorough in her description of the methods used. This was necessary for the reader to be assured that the practices undertaken were appropriate and correct. Dependability also suggested the propensity for the study to be repeated. In this research, a comprehensive description of the methodology was provided, enhancing the dependability of the study and allowing for replication studies to be pursued.

Lastly, confirmability was concerned with whether the report provided a true account of the data. The researcher ensured that the expressions and experiences of the participants were presented and not the researcher's own predispositions. The researcher was transparent about her own predispositions and acknowledged the effect of this on the report (Shenton, 2004). This was achieved through exploration of issues of reflexivity.

8. Issues of Reflexivity

Reflexivity served to inform the readers of the researcher's perspective. A researcher must engage in the process in order to manage her subjectivity and to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Morrow, 2005). My own identity and position as a black female student undoubtedly affected the manner in which I engaged in this process. This exploration, from the selection of the topic, the questions brought to the fore, to the way I engaged with the women through the discussions, and the analysis and write up were informed by my own experiences. Therefore, it was necessary and imperative to continuously indulge in reflexive efforts. This was in order to refrain from infusing this personal subject-position into the process and the findings in a manner that was not transparent, but also to use it as a source of valuable information.

The focus of the research was influenced by my seeking to understand my experiences as well as uncover how identity constructions of similar others are affected by these. To this end, it was most fitting for the study to be qualitative and explorative. Qualitative research provided the breadth of frameworks and resources that most fitted my desire to delve into the complexities of black female identities. The interest in these complexities, which I had an intuitive sense of being a black female myself, led to the more exploratory and flexibly allowance of qualitative research. Furthermore, I felt it necessary to allow for the process to be led by the participants and their assertions and to remove as much as possible any directive means that would be required of

quantitative methods. Consequentially, the fact that the focus groups were of as little as possible of my own leading ensured that it was as much as possible the participants voice that was heard. The use of multiple group discussion allowed for a sufficient amount of data that further aided this.

As the focus of the study was on the women's constructions of identity, it was important that their voice be paramount through the analysis as well. The interpretive paradigm, served to elicit the most organic representation of this. As my goal was for the research to serve to empower the voice of fellow black female students and produce as organic a representation of their articulations- the thematic means of analysis of the discussions was deemed most suiting.

The focus group context itself also allowed for an illumination of my position and its effect on the process. The focus group as a method of study resulted in an empowerment of the participants. In each of the groups I was therefore pushed to an awareness of how my perspective was different to, or the same as, the women's. I aimed to be conscious of and minimise the role I played in leading or influencing the discussion to ensure that my own views and experiences were effectively managed. This also provided to be assistive of the analysis of the results. I returned to the data itself multiple times, following reflection, to verify themes and reassure of a true reflection of the participants articulations. Through supervision I became aware of the literature and questions towards which I gravitated and how this would sway my perspective and the findings.

My position as a black female student, proved to be a resource as well. It was assistive to be able to draw on my experiences through an HWU, and relate them to the women in the study. Within the focus group contexts, it can be expected that the women would have been more open to speaking of their experiences because it was to a fellow black woman student. Rapport was easily built and in addition to this; I believe the questions I selected, informed by my own self-knowledge, allowed to unearth a dearth of data. This element could have been lacking had I not had the insight my positionality brought.

Few et al (2003) suggested that "[t]he theories we select to explain a phenomenon results from our own personal experiences and how we understand our social location and that of others in the world" (p. 206). An awareness of that which I chose to focus on or omitted was raised and a necessity to challenge these stances by reflecting on my own subject position was emphasised. Continuously assessing my position, in my thoughts, feelings and articulations and the direction these steered me towards equipped me with a valuable meta-awareness.

Chapter 4: The Report

Five themes were derived from the content of the focus groups discussions. The women's expressions of their HWU experiences were found to fall into these labelled as; 'Positive and negative experiences in the HWU', 'The Triple Jeopardy Identity' , 'Differences in Social and Cultural Capital' , 'The Tensions in Social Mobility' , and 'Democracy vs. the struggle continues'.

'Positive and negative experiences in the HWU' in which the experience of the HWU context and conforming to its requirements are expressed, shows a variance of the women's HWU lives both socially and academically. 'The Triple Jeopardy Identity' speaks to the manifestation of the oppression of black women in the HWU context, whilst 'Differences in Social and Cultural Capital' which speaks to the variance in students HWU experiences as a result of Capital, illuminated how the various forms of capital, and Social and Cultural in particular, are significant to the students functioning in the HWU. 'The Tensions in Social Mobility' is of the women's experiences of their social mobility and other aspects of their education and the responsibilities that come with this. 'Democracy vs. the struggle continues' speaks to discursive disjuncture's in the HWU as well as the greater South African society and the impact this has on the women's subject positions and identity constructions.

Although the results are presented in a thematic manner, the material raised in the focus group discussions was in no way as compartmentalised. The way the women spoke about their experiences was complex. The women's identities as they were expressed as diverse and complicated were contested and unstable, and this too was reflected.

1. Positive and Negative Experiences in the HWU

An important element that was raised across the focus groups was that the women illuminated that students face jarringly different realities. This is so despite being in the same HWU context

and being exposed to the same elements. Students continue on, living and learning in the same spaces however having very diverse realities. Participant's expressions of this showed how, even amongst black students; coming from different backgrounds, having different resources and opportunities, students have disparities among their university experiences.

1.1 Capital Allowing a Sense of Ease in the HWU

Lacking capital was expressed by some as resulting in a different perspective of the resources that the University offers and avails to students. Coming from a position of privilege, in comparison to fellow black students, this participant expressed how eye-opening, and somewhat jarring, this realisation was. In this segment we see how her privileged position aids a sense of ease in the HWU. Her position is that "life is good", counting access to internet and such as the reason why, whereas students not in this position have a different experience.

> Participant: … in our lecture rooms; the person right next to me might be having an absolutely different experience. Black female as well, sitting next to you, might be struggling to even get accommodation, to just be in this building. The sacrifices that she's probably made as a female that probably someone from the same family who is a male would not have experienced. But she would experience because where she comes from people are telling her it's a waste of money to come as a woman to school. …Do you know what I mean? That's the mentality, cos I mean I experienced that. There was this girl who, I only discovered in my third year that that was her reality. And here I was thinking that uh, there's internet, we can go surf throughout the night, and I mean life is good here, for everyone. I mean it should be good. How could it actually, how could somebody else experience it otherwise. And then I also learnt that there are students who actually sleep in the 24 hour section of the library. And it just made me start looking at my own existence here in a different way. You know?

Students without her privileges find the university setting far more impoverishing. These students have access to the same resources within the HWU; however their overall university experience is significantly disparate; harsh and difficult for students struggling financially and much more of ease for those who are not. We see the comparison with regards to her gender

position- in her family; being that males are not prioritised over her, and also with regards to her class- in that she does not have financial difficulties that would result in a below standard university experience.

1.2 Conforming to the HWU Requirements

Sacrificing is seen to exist in the educational settings as is informed by discourses within this context. The students express a requirement to adapt, shown here through the experience of adapting to the English language. The dominance of the English language communicates a lesser importance and worth of others. A sense of loss is expressed in the compromise involved in adjusting to and acclimatising to the language as the women do not experience a reciprocation of this compromise.

> Participant: Ya, I think what's worrying is that we as black people or black women, we always have to be accommodative to the…to the different race and what not. You know we always need to be understanding, always speaking English with them. Why don't they get, why don't they adapt to our, you know, our living. We always have to be adaptive to their living, which I think is not fair. And we, we actually make ourselves vulnerable to them. We actually allow them to treat us in that way. (What) if I'm gonna be with you and I'm gonna be like you know what, *ke Motswana, ke Mosotho* (I'm a Tswana, I'm a Sotho)? Either way you must learn my language. I think you need to be just as willing …

This student illuminates how a significant effort is involved in transgressing one's mother tongue. She describes that through this we "make ourselves vulnerable". This illustrates how an adaptation of language in the HWU in social, as well as formal interactions, is an act of self-compromise; a sense of being stripped of an element of identity. She asserts the necessity to insist on speaking her mother-tongue, that it is important that others be willing to compromise too.

The power dynamics involved in the process of compromise for the students is seen in this next segment. Ignorance towards the cultural and language disparities is seen in the formal setting of

lecture rooms and corporate environments. As described by this participant, it is communicated that black students' languages and their names have less of a place in the HWU than those of white students. The participants then explored how black women alter themselves in response to this.

> Participant 1: I had this teacher in first year, Ms B. She'll know like Daniel, she'll know Ethan, she'll know…and (with) a black person she's like 'Uh, girl in the pink top'. I'm like why can't you ask her by her name? You know Daniel or Ethan and if it's like a black person 'Ya, person in the yellow cap there'. And I'm just like, I was so angry cos I'm just like, you don't even take the time to ask me what's my name. You don't even try to like, learn my name. You know?
>
> Participant 2: Mhmm, I guess it links with what you're saying that in the corporate world there's no acceptance of the African culture. Like no, I won't have access to that death certificate because it's like my uncle; you know it may be further down the line (than) to you it would be, whereas to me it feels close. There's this misunderstanding of different cultures and there's non-acceptance.
>
> Participant 3: And you get like black people changing their names. You know like altering their names. Instead of Neliswa, I'm Nelly. *Angu Nikiwe* (when she is Nikiwe), you're Niki… So you're trying to accommodate them! Ya. (Laughter) …I'm Puppy…

We see here how the gap, raised by Kader Asmal, between the ideal mandated of South African higher education institutions and what is reality (Walker, 2005). Inclusive cultures are required of the HWUs in order to instil that all peoples are welcome. Part of reaching this goal includes an acceptance of diversity in language and cultures.

In the absence of this; black female students make sacrifices, at the level of self and identity. Aspects of self are surrendered in response to the tensions and conflicts experienced if they do not. Their positions in the HWU demand that certain parts of themselves be changed or moulded;

for example in response to the experience of the dominance of the English language in the HWU, in order for them to navigate the space successfully.

2. The 'Triple Jeopardy' Identity

The participant's expressions highlighted the 'triple jeopardy' quality of being of the bottom of social hierarchies along racial, gender as well as class categories (Kiguwa, 2001; Mama, 1995). This is moreover as intersectional as opposed to separate- these constructs combine in the students' subject positions as a black woman. The notion of being oppressed was introduced into the focus group discussions by the story in the vignette. The participants, some in using the notion specifically others not, spoke to subjugation of the black female subject in their opinions and recollections of what they experience and witness in the HWU.

2.1. The Black Female Voice Silenced

An element in the University that unearthed a sense of oppression was that of a lacking representation of the black females. This was most so seen to be experienced by post-graduate students. The HWU allows for this sense in its lack of representativeness at this level or silencing of the black female experience.

In this segment a post-graduate student, being the only black female at her level in her department, expressed her frustrations with her field of study. She expressed being barred from tackling particular subject matter that would be relevant and meaningful to her and her experience as a black female.

> Participant 1: Uh, I'm doing my masters right now and uhm, it's been, you know this whole thing about…; I'm quoting her (*vignette)* saying that suddenly she felt that she was not knowledgeable because now she found herself in this dominantly, pre-dominantly white… department. I can relate to this, it's something that I'm battling with right now to the level where I've had to adjust my study area like the kind of research I wanna do because it doesn't fit their, their ideas of knowledge and what is, what is seen as being worth looking at, you know what I mean…

Interviewer: So you feel like you have to change certain areas…

Participant 1: I have to compromise.

Interviewer: Compromise?

Participant 1: Compromise, not compromise on a level that maybe there's not enough resources; compromise because, compromise my identity. Compromise what really matters to me and rather do what's fitting to the… to the… to what they say, you know?

This student expresses that her interests and ideas, representative of her race and gender, are not seen as of value. To her this contests with her sense of self. What matters to her is integral to her identity and not being allowed to explore it undermines it. She compromises of herself in order to "fit" and to succeed in her department.

Initially a sense of dissent amongst participants arose, in their differing experiences of this. Many of the participants in the above noted discussion were silenced by this expression, being not able to relate. This emerged as largely due to their differing levels of study. Through clarification, engaging through the sense of disparity and further exploration, however, common ground, for some, was found.

Interviewer: So you feel like you don't have a chance to voice your black woman-ness in your department?

Participant 1: Yes.

Interviewer: It's kind of stifled?

Participant 1: Yes, my black perspective, my black female perspective. Ya

Participant 2: So what you're saying is that the work that they give caters to the white...

Participant 3: …To pre-dominantly reflect them.

Participant 1: …yes that's what I'm saying.

Participant 2: I can relate to that…Ya. Like uhm in my first year, you're doing uhm literature and like 80% of the work are from like white writers and 20% of the work is from black writers. It's strange because when you look at… when you look within the country it's probably like 50/50 so why can't it be 50? And most of the work is European, why can't it be African? It's very hard to identify with that kind of stuff, like I can't identify with a white man living in England when I'm a black girl living in South Africa.

Although her projection the statistics may not be accurate what is important is her sense of not being able to relate to the material provided. This has a significant impact on the students' sense of their place in the university. The emphasis on it being "very hard to identify with" asserts a sense of an effort put in by the black women to find themselves in their work, but struggling to do so. This experience illuminates the oppressiveness of a lacking representativeness.

It is necessary to note further the different experiences amongst the women. A voice of dissent was raised, in addition to that of different levels of study, with regards to racial experiences. This following segment, again of the abovementioned focus group where both post- and under-graduate students were present, an expression of difference was noted. This participant at first notes it is her being coloured that makes for a different experience- not feeling oppressed. She does however, then also explore whether her differing experience is due to her level in the university.

Participant 1: I don't, I don't know. I don't…I don't… I can't relate to much here. I'm coloured and I don't…my life hasn't really been like this girls and I… I'm not one to really speak out or anything but I haven't experienced anything that she's experienced;

uhm I don't know whether I will experience it in the future because she's in post grad, I'm still undergraduate so I'm not really, you know, recognised. But no.

Participant 2: And that's so weird; it did only start being like this for me in post-grad.

Participant 3: You see, ya.

Participant 2: Undergrad everything looked like 'Yay, it's gonna be good!' You know? And then I got to post grad and then that's where you have to learn to…to…

Participant 3: Conform.

The participant's expression was lost in post-graduate students' assertion and concurring that it is the post-graduate context that highlights a sense of inferiority. The participant's hesitancy in her expression, unearthed a sense of inferiority in her relation as an undergraduate student to the post-graduate students. She starts by referring to the girl in the vignette, in asserting that her life has not been anything like hers. She at first leaned towards negating her sense of not feeling oppressed with regards to her race category. She explored that perhaps being "coloured" is the reason for her not having the experience of oppression in relation to her race category. A very personal expression of her not being "one to speak out" shows the progression that occurred for her and others in the group, to asserting their voice. She then begins to explore that it could be that she would experience this when she is "recognised", in post-graduate studies.

2.2 Facing 'Black Girl' Stereotypes

Some women reflected on experiences in relationships were a sense of surprise was expressed at their not adhering to stereotypes of black females. In each of the groups this was largely expressed as being related by male peers. Male students were felt to express an expectation of an inferior standard in the women; in their dedication to their studies, their capabilities in relation to their studies or their propensity to tackle certain study areas found to be male-dominated.

In this segment the participant explains how the stereotypes held by male students of women students pertain to their opinion of why they cannot succeed in certain environments. This translates to male students' sense of feeling superior to the women. She explains that being subject to this only came about when contact with men in an educational setting resulted from her move from school to university.

> Participant: I went to a girl's only school so I didn't really get that much contact with males. But now in varsity I see that other male students like ya, they do tend to think that they're better than us. Just cos we're women they always say stuff like we're emotional and what not and we can't think straight and we will never make it in the corporate world and what not. So like I do come across some guys like that"

In this next segment a participant explained how it humoured, yet also offended, her that she was being judged by her outward appearance. Although in a post-graduate degree, this student felt that the judgement against her was that of diminished intelligence.

> Participant1: at the beginning of this year…Uhm, on the very first day, I got into the lab early and then this guy walked in… he gets out his seat and he sits down...the lecture goes on and then the year goes on, we start getting to know each other. And round about June this guy tells me, uhm, 'You know the very first time I saw you, I thought you were a floozy.' *(Laughter)*
>
> Interviewer: What?
>
> Participant 1: 'I thought you were like…' he basically, I can't remember his exact words, but the equivalent of what he said was that he thought that I was brain dead. And I'm like 'Bryan but why would you think that?' And he's like 'No, it's because you had a weave'. I had a weave then, and ya my hair is natural obviously, it's always been natural but then I decided to get a weave and he's like 'Ya, I looked at your cheap hair' *(laughter)* 'and I thought, ag…'

Participant 2: She's a bimbo.

Participant 1: Ya, she's a bimbo. You know I laughed. I laughed you know. I could not believe that someone could stereotype me, pigeon hole me so much to that extent without me ever having said a word to him.

This student was placed in a powerless position by the stereotypical view of her. Having a particular hairstyle informed the fellow student of what kind of women she is. This perception, from his first impression, was that she was "brain dead"- or not as intelligent as he, was held to the point where his discovering the contrary was expressed as a shock. This student's experience illuminates black female student's experiences of patriarchal as well as racist discourses. As the stereotype of a black girl being not as intelligent as a black man is asserted so is her position in general social hierarchies reiterated. Through this it can be seen how colonial (or apartheid) forms of oppression are infused through the oppressed groups- as the oppressed reinstate the oppression themselves.

The role of habitus is seen too, in the expectation of the role a woman plays in society (Bourdieu, 1986 as cited in Tramonte & Williams, 2010). For these students it is of having inferior abilities or intellect as compared to their male counterparts. The subjective experience in these interactions is significant. Disdain was expressed for being casted and stereotyped but a powerlessness is expressed too as the women are judged according to their gender or outward appearance.

2.3 The Notion of "Black Tax"

"Black tax" was explained by one of the participants to be what is experienced by educated black professionals in the working world. There is a sense that as a black individual one has to pay and endure extra dues in order to succeed. The aim, through this, is to prove one worthy of their achievements and to show that black racial stereotypes do not adhere to them. Following the hard work of studying towards a degree and attaining a qualification is thus the further gruelling process of proving your worth it in the work environment. As the black racial category denotes lack in the combined forms of capital, black individuals who are educated must work hard

(significantly harder than those of other race categories) to justify their positions. Social mobility is thus attained, e.g. through better employment opportunities, however, within this is still a sense of being at the 'bottom' and 'last' (Kiguwa, 2001). There is thus, a struggle for legitimacy despite the Cultural Capital of education as being black, a woman and (assumed or expected to be) of a lower class denotes that you are not good enough.

> "Black tax is like; we work in a white dominated industry and you're a black person and you have to work ten times as hard to prove yourself as a black person. So women have to work twenty times to prove themselves, just cos you're black and you're female. So like that for me is like really disturbing that women always have to like put that extra ten percent you know to prove themselves that "I am qualified". Even if you have a degree, people still like look down at you if you're black and you're female. They still like question your capabilities and they question everything you do. They question; whether I can go to a black lawyer who's a female or a doctor and I'd still get the same amount, the same standard as a man whose white you know… it's very discouraging when you hear things like that because you yourself as a young woman getting an education, you think about such things. After… even though I get my degree, I still have to put in an extra twenty percent just for people to take me seriously; for people to know that I'm capable of this qualification. I earned it; I didn't buy it you know I earned it. But then it's really discouraging because I don't know you're powerless in that situation because it's other people that determine your capabilities, not your degree anymore you know."

This student's expression that having to pay "black tax" is "discouraging" and "disturbing" illuminates how emotionally taxing the experience of it is. She illustrates how this requirement of black women can have a significant effect on confidence and self-worth. A significant amount of effort, as well as anxiety, seems to be ingrained in the process as paired with the accomplishment and pride of attaining one's degree is the fear of it not mattering because of one's race category; the fruition of which being that the black woman professional's position, skills and qualifications are questioned.

“Black tax” thus induces that even when educated black women stand outside of the “triple jeopardy” position in society; being that their educational attainment grants them cultural capital, the jeopardy is still imposed as one is assumed to still be of the lower, or poor, class of society. It is experienced that the opinion would be that the individual does not have the skills and abilities of the higher, dominant class because she is a black woman and therefore does not belong in certain professional spheres. One is in instants thus drained of the accomplished sense of achievement and a process of regaining and claiming self-worth, paying the “tax”, as an educated professional ensues.

3. Differences in Social Capital and Cultural Capital

Here Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts of Social Capital and Cultural Capital and their impact on the identity of the students are illuminated. In this theme the participants highlighted the experience of one’s Social Capital, or lack thereof, as determined by certain elements in the HWU environment. The HWU is explained to in many instances have the propensity to ensure that, for the black female, one’s background and family elements are devalued. The result is a sense of not being as well-equipped as others, who have Social Capital, in this context. This was largely expressed as interconnected to race category as those with Social Capital were expressed to largely be white students. Cultural Capital is more easily adopted by them; the white students have a command of the educational environment as a result of their Social Capital. Lack of Social Capital thus emerges as a significant barrier in the HWU experience of the black women.

3.1 The Sense of Feeling Inferior

It was seen that the women at times feel a sense of inferiority in their sense of self when faced with the difference between themselves and white students. We see how the combined forms of capital and lack thereof make for this position. One of the women’s expressions described a sense of feeling personally inferior because of individual personal qualities (e.g. in how she speaks), Symbolic Capital (Bourdieu, 1986), that she felt she does not possess. An awareness of this coupled with the difference in Social Capital; wealth and access to resources (Bourdieu,

1986), being illuminated by the context (certain requirements for assignments etc.) enhances a sense of lacking for the students.

> Participant 1: I think I can relate to kinda feeling inferior around white people…but to me it's not about, I don't think it's about the way they speak or the way they talk about certain topics, its more, uhm…I don't know it's like an uneasy feeling…like
>
> Participant 2: Ya.
>
> Participant 1: You don't know how to relate to them in some ways and even like when they talk about… let's say when they talk about certain topics, they don't talk about them the way that you would talk about them with your friends, it's like different. And that's when you feel kinda inferior, like you don't know – their way of talking about stuff is better.
>
> Participant 3: Yeah it's more like that.
>
> Participant 4: I also agree with her because like with me, I just get discouraged, like when I'm put in a group where there's predominantly white people I just, I just keep quiet because I feel like what I say might sound stupid to them, or maybe I won't, I won't say it in the way that they usually say things and what not.

In this segment a participant describes how feeling different to white students, in the way she expresses herself, translates to feeling inferior. She progresses from asserting that it is not the white students way of talking in particular that makes hers inferior, but rather the fact that their way is different to hers, to then reflecting that their way actually is "better". We see that other participants begin to concur. Many of the women spoke to, relating to the experience of the woman in the vignette, feeling as though they're participation and contributions in groups or in lectures are not worthy. A feeling was described by women in each of the groups that white students' contributions were more respected.

The women's sense of being different from white students- expressing themselves differently, translates to them feeling inferior. They are made to feel as though their way of being is therefore of a lower standard. Their "different" way of talking and understanding is of a lesser-than value- not fitting to the HWU environment. The women's sense of discouragement is significant. However, this translates into them being silenced and making do with, continuing on despite it.

Another significant element has been the impact of institutional culture on the socialisation processes of black women within the HWU. An area found not to be sufficiently addressed is the lack of support for women within the institutions. The HWU makes for a completely different cultural experience for many; through language, behaviour and dress, adding to an experience of entering into a new world where one does not fully belong.

> Participant: I remember myself when I got into first year, straight from Limpopo. You don't know what (university) is like. You don't know what to expect. The dress sense is different. The English is different. You feel like this is survival of the fittest and you are not going to survive. The next person sitting next to you doesn't look like you. You have been in a school where they teach you English in Sepedi; they teach you maths in Sepedi. So you get to (university); everything is in English, the first time you've ever been taught by a white person. So it was challenging.

Bulhan's (1980) concept of "cultural in-betweenity" enlightens this experience. The students who have left their home-towns and have moved to Johannesburg, in particular, seem to express this. Their senses of self extend from this position; being between the forces of the dominant culture (the university setting) and their culture's from "back home". In this segment the importance of language is highlighted in that the students lowered confidence in her English proficiency hampers her confidence in her sense of self in the university setting. The exclusionary elements of the institutions are evident in this (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004). Through these a sense of alienation in the university environment, for some students, is enhanced. This is significantly so by an awareness of lacking. In the above segment it is a lacking sense of confidence in the English language. For other students; due to their Social Capital, an easier settling into the university culture is possible.

The women reflected on feeling inferior to white students most so with regards to having a lack of access to certain resources and also in the differences in cultural or social experiences and ways of expressing self. Some women reflected a sense of being inferior in relation to male students. This was largely in overcoming how stereotypes pigeon-hole and restrict them. The black women are expressed to not have the capacity to make it in the HWU, not because of her abilities, or lack thereof (or that of the fellow students) but because of the requirements of this setting. A form of power is awarded to the setting to define the black women as unworthy and inferior.

3.2 Social Capital as Beneficial to Educational Success

The women also reflected on how a lack of access to resources, aided by Social Capital, affects their performance through their studies. In the following segment the participant explains, using a hypothetical example, that it is because of white students' "father's" ownership of businesses, and black students' lack thereof, that black students are outperformed. White students' easier access to certain resources is viewed as an ownership of them (or their families' ownership of them); following a discourse of their superior status due to the Social Capital attained from their families and networks.

> Participant: If we're given an assignment uh, they offer much better up because of printing, because their fathers have uhm printing companies, and say you are offered a task where you have to pull a design, a certain structure… Black people normally come back with a structure that they built with uh, boxes of Kellogg's and this and that and that; whereas white people really come with nice corrugated structures, well built – and that is, it's not really oppressive but it intimidates you. Because you didn't cause it to be like that, it's from your background. Your father didn't offer you, or they didn't have the resources enough for you to be able to maintain those things in varsity whereas for *bona* (them) it's quite easy... And they don't complain about money… whereas if *wena* (you) you're a bursary student or something like that, you can't really go all out on your school work.

The student in this segment claims her personal experience in defining that she is intimidated as opposed to oppressed. The word "oppressed" had been introduced in the vignette. In exploration of what this experience meant for her, her expressions show that indeed it is one that involved power dynamics but that for her it is of intimidation. This speaks more to the emotion induced in this experience. Oppression is to be dominated, stifled, and impeded upon whereas intimidation speaks to the fear, the sense of threat and being made to feel small.

A view that despite gender or race category, access to financial resources has a significant impact on University life was raised in all the discussions. This participant expresses this view in asserting that all "children" born of financial privilege are more prone to success in university.

> Participant: Children born from rich families are more likely to succeed, but when you're poor, you really have to struggle in order to find your riches, and most people just drop out because it's just too much.

A sense of struggle and defeat is linked to the position of "poor" students and that of ease and achievement to "rich" students. This is as Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction ascertains (Sullivan, 2001). The assumption of privileged students being "more likely to succeed" was contested by some participants, however. In this discussion, the discourse of status- here in terms of cultural capital in one's family; being necessary for success was disproved by an opposing voice.

> Participant 1: I think for me it's also like your parents. Like…their background you know? …and how they're educated. Like it's, you're more likely to be educated if your parents are educated. But if your parents themselves didn't receive education it's very like…
>
> Interviewer: Challenging…
>
> Participant 1: Ya, there aren't many parents who encourage education if they didn't have education. …It doesn't like guarantee success because your parents are educated but it

> gives you a greater advantage above people who don't have parents that are educated…It starts from like way back. Like your family…like generations of people that determine your present status you know…
>
> Interviewer: Mhmm... I see you shaking your head.
>
> Participant 2: I disagree with that. My grandmother is not educated and my mother is. The thing is I think when you are poor you want to better your life somehow. So I don't think you want to stay in that circle you know. Ya, that's how I see it.

This student's view is that a lower status in terms of cultural or social capital; a background lacking education or financial privilege, is conversely a propeller towards success. This is in opposition to the expectation that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more prone to failure. Perhaps the notion of resilience is fitting here, however this segment also illuminates how personal histories can inform ones subjectivity towards an agency that overcomes barriers of oppression. For this student, having been raised by her grandmother in a rural area, whilst her mother (a teenager) was sent to finish her schooling, it was her realisation of the liberation propensity of education that propelled her. She experienced the hardship of being without the benefits of an educated care-giver. This resulted in a strong appreciation for education; it was her experience of poverty and hardship as opposed to her mother's education that resulted in this.

3.3 Cultural Capital and Conforming to Expectations

The women illuminated how their various subject-positions- as women and as black, are impacted by their education and the social mobility it grants. Here the women speak to how, because black men are intimidated by an educated black woman, they must oblige by downplaying their abilities, resourcefulness and the Cultural Capital attained of their education. In the context of the cultural, family expectations of a woman's role- the educated black woman is seen to be rebelling. Her assertiveness and ability to transcend these roles is met with disdain. It is expected that she diminish her resourcefulness, and conform to these expectations.

Participant 1: And another thing that comes with being an educated woman (is) it intimidates men. It intimidates a lot of men in relationships especially. Because if you want to, if you have your own opinion and you challenge them a bit, they won't like that. They'll be like 'you're making me feel less of a man, what would my mom say, if my parents come home and they find a situation like this?' Or they actually ask you 'If my parents or my family members come to visit us, please behave this way so that you can be accepted in the family'. Rather than (you) saying "you know what, I don't like doing dishes so I'll hire aunty because I can afford (it) to clean up to do that"...when the family comes to visit *utlansa mop a re* (he'll take out a mop and say) 'Just for one week so that you can be the acceptable wife who cleans.'

Participant 2: Ya, I think that what she's saying is like true. Like as women we downplay our abilities in order to fit in. Even though you know you're capable of doing something, you downplay yourself so that other people like maybe your family… Or even if you have an opinion of something you don't wanna seem like you know the…

Participant 3: The know it all

Participant 2: Ya the know it all! The person who knows all, so we tend to downplay, even like in relationships, there's some things that you know but you tend to not say cos you don't want to be the, the know it all!

On the opposing hand to clipping the propensity to use her resources, is that she has to lessen her expression of knowledge. These women were in consensus about not wanting to come across as a person who asserts their knowledge. The "know it all" is an expression of someone who is scorned or whose all-knowing disposition is offensive. There is a fear of occupying that position in social relationships and so the women hold back on their knowledge.

This process is voluntary; done in order to please partners or family, however, there is also an experience of an involuntary process of certain identity elements being diminished or taken away. In particular is that of black identity; there seemed to be an experience of being stripped of

one's blackness because of being educated. Their education deems that they are less black. This is a process beyond the women's control.

> Participant 1: I don't know as educated women, I think sometimes, in your life, maybe you've experienced this. You uhm, you have to like prove that you're black somehow because now when people, your friends maybe are not at the level of education that you are, they think you are, like adapted to the Western ways and you're like snobbish or whatever. In some part of your life you have to prove that 'I'm still black, I'm still African'. Like if you speak English people just look at you like 'Oh my gosh'. If you like; me and you are speaking English and we're black people just, they'll raise their eyebrows like what the hell?"
>
> Participant 2: Like seriously!
>
> Participant 1: So when we speak English just because we're educated people and we know how to speak English; like English is a universal language you know. People raise their brows like 'Hau two black people speaking English', what the hell is that?' So in some ways you have to prove to people that 'No I'm still black, not because I'm educated now I've stopped being black. I'm still black, I still identify with black people, I identify with their struggles, it doesn't change that.' Just because I live in Sandton and drive five cars, it doesn't mean that I don't feel, you know, the same struggles that you're feeling, you know what I'm saying. So you kinda have to prove yourself and prove your race your blackness to people or society in general.

The participants thus acknowledge the benefits of Cultural Capital that their education affords them, and this is conflicted with the expectation that these equate a lessening of their "blackness". A tension arises between having to "downplay" their education- in its value and the knowledge attained, but at the same time acknowledging the Cultural Capital it affords. In addition to this is the factor of their "blackness" being seen to be lessened or removed by their education.

Therefore, not only does a multiplicity of identities arise but that also, in order to integrate their education and the cultural capital attained into one's self-concept, sacrifices and compromises were made in identity. The women negotiate the various discourses within the different contexts they reside in that inform their subject-positions; adhering to the requirements of each in order to find a sense of belonging. Here we see how Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is engrossed into an individual's life through the reiteration of social norms and "rules" (Atkins, 2005). The women then use techniques of the self, in their identity construction process, to understand their positions and allow for the integration of this into their identity (Atkins, 2005).

4. The Tensions in Social Mobility

The participants raised significant elements of the experience of Social Mobility. These included expressions of having to navigate the space between a lower and upper/middle class. A consciousness of historically instituted elements of their group's positions in society influenced this. Largely the experience of social mobility was expressed to bring about a double-bind in being still connected to one's previous status.

Upward mobility in society brings tensions and this was particularly so at the level of identity as found by Cole and Omari (2003); Jetten et al (2008) and Jones (2003). Being that upward mobility has implications in an individual's status in society. A re-evaluation of one's subject-position in the social stratification occurred and the result was a need for a re-conceptualisation of self, as "changing one's social category affects self-definition" (Jetten et al, 2008).

4.1 Trapped in the "Previously Disadvantaged"

A contradiction is seen here as the attaining of social mobility changes the women's class position, however the view of their race category and class being inseparable as a result of history entraps them in feeling "previously disadvantaged" despite it. The concept of a "discourse user" is brought to light, as this woman expressed her command of elements of her identity, in order to claim stakes to that of generations before. As being educated and attaining social mobility, can divorce her from black identity, she asserts that it is not her blackness that

she identifies with but her group's previous disadvantage- thus black people's (previous) class position. She explains this as aligning herself, politically, with the values of Julius Malema.

> Participant 3: I'm not black (laughs). I think for me, it defines me but it doesn't really define where I'm going... Uhm, I'm a previously disadvantaged person. I think like Julius, I really do.
>
> Interviewer: You think like?
>
> Participant 3: Like Julius. Yes. I'm still in the struggle and I'm still struggling for my identity as a black person. I'm struggling for my identity as a black person to be respected and honoured. Yes they marched, they did everything with kids, they chopped wood, they worked in mines, but we still don't have the respect as black women that we ought to have. And I'm still previously disadvantaged even if I'm gonna stay in Sandton and own my own company but I'm a previously disadvantaged black person who is still in the struggle for her identity and honour as a black woman.

This student expresses through this how, to her, oppression transcends a barring from resources or opportunities to "honour" and the right to legitimise and claim acknowledgement of her subject-position as a "black woman". She acknowledges that people fought and worked for liberty; "marched" and "worked in mines" but that there is a level of liberty that is yet to be reached. She describes this as respect and that thus, despite her social mobility and access to a higher class lifestyle, she is still oppressed. Her argument is twofold; she acknowledges the struggle and the political freedom attained although asserts that it is limited and also that she sees her identity as beyond "black" but linked to her class position. Within the latter is a tensions as she lays claim to both the previous class position of her race category but also her own current (or future).

4.2 The 'Race less Persona'

An assertion of a race-less persona arose as a common experience. This is an adoption of an experience of identity that disdains typicality's of blackness in order to combat the experience of black racial stereotypes and in order to feel at home in the educated domain as well as in order to be able to incorporate the new position into identity. However, paired with this is an inability to be completely void of consciousness of race category due to Socio-historic factors that persist.

> Interviewer: When you ask yourself the question 'Who am I?' Is being black and being a woman… in the answer of that question?
>
> Participant 1: "For me not really hey, I even forget I'm black sometimes. (Laughs) Ok, not that I wanna be white or anything but I just don't wanna be stigmatised. I just don't wanna think *ho re* (that) you know, my success or whatever is attributed to me being black or my oppression is attributed to me being black."

The participant identifies that 'being black', or identifying with being black, will mean that she is stigmatised. In a double-bind, though, she asserts that she chooses no consciousness of racial category in her identity.

As "racial identity is the feeling of closeness to similar others in idea's feelings and thoughts" (Broman et al, 1988, as cited by Demo & Hughes, 1990, pg. 364) that they differ in the value of education and are granted access to upward mobility inaccessible to most other black people is a significant difference given the personal importance of the women's education. The result is a diminishing the importance of their race category to their identity. This is in order to succeed academically, by combating stereotype threat and circumvent ceilings on the achievement of black people as well as for personal self-esteem.

4.3. The Responsibilities to Others

The women contend with positioning in their communities informed by the expectation of others. These expectations are largely of who they ought to be as a result of their education. The women,

in addition to being caught between the space between their position before their education and that which lies after, also face not adhering to external expectations. Foucault speaks of the "discursive field", for example laws or the family. These contain competing and contradictory discourses giving meaning, each with varying degrees of power. Each also "offers" differing subjectivities (Weedon, 1987, p. 35). A strong sense of responsibility to their families was expressed by the women, particularly in the second and third focus group (in these groups a lot more of sharing with regards to background and family influences occurred). Paired with this, however, is a sense that their education was being devalued. This is most so by age group peers. A burden to give in to expectations results in a responsibility felt to both sides

A prominent responsibility that arose is that to the women's families. An expectation of their being educated is that they will give to their family, improve their family's life or enhance their family's status. An added pressure to the women in their studies is thus this responsibility to succeed not only for themselves but for their families too.

> Participant:…for me to actually achieve those dreams and reach my pillar of ambitions I need an education in my life. Completing my matric was a big thing. You know at home it was a big thing; I was the first kid *ko gae* (at home) to actually pass my matric with an exemption. So I had their support, I had everything. They were like you gonna go to varsity and we're gonna push and… I think for me being where I am right now, studying what I am studying it's for them. They know that there's someone on the company for them you know, uhm. I'm gonna probably better the standards at home you know even for my younger siblings and stuff.

It is significant to note here how, for the black female student, her education and its benefits are not for herself. She links her aspirations to succeed professionally to her family's hopes and well-being. She carries in her pursuits the responsibility to ensure that her family is made proud, is taken care of and honoured. The gendered aspect of care-taking is spoken to as this role is the black women's because she is a woman. The women adopt this responsibility and it is integral to their sense of self and identity throughout their education.

4.4 The Liberation Responsibility

Durrheim & Mtose (2006) speak of a "beacon in the imagination and for the aspirations of the populace" as the emergent black elite. This group arises of limiting circumstances and as a result are looked up to by those who cannot. In addition to the responsibility to their families, for these women, is the responsibility to the rest of their race category and of their gender. The burden of being representative of the entire race category is spoken to as well (Madsen & Mabokela, 2000). Another element raised is an expectation of educated black females to carry the load of liberating other black people and females.

> Participant 2: …that's what I find incredibly unfair about this identity that I find myself in, is that I'm left with no other option but responsibility. I can't be an explorer; I can't be someone who's just having fun. I have to be responsible with my skills. You know what I mean? Like what I see with other women and how they're being discouraged, I have to use this to somehow to better the other. I mean, maybe I won't go and start an NGO but something about the way I do things has to, at the end of the day, uhm, be something that will encourage another black female to also stand against those forces that are tryna put us down and all, or working against us"

This student illuminates the level of consciousness that is expected of educated black women; of her own liberation and of the need of others. She must be accountable to the rest of the black 'race' in her educational and professional pursuits and "give back". This students highlights that she "finds herself in this identity"; that it is not by choice she is demanded to have to be conscious of her privilege but that it is ensued of her position. She alludes to how this position, her identity, is not entirely hers.

A sense of concern for others of their age-group whose lives are not progressing as theirs was expressed by some of the women. A sense of alienation from their peers is felt as their education is not respected. In this segment it is seen how the depreciation of this participant's education first results in feeling belittled which then progresses to a deep concern for her peers.

> "Well for me, I think from where I come from, people just don't really understand. Especially blacks my age, in my age group. I don't know if they don't really understand the value of education at this point in time or they're just ignoring that. I'm not really getting that. Because the other time I was speaking to these two black girls, they have children; they have babies and they're like '*Hai girl, awucedi*?' (Aren't you ever going to complete?) *Bathong*! (Heavens!) *Eh eh bathong*. *Awucedi*? But then I'm like hai, I'm doing what I want to do understand? …But then I was like but then can't you see? ...like you know? What I'm doing is so valuable to me and my family as well. So I think that young people don't really understand the value of education you know, but then it's really a concern in this day and time you know? How is it that people can be so ignorant? So yeah, it's just a concern for me.

This student is significantly impacted by her peers lacking value of education. It seems to trouble her that they do not "see" what her education means for her and her family. Paired with the girls she had been relating to having children, expressed by many participants as a sign of ignorance, it transpires that hers is a position (though liberated from ignorance) that is not understood or merited. She is instead made to feel as though her education is somewhat of a nuisance, that it is taking too long and she is missing out on life as she pursues it.

A significant impact of personal relationships is seen here. There is a sense of hostility felt and this as a result of the students focusing on education. They are out casted and seen to be claiming superiority. This student reflects that a relationship turned from one where they greeted each other to one of opposition and absence of greeting. In this absence the student receives that what is being said is that "she thinks she is better" than her fellows in her township. It is the assumption of superiority, which is bestowed upon the students by fellow community members, which results in an apprehension in relationships. The women's education thus is a weight itself as is their concern for the ignorance of their communities. This brings a conflict to identity as on the other hand the education is the source of liberation itself.

5. Democracy vs. The struggle Continues

A significant tension that arose in each of the focus groups, and that can be seen throughout this report of the themes, is that between the discourse of democracy and of the struggle. The nationally informed discourses of South Africa's past and its lingering significance in the present democratic context have a significant impact on the students' university experience. The women carry "the burden of history" in that what South Africa's past continues to impede on their identity constructions. On the other hand is a pressure to not be a victim and assert agency above this.

We see here the evidence of Freedman's statement that "there can be no sound understanding of the psyche of any person in South Africa without seeing apartheid as a cardinal" (as cited in Swart 2001, p. 3). Apartheid has left markers in the current social reality of South Africa that even the current generations, despite their propensity for or attainment of upward mobility were affected by. Their identities were unavoidably shackled to the oppressed position of blackness in South African past and present society.

5.1 "The Burden of History"

In this segment the participant describes the "scars" of history. She asserts that oppression continues today through social ills that cause a stagnation of black women's progression. She asserts that young women falling pregnant and dropping out of school as a sign of this despite the belief that the past no longer affects them

> "Most black women carry the burden of history. They still carry the scars of what happened in the past. You know women were restricted from a lot of things and it's still happening today. Even though *rona* (we) we say it didn't affect us, it's still affecting us today. As a young woman, a black woman on top of that, when you go to most townships, young black women are falling pregnant and it's this whole cycle that repeats itself of you going to the grant offices and dropping out of school. Yes you've got all these beautiful facilities, but we don't look at what's happening in our own

neighbourhoods. Like *ko desababung* (in the suburbs), everything is well, you know only few kids falling pregnant and there are many options that they have…"

She highlights that the access to the "beautiful facilities" cause ignorance to continuing oppression. Here the disparity between the HWU context and the students' neighbourhoods is shown as part of the problem. She links this to how in suburbs, where people are well off and of a higher class, there are fewer social problems such as teenage pregnancy. The HWU thus falls into this as an environment where there is a muted acknowledgement of the plight of South Africa's lower class. It is in the environment, in the "beautiful facilities" that the reality of many South African communities is not acknowledged. These realities she asserts as "scars" of South Africa's past.

The effects of apartheid are still a reality for this generation and thus the battles of the past are aspects that they contend with too. As educated women they are placed in a conflicted position. Their education in itself is a marker of democracy, however much of their experience, within the HWU, that they witness in their communities etc. are not reflective of liberation. Much discussion and contestation arose as to whether apartheid is indeed "over". This is paralleled with a reflection of whether traditional roles, values and expectations of women have indeed shifted. In the following segment the dispute amongst the participants in this group is seen.

Participant 1: But I think you need to acknowledge as well the fact that things are changing. The fact that you are sitting here in your masters is evidence enough…

Participant 2: Mhmm, mhmm, definitely.

Interviewer: When you speak of things changed, do you mean in South African history, democracy and everyone being able to…

Participant 1: Traditionally, the black traditional sense as in like *ukuthi* (that) women do not usually go out. And in the sense of, yes of our history, that things are changing.

Participant 2: Although, although things change I just don't think it's good enough.

Participant 3: It's not enough.

Participant 1: It's not gonna be changed drastically…

Participant 3: Ya it's not gonna change drastically but we need to be alertly conscious of making it happen.

This discussion shows the dissent and uncertainty about whether things have changed and if it is enough. This speaks to the general uncertainty of the expectations held of democracy and what it should have brought. The variance in beliefs in liberation on the one hand and continued oppression on the other exist in the women. Participant 3 asserts that a consciousness of a lacking change is necessary for full liberation and that with this further change can be instigated.

Participants further reflected on the change that the alleviation of apartheid has brought in assessing their university experience. In this segment evidence of change being a larger presence of black students in comparison to white students was argued. The response to this was that this change was instigated by people of the struggle that came before.

Participant 4: I'm doing second year IR and there are still more black people than there are, you know, uhm.

Participant 2: White people

Participant 6: I, I happen. Sorry can I just say something. We also undermine the fact that those that came before us created that change for us to enjoy now. Do you know what I mean? Do you think IR always had a predominantly black uhm...?

Participant: No it did not.

Here is an assertion that recognition of changes and those responsible is necessary. The increased numbers of black students is asserted to not be taken for granted, as some students were expressing that these numbers were reflective of change. The response to this, by an older student, was a call for an awareness that it was not with ease that this change occurred.

5.2 The "Man Up" Discourse

In light of the contestation of whether "the struggle" is indeed over, a "man up" discourse persisted. This was an expression of an idea that given the current dispensation of South Africa, black people ought to grab hold of the opportunities presented. A sense that a dwelling on the difficulties of racism is a position of weakness and that holding on to the past must cease.

In this segment this participant draws on her financial struggles at university to show that she has to look beyond these difficulties and forge on. She owns and accepts hardship, particularly financial, as part of her identity. In avoidance of being stereotyped, she asserts the necessity of rising above it, trying her utmost to not be defeated by it.

> "Ever since I got into WITS it was all about money. It was always about who will I write to, who will I go to get that res, to get that financial aid? You know. So you know you get to understand that at the end of the day, this is your answer. And then if you stop and you sit down and you cry like 'I don't wanna do this anymore'. Why? Nobody's gonna do it for you. If you sit down and you're not going to study, you're just going to be another black person who's sitting down and you are conforming to that stereotype to say 'Ah they don't wanna learn, they just want to eat our tax money.' So regardless of what people would say; "being black is liberated", being black is a struggle! And that is our struggle and we have to grow with it. You have to first know that, I'm by myself in this struggle and I'm moving on."

In her not wanting to prove stereotypes right, she believes she has to not acknowledge the pain of the injustice and keep "pushing". Thus much of the emotional response to the injustice is repressed. In the following segment this women raises the need to "man up" as to repress the

need to "cry" in response to injustices. Her assertion is black women must "do something about it" instead.

> "…I think it becomes, as a black woman you find that you fight two battles; as a black person and as a female. So I mean, like you can cry and say that the universities like are doing you like an injustice but that's the reality women are fighting everywhere, black women are fighting everywhere. So it's about time we all just man up and deal with the situation because if you don't do anything about it, the person next to you might not. So we all end up crying about the same thing, but there's not enough black women writing. Why don't you write?"

The notion of man up speaks to the prising of masculinity in sexist, patriarchal societies. This discourse that in order to overcome oppression one must adopt a masculine quality is further indicative of the oppression itself. The idea that women belong in subjugated positions and that only male qualities can move them beyond this is communicated. Ironically, this is adopted by the women themselves. The HWU specifically, as it continues to privilege masculinity (Barnes, 2007) continues too to be a space where women resultantly devalue femininity; seen as the reason for their oppression.

The mandate to "man up" and be a force for change, is contested by a view that not much has changed for many black South Africans. Despondency with the magnitude of the damage of apartheid was expressed. The rebuttal to this is that despite the continued perpetuation of inequality in South African society, a state of empowerment and transcendence beyond an oppressed position is possible. This participant contests the oppression of race category in order to attain a sense of agency.

> "Well the reality at this stage is that race is always gonna have some sort of impact on African society. I am black. I acknowledge that. I understand that I'm going to face, I'm probably going to face more obstacles than the average white person. However I understand at the same time that it is up to me as an individual to overcome those things. I cannot rely on the next person to fix those problems for me. So I just think that if you're

> told that, (and) if I see that apartheid is over, therefore I have the opportunity to become something better. But if I choose not to, then I can't expect anything more than failure."

This participant illuminates that her acknowledgement of racism and, from what she sees and what she is told, that Apartheid is over allows for a realisation of the opportunities open to her. However, she asserts a need to "overcome" the difficulties that she as a black individual will face, noting that the average white person will not. This is furthermore an indication of the tension between the discourse of black women being free and that of them being still oppressed.

5.3 The Empowerment Value of Education

An acknowledgement of the benefits of education exists among black educated females. This is in appreciating the opportunities that are opened up due to their enhanced capital and societal status through mobility and a sense of empowerment.

> "For me I think is that I'll have better opportunities and I'll live better. I think my parents aim is to give me a life that's better than their life. And for me if I finish studying I'll have a better life than others that didn't study. So you appreciate the fact that you are able to study and that you have made the right choices…"

An element of empowerment was expressed by the women. The cultural capital attained from their education allows for this element as a release from and transcendence beyond the limits of their previous position.

> Participant 1: Uh, I think my life is….uh, I don't know, I don't know how to put it… but it wasn't that difficult. It was difficult for a single parent working and being poor and everything but the time goes by you know? Like she says here (*vignette*) I think of how education changed my life. I think that's how – that I can relate to. Ya

Interviewer: Ok. How do you think it's changed your life?

Participant 1: Uh, I'll tell you a story. I come from Magalies neh, where my grandmother lives. My mother got me when she was like seventeen years old, so my grandmother she's very strict. She's not as strict but when my mother got me she didn't have time to stay with me and nurse me and everything because she had to go back to school. So growing up with my grandmother was a bit difficult because we didn't have that kind of resources. I went to school yes, to a proper school and everything but studying wasn't that in thing for me. You know I just passed because I passed. But when I went to I think it was 2007 or somewhere there I lived with my mother and that's how I changed school and that's where I saw *ho re* (that- Setswana) education is very important you know. I have to have my matric in order to go to university to get what I want in life so that's how education changed my life. It made me look at things differently, you know. You know that life is not about sitting at home, you know having boyfriends, having a baby and because I saw how we grew up, I don't wanna go through that and I don't want my child to go through what we went through.

Another participant's account of her educational achievements and their effect on her sense of self-worth further illuminate the empowerment value of education.

Participant 1: Uh, uhm, what I love about being educated is that uhm, I'm empowered. You know I feel that I am the master of my universe; you know I have the ability to create. I do not, uhm well the world is my oyster basically, you know. I can be anything that I want to be and having reached the levels that I've attained in education thus far, I'm able to look back and say truly that I'm a conqueror. You know uhm, the challenges that I've come through in education do not detract at all from my education, rather they have built character, and they've built strength in me you know. I can put down what I want to do and through hard work, consistency, all of that; I can achieve it. You know uhm, it means uh, well I just love the empowerment that education has brought me. And as much as I've studied – I've studied in science, and now in journalism and stuff but like the higher, the more I study the more I realise *kuthi* (that- isiZulu) no, I'm not necessarily

pigeon holed in what, in those fields that I've studied in. I can do anything! Anything. Anything at all…

In this next segment the participant relates to how her sense of empowerment is linked to how she can empower those around her.

Participant 2: I think for me it's the respect that I get. You know a person just by looking at you and you say 'No I'm doing my honours'. You get that sense of respect you know to say, they're not going to class you anymore. I think I…you become you know….people listen to you. And I like the fact that, you know for me, we always; as women we always want to be validated, to be heard. That's what Oprah says. Am I being heard? Are you listening? And it's all about how do you speak, because you become somebody who speaks so profoundly about even little issues. I'm so passionate about people, it has given me that voice and that confidence to say, you know as much as I like it to be educated, but I also want others to be educated as well. And that confidence from it, from education, is one thing that I like and it makes me want to, you know, study further. And grow like a six pack, some people would say, in my brain.

Participant: In your brain?

Participant 3: Ya *(everybody laughs).* And go further. You know learning is so amazing when you know that yesterday you didn't know something and today you know something. And when you go telling that something to somebody else and they take in a certain thing from it. It's so amazing that you can change lives with your education. And it starts with you and what you want. Then you transfer that to somebody else.

These participants express a very personal sense of pride, assurance and respect that is attained of being educated. This is significant to their sense of self as a realisation of the limits transgressed, and the profits of being educated, includes a realisation of the agency attained. Being "a master of (her) universe" a black woman can use her education to equip her, to contravene the shackles of the oppressed position of her race category and gender.

We see that indeed as according to Hollway (1989) gendered subjectivity in particular is of a nature that is dynamic, of multiplicity and produced through relation (as cited in Kiguwa, 2001). The women derive their identity externally; the source of definition being the available discourses in their changing environments. Also, as Distiller & Steyn (2004) asserted, given South Africa's history, identity constructs of gender, class and others such as sexuality and ethnicity are unavoidably 'raced'. However, overriding this aspect is the benefits of education. The women's self-concepts are enhanced positively by their education; empowerment being particularly significant in this regard.

7. Conclusion

The themes found in the women's discussions of their experience of their education, positions and identity inform a multiplicity of identities that arises as they contend with the various tensions and conflicts that arise in response to their positions. Their constructions of their identity in their race category, class and gender are informed by the discourses around them within the various contexts they find themselves in. These include the University itself, as an HWU, their personal relationships (within family and community) and their relating to society at large.

The themes derived from the content of the discussions pertained to the discourses available to black female students in informing their identity constructions. These were of the HWU context, their backgrounds and future prospects given their education as well as their personal interaction with these in constructing their identities. In each of these the women's subject-positions pertaining to their gender, race category and class interacted to inform their identity constructions resulting in significant ambivalence, conflict and multiplicity of identities. The women's voices were shown to be diverse; their experiences are contested and informed by many factors, thus their expressed identities are multiple as well as fluid and continuously shifting. The following chapter will further represent the themes and condense the findings into the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings, Limitations and recommendations

5.1.1 Summary of findings

In answering the question "How do black, South African female students construct their identities?" the themes illuminate that conflicts and tensions in the students' constructions of self are inherent and are furthermore inflicted by the discord in the expressed discourses of South African society. These are infused through the university setting- creating disparity not only between the women but within them and their experiences as well.

Whilst some students find the HWU context as one of ease and many resources and opportunities, others struggle to find this and a continued strife in adjustment persists. In addition to this is the experience of the dominance of the English language is a factor very significant for some student's from backgrounds which did not afford this capital. This disparity in experiences is described in 'Positive and Negative Experiences in the HWU'. Also, the argument of 'Democracy vs. The Struggle Continues' highlights this divergence. Within this, 'The Benefits of Education', showed that the women's self-concepts are enhanced positively by their education; empowerment being particularly significant in this regard.

The women's education shifts their positions in society. The cultural capital attained and access to social capital afforded by their social mobility, too, informs their conceptualisations of self. In 'The Tensions in Social Mobility' the significance of how the women are rooted to their families and previous communities through their responsibilities to others impacts their subjectivity and their experience of their educational achievements. Identity shifts are made by the women at a conscious level in navigating their self-perceptions and articulations within the experience of mobility. In order to fit in their educational setting, the HWU, to succeed and be worthy of the capital gained they must concede certain aspects of their racial and gender identities. In order to

possess personal qualities of symbolic capital aspects of their "blackness" are diminished or certain gender roles set aside- which in some case brings on disapproval from families and communities.

A parallel is seen with Aries and Sander (2007) in the finding that social class has become a significant construct of identity particularly for upwardly mobile people. In addition to this, there is an element of diminishing certain aspects of themselves (particularly with regards to capital and class) in order to retain a sense of belonging to their race category. In some contexts the women must "downplay" their attained cultural capital. A difficulty arose in assuring "a sense of continuity" between the two positions (Aries & Seider, 2007). Class being embedded in one's history and then continuing to be lived in the present made for tensions experienced by the women in their self-concepts. This was due to the alienation felt from one's background, family and past and yet a lacking sense of belonging to the new world; feeling "nowhere at home".

In 'The "triple jeopardy" identity' the elements in the HWU context that serve to reiterate the oppressed subject of the black female, were seen. This also highlighted the discourses informed by South African socio-historic factors. The silencing of the black female voice serves to displace black women in their pursuit to find belonging or to assert their subjectivity, as does the advent of stereotypes that one must continue to try to disprove. The notion of 'black tax' spoke to that extra addition of difficulty to a black student's professional experiences, in light of the aforementioned. The women's experience is of an automatic expectation to have to work harder than their peers to attain the same amount of respect.

From the themes it was found that Bourdieu's (1989) postulation of the benefits from one's cultural capital was highly significant for the black female students. This study, concurring with Aries and Seider (2007), has found Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital particularly central to how social class can be incorporated into identity. This study also found the students' educational attainments or qualifications dependence on social capital to be particularly significant to the integration of cultural capital into their identity. Their social connections, communities and family and the cultural capital previously invested by this network of

connections continued to be important elements in their subject positioning; through their experiences as students navigating an educational space.

In “Differences in social capital” it is shown how some of the women carry a sense of inferiority as a result. The disparity in capital results also in a disparity in educational success. As the women inhabit the cultural capital of their positions, for some different from before their education, so too must they contend with expectations based on prescribed racial and gender roles. This study has, therefore, shown the importance of going beyond the critique of gender and racial constructions, in exploring the experiences of black women, by looking further into critique of class. The findings concurred with Durrheim & Mtose (2006) that images of blackness and whiteness in society were defined in terms of each other, however; furthermore asserts that at the heart of this were class and capital inequalities.

The women’s experience of social mobility as a black South African female has a distinct element due to the socio-historic context. With these women what was raised is the phenomenon of being “Trapped in previously disadvantaged”. As much as the women transgress beyond the bounds of their race category delineated by the apartheid regime, an element of still being oppressed still mares their educational and professional endeavours. Some speak to the “Race less persona” as a means to divorcing ones identity from the bounds of this. Significant too, and found in mobility studies across different contexts, is the “Responsibility to others” and the “Liberation responsibility” which an upwardly mobile person carries into their new position. Ties to the group are still kept intact through family and background connections. This brings a double-bind element to the black students’ identities as they are simultaneously of a higher class of society through the capital attained of education as they are of the lower class through these connections.

Studies of mobility of black individuals through education have often showed that these individuals were “caught between two cultures in which their membership is contingent, challenged, and problematic” (Cole & Omari, 2003, p. 793), and this study has shown how this was the case, specifically with black female South Africans in particular.

In “Democracy vs. the struggle continues”; “The burden of history” which is often expected to not be a part of the younger South African generations lived experience was spoken of as present. The educated black women, carries through her tertiary experience continued reminders of those who came before her, who struggled. “The man up discourse” is the articulation of the expectation of the women to whilst simultaneously acknowledging their privilege, and yet also their continued strife for position in the HWU, must forge on in an attitude and value of change and liberation. A sense of community is expected in that, because others in history struggled far worse, the black women student must acknowledge her privilege and use it. “The empowerment value of education” conveyed the element of appreciation and their acknowledgement of this privilege. Many of the women are conscious of the benefits of their education at both the levels of the personal, e.g. self-esteem and confidence, as well as the community and nation-wide impacts.

5.1.2 Limitations and Recommendations

A limitation of this study was that focus group discussions did not allow for deeper inquisition into the internal processes of the identity of each of the participants. The use of individual interviews could have been embarked on in order to augment the discussions. Focus group discussions did not allow for in-depth look into each participant’s responses. The views presented were representative of the groups in the discussions, and the flow of discussion that arose from group interaction. Although all participants in each focus group had a chance to voice their thoughts, some participants’ views may have been lost in the group. Given the personal nature of identity, further research would enhance these findings through more in-depth inquisitions into the women’s constructions of them.

The university context specifically ensures certain limitations. In addition to the limitations of the recruitment process, which resulted in availability of student’s as opposed to selection criteria being the main determinant of their participation, the focus group’s being held mostly on the university grounds (two of three groups) may have had a significant influence on the expressions of the participants. One way in which this manifested was in language, in that the primary language of communication was English. Had the groups not been linked to the university, this

and perhaps other elements of the discussion could have been different. This is a consideration for further research.

A further limitation was that the sample was not homogenous. The students were at different levels of their tertiary education and thus had differing views with regards to the value of their education to them. Also the students were at different stages in their lives and thus may differ in their maturity of their constructions of self. A study that includes both homogenous and heterogeneous groups could address this.

5.2 Conclusion

The themes found in the women's discussions of their experience of their education, positions and identity inform a multiplicity of identities that arose as they contend with the various tensions and conflicts that emerged in response to their positions. Their constructions of their identity in their race category, class and gender were informed by the discourses around them within the various contexts they found themselves in. These included the university itself, as an HWU, their personal relationships (within family and community) and their relating to South African society at large.

Many theorists and researchers have abided to a necessity of understanding identity as socially constructed and thus multiple and continuously in 'motion' (Distiller & Steyn, 2004). This research unpacked this, also showing the multifaceted nature of black, and specifically black female identity. A more fluid conceptualisation of racial identity was allowed by an intersectional understanding by looking at race category, gender and class in the inquisition into black females' identity constructions. The legitimisation of the particularly special experiences of black women was achieved through this study. Not only must black women's subjectivities be viewed as influenced by the multiple seats of oppression in their various subject-positions, but also the intersection of these and how these women navigate, and agentically choose to navigate, this.

The HWU education provides both positive and negative experiences. Experiences are a door to identity (Mama, 1995), and therefore illuminate individual's subjectivity and their process of identity construction. The women in this study illuminated how for the educated black individual, experiences in society can be particularly moulding of identity. Their experiences spoke to continuous adjusting and shifting. In particular this is due to the benefits of their education. Attaining cultural capital and being socially, upwardly mobile places one in a contested position as a black female.

The interaction of discursive conditions of contexts and societies, at the level of socio-historic factors, was proven to be of immense significance. These were intricately involved in the processes of identity constructions. This study showed that socio-historic discourses manifest in identity. South Africa was a particularly special case. The HWU was not, and cannot be, removed from the discursive conditions impeded by the country's apartheid history. The university perpetuates the discourses of the past. Student's identities within the HWU setting are consequentially influenced by this. Students' educational experiences were also linked to their societal, social, familial subject-positions. The women in this study have voiced that apartheid remnant markers continue to infiltrate these positions.

An exploration of this in a forum where shared subject-positions were expressed, in a group, added a dimension not otherwise accessible. The consciousness raising achieved through group discussion with similar others was a significant aspect. Through this participatory, collective knowledge production the emancipation goal of critical race theory and black feminism was achieved.

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Appendix A: Invitation to participate

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Hello,

My name is Bonolo Mophosho and I am a Masters in Community-based Counselling psychology student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am currently in the process of conducting research that is exploring the identity of South African black, female students. This study is of particular interest and importance as it will contribute to the understanding of the experience of being an educated, black female in South Africa and the effect of education on identity. Your contribution would be invaluable and thus I would like to invite you to participate in my study and to play a role in this exploration.

Participation would entail taking part in a focus group interview in a group of 5-7 other fellow black female students. The focus group discussion will be held at a convenient time for all participants at a location on Wits' campus and will last approximately 1.5 hours. With your permission the interview will be recorded so that accuracy is ensured. The recording will then be transcribed and you would be allowed the opportunity to read the transcription to verify the accuracy as well as choose to have anything omitted if you may wish. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the tapes; they will be safely stored and then destroyed once the study is complete. Responses will be kept as anonymous as possible and will be presented without your name.

Your participation would be entirely voluntary and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged by Wits in any way for taking part or not. During the interview you are not obligated to participate in all questions asked and may choose to not contribute to any parts of the discussion and that will not be held against you. Also you would be allowed to withdraw at any point with no negative consequences.

If you wish to participate or have any questions about the study please feel free to contact me.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Regards,
Bonolo Mophosho (bonolo.mophosho@gmail.com or 083 475 6878)

Supervisor:
Prof. Garth Stevens (garth.stevens@wits.ac.za)

Appendix B: Participation Consent

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

I ……. hereby consent to my participation in a focus group discussion led by Bonolo Mophosho for her study on the identity of black South African female students.

I understand that:

- Participation in this focus group is voluntary
- That I may choose to not contribute to any questions or part of the discussion that I would prefer not to
- I may withdraw from the study at any time
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report
- I understand that direct quotes may be used in the research report, but that I will not be identified by name
- I understand that no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged by Wits in any way for taking part

Signed…… Date……..

Appendix C: Recording Consent

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

I ……. hereby consent to the recording and transcription of the focus group discussion led by Bonolo Mophosho for her study on the identity of black South African female students.

I understand that:

- The recordings and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation, other than the researcher and her supervisor (once participants identity has been removed)
- All recordings will be safely stored, so that only the researcher and supervisor can access them
- All recordings will be destroyed after 5 years
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report

Signed…… Date……..

Appendix D: Focus-group interview guideline

Introductory statement to participants:

- (Greeting & introduction)

- Thank you for responding and being here

-This focus group is meant to gain an understanding of your experience of being an educated black South African female

-We'll be discussing what it means to you, being a black woman in university and how your education affects who you are

- (participants given the opportunity to briefly introduce themselves to each other)

Protocol for discussion:

As the discussion will be recorded, please ensure that all participants will be heard by allowing everyone who wishes to the chance to contribute and by not interrupting or talking over anyone.

Vignette:

"You know what little girl; your mouth is going to get you into trouble one of these days". That was an oft-repeated threat, and sometimes promise, from my mother throughout childhood. I always had a lot to say, and thought that there was no reason that I should not be able to say whatever it was, and clearly no reason that I should not be heard. I received straight A's in school, but always with the criticism "talks too much in class". In university, nestled within a community of young black scholars, I was always smart enough, and usually informed enough to follow along with, if not fully participate in, any conversation.

But one day I stopped talking. I was a post-graduate student in a predominantly White department, and no longer felt knowledgeable enough, or even compelled enough, to speak- on any topic. We talked about things I did not know about- or at least not in the ways they talked about them. I thought because I did not say things in the ways my White classmates did, I must certainly not be as smart as they were. Yet, I resisted the scholarly language they often used. I felt like a fraud when I tried to use academic language- I felt it betrayed me. It made me sound like someone else: someone I did not recognise, someone without ownership of the words being spoken… It did not belong to me, who I really am; it was a façade I had to put on.

I often found the generalisations my professor used to describe "us" as South African's did not take into account my unique position as a Black female with middle-class values and the poverty-level economic status of my race. As a young black woman in graduate school I felt "oppressed and violated".

But then I think of how education changed my life, how the opportunities open to me now are boundless because of it, how I could have fallen by the wayside of this possibility without it; the possibility that this country holds despite its trials. I realise that I have access to a world that I would not have had; access to respect, access to success. I am free. I am free?

(Based on an excerpt from Blue, 2001, p. 117-118)

A.)

What are your thoughts about this woman's experience?

Have you felt the same way? / Can you relate?

What aspects of her story can you most relate to? Why?

B.)

1. How do you define yourself?
2. What is most important to your identity?
3. How has getting a tertiary education affected the person that you are?

4. What does being a black woman mean to you?
5. Is your being a black woman important to whom you are as a person? /How does being black/ being a woman contribute to the person that you are?
6. How does your being a student /being educated affect this (If at all)?
7. Would you view your being a black woman differently if you weren't educated?

8. What has your experience of getting a tertiary education been like?
   -What have been the positives and negatives of the experience?
9. How has this changed your life (if in any way)?
10. What benefits are there to getting your tertiary education?
    -Why are those accessible to you?
    -What allows you to reap those benefits?

Appendix E: Ethics Clearance Certificate