

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES OF EMPOWERMENT AND IDENTITY IN A BANK

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis on EMPLOYMENT EQUITY DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES OF EMPOWERMENT AND IDENTITY IN A BANK is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

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10 January 2014

A paper based on data from this research has been accepted for publication by *Gender in Management: An International Journal*. The paper is entitled *Outsiders within: Non-conformity among black female managers* and is due for publication in early 2014.

Dedication

Mary Canham. You are my mother and father. The extent of my gratitude and love for you cannot be quantified. I marvel at your selflessness every day. Mama, may your laughter stay forever young.

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Abstract

Since it began recording statistics on “race”, gender and disability in 2000, the Employment Equity Commission has criticised the appointment patterns of the private sector. In this regard, their data suggest that private sector organisations are generally employing black people, women, and people with disabilities into professional, senior, and top management roles, at a very slow pace.

This research took this factor as a starting place to begin to explore issues beyond the numbers but which may in part account for the very slow pace of recorded change. The research explored employment equity discourses and practices of empowerment and identity in a bank. Focusing on the headquarters of one major bank in Johannesburg, 55 managers were interviewed using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Sixteen participants submitted written personal reflections on a collection of extracts that they were asked to read and respond to. A discussion group of black participants was conducted. Publicly available documents on the organisations demographic profile were analysed. Lastly, nine naturalistic observation sessions were conducted to get a sense of social patterns of engagement across “race” and gender. These data sets were explored using a qualitative framework and critical discourse analysis to make meaning of the data.

The findings suggest that discourses of merit have become pervasive and cast doubt on the competence of black professionals and managers. More senior professionals and managers believe that they are substantively empowered while those with less authoritative power see themselves as relatively less empowered – these patterns were largely “race” based. Women primarily identified as raced (black or white) and white female participants distanced themselves from employment equity whereas black female participants bore the stereotypes associated with employment equity. Patterns of social engagement indicate marked voluntary self-segregation by “race” and micro segregation patterns. This suggested little career advancement opportunities for those groups with less organisationally powerful social networks. Lastly, employment equity discourses and

practices were key constituting factors in identity constructions of the sample of bank managers that were studied.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Discourses which create meaning of employment equity are pervasive in the South African imagination, particularly in the workplace. Employment equity has been simultaneously credited with bringing about change, growing a black¹ middle class, criticised for being too slow and ineffective, maligned for creating and emphasising fractious divisions, charged with promoting a culture of entitlement and incompetence, and polarising the South African populace along old fault lines (Bentley and Habib, 2008; Modisha, 2008; Solidarity, 2009; Mare', 2011; Erasmus, 2012). The importance of these discourses and practices piqued the researcher's interest to understand two phenomena which ultimately drive this research. The two phenomena are the discourses and practices of employment equity and concomitantly how these construct workplace identities. The conceptualisation of the study was informed by the hunch that the swirling discourses might have sedimented over the years since 1994 and gained such prominence and value in people's lives as to be core constituting factors in the ways that organisational members perceive themselves and in how they are constructed by others. The research was thus essentially about methodically examining this hunch. This necessarily called a number of important issues into question. "Race"², gender, merit, coalitions, substantive psychological empowerment, discourse, ideology, and interaction with the "other," are some of the central organising concepts that have had to be addressed.

Following on the above, two philosophies underpin post-apartheid South Africa's "race" relations. The first is the philosophy of non-racialism which holds that "race" has been the source of great division and that it should be discarded in favour of debunking the fallacy of its existence and focusing on unity. This principle of non-racialism is enshrined in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) of the country. The second philosophy is that of redress as legislated in the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998. This philosophy recognises the differential effects of many years of

¹ Here black refers to a political category incorporating African, "Coloured", and people of Indian descent. Where the word, *African* is used, its meaning is narrow and excludes "Coloured" and those of Indian descent.

² "Race" is understood as a social construct and it appears in quotations marks throughout this thesis to connote the researchers position that it is has no basis as a scientific construct (Loury, 2002).

discrimination against the black majority and the privilege that accrued to the white minority (Habib, 2008). It therefore allows for positive discrimination in order to develop black capacity and to provide opportunities hitherto unavailable to black people. Moreover, it recognises that discrimination is ongoing and that those who experience its effects should have recourse to address their claims through relevant bodies such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) and the Equality Court (Employment Equity Act, No.55 of 1998).

While they ultimately desire positive outcomes whose final result will be a society where substantive equality and non-racialism are normative, these philosophies are beset by an internal contradiction. Even as the country strives for non-racialism, redress legislation keeps “race” talk and practices alive. Others have argued that it reifies “race” categories (Mare’, 2011; Erasmus, 2012). Still, others have noted the extremely slow progress of change in attaining critical participation of black people in professional specialist and senior to top management roles within corporate South Africa (Department of Labour, 2007, 2010, 2011; Modisha, 2007, 2008; Nkomo, 2011). Ironically, both of these philosophies are articulated in the Freedom Charter of 1955 which outlined the aspiration towards a non-racial democratic South Africa where all would have access to equal opportunity and participate equally in the economy and civic life of the country.

The evolution of employment equity discourses in South Africa since the Sullivan Codes of 1977 which compelled American multinational corporations operating in South Africa to implement affirmative action programmes during apartheid, have been characterised by a shift in the importance of change from the margins to the centre (Thomas, 2002). The major paradigms influencing this positionality were apartheid and democracy. With the legislation of employment equity in 1998 and the attendant shift to the centre of public discourse (Soudien, 2008) both the practice and perceptions of employment equity might have attracted new and shifting meanings. This research was driven by the need to understand how these meanings have come to actually constitute peoples conceptions of who they are.

This research was thus interested in how discourses unfold in organisational life as an organisation grapples with its implementation of the Employment Equity Act, Number 55 of 1998. Moreover, the research was interested in understanding how merit, empowerment, and broad conceptions of identity have come to have as big an influence on redress discourses (e.g. Solidarity, 2008).

The practical concerns raised above are closely tied to theoretical questions. In forecasting the desired direction for the field of organisational studies, Mumby (1993) calls for more “secondary analysis” of specific organisational phenomena using critical analysis of coherent organisational studies literature. This he believes leads to greater “epistemological reflexivity” for the examination of assumptions underlying relations to power. He states that “it is at the level of the everyday that the relations of power are chronically reproduced” (Mumby, 1993, p.22).

Following Foucault’s (1979) and Mumby’s (1993) injunction to focus on relations of power, this research sought to examine how organisations deploy knowledge and people resources through techniques of control even through supposedly empowering discourses such as employment equity. In doing this, it made apparent the porous boundaries between organisations and society in relation to how they co-constitute each other through dominant discourses of what constitutes the “good” and capable citizen and employee. The power of employment equity discourses in this role of creating the “good” employee has not received sustained scholarly attention. This silence implicates organisational theory in creating deficit discourses of people that have historically been in the margins of society and organisational life. These groups include black people, females, and those with disabilities. This research therefore turned the spotlight onto these groups to examine how current dominant power asymmetries are maintained within present day constructions of empowerment discourses. In other words, the very means through which change is meant to be achieved may be tainted through mutating tropes so as to challenge the process of progressive change.

This research sought to investigate modes of operation of “race” and gender in the discourses and practices within a major bank as it implements its employment equity policy. These aims were accomplished through the disciplinary orientation of the

interface between critical organisational studies and critical psychologies that draw on “race” and feminist critiques. The research argued that there is a limited stock of tools within the field of organisational behaviour which can allow for a critical outlook on gender and “race”. The ethical hinges of the discipline are generally compromised by its often uncritical service to organisations and capital (Mele, 2003). The conflict of interest is most stark when organisational psychologists are deeply embedded within the very organisations which are sometimes culpable for reproducing gendered and racialised asymmetries (Parker, 2007). When the discipline does venture into the study of “race” and gender it is generally conducted within the positivist paradigm which is seldom informed by a critical orientation. These studies are invested in presenting the “facts” with little contextual and historical interrogation of what colours these facts. This allows authors like Oosthuisen and Naidoo (2010) for example, to conclude that Affirmative Action is disempowering for all. The danger of studies that do not provide the necessary nuanced understandings of the complex issues is that they can reaffirm deficit understandings of interventions.

In South Africa and many parts of the world, there is very little work done on “race” and racism from within the discipline of organisational behaviour. There are exceptions to the poverty of critical analyses in organisational studies. Schein (1980, 1985), Mumby and Claire (1997), Hatch and Cunliffe (2006), Morgan (2006), and Mumby, (2012) are some examples of those that conduct research within the organisational power, ideology, communication, and culture space. The research contended that where there is a paucity of appropriate tools to engage “race” and gender from inside the discipline, these should be obtained from elsewhere. In this regard, community psychology and its application of critical feminist and “race” studies is a useful ally. Thus, following Bhavnani and Phoenix (1994, p.10), feminist writings on identity and difference as well as on racisms, allow us “entry points by means of which we can discuss human behaviours at the present time”. We are thus able to examine processes of human development and interaction in the spaces between the old binaries of nature and nurture within the simultaneous possibilities of deconstruction and reconstruction of identity categories.

Critical theories allow us to deconstruct the ways in which disempowering practices are instantiated while allowing us to reconstruct empowering behaviours that centre experiences that have been marginalised within organisations. Community psychology has a well-developed tradition of empowering psychologies that have drawn from post-colonial (e.g. Memmi, 1965; Fanon, 1968; Bulhan, 1985; wa Thiongo, 1986; Achebe, 1988) feminist (hooks, 1989; Butler, 1990; Essed, 1991, 1994; Mama, 1995; Hill Collins, 2000), liberation (Freier, 1970; Rappaport, 1992; Biko, 1996; Mkhize, 2004; Tavares, 2010; Sonn, 2011), and critical race (Thompson, 1990; van Dijk, 1992; Steyn, 2001; Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Marable, 2002; Ratele, 2009) theories. The value of feminist theories in particular is the multidimensional approach taken to analyse inequity through what has come to be known as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). It is these psychologies and theoretical outlooks that can be drawn on in order to create an ethical and reflexive study of organisations. Moreover, the methodological angle of this research was influenced by the critical turn towards discourse and draws on these scholars with particular influence from van Dijk (1998) and Thompson (1990).

Gender and “race” were key analytical concepts for this research as they structure the policies around which employees are framed and the ways in which they may organise their identities. These identity categories are the axis along which substantive psychological empowerment is meant to occur and thus form a central part of the research questions, theoretical underpinnings, and the subsequent results and discussion chapters of this research. While this did not foreclose the emergence, of other identity dimensions such as religious affiliation, parental status, sports affiliation, and party political affiliation, “race” and gender were foregrounded as salient identity categories. Moreover, ideas of merit, competence, standards, privilege, substantive psychological empowerment, cultural capital, and organisational culture are important analytical concepts that were addressed here. The key chapters of the research broadly align to these issues and the research questions which follow.

1.1 Background and Rationale

Debate on employment equity in South Africa like elsewhere has tended to be emotive and polarised around “race” (see Polity, September 18, 2008; AfriForum Youth, 2009, February 10; Fin24, 2012, September 07) and other social asymmetries (Statistics South Africa, 2011). This has often been at the expense of a frank discussion and analysis as to the moral and psychological (in addition to the economic imperative) necessity of employment equity. This psychological and moral work is not only crucial for the beneficiaries of employment equity but is important for dealing with the guilt of privilege (acknowledged or latent) of the past borne by those that benefited from morally repugnant exclusionary systems. This is valuable because the fate of white people is inextricably tied to their black counterparts (Ramphela, 2008).

South Africa has the potential to be the pioneer of employment equity. Never before has any other country sought to apply employment equity on such a large scale. Even the forerunning Malaysian experience (Emsley, 1996; Gqubule, 2006), while it has huge lessons for South Africa, cannot compare with the enormity of the task which faces the local context. While other countries such as the United States of America (where Affirmative Action remains optional in the private sector, Crenshaw, 2000) have a relatively long history of programmes to include the African American minority population, unlike in South Africa their strategy addresses a minority black population whereas South Africa hopes to provide redress for the majority black population. This suggests that most South African organisations are undertaking pioneering practical work in the arena of employment equity and transformation in general. The theoretical research that should be matching or exceeding the burgeoning practical application of employment equity is however scant and may not be doing justice to achieving a deeper understanding of the practice (Habib and Bentley, 2008). In order to address this gap, this research sought to employ a more layered and deeper understanding of human behaviour (Geertz, 1973). Guided by Foucault’s (1982, in Clark, Chandler, Barry, 1994) injunction for researchers to understand sites of resistance in social life, this research sought to take up this challenge by looking at the highly contested terrain that is employment equity. While this research could not escape engaging with the macro and very public discourse of

employment equity, echoing Carter (1991), it reflected on the very intra-personal and interpersonal experiences that the discourses generate.

According to Van Dijk (1998), there is a need to reflect on the role of scholarship in society and on the polity. This suggests that discourse analysts conduct research in solidarity and cooperation with the dominated groups, of society. While there is a lack of total consensus about the importance of the goals of employment equity (Carter, 1991; Ramphela, 1993, 2008; Breakwater Monitor, 1995; Horwitz, Bowmaker–Falconer, and Searll, 1996; Rodriquez, 2000; Steele, 2000; and Thomas, 2002), it behooves socially conscious researchers to examine the reported challenges of employment equity in order to make sense of the complexity of the issues. In this vein, studying employment equity should be a priority of critical organisational discourse analysts as the approach primarily focuses on social problems and political issues rather than on current paradigms and fashions (Van Dijk, 1998).

The South African workplace cannot be adequately understood without a focused analysis of the motives and implications of the Employment Equity Act no.55 of 1998. The writing and research on employment equity in South Africa has either focused on the merits or demerits of employment equity (Department of Labour, 2007; Jack with Harris, 2007; Modisha, 2008; Solidarity, 2009), how to implement Employment Equity (e.g. Thomas and Robertshaw, 1999); it has been reactionary (e.g. Solidarity, 2008; Afriforum, 2009); or largely speculative (e.g. Minister of Labour, 2008). While this area is not necessarily under researched (see Habib and Bentley, 2008; Bezuidenhout, Bischoff, Buhlungu, and Lewins, 2008), there remains significant scope to engage with a range of complex issues located in the discursive realm of the everyday sense making processes evoked by discourses and practices of employment equity. While employment equity is one of the pillars of Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) (Gqubule, 2006; Maziya, 2006; Jack with Harris, 2007), it has received scant attention on its own merit. Of late, there has however been encouraging research undertaken by Bezuidenhout, Bischoff, Buhlungu, and Lewins (2008) which has sought to broaden debate on the progress of employment equity by looking at data sources that have been largely ignored by the EEC. Among other things, the volume entitled “Racial redress &

citizenship in South Africa” edited by Habib and Bentley (2008) looks at the normative views that are held by the different population groups, survey data, and it examines various sectors including the public service.

Moreover, there is no empirical research in South Africa that seeks to understand the professional identities emerging from employment equity. This is true of both the designated groups (black Africans, “Coloureds,” Asians, Chinese living in South Africa before 1994, and white females) that are meant to derive benefit from employment equity and the white males primarily located at senior management. There is a need to understand whether or not employment equity leads to empowered professional identities. With particular regard to “raced” subjectivities, both designated groups and white males have been under researched in the management and organisational behaviour literatures. By applying a critical organisational studies and community psychology framework to the workplace, this research provides a people centred (Freire, 1979; Rappaport, 1981; Huygens and Sonn, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000) understanding of employees and managers. In this regard the concept of empowerment is central to achieving the proposed people centred approach.

The challenges arising out of the phenomenon of large scale application of employment equity are likely to be with us for many years to come (Modisha, 2007). This calls for a multi-pronged and multidisciplinary analysis which will equip academics, practitioners and legislators with the necessary understanding of the complexities of this issue (Morgan, 2006). While organisational culture was engaged with here, it played a secondary role to the more central notions of empowerment, “raced” and gendered ways of being at work and professional identities.

1.2 Context

South Africa has a very particular history. While it shares a history of colonialism with many countries in Africa, the prolonged period of apartheid and the make up of the country’s population means that redress legislation had to be tailored for the local context (Stone and Erasmus, 2012). This section looks at the context within which South African banks operate.

1.2.1 Employment Equity in South Africa

The South African government has legislated transformation imperatives (e.g. Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, Republic of South Africa, 1998a) in the workplace in order to redress past imbalances resulting from discriminatory workplace practices. Perhaps the way in which South Africa differs in its application of employment equity from that of many other countries is that social transformation is the cornerstone of government's mandate (see African National Congress (ANC) Policy documents, 2003, 2007, 2012). The nature of this social transformation is intricately tied to economic transformation. Gqubule (2006) has however taken government to task in its interpretation of this mandate at the macro-economic level. Gqubule (2006) critiques the narrow scope of employment equity in that it does not address poverty alleviation and rampant unemployment. Friedman and Erasmus (2008) have alluded towards a similar sentiment. They do however caution against conflating employment equity and other poverty alleviation measures as the two are not mutually exclusive. Gqubule (2006) argues for a broader reading (maximalist approach) of the concept of empowerment to include equity across all social and economic indexes. In this regard, together with Solidarity (2008), he observes that employment equity is generally concerned with making a difference in managerial levels of employment. It is not tied to expanding employment opportunities across the board.

In addition, when compared to the public sector, most private sector organisations are said to have organisational cultures that are resistant to this employment equity driven transformation (Maziya, 2006; Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2008). The private sector thus provided conducive space to engage in a complex environment. In addition to the above it has been noted that the levels of racism endemic in apartheid South Africa have only declined marginally after democratisation (Duncan, 2005; Vourc'h, 2006; Radilhalo, 2007). Occurrences in the latter parts of the last decade reinforce this view. For example, in what has come to be known as the "Skielik Killings," in a small town in the North West where 18-year-old Johan Nel was arrested for a racially motivated shooting spree that left four people dead and several wounded (*The Times*, 2008, January 17). Bonga Bangani's open letter to a bank CEO in 2007 where he listed a litany of "racist"

aggressions that he allegedly experienced, received a lot media and political attention. Economic privilege of the few was the real hinge upon which apartheid was able to sustain itself (Gqubule, 2006; Modisha, 2008). Some (e.g. Solidarity, 2007; Afriforum, 2009; Freedom Front Plus, 2009) have interpreted legislation as a government effort to take away what white people have worked for and is theirs in order to freely give it away to “undeserving” black people. Kasese–Hara (2006) reports on a 1997 survey which found that a very large number of black South Africans (71.8%) supported affirmative action while a majority of whites (63.5%) were opposed to it. Roberts, Weir-Smith, and Reddy (2011) report that 76% of black people supported affirmative action in 2009. Friedman and Erasmus (2008) also review a host of surveys that have borne out the “race” based differences in support and opposition to affirmative action.

Although Terre Blanche (2006, p.86) vehemently critiques governments application of the employment equity strategy, he concedes that “a vastly greater number have benefited from the removal of apartheid impediments [and] the judicious application of affirmative action...at the cost of relatively minor disruption to the white middle class”. The shareholder activism of organisations which invest provident funds on behalf of large numbers of government employees, has begun to send the message to industry that empowerment makes sense economically, politically and socially (Business Report, 2007, August 22).

Given the prevailing tension between legislation and implementation, it would appear that an uneasy atmosphere prevails in the corporate setting. The relationship between the EEC and the white interest groups is fractious, troubled and characterised by “attacks” in the press (see debate over Woolworths in Fin24, 2012, September 07, and the University of Pretoria’s application of employment equity in Afriforum Youth, 2009, April 23). This is partly indicative of the resistances framing the discourse of employment equity. On the one hand we have new black entrants in the workplace whose arrival has been facilitated by employment equity, while on the other hand, we have some people that view the corporate environment as their domain that they have built and nurtured over the years (e.g. Afriforum, 2009; Freedom Front Plus, 2009).

Jack with Harris (2007, p.55) speaks of the “white male syndrome” which he states is often articulated as “I have started my business, worked very hard and now I have to give it away to black people”. In a similar vein there are corporate mergers between relatively new black business and established white capital. This might also be viewed as interventionist transformation that seeks to destabilise the privileged status quo. Typically, the new black players are entering a world already inhabited by a “white” culture (Thomas, 2002), value system and way of doing things. The expectation might be that they should be assimilated into the existing culture. Morgan (2006) argues that organisation resides in the heads of people and therefore for effective change in organisations, there is a need for cultural change. Seen in this light, changes that may be effected in rules, systems, policies and procedures, may not be sufficient. There has been a growing call for an African oriented organisational theory that reflects the location of the application of theory rather than the wholesale importation of Western concepts (Khoza, 1994, 2008; Mbigi, 1994).

As one of the last to obtain democracy, South Africa joined North America, India, Malaysia, Britain, and Zimbabwe, in implementing affirmative action when it formerly promulgated the Employment Equity Act³ No.55 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a). In a comprehensive review of how these countries implemented employment equity, Thomas (2002) states that although not without its own problems, South Africa has learned from the challenges experienced by these forerunners. Moreover, successive cornerstone documents of the African National Congress (ANC) (e.g. The Freedom Charter of 1955, ANC 52nd Congress Resolutions, 2009) upon which South Africa has chartered her direction have seen economic transformation as the pivot to achieving social change. The Freedom Charter (2009, p.1) states that “[T]he national wealth of our country... shall be restored to the people”. On economic transformation, the ANC 52nd Congress Resolutions (2009, p.26) state that “[T]he changes we seek will not emerge spontaneously from the ‘invisible hand’ of the market”. The resolutions also commit to transforming structures of ownership through advancing employment equity in every area

³ The Act applies to designated groups which it defines as black people, women and people with disabilities. Chapter one states that “black people” is a generic term for Africans, “Coloureds”, and Indians. A designated employer refers to those organisations with 150 or more employees or with an annual turnover above a specific threshold.

of work. Modisha (2008) deftly recalls the many events over the previous century which eventually saw the promulgation of the EEA. Some of the influences external to South Africa include lessons from Canada, the United States of America, Zambia, Malaysia, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Sullivan Codes. The factors internal to South Africa include but are not limited to the Black Management Forum (BMF), Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

The Employment Equity Act, No.55 of 1998 (EE Act, RSA, 1998a) was a culmination of the historical aspirations and struggles dating back many decades and ultimately set out in the Freedom Charter in 1955. Since before its inception, a number of authors (Ramphela, 1993, 1995; Breakwater Monitor, 1995; Horwitz, Bowmaker–Falconer, Searll, 1996; and Human, 1996) have written on employment equity as a necessary vehicle to achieve social transformation. A lot more has been written about employment equity in South Africa after 1998 (Breakwater Monitor, 1998; Thomas and Robertshaw, 1999; Thomas, 2002; Gqubule, 2006; Maziya, 2006; Department of Labour, 2007; Modisha, 2007, 2008; Jack with Harris, 2007; Solidarity, 2007; Bezuidenhout, Bischoff, Buhlungu, Lewins, 2008; Habib and Bentley, 2008; Ramphela, 2008; Mare', 2011; Nkomo, 2011; Department of Labour, 2012; Erasmus, 2012).

The general tenor of these writings has been largely critical of the implementation of employment equity, both for its “poor” implementation and its pace (Mwita and Matsapola, 2005). The most vociferous criticism has been reserved for affirmative action (AA), the instrument for reaching the goals of employment equity (Solidarity, 2007; Afriforum, 2009). For example, Solidarity has charged the chair of the EEC of racism for excluding white men from preferential employment practices (Solidarity, 2007). Other commentators such as Nzimande and Sikhosana (1996), Terreblanche (2002) and Qqubule (2006) have criticised South Africa’s conception of employment equity as minimalist or thin. They argue that it is concerned with representation of designated groups “without considering the embedded nature of inequalities in the social, economic and political system of the country” (Modisha, 2008, p.155) while focusing only on the upper ends of the class hierarchy (Ndletyana, 2008). Another group of those who take

issue with employment equity are concerned that it continues to racialise South African society in ways that are inimical to the aspirational non-racialism discourse (Alexander, 2007; Mare', 2011; Erasmus, 2012).

While the EEA does not provide for substantive empowerment from a broadly social and economic stance, it seeks to achieve individual empowerment of the employed. In this respect, one of the hinges of the legislation is skills development which is also provided for in the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act (no. 53 of 2003). Thus, the EEA makes it clear that affirmative action measures only apply to suitably qualified people of designated groups who are able to perform the inherent requirements of the job. Skills development is supported by the related legislation in the form of the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998). Thus substantive empowerment is the aim here as members of designated groups should be employed on the basis of suitability to perform the job, supported to obtain more skills to develop further, and to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of workplace goals. Together with the culture and legislative support for lifelong learning, the legislative environment has enacted a number of measures to support anti-discrimination. These include the CCMA (Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration), Equality Court, and the Labour Court.

Notwithstanding the legislative parameters and framework that has been put in place to both ensure and support changes in the South African workplace, there has been criticism leveled at the pace of change (EEC, 2010, 2011, 2012). Thus successive Employment Equity Commission reports have lamented the slow pace of change across most indexes with the exception of white females. Moreover, Modisha (2008, p.168) notes that “the fact that white females benefit most from the EEA may imply that there is still racial preference”. While changes have been slow, they have been progressive with the exception of the employment of people with disabilities which has seen a decline off a very low base (EEC, 2012). According to Bezuidenhout *et al*, (2008, p.26), “African women [who] are very much under-represented as they account for 40.4% of the population of South Africa but only 34% of the economically active population”. They point to a low representation of African women and high representation of white people

in sectors requiring higher levels of education and skills. Modisha (2008) has critiqued the delinking of skills development from employment equity.

Bezuidenhout *et al.*, (2008) have been particularly critical of the extremely poor use of discrimination mediation and arbitration structures such as the Equality Court. Their seminal examination of employment equity moved from simple numbers tracking based exclusively on EEC data to look at different sources including the Labour Force Surveys, government departments, sector bodies, and legislated structures whose role is to resolve employment equity based discrimination cases. Bezuidenhout *et al.*, (2008) challenge the veracity of the EEC statistics and offer the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as the most reliable data source on the labour market (see Table 1). They also highlight the importance of sector specific analysis as it reveals the complexity of the data which is often overlooked by the EEC. For example, the last column of Table 3 reveals that the financial services sector is the most under-representative of black people. They assert that “by combining an understanding of the nature of work with equity, we are able to transcend the pre-occupation with change on the high end of the labour market...” (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2008, p.29).

In addition, this stratification allows them to observe the continuity and in some cases the worsening of labour conditions in sectors like agriculture which is staffed by black men and women particularly at the low end. Bezuidenhout *et al.*, (2008) further note that data contained in EEC reports is based on a very limited sample of the national labour market as it collects data from companies with 150 or more employees. They also lament the poor reporting of companies to the EEC. In this regard, they state that levels of non-compliance remain relatively high and there is “too much variability in the submission of employment equity reports annually to the Employment Equity Registry that allows for any comparisons to be made and lastly the quality of the information provided is questionable” (2008, p.25).

Industrial sector	African			Coloured			Indian			White			Total Black		
	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	Total	M	F
Wholesale, retail trade & catering & accommodation services	68.8	34.4	34.3	9.9	4.4	5.5	4.5	3.1	1.4	16.3	9.4	6.9	83.2	42.0	41.2
Community, social & personal services	64.8	29.8	35.0	12.0	5.1	6.9	2.7	1.3	1.4	20.4	7.1	13.2	79.5	36.2	43.3
Manufacturing	64.2	42.9	21.3	15.1	9.1	6.0	5.2	3.6	1.6	15.2	10.9	4.3	84.4	55.5	28.9
Agriculture, hunting, forestry & fishing	76.5	46.0	30.5	14.0	9.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.6	6.4	2.1	90.5	55.0	35.5
Financial intermediation, insurance, real estate & business services	54.6	37.6	17.0	9.0	4.2	4.8	4.2	2.0	2.3	32.0	16.2	15.8	67.9	43.8	24.1

Table 1: Demographic Statistics for the Top Five Sectors. Source: LFS March 2007 – from Bezuidenhout et al, (2008)

1.2.2 The Banking Industry

Any historical analysis requires writing “race” and gender into the analysis to include the elisions of the apartheid order. Writing in a volume on *History Making in South Africa*, Lipton (2007) takes a revisionist position in relation to the role of business in the changes that led to the decline and end of formal apartheid. Her history of business in South Africa seeks to rehabilitate the role and image of capital while critiquing what she calls the influence of “communism”. This research contends that her analysis lacks the textured truths about how white business has historically maintained white privilege and the attendant racialised and gendered power asymmetries in the workplace. Thus, commenting on Johannesburg’s structures of extraction, Mbembe (2008, p.44) observes that, “far from being an accident, racism became a constitutive dimension of the city’s modernity”.

Using the African National Congress’ (ANC) adoption of the neoliberal agenda (Bond, 2005; Gqubale, 2006) as a yard stick of the similarities between white business and the post-apartheid elite does not address the real questions of how some people participating (or excluded) in the labour market were disempowered. At this level of analysis, the divide between English and Afrikaans capital which Lipton (2007) accentuates, is a rather false divide. This is because there are no identifiable groupings of

black employees that can claim to have been better off in relation to skills development and advancement opportunities from English or Afrikaans employers, working conditions on farms and mines notwithstanding (Luhabe, 2002).

In line with Steyn (2001) and Giliomee (2003), the trope of legitimating vast distinctions between English and Afrikaans people ultimately seeks to disentangle one group from a complicity in which both parties actively participated. A perusal of the literature suggests that there is little evidence to illustrate how white business actively campaigned against apartheid in ways that were distinct from the motives of self-interest (Luhabe, 2002; van der Westhuizen 2007). There are significant qualitative differences between wanting to expand the labour market for growing business on the one hand and coupling this expansion by providing equal advancement opportunities for black people and women on the other hand. The later approach would mean that post-apartheid South Africa would have a significant number of experienced black managers. This was not the case at the demise of apartheid. The most distinct group of black business leaders emerged out of the township entrepreneurial class rather than out of the bigger and more established white business (Luhabe, 2002). With notable exceptions, women and black women in particular were practically absent from any meaningful positions of power in the labour market (Luhabe, 2002). It could be suggested that at the end of apartheid, business had not radically shifted from Verwoedian ideology of limiting black skills to those of “hewers of wood and drawers of water” (South African History Online). Ethical historical analysis needs to examine the micro experiences of people during the historical period under examination. It may be argued that a rehabilitation of white capital such as that attempted by Lipton (2007) continues to decentre the experience of black people (van der Westhuizen, 2007).

Perhaps the most extensive historical account of the early years of the one of the banks and its predecessors is by Webb (1992). Insight into this institution which has always been a major player in the South African economy is instructive. The bank was founded in the early 1800’s. There is very little said about the composition of the workforce of this bank in the early years. It is however clear that white males were the primary employees at the time (Innes, 1992). From the general labour and employment

patterns and practices of colonial South Africa it can be inferred that white people occupied semi-skilled and skilled positions while black people provided the cheap unskilled labour necessary for early industrialisation. Webb (1992) indicates that the early 1900's witnessed the first assertion of white labour through union organisation. When the bank began to sell shares to its employees as a way of countering rising antagonism of labour, Webb (1992, p.225) notes that, "it is unlikely that clerks and lower paid workers could have afforded to buy shares".

The First World War saw an eerie repetition of current employment patterns. This came about when many employees were drafted to participate in the war. Webb (1992) notes that rather than employing more educated Africans, the bank decided to employ (white) women on a temporary bases. The Employment Equity Commission (2007) has recently argued that employers would rather promote white women than appoint black people to management and senior positions. Even though white females were preferred over "educated Africans," the former were not afforded equivalent rights to their white male counterparts. Webb (1992) notes for example that in 1918 unionists voted against the inclusion of females in the union movement known as the Society. Much like other industries of pre-apartheid South Africa, social asymmetries favoured white males, followed by white women, with Africans making up the rear. "Race" consistently trumped gender inequities.

The history of banking in South is inextricably tied to the social system of black exclusion and white accumulation of capital to uphold white privilege. van der Westhuizen (2007, p.66) notes the victory of the National Party and the resulting Afrikaner nationalism led them to becoming a political and economic force. She states that the foundations of this were "built through state patronage, as racial policies explicitly advanced the cumulative ambitions of white people". This period witnessed a rapid form of white economic empowerment that enabled historically poor and uneducated families within the Afrikaner community to scale socio economic classes within a single generation. A sharp distinction between Afrikaner fortunes and their English speaking counterparts is deceptive because both groups benefitted very "handsomely after 1948, as the NP continued to ensure that black wages were kept at the

same appallingly low level” (van der Westhuizen, 2007, p.66). Sanlam provides an apt example of how capital benefitted from apartheid. In this regard van der Westhuizen (2007) notes that after the Sharpeville and Langa massacres, foreign investors withdrew but Sanlam capitalised on this withdrawal by moving into the technology, vehicle and electronics space in manufacturing. Volkskas and Old Mutual are recorded to have taken similar advantage of the political space afforded by apartheid.

With the historical underpinnings of the South African economy sketched out in preceding paragraphs, a direct look at banking and employment equity is provided below.

Banks as a site of research have been of interest to other researchers (e.g., Maier, 2002; Strachan, Burgess, Sullivan, 2004; Jongens, 2006). Employment within the banking sector is formal “white collar” with a high number of professionals and a significant layer of management staff. It is seen as a significant driver of the local economy and many bank head-quarters are located in Johannesburg which is also known as the financial capital of Africa. The expansion of many banks into the rest of the continent, South America and parts of Europe is also being largely driven from Johannesburg. This requires a significant workforce. In 2008 the three largest banks jointly employed approximately 130,821 (EEA2, 2008) staff. As in most industries, black people were generally employed at junior and clerical levels within the banking sector (EEC, 2007). The legislative and moral expectation placed on banks to engage in redress measures was therefore huge. As a site of research, the banking sector is particularly interesting as there is a significant base of professionals that would provide complex data on empowerment. Moreover, the incentive to empowerment has been couched as a business imperative within the broader “diversity” genre (Human, 1996) that the banking sector appears to have adopted.

This research was not about ownership in banking but a brief background to ownership may be useful to understanding employment practices. The lack of state ownership in the banking sector is lamented by Gqubule (2006) as he views state intervention as a strategic driver of economic transformation. He argues that “many vibrant capitalist economies have large state-owned banking sectors” (2006, p.34). He also sees finance as too valuable a commodity to be exclusively left to the market. For

him, transformation in the banking sector would therefore be enhanced by state ownership. The history of black people in banking is fairly short. With the exception of African Bank (Government Employees Pension Fund is the major shareholder) which was formed in the 1970's (Gqubule, 2006) and which has remained a small player in comparison to the bigger banks, the ownership of this sector is largely white. Black people operate as employees rather than as owners or significant shareholders.

According to their websites and mission statements, all of the major banks ascribe to employment equity legislation and have incorporated it into their corporate strategies. The Banking Association of South Africa is also a key signatory to the Financial Sector Charter (2002). The early 2000's saw a lot of energy and effort in the financial sector directed towards the financial services charter. In the period between 2003 and 2008 the framework that drove transformation efforts in the financial sector was the sector charter. The charter was a voluntary framework that was widely endorsed within the financial sector. It was published in terms of section 12 of the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE Act) for general information, but not legislated (Financial Sector Charter Council, 2013). With the promulgation of the Department of Trade and Industry's (dti) Codes of Good Practice for Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (generic codes), the sector charter was intended to be converted into a binding sector code. However, failure to resolve issues resulted in the expiry of the time frame which governed the charter which meant that the charter had to be jettisoned in favour of the generic BBBEE codes (Financial Sector Charter Council, 2013). The status quo remains and the sector continues to be measured against the generic BBBEE codes.

Notwithstanding the status of the Financial Sector Charter, it is insightful to look at its earlier commitments. The charter bound financial institutions to a range of human resource development commitments. The Financial Sector Charter (2002, p.7) states: "In addition to the obligations of the financial sector in terms of employment equity and skills development legislation, and:

- based on an estimated ratio of 10% for 2002, each financial institution will have a minimum target of 20% to 25% black people at senior management level by 2008;

- based on an estimated ratio of 1.6% for 2002, each financial institution will have a target of a minimum of 4% black women at senior management level by 2008;
- based on an estimated ratio of 17% for 2002, each financial institution will have a target of a minimum of 30% black people at middle management level by 2008;
- based on an estimated ratio of 5% for 2002, each financial institution will have a target of a minimum of 10% black women at middle management level by 2008;
- based on an estimated ratio of 28% for 2002, each financial institution will have a minimum target of 40% to 50% black people at junior management level by 2008;
- based on an estimated ratio of 12% for 2002, each financial institution will have a target of a minimum of 15% black women at junior management level by 2008.”

These targeted commitments suggest that there is an active empowerment agenda currently underway within the banking sector. However, against the backdrop of the outlined context, it is worth noting that the Labour Force Survey (Statistics South Africa, March, 2007) found the financial services sector to be the most under representative of black people. The EEA2 report detailing the results of the four major banks also suggests that the commitments made in 2002 fall short in implementation. For example, at top management levels, black males were at 14% while white males were over 70% and in middle management black males constituted 10% compared to over 40% white males in 2008 (EEA2, 2008). Also worth noting is the suggestion that the Banking Association of SA is also largely defunct and many of its functions have been assumed by the Bank Seta (Financial Sector Charter Council, 2013).

1.3 Research Aims and Research Questions

The research explored how employment equity discourses and practices influence the development of professional identities within the context of organisational efforts to transform the demographic profile of employees and managers in particular. Its contribution to knowledge is an understanding of some of the meanings that managers make out of empowerment discourses and practices in as far as these make them think about their professional identities in particular ways. In this regard the broad research

goal was to contribute to the development of knowledge in employment equity research and to broaden our understanding of how discourse, ideology and power shape professional identities within the context of employment equity as well as to shape guidelines on future implementation of redress measures.

Research Aims

- The research sought to illustrate how discourses of employment equity and merit operate to reinforce or destabilise racialised and gendered stereotypes and power asymmetries.

The power of discourses in constituting worlds, structuring reality, and determining the course of policy interpretation and practice made this a worthwhile course of enquiry (Thompson, 1990).

- There was a need to understand if employment equity discourses and practices were leading to substantive psychological empowerment among managers.

The discourse of tokenism and window dressing necessitate an understanding of a systematic understanding of empowerment (Atewologun and Singh, 2010).

- Another aim was to surface how gender and “race” intersect to shape professional identities of female managers.

The focus on female managers to the exclusion of males is not an effort to disregard the raced and gendered positionality of males. Rather it is motivated by an understanding that the employment equity legislation views females as a homogenous group whereas men are clearly defined as either beneficiaries (black males) or non-beneficiaries (white males). The legislation is silent on the differential impact of patriarchy and racism in the history and present of black women and white females. This warranted a closer examination of women. Further studies might focus more closely on men.

- The next aim was to examine how informal voluntary social practices of employees and managers support or challenge the aims of employment equity.

The literature suggests (Ibarra, 1995) that social networks serve as powerful means of progression. There was a need to understand how networks impact on the aims of employment equity.

- The final aim was to explore how the discourses and practices of employment equity influence the identity constructions of managers.

There is a sense that the influence of employment equity is pervasive. This study was therefore interested in understand how discourses and practices of employment equity influence identity constructions (Duncan, 2012).

Following on the research aims introduced above, five research questions guided this research. In addition to the research questions serving as the key thrusts to examining the core concerns of the research undertaking, they also served as a primary structuring device. In this regard, this thesis sequentially addresses each of the questions presented below.

Research Questions

- 1) In what ways do discourses and practices of employment equity and merit operate to reinforce or destabilise racialised and gendered stereotypes and power asymmetries?
- 2) Do discourses and practices of employment equity lead to substantive psychological empowerment for managers?
- 3) How do gender and “race” intersect to shape professional identities of female professionals and managers?
- 4) How do the informal voluntary social practices of employees support or challenge the aims of employment equity?
- 5) How do the discourses and practices of employment equity influence the identity constructions of managers?

The literature review, presentation of findings, and conclusions are presented in the order of the research questions.

1.4 Scope

This section deals with the significance of the study in relation to its theoretical and practical outputs. It provides the delimitations of the research as well as a brief summary of the study. Lastly, it presents an overview of the various chapters that serve as a roadmap for the research.

1.4.1 Significance of the Study

It is unclear what impact employment equity has on the professional identities of designated groups (Ramphele, 2008). This is the case for both those who derive overt benefit from employment equity and those who do not. According to Spreitzer (1995, p.1442), even though there is growing attention to empowerment in organisational studies literature, “the lack of a theoretically derived measure of psychological empowerment in a work context has deferred substantive research on empowerment”. There was a need to understand whether the nature of empowerment practiced in the corporate environment leads to identities of belonging or alienation (Caver and Ancella, 2002). The gap identified here was therefore theoretical and practical.

Employment equity has been studied in a number of ways as can be seen in major interventions in the edited volume by Habib and Bentley (2008), the study which examines the state of employment equity by Bezuidenhout *et al.*, (2008), and special issues edited by Reddy, Moletsane and Masilela (2011) and Erasmus (2012). This study has shifted the lens to the mutually constituting dimensions of employment equity discourses, practices and identity constructions. This research was needed in order to understand how substantive psychological empowerment can be attained in order to achieve the goals of employment equity. This shifted the discourse beyond representation to active participation. Furthermore, it was important to examine how current employment equity discourses influence identity constructions of employees. There is a grey area in understanding the divergent and converging ways in which black and white females participate in employment equity discourses and the implications that this has for the implementation of employment equity measures. Conceptions of merit and the ways in which employees engage with each other in social spaces are under explored areas that warranted research in order to shed light on the practices and discourses of employment equity. Overall then, this research has moved the discourse from representation as a starting place towards a depth analysis and understanding of organisational identities. Theoretically, the contribution to knowledge has been the use of critical theories including feminist theory within organisation based research.

1.4.2 Delimitations of the Research

The Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 includes black people, women, and those with disabilities in its classification of designated groups. While recognising the importance of engaging with disability and its continued marginalisation in both practice and research, the study foregrounded “race” followed by gender to the exclusion of disability. However, there remains an urgency to understand the ways in which women are differentially impacted upon by employment equity (Nkomo, 2011). The focus on female managers to the exclusion of males is not an effort to disregard the raced and gendered positionality of males.

The choice of focus on “race” and gender was motivated by both the researcher’s interest as well as the current racial and gendered distortions that were deliberately created by apartheid’s “race” and patriarchy based exclusions from meaningful work. For example, the EEC (2007-2008) reported that black South Africans constituted 41.3% of professionally qualified, specialists, and middle-management, while white people make up 57.2% at this level. Foreign nationals make up the remaining 1.5%. At senior management levels, the same report indicated that black people constitute 32.4% and whites form 65.2%. At top management, black people make up 32.9% while white people constitute 68.2%. The balance is made up of foreign nationals (see Table 2). It is worth noting that the researcher is aware of the sustained marginalisation of people with disabilities (Bezuidenhout, *et al.*, 2008) and the urgent need to conduct further research in this area.

Organisation culture has been implicated in the pace of employment equity (Ramphela, 2008). However this research did not foreground organisational culture as this has been addressed elsewhere (e.g. Nkomo, 2011) and the focus was deliberately on identity constructions. Additionally, there are many other identity dimensions in addition to “race”, gender, and disability. These include sexuality, party political affiliation, language groups, departmental specialisation, and religious affiliation among others. The researcher was however guided by what participants highlighted as salient. Moreover, asking the questions against the backdrop of “interview about employment equity” might have triggered particular identities. It is important to note that it is often those aspects of

our identities that are marginalised by social asymmetries which become most salient within particular contexts.

While poverty alleviation largely overlaps with racial redress efforts (Friedman and Erasmus, 2008), this research was limited to racial and gender redress and did not examine poverty alleviation measures. Gqubule (2006) and Ndletyana (2008) have critiqued the narrow scope of employment equity as lacking in broad societal transformative action. The research recognises the importance of a holistic understanding of the entire labour force. It does however focus on the higher end (professional, senior, and top management) of the labour market. It also only focuses on a segment of the financial services sector and one bank which excludes a wide variety of other important sectors. For a broader analysis see Bezuidenhout *et al.*, (2008).

1.4.3 Summary of the Research

This study examined the accounts of 54 managers in relation to how they experience and make meaning of employment equity discourses in a major bank in Johannesburg, South Africa. The study employed critical discourse analysis and discursive analysis to surface meanings from discourses of employment equity with a focus on how power asymmetries are produced and reproduced in organisational life. The section below details the organisation of chapters of this research.

1.4.4 Chapter Organisation

Chapter One provides an introduction to the research and outlines the background for the study. In this regard, it provides the context to the banking industry in relation to its historical patterns of racialised and gendered employment. The state of employment equity research is briefly laid out and the significance and scope of this study is provided. The guiding research questions are outlined in this chapter.

The literature review makes up *Chapter Two* of this research. In line with the research questions asked, the chapter begins by exploring how employment equity has become intertwined with the *discourse of merit*. It traces the literature on the elite discourses of meritocracy and its gate keeping function. In this regard, it crafts the argument that

meritocracy may not only keep certain people out thereby maintaining asymmetries through colourblind discourses, but that it also possibly taints the practice and perceptions of employment equity by offering deficit constructions of competence.

The literature review on the subject of employment equity and merit is followed by a review of the literature on *substantive psychological empowerment*. Thus, if employment equity is inimical to meritocratic discourses, what does substantive empowerment look like? This section looks at the literatures in organisational theory and psychology for an explication of substantive psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1992; Spreitzer, 1996) is the lens through which these literatures are reviewed. Moreover, the empowerment is understood as inextricable from conceptions of dominant power formations as outlined in Foucault's (1979) and Mumby's (1988) critique of organisational power.

The next section of the literature review explored *gendered forms* of empowerment with regard to how women managers understand employment equity in as far as it applies to them. To set the scene for this exploration, the history of women's movements in South Africa was looked at (as documented by Meintjies, 1996 and Gasa, 2007 among others). This history seeks to understand patterns of women's "race" based coalitions⁴ and cooperation in order to understand the current manifestation of women's ways of identifying in the workplace. Feminist literature on power and intersectionality was reviewed. This literature helped to shed light on how white and black women identify as raced and gendered beings. This was important for understanding discourses and practices of employment equity as they apply to women.

The next section reviewed literature on *informal voluntary segregation* in relation to how people organise themselves in social settings and *networks*. Here, a series of naturalistic observation studies which examine social engagement in school and workplace settings were reviewed. The implications for the perpetuation of power asymmetries and unequal career advancement are reviewed.

⁴ The words coalition and solidarity are used interchangeably to connote strategic alliances between social groups.

Finally, the literature on *identity constructions* is reviewed beginning with a brief history of South African history of racial domination and the transition to a democratic system. It reviews the classical identity theories, social constructionism and then examines how identities evolve as well as their recalcitrance to change (Steyn, 2001). In this context the research explored literature on identity (Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard, 2008) pointing to the complexities of continuities, adaptations and discontinuities in post-apartheid identities particularly in relation to the complicating variable that employment equity has become.

Chapter Three consists of the methodology used in this research. This chapter grounds the study in discourse studies and critical discourse in particular. The four discourse analytical methods reviewed are conversation analysis, discursive psychology, Foucauldian discourse analysis and *critical discourse analysis* (CDA). The works of Thompson (1990) and Van Dijk (1998) served as the grounding texts for explicating the research orientation to discourse. An explicit position of how the research relates to power and ideology was outlined.

The methods section consists of the research methodology and procedures followed in conducting the research. This section explicates qualitative research methods as well as the choice of CDA as a methodological orientation and tool. A comprehensive account of the procedures that are followed was provided. Data collection methods and data sequencing were outlined. The logic of interviews, observations, written reports, discussion groups, and documents is discussed. Issues pertaining to access, informed consent, ethical concerns, data handling and processing were discussed. A detailed account of the philosophical approach as well as the detail of how the data was analysed is provided. Thompson's (1990) analytical frame focusing on the operation of ideology is outlined as the research's primary analytical method.

Chapter Four consists of the study *results* as well as the *discussion* of these. The sequencing of the findings and the discussion is appropriate when using critical discourse analysis as the two are intricately linked to each other and cannot be productively read apart (Potter and Wetherell, 1992). The structure and presentation of this chapter followed the key research questions which underpin the study. Thus, the chapter begins

by seeking to understand discourses of merit and how they are influenced by, and influence employment equity. It then looked at the results and discussion of the manifestation of substantive psychological empowerment in relation to employment equity within the organisation. This was followed by the findings emanating from an exploration of women participant's ways of identifying within the context of employment equity discourses. The results and discussion of interpersonal ways of voluntarily relating in social networks is presented. Finally, the chapter looked at how these discourses emanating from employment equity influence identity constructions of the cohort of participants that are the subject of this study.

Chapter Five is the concluding chapter which provides a summary of the research findings. In addition to the narrative account, the findings are also presented in the form of five tables. The chapter then outlines the implications of the research particularly for the field of organisational theory. It goes onto present the limitations of the study. Future directions and concluding comments bring the research to an end.

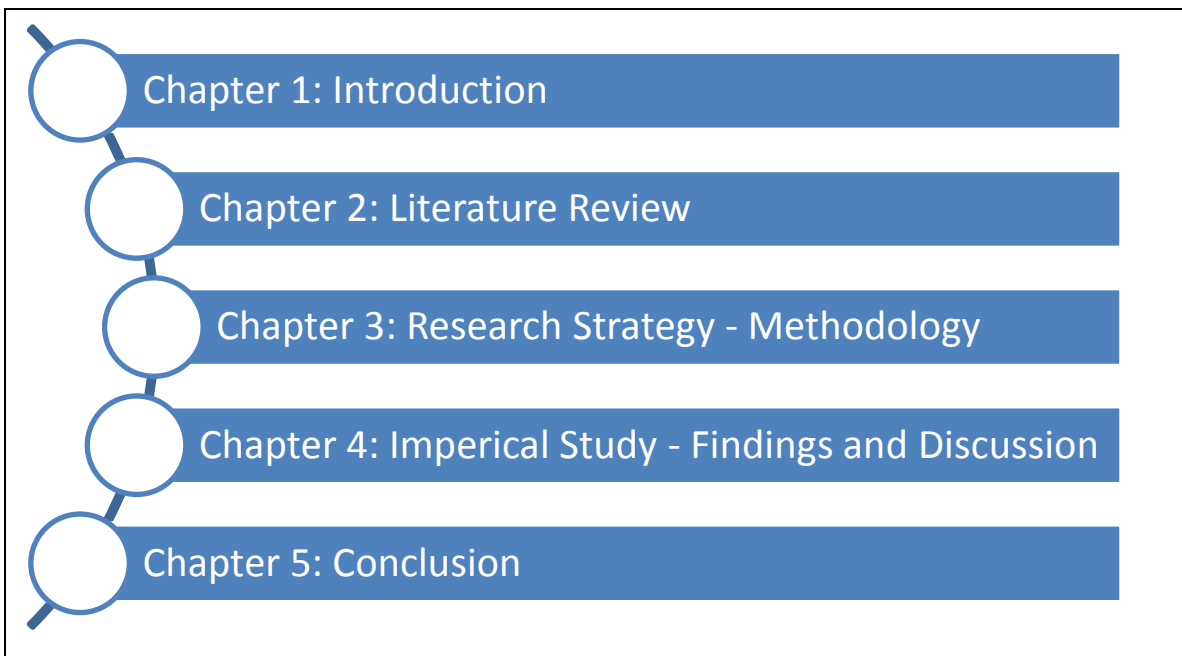


Figure 1: Chapter Overview

1.5 Definition of Key Concepts

To understand the research problem in context, some of the key concepts were defined in more detail. A further explication was provided in the literature review section.

Transformation is a call for a broader agenda for substantive change across of a number of indices. Having noted the widespread confusion surrounding the understanding of *employment equity*, affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), Ramphele (2008) seeks to bring about some clarity. She observes that employment equity through the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998, intends “to promote more equitable employment opportunities for all South Africans...” (Ramphele, 2008, p.84). The Employment Equity Act calls for the employment and advancement of suitably qualified employees as well as training and development. However, in recognition of the historic manipulation of opportunities so that they systematically favoured white people (and white males in particular), the Employment Equity Act provides for the practice of affirmative action (AA) to fast track the entry of designated groups into areas of employment where they are underrepresented. The Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998, section 15 (1) (EE Act, RSA, 1998a), states that AA provides measures that employers must take in order to ensure that “suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in their workforces”. *Affirmative action* is therefore one of the means employed to realise the goal of employment equity. In terms of the classical definition, affirmative action occurs when an organisation goes out of its way to make sure that women and men, black people, people with disabilities and the fully abled have equal chances of being hired, promoted, or retained (Crosby and Cordova, 2000).

Responding to the view that emerged in later years that affirmative action was preferential treatment, the U.S. Department of Labour (1995, p.1 as cited in Crosby and Codava, 2000, p.16) stated: “affirmative action is *not* preferential treatment. It does not mean that unqualified persons should be hired or promoted over other people. What AA does mean is that positive steps must be taken to ensure equal employment opportunity for traditionally disadvantaged groups”. Williams (2000, p.87) states that a company

should perceive affirmative action as “making sure that it doesn’t miss out on a group of qualified employees through discriminatory recruiting practices or lose some of its qualified employees because institutionalized racism or sexism prevented them from working to their full potential”.

Empowerment varies across different contexts. There are global, social, and workplace conceptions of empowerment. For example, social empowerment is dependent on economic empowerment. In this regard, poverty is akin to social disempowerment (Friedman, 1992). This research limits its examination of empowerment to the workplace using a psychological framework of analysis. Thomas and Velthouse (1990, in Spreitzer, 1995, p.1443), understand “empowerment... as increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual’s orientation to his or her work role: meaning, competence..., self-determination, and impact”.

Professional identities refer to the sense that people have of themselves as a consequence of being in the workplace, the positions they hold, the value they attach to their input, their level of empowerment, how they are constructed by their peers, history and society. There are three major foci of identity: self as an individual, as interpersonal being, and as a group member (Brewer and Gardener, 1996). Within this conceptualisation, notions of empowerment are inescapably tied up to the construction of professional identity. For example, in the parlance of the oppression and apartheid discourse, the dominance of white males in positions of power in corporate organisations is seen as problematic. It suggests that their power has been ill-gotten with the aid of the colour-bar and entrenched mechanisms of patriarchy which characterised apartheid. Notions of fairness, moral obligation and redress therefore call on white males to participate in the reconstruction of their professional identities as well as those of their peers.

Following Ott (1989), *organisational culture* is understood to mean the culture of an organisation which includes shared values, beliefs, assumptions, norms, perceptions, artifacts, and patterns of behaviour. Through the organisational culture perspective, organisational culture is used “...as a frame of reference for the way one looks at, attempts to understand, and works with organizations” (Ott, 1989, p.1). There are many

descriptions and definitions of organisational culture. However, many of these are based on what this research identifies as the core understanding of organisational culture as defined above. The postmodern perspective of organisational culture was adopted here as it seeks to critically understand and to expose the ideological nature of organisational cultures as well as how they privilege particular groups and exclude others. The very idea of the organisational culture perspective is therefore challenged.

This study employs *discourse* in its philosophical and ideologically based tradition. In this way, following Thompson (1990) and Van Dijk (1997), the ideology of discourse is based not so much on the presumption that discourse has meaning, but rather that meaning (through ideology) is assigned to a discourse by the users of language.

Critical Discourse Analysis, according to Van Dijk (1998, p.1), “is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk... Critical discourse analysts take the explicit position... to understand, expose and ultimately to resist social inequality”.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Five major themes organised around the research questions were reviewed in this chapter of the research. This review of the literature goes beyond the work that has been produced on the subject of employment equity and looks at how fields such as organisational studies, community psychology, and critical studies including feminist work and critical “race” studies conceive of equity and power asymmetries. A combination of the literatures emerging from various areas of understanding work and identity allows for a reframing of the questions that have been brought to bear on employment equity and affirmative action research.

2.1 Employment Equity and Merit in Relation to Racialised and Gendered Stereotypes and Power Asymmetries

2.1.1 Affirmative Action

This section on affirmative action should be read in relation to the extensive discussion of employment equity as set out in the introductory chapter. Affirmative action is the instrument used to achieve some of the goals of employment equity. The Act defines affirmative action measures as those “designed to ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce of a designated employer” (EEA, 1998, No.15). At a broader level, the HSRC (2011, p.39) states that affirmative action is one of the key instruments for achieving employment equity in South Africa and that it is meant to “drive social transformation of the workforce and contribute to the development of a diversified, representative and cohesive South African society”.

At this point it is worth reflecting on the observations of the EEC report for the period up to 2007 (see percentage figures in Tables 2 and 3). The report notes a considerably slow pace of change. The Commission further states that “the slow pace of change is reflected in the low representation of black people in general, Africans in particular,

especially in the top and senior management levels” (CEE, 2007-2008, p.48). Table 2 as reproduced here depicts these concerns.

Occupational level	Male				Female				Foreign Nationals		Total
	A	C	I	W	A	C	I	W	Male	Female	
Top Management	1013	230	397	4593	462	75	83	770	222	25	7870
	12.9%	2.9%	5.0%	58.4%	5.9%	1.0%	1.1%	9.8%	2.8%	0.3%	100.0%
Senior management	3733	1278	1713	14768	1639	537	710	4476	552	130	29536
	12.6%	4.3%	5.8%	50.0%	5.5%	1.8%	2.4%	15.2	1.9%	0.4%	100.0%
Professionally qualified & specialists & mid-management	18464	6324	6647	45959	10248	3860	3719	21956	1188	421	118786
	15.5%	5.3%	5.6%	38.7%	8.6%	3.2%	3.1%	18.5%	1.0%	0.4%	100.0%
Skilled technical & academically qualified workers	143367	33826	18851	95227	63899	26096	12483	71813	3956	673	470191
	30.5%	7.2%	4.0%	20.3%	13.6%	5.6%	2.7%	15.3%	0.8%	0.1%	100.0%
Semi-skilled & discretionary decision making	345961	52062	16253	29002	17622	62926	17622	48127	32541	498	781223
	44.3%	6.7%	2.1%	3.7%	22.6%	8.1%	2.3%	6.2%	4.2%	0.1%	100.0%
Unskilled & defined decision making	211079	22638	2938	3170	96520	21958	1942	1320	18258	519	380342
	55.5%	6.0%	0.8%	0.8%	25.4%	5.8%	0.5%	0.3%	4.8%	0.1%	
Total Permanent	819811	131034	56398	204126	426248	129159	40952	162281	58223	2605	2030837
	40.4%	6.5%	2.8%	10.1%	21.0%	6.4%	2.0%	8.0%	2.9%	0.1%	100.0%
Non-permanent employees	96194	14676	9599	114407	77249	13707	4393	13819	1506	339	242889
	39.6%	6.0%	4.0%	4.7%	31.8%	5.6%	1.8%	5.7%	0.6%	0.1%	100.0%
Grand total	819811	131034	56398	204126	426248	129159	40952	162281	58223	2605	2030837

Table 2: 2007 total numbers of employees by occupational level, race and gender.

Reproduced from the CEE Report 2007 – 2008

Industrial Sector	African			Coloured			Indian			White			Total Black		
	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F
Wholesale, retail trade & catering & accommodation services	68.8	34.4	34.3	9.9	4.4	5.5	4.5	3.1	1.4	16.3	9.4	6.9	83.2	42.	41.2
Community, social & personal services	64.8	29.8	35.0	12.0	5.1	6.9	2.7	1.3	1.4	20.4	7.1	13.2	79.5	36.2	43.3
Manufacturing	64.2	42.9	21.3	15.1	9.1	6.0	5.2	3.6	1.6	15.2	10.9	4.3	84.4	55.5	28.9
Agriculture, hunting, forestry & fishing	76.5	46.0	30.5	14.0	9.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.6	6.4	2.1	90.5	55.0	35.5
Financial intermediation, insurance, real estate & business services	54.6	37.6	17.0	9.0	4.2	4.8	4.2	2.0	2.3	32.0	16.2	15.8	67.9	43.8	24.1

Table 3: Demographic Statistics for the top five sectors: March 2007, Proportions

Reproduced from Bezuidenhout et al, (2008): Source Labour Force Survey March 2007

2.1.2 Colourblindness

Understanding equality within the familiar standard of equal treatment regardless of existing social asymmetries may be seen as a colourblind approach to employment equity. Here, the maxim is that everyone should be treated equally regardless of “race”. Being colourblind is not the same as not seeing that people have different skin tones. Rather it is the belief that skin colouring and the social constructions around skin colour do not matter and do not make a difference in the world. Thus introducing special measures such as employment equity to prevent discrimination and advance those that are traditionally marginalised in the world of work may be perceived as controversial because this is not easily reconciled with the concept of equal treatment in its narrow conceptualisation (Goonesekere, 2007). Crenshaw (2000) states that those opposed to affirmative action hide behind the easy definition of equality as amounting to equal treatment. This renders “race” and the inequalities that stem from it as irrelevant.

South Africa's long history of fighting racism and its aspirations towards non-racialism makes it similar to North America where measures of racial preferences are perceived by some to threaten "fundamental American values of fairness, equality, and democratic opportunity" (Sturm and Guinier, 1996, p.1). Echoing a number of Organisational Communication Studies theorists such as Mumby (1988), and Ashcraft (2000), as well as critical theorists like Parker (2007), Van Dijk (1998), and Thompson (1990); Nkomo (2011, p.125) notes that organisational neutrality is a myth as systems and belief systems are typically shaped and formed by the values and assumptions of the dominant groups in the organisation". Colourblind approaches thus often favour the dominant groupings. In this regard Ellison and de Wet (2002, p.144) have stated that, "In the land of the colourblind the blue-eyed Caucasian is (still) king". Colourblind views of the world generally find an accommodating place within the discursive frame of merit.

2.1.3 Discourses of Merit

Haney and Hurtado (1994, p.227) define merit as referring for the most part to "the bundle of ability and skills that individuals possess and upon which they can and should be allocated opportunities and rewards". The underlying assumption is that people get what they deserve based on their proximity to the virtues of "meritocracy". For Castilla (2008), meritocracy is also an ideology for the justification of how rewards are distributed. It is often equated with fairness. The question of merit has undergirded most conceptions of affirmative action measures since the inception of these policies. Sturm and Guinier (1996, p.953) state that those opposed to affirmative action "depict racial preferences as extraordinary, special, and deviant—a departure from prevailing modes of selection". They go on to assert that opponents "proceed on the assumption that, except for racial or gender preferences, the process of selection for employment [...] opportunity is fair, meritocratic, and functional" (p.1). This renders affirmative action as unfair and unnecessary. It is perceived as a departure from a system that without affirmative action would be considered as universally fair and meritocratic. Thus, in this conception, there are those that are employed and promoted fairly and those who gain access without merit.

For Crenshaw (2000), the underlying tension between affirmative action and merit has remained unresolved. Affirmative action and employment equity discourses broadly have been informed by a deficit approach which presupposes the absence of merit or presumes that those who are given access to opportunity are not ready and need to be aided to a point of readiness which their white peers occupy *de facto*. Sturm and Guinier (1996, p.6), make this point as follows:

Thus, the stock story frames the affirmative action debate in terms of racial preferences that depart from normal, universal, unbiased, and purportedly fair standards for determining merit.

Crenshaw (2000) observes that instead of addressing these assumptions, liberal allies have implemented affirmative action on the strength of the diversity rationale. This view has it that the existence of a diverse workforce, has benefits of learning from difference, diverse world views, and prepares people for a world that is becoming increasingly diverse (Human, 2006; Nkomo and Stewart, 2006). It is also referred to the “business case” for change (Noon, 2007). This can be characterised as functional diversity. It does not necessarily address the underlying assumptions of deservingness and competence.

The counter offered by Sturm and Guinier (1996) to the meritocracy perspective is to challenge the very basis of value neutral access measures such as psychometric and other forms of assessment. In this regard, they argue that the meritocratic assumptions are ill-founded and fundamentally flawed predictors of actual performance. For them, measures of merit are actually reflective of past opportunity rather than future performance. Elsewhere Guinier (2000) terms this “confirmative action”. Sturm and Guinier (1996) posit that these merit assessments are used as wealth preferences as those who generally perform well often come from privileged backgrounds. When used with subjective measures such as “culture fit” and informal networks, the dominance of particular groups is strengthened. For Sturm and Guinier (1996), affirmative action is about bringing those in the margins onboard and making them the norm rather than the exception. They argue that those on the margins should serve as a barometer of how fair, inclusive, and responsive selection processes are. This suggests that the experiences of those on the

margins should lead to a fundamental rethinking of the whole. Thus, in addition to functional diversity as outlined by Crenshaw (2000), there should be cross racial collaboration, and genuine democratic opportunity (Sturm and Guinier, 1996). Nkomo (2011) asserts that diversity and inequality can co-exist if functional diversity is the driving force for change rather than contextual, substantive equity that recognises the pernicious effects of apartheid.

Sturm and Guinier (1996) advance the view that functional merit is the dominant habit of equating merit with narrow paper and pencil assessments that organisations utilise to screen potential employees or students. This form of fairness is highly valued in many circles as legitimate fairness while measures outside of this are perceived as illegitimate or reverse discrimination (cf. Solidarity, 2008). Thus, Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2007) found that among white South African's there is general support for equal opportunity but huge opposition to affirmative action. Roberts, Weir-Smith, and Reddy (2011) also found that 2009 data from the adult population suggested that only a fifth (22%) of the white population were in support of race-based affirmative action when compared to three-quarters (76%) of black people in support. Similar findings were reached for students including marked opposition among older white students (Mwaba and Simbayi, 1998).

For Sturm and Guinier (1996), this conception of fairness which supports equity without any measures to make it a reality is the stock narrative of merit that views fairness as sameness. Thus, for many people who subscribe to this narrative, any deviation from standard tropes of fairness and merit are seen as unfair. Castilla (2008) has empirically demonstrated that contemporary merit based policies and practices for reward systems have little accountability and transparency and ultimately have ascriptive bias and increase inequity. He found that gender, "race" and nationality differences affect growth in salary after performance ratings have been taken into account. In this regard, white males continue to benefit disproportionately. Meritocracy appears to favour white males in this conception. Elsewhere Castilla and Bernard (2010) point out that those organisations whose cultures promote meritocracy ironically have significantly more bias towards men and against women of equal performance in both performance evaluations

and related remuneration and career outcomes. They call this the “paradox of meritocracy”.

The scientifically “valid” tests which are used to assess merit are seen as offering equal opportunity to demonstrate individual merit. This view would have it that a one size fits all approach produces fair results (Haney and Hurtado, 1994; Sturm and Guinier, 1996). These tropes of fairness are generally understood as closely related and predictive of the quality of performance outputs once the applicant is employed. This all presumes objective, “race” and gender neutral criteria. However, according to Haney and Hurtado (1994) white people disproportionately possess the dominant form of recognised merit. Their “deservingness” is legitimated. They posit that lack of merit rather than the existence of discrimination in the workplace is often presumed when group disparities emerge. In her study, Nkomo (2011, p.126) found that the high performance culture of one of the organisations she researched was used as a “pretext for racist assumptions that black people are never competent”. She notes that this assumption was so pervasive as to taint the organisational expectations with regard to even very well-qualified black recruits. Finally, she found that organisational expectations of black employees were so low that there were occasions when the performance of those who performed badly was not reported on the basis that this was expected as the person was an “equity” appointment. This suggests that the expectation of failure stalks black people in this organisation.

Psychometric assessments are meant to advance equal opportunity because they are purportedly colourblind and rational, but Sturm and Guinier (1996, p.962) contend that for those in the margins, this “rationality was introduced into an environment that was not benign”. Thus in South Africa, at the time of the end of apartheid, the skilled, professional, and senior employees of organisations were largely white and the organisational cultures of most organisations were steeped in apartheid forms of exclusion based on segregated facilities, the “colour-bar” and discriminatory practices (Modisha, 2008; Seekings, 2008). However, according to Sturm and Guinier (1996), the “rational” approach to assessment, merit and subsequent appointments does not take immediate histories and continuing inequities into account. They believe that the push

for rationality must be “juxtaposed against efforts by blacks and other people of color to challenge both the racially discriminatory allocation of benefits and the racial stereotypes that reinforced that allocation of benefits” (Sturm and Guinier, 1996, p.962). In their assessment, meritocracy is neither fair nor democratic and even fails in the functional meritocracy stakes.

Haney and Hurtado (1994) posit that the taken for granted nature of the meritocratic model is problematic. This is because access to opportunities is not universally applied and opportunity to perform and succeed is limited. Moreover, the predictive power of functional meritocracy is dubious as it is not consistent and not linked to performance and sometimes leads to the exclusion of those who would be able to do the job. According to Light, Roscigno and Kalev (2011, p.43), “formal meritocratic procedures and rhetoric can become an institutionalised cloak for ongoing ascriptive bias”. They posit that meritocracy is a legitimating discourse that allows decision makers such as managers and employers to conflate the symbols of meritocracy and equality. Thus, the pitch of one’s voice, accent, and markers of social capital may be construed as markers of merit. Formal procedures for merit such as standardised tests, performance appraisals, and rituals for determining salary increases, enable decision makers to believe that structures are unbiased. This belief allows them to interpret unequal outcomes as a reflection of differences in merit (Light, Roscigno and Kalev, 2011).

2.1.4 The Psychology of Meritocracy

Psychology is deeply implicated in the meritocratic system as it imbues psychometric assessment with the necessary technologies for legitimacy. These are often uncritically applied and abstracted from their context by line managers and practitioners. Thus, even as the EEA prohibits unfair psychometric testing in employment practices, the highly specialised nature of this form of testing means that psychologists retain power of arbitrating fairness. Parker (2007, p.8) provides an incisive critique of the work of mainstream psychology. He states that the “problem with most mainstream psychology is that it either deliberately leaves things as they are – it explicitly reproduces existing power relations – or it pretends that scientific inquiry or interpretation is neutral, and,

hence, it gives tacit support to those in power”. Psychology has also legitimated the individual as the unit of analysis at the expense of group based disadvantage. Individual deservingness is pitted against absence of merit. For Haney and Hurtado (1994), the “lack of” individual merit does not prevent the stereotype from being generalised to the lack of group merit. Durrheim, Boettiger, Essack, Maarschalk and Ranchod (2007) found that among black people who opposed affirmative action, the stigma which they perceived as associated with the policy as well as prevailing stereotypes concerning the competence and merit of those who are seen as beneficiaries, were the primary reasons for some people wanting to disassociate with the policy. This suggests that the success of and pervasiveness of the meritocracy argument, propelled by fears of being described as incompetent, thus appears to be spreading across its traditional base.

In the absence of overt discrimination, the presumption is that all employment and promotion practices are fair. Thus Crenshaw (1988) notes that using “merit” based systems, enables companies to claim to be equal opportunity employers even when they do not have any people of colour in their workforce. In South Africa, this kind of “meritocracy” potentially disregards the existence of a script that all employees (except for the exceptional few) belonging to designated groups are employed and promoted through employment equity, a discourse which may be universally tainted. Conversely, appointments of white males may be imbued with superior merit value since they are employed and promoted “in spite” of employment equity legislation. The logic is that they have to work extra hard and be exceptional to be employed in this environment. The accompanying script is usually that a suitably qualified and experienced person from designated groups was impossible to find and the best person for the job was subsequently employed (Van Dijk, 1993). At the same time, the “reverse discrimination” charge (Solidarity, 2008) is marshaled against organisations when they implement measures to rectify systemic imbalances. Proponents of this charge of “reverse discrimination” would have it that there is no longer any workplace discrimination, systemic barriers, and institutional culture impediments against groups with less power. Nkomo (2011) points to the contrary.

Durrheim (2010) and Roberts *et al.*, (2011) argue that self-interest may be one of the primary reasons why there are such marked differences between black and white South Africans support and opposition to affirmative action. They support the self-interest argument by citing the negative relationship between support for affirmative action and increased level of education as well as that between being in employment and support for the policy. This means that affirmative action has less support from those with post school education and those with jobs. Overall though, across all measures, Roberts *et al.*, (2011) found that differences in “race” were the most consistent and prominent cleavage predicting support and opposition. Looking at multiple data sources Friedman and Erasmus (2008) made similar findings even as they cautioned against generalisations and argued for dissecting survey data along multiple dimensions. Roberts *et al.*, (2011) however give very little attention to the meritocratic motivations that may be motivating the opposition to the policy. Moreover, the arguments lack nuance in relation to the broader social justice needs that the policy seeks to meet. These include the importance of redress in order to address some of the wrongs of the past and “normalise” society; the anti-discrimination measures to deal with ongoing discrimination; and the training and skills development aspect of the policy which seeks to ensure that people are “suitably qualified”.

A growing call to move away from “race” based and towards class based policy to address inequality among the academic community (Alexander, 2007; Habib and Bentley, 2008; Durrheim, 2010; Maré, 2011; Roberts *et al.*, 2011; Erasmus, 2012), while supportive of the non-racialism aspiration, bears the risk of un-focusing from the redress aspect of the policy. Nkomo (2011) contends that colourblind approaches ignore the history of apartheid and its attendant effects on training, skilling and access to opportunities. She points out that the Employment Equity Act of 1998 is clear on the need for demographic representation, equity and diversity made up of all South Africans. It would thus appear that criticisms of the raced nature of redress do not convincingly argue against the training and skills development aspects of the policy. It is however necessary to heed the caution that non-racialism does not necessarily translate to resistance to redress as the two can co-exist. Thus, it is possible to implement redress policies while aspiring to equality and non-racialism in the future.

2.1.5 The Experience/Qualification Dilemma in Relation to Merit

While the South African higher education system was formed to serve the white population, the value of higher education and rates of participation among black people are much higher today than a few generations ago (Council on Higher Education, 2012, December 27). This means that those entering the workplace often have equivalent or higher qualifications than those who have been working over a number of years. While the numbers of people graduating with business, commerce and management degrees are relatively low (Council on Higher Education, 2009), banks often take the best of these graduates through their graduate recruitment programmes and by employing from other financial institutions. Therefore, while new entrants into the job market generally possess the necessary qualifications, they possess less experience than the older employees. The extensive graduate recruitment placement programmes suggest that banks prefer to train their own professionals at the junior entry levels. Through these programmes, minimum working experience for particular roles is generally easier to accumulate than additional qualifications. This means that many suitably qualified black people often also meet the minimum criteria for experience particularly at junior management levels. Older, more experienced employees in management positions tend to be white with many years of working experience. This has led to the experience versus qualifications dilemma – older and mostly white employees with extensive experience and limited education, compared to a younger generation of mostly black employees with little experience and more extensive qualifications.

In her research, Nkomo (2011, p.129) found that white employees fear “centred in the belief that organisations were valuing blacks with formal qualifications over highly experienced whites”. They expressed the view that blacks who had formal qualifications were being promoted much faster into jobs that had taken many years of experience to attain for white employees. They described this condition as fundamentally unfair (Nkomo, 2011). For them, opportunity is “earned” and should be earned in the same way in which they have obtained it, through years of experience. Thus, while many white people uphold the principle of equal opportunity and fairness (Roberts *et al.*, 2011),

Nkomo (2011) found that the sentiment had a condition attached – “chances should be earned!” Roberts *et al.* (2011) and Seekings (2008) found support for the principle of fairness but not the actions proposed to attain this fairness. Nkomo (2011) found the discourse of meritocracy to permeate the interviews of many white employees and managers. For her, meritocracy of individual justice is informed by colourblindness while gender and other differences are seen as insignificant.

In defense of affirmative action, Williams (2000, p.79) argues that affirmative action is “an affirmation; the affirmative part of hiring – or hearing – blacks, it is a recognition of individuality that includes blacks as a social presence, that is profoundly linked to the fate of blacks and whites and women and men either as subgroups or as one group”. She further states that blacks and women are the objects of a constitutional omission that has been incorporated into a theory of neutrality. Arguing against those who view affirmative action negatively, she states that the whole historical object of employment opportunity, formal or informal, is to structure preferences “for rather than against – to like rather than dislike – the participation of black people. Thus affirmative action is very different from numerical quotas that actively structure society so that certain classes of people remain unpreferred” (Williams, 2000, p.79). In response to the assertion that employment equity compromises standards, Williams (2000, p.78) states:

The mind funnels of Harvard and Yale are called standards. Standards are concrete monuments to socially accepted subjective preference. Standards are like paths picked through fields of equanimity, worn into hard wide roads over time, used always because of collective habit, expectation and convenience. The pleasures and perils of picking one’s own path through the field are soon forgotten; the logic or illogic of the course of the road is soon rationalised by the mere fact of the road.

2.1.6 The Social Construction of Merit

As pointed out earlier, the notion of merit is not value neutral. A way of interpreting standards and merit is through the lens of social constructionism. Key figures in the development of social constructionism include Berger and Luckmann (1991) and Burr (1995). Gergen (1996, p.8) challenges the methodological truth claims of the experimental tradition and asserts that the self is “achieved through dialogic processes

that are continuously in motion”. He argues for truth claims which see reality and hence merit as socially constructed. For Burr (1998) social constructionism problematised the conception of “objective fact” in a manner that was radical and set apart from the essentialist and “apolitical” claims that disciplines such as psychology had made. Instead, it asserted that psychology was value driven and premised on vested interests. Indeed, Gergen (1996) contends that value neutral science is a misguided hope. For Gergen (1996), the assertion of a world view where knowledge is interpretatively constructed within a community of interlocutors, suggests that reflexivity as well as recognition of the boundaries of knowledge is critical. He thus challenges the existence of an objective reality that precedes interpretation. In place of objective reality, he offers the view that people move towards collective agreements to establish their reality. Even in this process, those who are “weaker” are not equal co-creators of reality and the objective world often casts them as the “other”. The liberatory promise of social constructionism is the creation of space for alternative voices, reflexive dialogue and social transformation (Gergen, 1996).

Having outlined the key principles of social constructionism, if it is to be applied to the current research, it is possible that concepts such as merit and competence which have come to assume great value are not as value neutral as they are claimed to be. Their application in the corporate world is infused with the consistency of standards that all can be held up against (Sturm and Guinier, 1996). A social constructionist critique would posit that these concepts and their attendant practices strategically favour those who set the standards or merit and that competence shifts according to the needs to those with power. In other words, corporate elites construct these frames of reference to benefit themselves and to keep those who are unlike them at bay. Thus, this research posits that merit has been framed as a major gate keeping discourse. In this conception, the co-existence of a competent employee and employment equity is not possible. Because merit is socially constructed as standard and unchanging, old conceptions of merit have not been amended to fit new realities. Rather, it is the new realities like employment equity which are framed as problematic.

Social constructionism has attracted criticism. This criticism has been primarily on the grounds that it denies the existence of a reality that is independent of interpretation and meaning making in the social sphere (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002; Andrews, 2012). Advocates of the form of constructionism that denies and challenges ontological claims (Gergen, 1996), have been termed “anti-realists” (Andrews, 2012). The position which restricts itself to epistemological questions rather than ontological critiques has been described as “realism”. For scholars such as Andrews (2012), the external world exists independently of our representations of it (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002). For the realists, the reduction of the world to representation is self-defeating as it leaves little possibility for change and reduces the research endeavour to adding yet another interpretation among many. Andrews (2012) thus argues for a brand of social constructionism which accepts the existence of an objective reality thus limiting the field to epistemology and excluding ontology. In this conception, the discourse of merit and standards are positioned as realities in the world that are attainable by those with the requisite talent and motivation.

The critical instinct of social constructionism remains fairly popular within the academy even as it has been subject to increasing critique from the likes of Fish (1995), Hacking (1999), and du Gay (2007). This thesis advocates for a position that takes seriously the operation of oppressive ideologies in taken for granted social asymmetries. However, like Janks (2008), it is important to recognise that ideology is a two way process that enables the subaltern to resist oppression. This means that those that are oppressed do not always passively accept injustice but that they are often sufficiently smart and resourceful to recognise oppressive systems and their effects. Identity thus does not only occur at the place of repressive agenda’s and their creation of “others” but is also formulated at the site of agency and resistance. Research in the field of community psychology (Sonn, 2000, 2011) thus repeatedly demonstrates the resistance of communities and their ongoing attempts to redefine local realities in ways that challenge dominant conceptions of the good.

Notwithstanding the disagreements which have characterised the direction of social constructionism and the various strands of what Hosking (1999) has termed

“constructionisms”, it has created a space for alternative voices and different ways of creating meaning including critiques of dominant conceptions of standards. It is within this space that critically oriented forms of enquiry in the tradition of Foucault (1979) and Van Dijk (1998) as well as the methodological innovation of critical discourse analysis have grown. In this research therefore, an approach which supports a two way process of social constructionism is applied. Thus, while recognising that corporates elites are invested in creating standards that are exclusionary, this research also argues that those constructed as lacking merit are constantly involved in processes of challenging dominant conceptions and reconstituting reality for themselves.

2.1.7 Summary

This section contended that employment equity can be intimately tied to dominant discourses of merit. This is to say that conceptions of merit are not value neutral. Merit is constructed in ways that favour old knowledges to bolster the position of elites in maintaining a position of dominance. Viewed this way, merit can be understood as a means of gatekeeping that is potentially deployed to exclude those that have been positioned on the margins of society. The research contends that employment equity and its mechanisms of affirmative action and skills development are perhaps the biggest challenges to dominant gatekeeping forms of merit. It is therefore not surprising that many of those most opposed to employment equity cite the lack of merit as their primary reason for opposition. This opposition is framed within the stock narrative of the need to uphold standards as though those standards are themselves not human creations and therefore socially constructed (Sturm and Guinier, 1996).

The discourse of merit is framed within that of colourblindness where rules are seen as applying equally to all people. This view is conveniently detached from a history that deliberately excluded black people and women from active and meaningful participation in the economy and therefore in the construction of the meaning of merit. In South Africa, the historical record indicates that apartheid instituted a colour bar which deliberately barred black people from management work in the formal economy (e.g. Luhabe, 2002). The propagation of colourblind views in the construction and deployment

of merit in employment equity discourses can thus be interpreted as continued efforts to maintain elite interests in the workplace. The ontologically of merit is a social construction. This is not to deny the need for particular levels of competence in order to successfully complete tasks. Rather, it is a call for the recognition of the possible ways that discourses of merit frame black and women employees as automatically lacking in merit while white males are naturally imbued with it. In this regard, this research takes issue with studies such as that of Oosthuisen and Naidoo (2010) for feeding dominant stereotypes thus lending credence to a deficit view of blacks and females. Ultimately, for employment equity to be successful there is a need for an interrogation of not just the progress towards representativity but what it is that constitutes a competent and equally valued employee and manager. A concomitant goal is to be alert for how the exclusionary potential of merit may be in operation when dominant interests are at stake.

2.2 Employment Equity and Substantive Psychological Empowerment

Popular conceptions of employment equity are wary of the phenomenon of “window dressing” or tokenism. These concepts signify the expedient and inappropriate appointment of people of designated groups into positions of for which they are not suitably qualified and experienced to perform optimally. Tokenism and window dressing are seen as disingenuous ways of portraying purported demographic change in visible positions in order to give the public impression of change. In this situation, decision making, responsibility, and accountability generally remain in the hands of the dominant class rather than with the new appointee (Nzimande and Sikhosana, 1996). Both designated groups and non-designated groups express concern at this practice (Thomas, 2002).

The challenge that tokenism carries is the danger of marking all appointments of black people and women as window dressing hires. There is after all no truly “objective” test that separates competent suitably qualified individuals from those who are not. The risk of stereotyping all designated groups is therefore increased. As found by Atewologun and Singh (2010) in the United Kingdom, it is likely then that suspicion of window dressing may haunt many new appointments of blacks and females. The practice of window dressing and tokenism is the antithesis of substantive psychological empowerment. It is therefore important to examine the levels of psychological empowerment of employees in order to ascertain their own perceptions of empowerment, suitability for the job, and support from the organisation. This research was therefore interested in understanding the extent to which managers believe that they are substantively empowered.

Empowerment stems from equality as the starting place. Thus, empowerment can be understood as the realisation of broad and substantive equality. The challenge for legislated employment equity initiatives is a movement away from narrow conceptions of formal equality (Goonesekere, 2007). This requires a deep understanding of context and relative disadvantage.

2.2.1 Substantive Psychological Empowerment

Following Goonesekere (2007, p.3), “Substantive equality provides a basis for recognising protectionist measures to eliminate disadvantage and gender based discrimination, without perceiving them as related to stereotypical attitudes on women’s weakness and vulnerability”. This posits that the same principles may apply to “race”. Like gender neutrality is not sustainable for addressing the discrimination faced by women, so too is “race”. “Race” neutral (Haney and Hurtado, 1994) workplaces are not conducive to substantive empowerment. Neutrality in relation to “race”, gender, disability and other significant points of difference presuppose equality among equals and common starting places. According to Dupper and Garbers (2009), the Employment Equity Act takes its mandate from Section 9(2) of the Constitution which is specifically concerned with the achievement of substantive equality as opposed to formal equality. Thus substantive equality takes account of inherent structural inequalities and pursues strategies to bring about equality (Nkomo, 2011).

The earlier waves of social justice legislation and programmatic interventions were largely operating within a time of political contestation and were conceived of as concessions in the broader struggles against racism and gender oppression. Many of the initial gains in the USA and parts of Europe could thus be seen as early gestures towards equality rather than substantive equality. With her oppressive past and having developed her jurisprudence as recently as the end of last century, South Africa was in a position to legislate substantive equality largely unencumbered by the constraints that countries such as the United States had faced earlier. Goonesekere (2007, p.5) notes the “[T]he concept of substantive equality determined by outcome and result has now been incorporated in the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution (1996)”. She further observes that the South African Constitution has included the concept of private non State actor’s having a duty to conform to the human rights standards set by the document. In particular, Article 9 of the Constitution authorises legislative and other measures to protect or advance persons or categories of persons disadvantaged by “unfair discrimination”. According to Goonesekere (2007), this broad definition interprets equality as going beyond formal

legal equality. Contexts as well as the impact of discrimination are important considerations here. Importantly, there is an interlinking of all human rights to equality.

Goonesekere (2007, p.14) states that “the goal is thus not merely formal equality of treatment but extends to eliminating discrimination of outcome or result,” thus cohering with substantive equality. She states further that the impact of laws, policies and programmes to eliminate discrimination must be evaluated from this perspective. For her, “since gender based discrimination in substance violates the norm of fairness, it becomes difficult to argue that a standard of equity (fairness) is different from equality (Goonesekere, 2007, p.14).” To this we can add “race” and indeed other social justice asymmetries that apartheid had supported. Substantive empowerment is crafted into the very founding documents of South African democracy. Here, the research sought to explore how this is lived in the everyday lives of managers.

2.2.2 Psychological Empowerment

In her review of the literature on empowerment, Honold (1997) identified only four scholarly reviewed writings on employee empowerment. These are Conger and Kanungo (1988), Keller and Dansereau (1995), Spreitzer (1996), and Thomas and Velthouse, (1990). Since then there have been more researchers pursuing this area of work. For instance Spreitzer, De Jansz, and Quinn (1999), Yukl and Becker (2006), Speer, Peterson, Armstead and Allen (2012) have explored psychological empowerment in relation to leadership, and gender, and participation and income as moderating effects. Borrowing from a number of diverse frameworks allows one to develop a broader understanding of the concept. Friedman (1992, 1996) distinguishes between social, political, and psychological empowerment. While the three concepts are entwined as one cannot be achieved without the other, Friedman sees social empowerment as most related to economic empowerment. He views social empowerment as access to the basis of household reproduction, such as supportive life space, surplus time, knowledge and skills, social organisation, social networks, instruments of work and livelihood, and financial recourses.

For Du Bois (2004) and Friedman (1992), poverty is social disempowerment. Bekker and Crous (1998) outline three broad facets of empowerment. The first is a subjective aspect which refers to psychological empowerment, the second is an objective aspect which is the exposure to opportunity, and the third is competence related to training and development to grow knowledge, skills, and experience. For Zimmerman (1992), while psychological empowerment is individually focused, it engages with the socio-political environment too. He notes that this construct is not solely individual perceptions of competence, but also includes active engagement with the broader community and understanding of the socio-political community within which perceptions are shaped.

Zimmerman (1992) contends that although related, authoritative power is not a necessary condition for psychological empowerment. He states that power suggests authority while psychological empowerment requires a feeling of being in control and a critical and active involvement with one's environment. A sense of personal and interpersonal control is therefore important for the realisation of psychological empowerment. Therefore, one does not have to be in a management role with authoritative power in order to feel psychologically empowered. Participatory decision making and team work may enhance psychological empowerment even if the final outcomes are not directly related to inputs (Speer, Peterson, Armstead and Allen, 2012). A sense of involvement, up skilling, and being valued and respected may be more important than authoritative power. These are important contributing factors to the intrapersonal domain of psychological empowerment. The interactional aspects of psychological empowerment may be found in team work and mutual help associations such as women's groups. These affiliations assist in developing and enhancing coping and problem solving skills. Assuming leadership roles is a demonstration of behavioural empowerment. A developmental understanding of these concepts illustrates how intrapersonal empowerment can lead to interpersonal empowerment which is in turn important for behavioural empowerment. For Zimmerman (1995, p.593), "actual power or control in a particular domain may be a sufficient condition for psychological empowerment, but not a necessary one".

Spreitzer (1995) also provides a psychological definition of empowerment. Following Conger and Kanungo (1988), Spreitzer (1995, p.1443) defined empowerment as “increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of cognitions reflecting an individual’s orientation to his or her work role: meaning, competence..., self-determination, and impact”. *Meaning* is defined as the value of a work goal judged against the individuals own ideals and standards. *Competence* (or self-efficacy) is the person’s belief that they have the capability to competently carry out a work task. *Self-determination* refers to the individual’s sense of having choice in initiating and regulating behaviour while carrying out their job. Finally, *impact* is the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, operating, or administrative outcomes at work (Spreitzer, 1995). For Menon (1999), an enabling environment along these dimensions is an important element of psychological empowerment. In view of the aims of this research, it is important to point out that psychological empowerment is not an in-born trait that can be generalised across various contexts; it is context specific and shaped by the environment where one works (Spreitzer, 1995). For Zimmerman (2005), psychological empowerment is contextual, dynamic and may fluctuate over time.

2.2.3 Community Psychological Perspective of Empowerment

From a community psychology framework, Rappaport (1981, 1987) argued that empowerment is ecological in nature and can be conceptualised at multiple levels of analysis. Power is an overarching concept for community psychology. At the individual level, people who have typically experienced a lack of control in their lives not only need a change in their thinking about power but experiences of actually having authority over events in their lives (Riger, 1993). Personal empowerment is the process of reclaiming power in one’s life (Lord and Hutchison, 1993). An important component of empowerment is active participation in the life of the community (Zimmerman, 2000). By extension, his research argues that the core principles of empowerment from community psychology should be applied to the workplace. For Zimmerman (1995, p.583), empowering processes are those where “people create or are given opportunities to control their own destiny and influence the decisions that affect their lives”. To

overcome discrimination and to promote inclusion, interventions need to occur at multiple levels of analysis. At the individual level, the recovery of a positive identity and the development of an awareness of sociopolitical conditions create shame and stigma and is an important part of the journey of disadvantaged people. Echoing Fanon (1967) and Biko (1996), Ramphele (2008) states that it is important to confront the enemy within. She views this as the beginning of psychological liberation from the yoke of oppression that comes with internalising myths of inferiority.

Empowering organisations are those that encourage mutual help groups which help individuals to learn organisational and leadership skills (Zimmerman, 1995; Spreitzer, Janasz and Quinn, 1999). Women's groups are an example of mutual help organisational groups. For Zimmerman (1995), psychological empowerment is located across three realms; intrapersonal, interpersonal, and behavioural. In this regard, psychological empowerment is inclusive of a sense of "control, decision making, problem solving skills, and a critical awareness of one's sociopolitical environment and participatory behaviours" (1995, p.588). At the intrapersonal level, low psychological empowerment would be characterised by a sense of helplessness, powerlessness, and normlessness (Zimmerman, 1995). A sense of perceived competence falls into the realm of intrapersonal psychological empowerment. Interpersonally, a key competence is critical awareness of the organisational context and environment in order to understand resources and networks that might be necessary for success. The behavioural components of psychological empowerment are the set of actions taken to directly influence the set of outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995). An example of this would be participating in skills development and training initiatives in order to develop a skill set necessary for promotion. Psychological empowerment is closely related to other psychological concepts such as self-esteem, competence, and mental health. These do not however confound the main measures of the psychological empowerment construct (see Zimmerman for more, 1995).

Community Psychology has been of critical importance in foregrounding the role of participation in facilitating empowerment. For instance, Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) examined the relationship between empowerment and participation and found that

higher levels of participation, led to greater feelings of empowerment. In this respect studies on disability have given much insight into the value of participation, particularly as it relates to different forms of participation, the dynamic interplay between structural and individual factors, and embedded participatory structures and processes (Radermacher, Sonn, Keys, Duckett, 2010). Alienation has been consistently found to inhibit participation and feelings of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988, Kanungo, 1993). According to Kanungo (1993), the Marxian concept of alienation is a variant of powerlessness. Thus, participation in ones work community leads to increased group identification and empowerment. Speer, Peterson, Armstead and Allen (2012) found a strong relationship between participation and intrapersonal empowerment.

2.2.4 Power and Empowerment

Perhaps the most widely held view of power is that provided by Dahl (1957, p.201) who stated that, “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B could not otherwise do”. Since this early definition, many theorists have sought to show the multiple ways in which those with power wield it, preserve it, and normalise their domination over those without it. The many sources of power include formal authority, reward power, personal characteristics, expertise, knowledge, connection power, coercion, control over scarce material resources (Roodt, 2001). Modernist conceptions of power locate the locus of power in hierarchical authority. Critical theorists see power as located in social, economic and political structures. Postmodernist conceptions of power view it as located in everyday social relationships, and discursive and non-discursive practices (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). A further breakdown of how the different theoretical perspectives view power is provided in table 4 below.

Modern, critical and postmodern conceptions of power, control and conflict			
	Modern	Critical	Postmodern
Goal of Power	To improve organizational efficiency & effectiveness	To emancipate dominated groups & develop democratic & humanistic forms of communication & decision making	To interrogate discursive & non discursive practices that lead to self – disciplinary behaviours & marginalization of groups & individuals
Implications for Control	Managerial control exercised by monitoring performance through the mechanisms of the market, bureaucracy & organizational culture	Control exercised through hegemony & systematically distorted communication processes. Employees give active consent to their own exploitation through false consciousness	Control exercised through disciplinary technologies & self – surveillance – a fear of being watched
View of Conflict	Conflict is counterproductive	Conflict is an inevitable result of capitalism & its resultant social & economic inequalities. Conflict is necessary for resistance, the overthrow of those in power & radical change	Conflict emerges within the network of power relations as groups contest the ability to frame the realities & subjectivities of others

Table 4: Power: Adapted from Hatch and Cunliffe (2006)

A sociological conception of power assists in broadening our understanding of power beyond psychology. The relational tenor of power is emphasised here (Elias, 1978). In Dalal’s (2002) view, power is not an essentialist category but it is relative. Thus according to Elias (1978, p.74), “Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another; it is a structural characteristic of human relationships – of all human relationships”. Dalal (2002) notes that Elias (1994) is able to bridge the divide between Freud’s conception of power as primarily internal and Marx’s overemphasis of the social. Dalal (2002) sees power as residing in the network of interdependencies between individuals. The creation of power of one group over another is understood as the fundamental generator of difference. Thus, historically, it is the more powerful that created the terms of what we view as salient, good and bad (Dalal, 2002). This view of power is further extended by Foucault (1979) below.

Foucault's (1979) *Discipline and Punish* provides a compelling criticism of organisational power. Foucault (1979) details how power operates to discipline by inscribing itself into the minutiae of everyday life in ways that come to be taken for granted. He argues that these power arrangements favour societal and organisational elites. He notes that power resides in the "tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines" (Foucault, 1979, p.222). The production of "docile bodies" that are subtly coerced into accepting, internalising and legitimating elite control, allows easier control of peoples bodies at the service of industry among other disciplinary agents. According to Foucault (1979), the control over the docile body is enhanced by constant surveillance by supervisors.

Ideals of what constitutes a work ethic and merit are created as the dominant standard such that the individual body becomes self-regulating even in the "absence" of the all-seeing technologies of surveillance. Following his example of the prison Panopticon, power thus takes on an invisible mantle but is fundamentally characterised by an "unequal gaze" that becomes embodied and generalised (Foucault, 1979). The state, warden, and manager retain the dominant gaze over citizens, prisoners, and employees. Deviations from implicit norms are punishable both by the agents of control and the individual or docile body that has come to internalise the disciplining gaze. The instruments of surveillance seek to create the "obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him (sic)" (Foucault, 1979, p.128-129). The system of control is so pervasive that the individual is totally enveloped in its power. Foucault (1979) terms these systems of discipline and control, technologies of power.

To instill discipline through docile bodies, Foucault (1979) posits the necessity of distributing individuals in space that is heterogenous and enclosed for protected monotony. The factory as modeled on the monastery and boarding school is an example of the creation of docile bodies. Thus regulated times of arrival, breaks, departures, close monitoring of behaviour and outputs, are hallmarks of how the modern workplace came

to be. Foucault (1979) however notes that the enclosure is not a necessary aspect of disciplinary machinery. In order to affect more precise control over individuals and their absences, communication practices were instituted to establish presences and absences in order to ascertain where and how to locate individuals. With large scale industrialisation, the disciplinary space often assured the division of the production process and the individualising fragmentation of labour power (Foucault, 1979). He goes on to state that discipline “individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations” (1979, p.146). This allows for an expansive form of control of the workforce. Foucault has provided the field of critical psychology, from which this research draws its inspiration, a lens to pursue its interrogation of how power and control are normalised. Thus Parker (2007, p.3) states: “critical psychology is the study of forms of surveillance and self-regulation in everyday life and in the ways in which psychological culture operates beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice”.

Organisational Communication Studies have contributed a critical canon in the study of organisational power. Their starting place is that of a struggle to fix meaning (Deetz, 1990). Critical organisation scholars articulate a “discourse of suspicion” (Mumby, 1997a; Ricoeur, 1970) exploring underlying structures of domination, resistance, and interest driven discursive strategies that lurk beneath ostensibly consensual meaning systems (Hardy, Palmer, Phillips, 2000; Mumby, 1997; Young, 1989). Following Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power and surveillance, Clegg (1979) stated that power relations flow through three interdependent circuits. These include the episodic (daily interaction), the dispositional (socially constructed rules), and the facilitative (including technology, work, and rewards). At the points of intersection the circuits can lead to empowerment or disempowerment of groups. For Mumby (1988, p.3), the exercise of power in organisations is achieved when “one group is able to frame the interests of the other groups in terms of its own interests”. The dominant group thus provides the frame of reference for what is important in relation to organisational sense making. As suggested in the preceding section on discourses of merit, the dominant group might have vested interests in framing those potentially benefiting from employment equity as lacking in merit value.

Mumby (1988) argues that the supposedly rational decision making processes of management are intimately tied to issues of power. The rational frame which Foucault (1979) articulates above, becomes the site for legitimating, wielding and hiding power. Power can thus function as a hegemonic force to structure interests within organisations. The recognition of hegemonic group interests in the exercise of power infuses the concept with ideology. This according to Mumby (1988) is an important link. For Mumby (1988, p.63) power is not simply part of organisations but is in essence, “both a product of organisational activity *and* the process by which activity becomes institutionally linked”.

The above conception enables an understanding of Clegg’s (1975) view of power as related to domination. Domination occurs when organisational rationality (for example; retrenchments, restructuring, appointments etc.) is structured to support vested interests while militating against others. The maintenance of the status quo is generally one of the vested interests that those with power seek to achieve. Organisational culture, history, and particular forms of competence and merit are conjured to resist changes such as employment equity. Mumby (1988, p.66) takes on the subject of organisational culture when he contends that “organizational power is constituted and reproduced through the structure of organizational symbolism”. Here the symbolic sits at the nub of reality construction. The symbolic communicates and creates ideology. Thus the appointment of white males into leadership roles at a time when there is increasing pressure to diversify top management can be read not as a regression from the employment equity targets but as an affirmation that only white males have the competence to occupy positions of leadership. This discourse comes to symbolically frame the ideology of white competence. Mumby (1988, p.73) points to the link between ideology, consciousness, and communication and states that “this tripartite relationship exists in the context of actual material practices and actual social structures”. He identifies language as a material and social practice that regulates interaction among social actors within the constraints of institutional structures. Thus, for Mumby (1988), our behaviour and hence our consciousness is constrained by structures.

Organisational Communication Studies has developed to explore the gendered (Mumby, 1992; Buzzanell, 1994; Ashcraft, 2000; Mumby and Ashcraft, 2006) and raced (Ashcraft and Allen, 2003) patterning of power in organisations. In examining gender in organisations, Ashcraft (2000) studies pluralist⁵ organisations that employ radical feminist theory merged with alternative ways of organising as a starting point and used empirical lived experience as the driving force to understand the organisation of power. For Ashcraft (2000, p.352), there is a need to reframe the “ideology-practice contradiction as a situated web of dilemmas experienced by concrete organization members and navigated discursively and materially toward various ends”. She notes that even in feminist organisations, counter discourses do not naturally arise in preset ways but they “emerge as members engage practical tensions and improvise tactics that enable both empowerment and productivity”. The simultaneous presence of domination and resistance is observed by Clair (1998) and Mumby (1997). Here contradiction is inevitable and has to be managed as it arises.

2.2.5 Summary

Following on the prescripts of the Constitution and its Bill of Rights (1996) as a starting place, this section framed employment equity as the attempt to inculcate deep change. In this regard, the literature from community psychology and communication studies was examined in order to understand the various forms of empowerment which could be seen as important for the occurrence of substantive empowerment. This research advocates for psychological empowerment as espoused by Zimmerman (1995) if employees are to benefit beyond access. This is a move from what has been termed tokenism and window dressing towards substantive empowerment where managers not only hold positions of titular importance but feel a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and that their contributions make a marked impact. It is, however, important to caution against the narrow prescripts of empowerment that community psychology appears to advocate (e.g. Zimmerman, 1992). This inadvertently focusses on the individual without due attention to the ways in which the social realm influences what

⁵ Organisations characterised by diversity and multiple ways of organising which are non-traditional.

one can do. Much of the literature cited here also falls short of critiquing the structural limitations of capitalism and its effect on individualising the employee.

Additionally, this section was interested in how power operates within organisations to perpetuate dominant interests and elite ideologies thereby undercutting substantive empowerment. Foucault (1979) and Mumby (1993) were consulted to show how management structures and rhetoric which might be seen as benign at face value are sometimes influenced by powerful groups to entrench control. This critical orientation to structural and imbedded privilege is understood as important for a deep reading of employment equity and the potential blockages to its full realisation through substantive psychological empowerment.

2.3 Employment Equity and Identity in Relation to Intersections of “Race” and Gender among Female Managers

Black women in general are the most economically and socially marginalised, according to the successive Employment Equity Commission (EEC) reports from 2000 to 2012. Statistics South Africa (2011) confirms this observation. While women generally lag behind their male counterparts, white women have entered the ranks of senior management much more rapidly than their black counterparts. Furthermore, the fuzziness or lack of certainty of the applicability of employment equity to women is absent when it comes to men. This is because it is clear that white males are not a designated group while black men are. On the other hand, even as there is clarity in policy on white women’s eligibility for employment equity, there appears to be confusion in the public rhetoric and discourse on this issue (cf former chair of the EEC, Jimmy Manyi; Mail & Guardian, 2006, June 28). This calls for greater nuance in understanding women’s gendered dynamics and identities in the workplace. A similar focus on male gendered positionality is suggested in follow up research. This section reviews the literature on women’s movements in South Africa with the aim of shedding light on present day black and white women’s identity constructions and coalitions.

2.3.1 Policy and the Matrix of Domination/Marginalisation

For the purposes of locating the policy differences concerning black and white women, a policy overview is provided here. One of the key aims of the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE Act) of 2003 is to: “promote the achievement of the constitutional right of equality, improve broad based and effective participation of black people in the economy and promote a higher growth rate, increased employment and more equitable income distribution” (p.2). A related Act which is the primary driver of the current research is the Employment Equity Act (EEA) No.55 of 1998. Key aims of the EEA of 1998 are: to eliminate unfair discrimination in employment; ensure the implementation of employment equity to redress the effects of discrimination; achieve a diverse workforce broadly representative of South Africans,

among others. The two pieces of legislation overlap in that they have a common mandate to address South Africa's divided history and to bring about equality. While the EEA of 1998 focuses on the elimination of discrimination on the basis of "race", gender, and disability - and the implementation of affirmative measures for these groups, the BBBEE Act of 2003 focuses on the enhancement of economic participation and ownership of black people. Employment equity is one of the measures of transformation within the BBBEE requirements. The Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998 provides support to the EEA in order to ensure that people are sufficiently skilled to take up employment. The Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE Act) of 2003 is only inclusive of black people – a generic term for Africans, "Coloured's" and Indians. The EEA of 1998, on the other hand, (p.3) defines designated groups as "black people, women, and people with disabilities". Thus, the BBBEE Act excludes white women but the EEA is inclusive of this group.

The Employment Equity Act of 1998 isolates three key features for empowerment through access and developmental support. These are "race", gender, and disability. In relation to "race", it is common course that apartheid was founded on racial exclusion bolstered by a number of laws which sought to advance the interests of whites at the expense of blacks in general. In addition to the most overt forms of racism in the world, gender based discrimination in the form of patriarchy sort to exclude women from nearly all forms of public life including work. While white women were granted voting rights in 1930, their rights were limited by an overly sexist political culture (South African History online, 2013). In addition to the laws of the time, society was both decidedly racist and patriarchal in character. Despite repealing these laws, change towards the realisation of full equality has been painstakingly slow (Stevens, 2007). Thus, Finchilescu (2006, p.85) bemoans the status of women. She states that women remain in an "unequal, subordinate position to men" in all societies. Even as black women can claim majority status in lieu of their sheer numbers relative to white women (Statistics South Africa, 2011), it is clear from the Employment Equity Commission (2011) statistics that they lag behind their white female counterparts in their occupancy of senior and top management roles.

In South Africa, the need for redress has been balanced and couched in the language of unity. Thus, in recognition of patriarchy, white females like their black female counterparts have been included in employment equity redress measures. The lack of nuance in understanding the differential position and status of black and white women was possibly tied to the unity discourse of non-racialism that sought to ensure that “race” was not foregrounded in a manner that may be fractious and threatening to white people. An examination of the matrix of seniority (a proxy for power and dominance) reveals that white males continue to lead the South African economy and occupy many of the more senior strategic positions in the banking sector and private sector in general. The EEC (2010, iv) expressed it in the following way:

Whites still dominate the Top Management and Senior Management levels and indications are that they will continue to do so unless we change our recruitment, promotion and skills development trends. Despite employers citing limited opportunities to transform the top and senior levels, the reports indicate staff movement at these levels, and these opportunities are mainly used to employ more white males. Research from BUSA [Business Unity South Africa] shows that more than 90% of the CEO positions at JSE listed companies are still dominated by White males, with a number of them nearing retirement. Evidently, more effort should be placed on building succession plans which will contribute to transforming the profile of our captains of industry. The reports also show that White women are more likely to be employed at these levels than any other designated group.

At the broader level, the 2011 Labour Force Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2011), shows that 36.7% of black African’s in South Africa are employed compared to 64.5% of white people. Unemployment rates are 28.9% and 5.6% respectively. The sex breakdown of employment patterns reveals that 47.5% of men are employed while 34.7% of women are active participants in the labour market. Men constitute 22.5% of the unemployed and women make up 28.0% of the unemployed (see Table 5 below). These data suggest that employment patterns have not normalised in post-apartheid South Africa. They retain both raced and gendered inequalities. A study of companies listed on the JSE (Johannesburg Stock Exchange) commissioned by BUSA revealed the following (Fin24, 2010, March 02):

- Of 269 Chief Executive Officer positions, blacks occupy 9% (Africans 4%; Coloureds 3%; Indians 2%) and whites 91%
- Females accounted for 3% and males 97% of 219 Chief Financial Officer positions. Blacks occupy 8% (Africans 2%; Coloureds 1%; Indians 5%) and whites 92%.
- Females accounted for 7% and males 93% of 245 non-executive chairperson positions. Blacks occupy 28% (Africans 24%; Coloureds 1%; Indians 3%) and whites 72%.
- Females accounted for 6% and males 94% of 1 664 non-executive director positions. Blacks occupy 36% (Africans 29%; Coloureds 3%; Indians 5%) and whites 64%.
- Females account for 18% and males 82% of 339 TEL positions. Blacks occupy 18% (Africans 15%; Coloureds 1%; Indians 2%) and whites 82%.

Labour Force Characteristics by sex and population group						
Data for July-Sept 2011						
	Women	Men	White	Indian	“Coloured”	African
Population: 16-64 years	16747	15 808	3 090	930	3 038	25 496
Labour force	8064	9 697	2 110	528	1 957	13 165
Employed	5807	7 511	1 992	471	1 495	9 361
Formal Sector (Non-Agricultural)	3 852	5 584				
Informal Sector (Non-Agricultural)	891	1 269				
Agriculture	205	419				
Private Households	860	239				
Unemployed	2257	2 186	118	57	463	3 804
Not Economically Active	8 683	6 111	980	402	1 081	12 331
Discouraged Work Seekers	1 240	963				
Other (Non-economically active)	7 443	5 148				
Rates (%)						
Unemployment Rate	28,0	22,5	5,6	10,8	23,6	28,9
Employed / Population ratio (absorption)	34,7	47,5	64,5	50,6	49,2	36,7
Labour force participation ratio	48,2	61,3	68,3	56,8	64,5	51,6

Table 5: Reproduced from data from Statistics South Africa, Labour Force Survey, Quarter 3, 2011⁶

⁶ Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

2.3.2 Intersectionality

Initial conceptions of the broader research project sought to exclude gender as an analytical frame in favour of “race” based understandings of employment equity and identity. However, following Crenshaw (1991), Hill Collins (2005), Shefer and Ratele (2011), gender has proven to be inextricable from “race”. Elliot and Smith (2004) argue that splitting gender from “race” is limiting because it reinforces the view that racial stratification and gender stratification are mutually exclusive. For Essed (2004, p.243), “elements of domination are interconnected, reciprocate, and mutually constitutive, interwoven into more general principles of modernization”. Hall (1991, p.10) notes that “identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space... between a number of intersecting discourses”. Ndlovu (2012) proceeded on the understanding that women are always “more than (just) women” and that the selection of a single dimension of identity as most salient is always contextually contingent and fluid. De La Rey (1997, p.7) contends that, “Being a woman is not distinct from being either black or working-class or heterosexual. We cannot partial out gender from the rest of who we are-for we are simultaneously classed, raced and gendered”. Empowerment, the central concern of this research, is impossible without an understanding of the intersections between “race” and gender.

In an ever patriarchal world, women come off second best in the world of work and face unique challenges to both remain in the workplace and for advancement within the system. For black women, the burden is two-fold. Davidson (1997) and Fielden and Davidson (2012) contended that Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women managers most often experienced discrimination in the form of double negative effects both gender and ethnicity. Black women face the double oppression related to being female and black in a sexist society where the markings of “race” carry historical disadvantage and continuing prejudices. The majority of black women are working class which means that they bear the brunt of triple oppression (De La Rey, 1997) with the added burden of economic marginalisation. Following the literature of black feminist scholars (Lewis, 1977; Davis, 1981; Pheterson, 1986; hooks, 1992; Mama, 1995; Hill Collins, 2000; Gqola, 2002 and Marable, 2002) there are differences between black and white women’s access to power. They argue that while both groups experience

patriarchy, “race” mediates this so that one group experiences the effects quite differently (Schefer, 2004). Black women therefore experience both the effects of sexism and the pernicious results of “race” based prejudice. Beal (1970) called this phenomenon double jeopardy. Setting the scene for black feminism, the *Black Feminist Statement* of the Combahee River Collective (1977/2011, p.808), states:

It was our experience of disillusionment within these liberation movements [civil rights, black nationalism, the Black Panthers], as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of black and white men.

Ways of studying women’s oppression can be loosely gathered under the concept of intersectionality. This was a response to research that tended to focus on inequalities along the lines of either one the categories of “race”, gender, or class (Acker, 2006). Intersectionality therefore came about in recognition of the fact that gender is complicated by class, race and other differences. Choo and Marx Ferree (2010) have called for a more conscious application of intersectionality so as to realise more generative forms of analysis. They identify three major strands of intersectional work: group-centred, process-centred, and system centred. The group-centred centred body of work seeks to give “voice” to multiply-marginalised groups by centering them in research. The process-centred approach sees intersectionality as process and views power as relational. It focuses on interactions between multiple oppressions at their points of intersection and draws attention to unmarked groups such as white males. The third approach is system based and is interested in historical, interactive and complex processes which are understood as shaping the entire social system without a focus on specific inequalities. The approach adopted here draws from the group and process centred forms of analysis which seek to give voice to marginalised groups while also drawing attention to unmarked groups and analysing the interactions of identity markers at their various points of intersection. While the eemphasis on systemic and institutional approaches to intersectionality is muted, it is also considered as the historical positioning of women is treated as important.

2.3.3 Black Women

Remarking on the special challenge confronting African-American women, Collins (1977, p.343) stated that their membership in two subordinate groups which “lack access to authority and resources in society, are in structural opposition with a dominant racial and dominant sexual group”. They share potential common interests with each of their group memberships; that is “race” with black men and gender with white women. Collins (1977) points out that historically, black women have tended to identify with black men more than they do with white women. Thus their interests as blacks have overshadowed their interests as women. This is true for white women as well. Gurin and Markus (1989, p.79) support this assertion. They state that “membership of other groups, particularly of other ascribed groups such as race or social class, are frequently perceived as more powerful in determining one’s experiences in society than gender”. This mitigates the perception of “common fate” that is so important in determining group identification. Thus, a black woman might feel a strong sense of identification with other black women, but the feeling of identification with white women will be considerably weaker than with black men.

The social psychological research on cross-group membership suggests that one of the groups will generally take precedence, but the amount of favouritism and bias is generally affected by the number of shared groups (Finchilescu, 2006). In-group favouritism tends to be stronger where both group memberships are shared, and weakest or negative when there are no shared groups (Brown, 1995). For Maier (2002), multiple group affinities can be explained within a kaleidoscope. Within Choo and Marx Ferree’s (2010) framework of the process approach to intersectionality, Maier (2002) contends that each individual is active in constructing their identity depending on what he or she deems as important to her. Thus, a white woman may elevate certain aspects of her identity such that she has more in common with a black woman than another white female. Therefore, religion, work, education, motherhood may be seen as more salient than “race” or ethnicity. Maier (2002, p.135) states that “each individual has a unique composition of her or his kaleidoscope because each individual features a very specific set of group memberships and physical, mental and intellectual idiosyncrasies”. While

this approach is open to a range of influences on identity construction, it is important to foreground historical context in explaining particular identity constellations in the South African setting. These constellations are fashioned by individuals within a particular historical context. Moreover, contextually specific factors also activate particular forms of identification above others (Essed, 2004). In this research, those identities that are identified as salient within the workplace assume primacy.

As in the post-civil rights era in which Lewis (1977) wrote, in South Africa, racial discrimination and “race” based segregation ensured that black women would identify with black males in the immediate post-apartheid period. Outside the “madam and maid” relationship which reinforced the racial hierarchy, gender proximity across “race” is a relatively new phenomenon in South Africa. Moreover, the anti-apartheid struggle, primarily a fight against racism, eclipses the black feminism movement which is yet to take on the form of a mass based movement outside of pockets of the academy and the African National Congress Women’s League (ANCWL). For example, Kimble and Unterhalter (1982, p.13) cite Mavis Nhlapo of the ANCWL:

In our society women have never made a call for the recognition of their rights as women, but always put the aspirations of the whole African and other oppressed people of our country first (SED Committee, 1979, p.241).

In our county white racism and apartheid coupled with economic exploitation have degraded the African woman more than any male prejudices. The contra-dictions that occur between sexes in any capitalist country are veiled by the hatred both sexes have for the regime. A community of interests springs up and this is one aspect in which the fascists have failed to apply their policy of divide and rule. The women have realised that the national liberation struggle is an important part of their social emancipation (M. Nhlapo, SED, 1979, p.241).

However, the existence of the ANCWL itself suggests that women felt the need for a parallel structure to take up their course within the broader movement. Bahati Kuuma (2002) and Gasa (2007) document the agency of parallel women’s movements in relation to the fact that they resisted pass laws more forcefully than their male counterparts. Thus the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) warned that while the national

liberation was the primary course, it could not be attained without the full participation of women (South African History Online, 2012). Black women's activism in South Africa is legendary. Meintjes (1996, p.53) notes that "[T]heir capacity to mobilise has given African women in South Africa an aura of power and mystique. Paradoxically, women are also conceived as the most exploited and oppressed members of society". This account of black women's role can be seen as a historical and institutional analysis of intersectionality as defined by Choo and Marx Ferree (2010).

In the post 1994 South African workplace, there is little organisation of gender based rights groups beyond structures such as Whiphold which has functioned as more of an elite women economic empowerment vehicle. Developments have occurred in the financial services sector in relation to black organisations which centre women's interests. Some of these include the Association of Black Securities and Investment Professionals (ABSIB), the African Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA) Forum, and the Association of Black Accountants of Southern Africa (ABASA). According to Collins (1977) interests only change (from "race" to gender) when equality is gained on the primary front of identification. Elsewhere, Collins (1986) however warns that a single focus on one form of oppression may leave black women oppressed in other ways. With the limited gains made to change "race" and gender based economic inequality in the post 1994⁷ dispensation (Maziya, 2006; Mbeki, 2009, 2011), it would be unsurprising if black females were discontented as both blacks and as women. However, even as we recognise the downtrodden location of black women in South African society and within the world of work, we should heed Essed's (1994, p.99) caution that "black women are not a monolithic group" and one cannot therefore speak glibly about "a black women's point of view on issues of oppression and resistance". Indeed Atewologun and Singh (2010) found that black women in the United Kingdom expressed their identities in complex and different ways.

⁷ The year 1994 was the watershed year in which South Africa held her first inclusive democratic elections. The year marks the divide between apartheid and democracy.

2.3.4 White Women

White women's participation in anti-apartheid political activity has been patchy with the exception of a few personalities including Ruth First, Helen Joseph, Amy Thornton and Ray Simons. For example, Simons was prominent in the activities of FSAW and was one of the leaders of the anti-pass marches in the 1950's (South African History Online, 2012). Kimble and Unterhalter (1982, p.11) note that "...a striking role has been played by women of all races, African, "Coloured", Indian, as well as a small number of progressive whites". Meintjes (1996) notes that white women began to organise as early as 1894 but they were always exclusively white and never questioned racial exclusiveness. In fact, they emphatically endorsed the exclusion of black women from the vote. From the 1960's onwards, apart from the Black Sash (a predominantly white women's organisation which opposed apartheid through Advice Offices, working with black rural women, and silent individual protests), the history of white South African women is not one of activism. In this regard, Meintjes (1996, p.55) notes that the Black Sash was established in 1955 as the Defense of the Constitution League: "Comprised of a small group of white liberals, membership remained small and middle class".

In the past, white women were largely supporters of white men within a deeply patriarchal culture. White women were granted limited opportunity to advance to their full potential (Webb, 1992). Thus, while many obtained tertiary education, access to meaningful employment was stifled and advancement within the workplace was difficult. Therefore, many educated white women served as assistants to white men. In present day South Africa, even though a white woman leads the official opposition party, the party is perceived as principally concerned with advancing white interests (Political Analysis South Africa, 2012 December 18). The policy positions of this party largely reflect a colourblind view of the world and argue for a "merit" based reform agenda. Post the attainment of democracy, there has been a proliferation of white female middle class led non-governmental organisations that have taken up a number of causes to advance the interests of animals and the poor in particular. With the exception of Khuluma and the Anti-racism Network in Higher Education (ARNHE), they have steered clear of "race" and apartheid. Reflecting on the early period of democracy, De La Rey (1997) noted that

racism was alive and well and continued in feminist groupings in South Africa. She states:

I have recently had direct experience of racism from some white sisters'. Many white South African women (and men) seem to naively believe that having been active in anti-apartheid movements distances them from racism and hence they respond with apparent incredulity when there is any suggestion that their behaviour could be racist (1997, p.9).

De Le Rey (1997), Bannerji (1995), and Essed (1991) describe commonsense racism. This, they say is familiar everyday events and practices which may not initially appear to be racist: such as a white woman winding up her car window when she sees a black man approaching. De La Rey (1995, p. 9) cautions that a “South African feminism that ignores the centrality of race will run the risk of making it invisible, and it will be a limited feminism”.

Fifteen years after De La Rey’s (1997) survey of South African feminism’s troubled nature in relation to “race”, there is developing consensus that white women’s representation is growing exponentially within the management ranks of institutions (Booyesen, 1999; Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). This is supported by the various reports (Employment Equity Commission, 2011; Labour Force Survey, 2011) which monitor the progress of employment equity measures to increase representation of designated groups in formal employment. The Financial Services Sector Report points out that the faster growth in numbers of white managers should also be understood in light of a “substantially larger and historically stronger pool of white women professionals” (Research Focus, 2009, p.12).

2.3.5 Coalitions

More (2009) provides a compelling argument for the basis of “race” based solidarity in South Africa. He argues that it is from a position of subordination that alliances develop. They are not voluntary associations but imposed by the nature of the subordination. Following this line of reasoning, the “race” based alliances which exist should be understood in relation to the historic imposition of racism from the dominant position of whiteness. Solidarities between black men and black women should thus be

seen as arising from their common alienation as black people. In his 1988 analyses, Sartre did not see gender as central when he stated: “But before the universalism of socialism, the black person, for example, must realize that since he or she is oppressed primarily because of his or her blackness, he must first of all become conscious of his race” (Sartre, 1988, p.296). Like Biko (1996), he posits that the consequence of the “race” based oppression should not be each black person on his or her own but rather an in-group fusion along the common interest to end “race” based oppression. For More (2009, p.26), what starts a “group-in-fusion as a transformatory or emancipatory agent, therefore, is the negation of itself as serial inertia, alienation, separation and powerlessness”. More (2009) evokes Biko (1996, p. 97) when he said,

We are oppressed not as individuals ... we are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group. We must cling to each other with the tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil.

Audre Lorde, a prominent feminist made a similar call for solidarities based on the subordinated position when she insisted that it was not the master’s tools that would dismantle the master’s house (1984).

The position outlined by More (2009) in the preceding lines, while not negating gender, clearly argues for “race” based solidarity. On the subject of gender, a host of black feminists led by Lorde (1984) have consistently called for a “race” based feminist struggle to address the unique challenges faced by black women. Recognising the common interest against patriarchy, these black feminist scholars have not foreclosed the future convergence of their struggle with white feminist interests. They have however called for the space and support to engage in their own struggle until such time as “race” based gender discrimination is overcome. Collins (2000) argues for a need for consciousness and a self-defined standpoint that black women should engage in order to comprehend their unique position of insubordination. She states that a premature coming together of black and white feminists is problematic as “groups [that are] unequal in power are correspondingly unequal in their ability to make their standpoint known to themselves and others” (Collins, 2000, p.26). Following Lorde (1984), she is of the view

that black women have to engage in self-definition before others seize the gap to define them which would be to the detriment of black women. This process will lead to a transformation which enables black women to develop new interpretations of old realities (Collins, 2000). Thus black women will be sufficiently empowered to reinterpret and challenge the stereotypical view that they are controlling and hyper emotional (Jewell, 1993). Working on their own also gives black women the space to work on their internalised oppression (Pheterson, 1986).

If black feminist scholars are consistently calling for autonomous space around which black women can understand the particularities of their position, what does this mean for solidarities and coalitions of gendered subjectivities between black and white women? Black female feminist scholars challenge the idea of separatism in favour of autonomy. They have argued that total separation of causes has the strong risk of rendering groups irrelevant in view of the fact that social inequalities intersect at various points. Collins (2000, p.217) thus advances the view that black women should enter into “coalitions with black men, white women, people of colour, and other groups with distinctive standpoints”. In her view, these coalitions enable mutual learning, critical enquiry, and dissemination of black women’s self-defined standpoint. It would thus appear that the point of engagement with black men also requires a more critical lens in order to be vigilant of the inherent patriarchal asymmetries. Yuval-Davis (1994) however offers a freer framework for understanding coalitions. She notes that coalition politics “recognize the differences among women and give voice without fixing the boundaries in terms of who we are but what we want to achieve” (Yuval-Davis, 1994, p.189).

While not necessarily organised around “race”, the women’s movement in South Africa has been characterised by coalitions at different points. FSAW formed in 1953 in response to the pass laws and living conditions and the National Women’s Coalition founded in 1992 to ensure that gender equality would be entrenched in the democratisation process and in drafting the constitution (Meintjes, 1996) are examples of such coalitions of various women’s interest groups. For Meintjes (1996, p.49), experiencing the history of segregation created by apartheid ensured that there would be a gulf between women from different class, “race”, and ethnic backgrounds. She notes that

“even working class women from different race groups had little in common in a society which had been predicated on racial identity” (Meintjes, 1996, p.49). The early 1990’s saw concerted efforts among women’s organisations to form coalitions based on their common desire to have women’s struggles on the agenda of the new democratic South Africa. Thus Meintjes states (1996, p.59):

The WNC approached the matter of diversity with sensitivity. Whilst recognising that women shared subordination and oppression, their experiences in every-day life differed according to their material circumstances. Middle class women and working class women, black and white, Christian, Hindu, Islamic women saw and experienced life very differently. This recognition of difference was what in fact made possible the coalition of women across such a broad ideological and political range. It moved away from the essentialism which had dogged feminist initiatives elsewhere in the world.

Mohanty (2002) argues that “third world” histories and struggles allow for configurations characterised by collaboration rather than the opposition that she sees as part of the western organisation. She states that the imagined community of the third world and its potential alliances and collaborations “leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance” (p.196). For Mohanty,

...it is not colour or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the *way* we think about race, class, and gender – the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colours (including white women) can align themselves with and participate in these imagined communities.

She sees ‘third world’ women as a “viable oppositional alliance” because they share a “common history of struggle rather than colour or racial identifications”. Together with other feminist writers, Mohanty (2002) posits that “third world” women’s oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than colour or racial identifications. Mohanty’s analyses offers possibilities for seeing the world in different ways where bigger struggles bring diverse people together. While this is possible in the “third world”, the nuances of location and history make some spaces more amenable to non-essentialist

struggles than others. South Africa's corporate space is a case in point. Here a history founded on biological and cultural alliances is deeply entrenched. How these shift and change or remain the same in the face of current formations and challenges is the subject of this research.

Holvino (2008) argues that white women have been privileged and often been in positions of dominance over women of colour. She notes that, "in organizations, this 'special place for white women only' translates into a tendency by white women to collaborate with white privilege and white men" (2008, p.7). Hurtado (1989) asks; what are the relative relationships to privileged white males by white middle class women and working class women and women of colour? She states that white middle class women have familial proximity to white males and thus white privilege and are groomed to be in their roles as daughters, lovers, and wives from very young. The relationship between black women and white males on the other hand is generally one of great social distance and power asymmetry. This relational complexity is corroborated by Holvino (2008) when she states that many white heterosexual women derive their affluence and status for their relations to white males as their fathers, lovers, husbands and organisational mentors.

Pheterson's (1986) theorisation of internalised domination is instructive to understand the phenomenon of identifications with powerful social groups. She states that people who have internalised their dominance are bound together in alliance on the basis of the power to dominate the 'other'. She says that the features of internalised domination "consist of feelings of superiority, normalcy, and self-righteousness, together with guilt, fear, projection, denial of reality, and alienation from one's body and from nature" (1986, p.148). When understood in relation to the marginalised and powerless "internalized domination perpetuates oppression of others and alienation from oneself by either denying or degrading all but a narrow range of human possibilities" (1986, p148).

2.3.6 Summary

Intersectionality requires that we recognise the differences in experience between black and white women. This is important not for the purposes of what some have called the “oppression Olympics” (Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009, p.468) but to research the stratifications of social asymmetries in a manner that allows for an understanding of the complexity of inequality. This section presented the differential positions of black and white women in a manner that sought to give voice to the marginalised while also pointing to invisibilised privilege and process elements of intersectionality. The historical analysis of the black and white women's experience showed the systemic and institutional aspects of intersectionality (Choo and Marx Ferree, 2010).

The section highlighted the ways in which black women in South Africa have been historically the most oppressed and how this marginalisation has persisted in a democratic dispensation (Statistics South Africa, 2011). The implications that this has for women's coalitions across “race” was discussed through a reflection on both South African and international feminist literature. Thus the need to provide a complex analysis of process related matters which see power as relational was illustrated. The focus on managers meant that the analysis assumed a flat class structure in which all the women were of the same class. In this regard the need to understand interactions between oppressions and how these locations may be troubled in “Third World” (Mohanty, 2002) settings was given. Even though males are gendered subjects, an interrogation of the gendered positions of males was not provided. This should certainly be picked up in future research.

Following the literatures on women's oppression, this section argued for a coalition based relationship between black and white women. However, the social distance engendered by a past which ensured that women constructed strong “race” based identities. The distance between these two groups of women was traced back to how they responded to apartheid and their relative access to power. This history was presented as a stumbling block in the way of a strong women led response to patriarchy. Finally, the most significant critique of South African scholarship is that it has not taken on workplace patriarchy as forcefully as it should.

2.4 Employment Equity and Informal Voluntary Social Practices

Behind the employment equity legislation are social patterns and interactions such as networking which are important factors in career progression. The informal nature of these practices means that they cannot be legislated and it may be difficult and undesirable to police and monitor them. Ashcraft (2000) has found that attempts to stifle social networks are undesirable and lead to the bureaucratisation of the personal. This is similar to what Mumby and Putnam (1992) have articulated in the notion of “bounded rationality”. It would however seem that these informal practices are possibly significant contributory factors towards the achievement of the aims of the employment equity legislation. In this regard, the support and success of individuals in performing their roles is one of the requirements of the Act. Furthermore, the link between conceptions of merit and competence (as outlined in the section on discourses of merit and empowerment) in relation to who one socialises with may be important. In other words, if one is part of an influential network of people within the organisation, their perceived worth and value may increase relative to those with lower status social networks. These factors may be particularly important when considering the contestations at middle to top levels of management where black people are generally underrepresented (Department of Labour, 2012). Workplace networks are therefore an important site of analysis if career advancement and psycho-social wellbeing are to be better understood.

2.4.1 Social Networking

Ibarra (1995) and Burt (1992) have suggested that social networking is an important factor towards achieving career advancement and success. This highlights the value of understanding social networks as they manifest in specific workplaces. Moreover, this calls for an exploration of some of the obstacles that those with less organisational power may experience when participating in valuable networks. The questions to address in exploring this should be broad and look beyond the existence or lack of social networks among particular groups. Thus Burt (1992) cautions that networks that are similar among different groups may not equate to the provision of similar benefits for the members of

those groups. Ibarra (1995, p.674) focused on informal managerial networks and defined these as “the set of job related contacts that a manager relies on for access to task-related, career and social support”.

For Ibarra (1995) the range and status of the network are significant factors in determining the utility value of social networks. Range is said to provide bargaining and information opportunities with a number of different stakeholders that go beyond specific work flow interactions or the team within which the person is located. Dispersed networks thus tend to be more powerful (Brass, 1984; Ibarra, 1995). With regard to status, the higher up the hierarchy one’s network extends; the more influential and powerful the people in the network are. The utility value of the network is thus significantly increased by range and status factors as these assist in accumulating power and enhancing advancement opportunities. In addition to instrumental value, close relationships to one’s network have been found to have psycho-social benefits (Kram, 1988). Ibarra (1995, p.675) contends that close relationships based on trust and loyalty, fulfill psychosocial functions which enhance one’s sense of “competence, identity and effectiveness in a professional role...and include serving as a role model, acceptance, and friendship”.

Burt (1992) has argued that informal social networks are probably more important in value than formal networks in the accomplishment of both organisational (macro) and individual (micro) objectives and goals. Combs (2003) defines formal networks as those that are organisationally sanctioned and tied to the official organisational structure in the form of committees and supervisor/subordinate relations, among others. Informal networks on the other hand are characterised by voluntary interactions and interest based associations such as professional organisations, lunch groups and social outings (Combs, 2003). According to Conway (2001) and Ibarra (1995), informal networks are not dependent upon organisational sanction and authority and might even not operate in mutual reinforcement with formal interactions that are prescribed by the organisation. This suggests that they can be a power unto themselves. Patterns of belonging and exclusion are therefore important to understand if one is interested in the outcomes which have been said to latch onto informal networks (Nkomo, 1992).

Homophily, the finding that people are drawn to others who look like them (Koen and Durrheim, 2010) means that those with less power have to establish both in-group networks and networks with the dominant group if they are to maximise on the functional value of networking (Bell, 1990; Ibarra, 1995). Conversely, the success and advancement of dominant groups is not dependent upon networks which include non-dominant groups (Ibarra, 1995). This finding may suggest that because non-dominant groups have negligible amounts of power and influence, they have no real bearing and impact on the advancement of those that are dominant. In addition, this would mean that dominant groups can maintain homogenous networks and still be successful. For Thomas (1990), in-group relationships tend to be stronger than cross group relations between people of different “races”. This suggests that those in non-dominant groups potentially benefit less from networking. Mollica, Gray and Treviño (2003) found that homophilous relationships are a valuable source of mutual support but that they circumscribe non-dominant groups’ access to information and organisational resources. Notwithstanding the relative disadvantage of non-dominant groups, Ibarra (1995) maintains that both in-group and across group relationships are important for career advancement opportunities. On the other hand, James (2000) found social capital to be non-significant in career advancement but as important for psychosocial support. She however found that black managers reported having significantly less social networks than their white counterparts.

James (2000, p.493) notes that a Fortune 500 financial services firm survey of black and white managers found a slower reported rate of promotion and less psychosocial support for black managers when compared to white managers. She found that “race” had “both a direct and indirect effect on these outcomes”. Notably, while participation in company training initiatives was a good predictor for promotion, “race” remained a significant factor. She argues that the significance of “race” in rates of promotion suggests a type of treatment discrimination against blacks.

2.4.2 Patterns of Segregation and Integration

Research on intergroup relations has tended to focus at the level of the macro-ecological while ignoring the micro-ecological (Dixon et al., 2005). Clack, Dixon and

Tredoux (2005, p.2) define segregation as a micro-ecological process that “shapes relations in contexts where members of different groups share proximity and co-presence and where racial boundaries are fleeting and informal”. Allport’s (1954) research into intergroup contact theory and a number of subsequent studies (e.g. Pettigrew and Tropp, 2000) found that under conditions of equal status and explicitly socially sanctioned contact, face-to-face contact reduces prejudice. Taylor and Moghaddam (1994) however note that notwithstanding the merits of contact, there is the problem of “illusory contact” where macro-ecologies facilitate contact but where segregation continues anyway.

Campbell, Kruskal, and Wallace (1966) conducted one of the earliest studies on patterns of segregated seating in classrooms. That study found significant segregation by sex and “race” within university classrooms. In this regard, they found that black people tended to sit with other black people, white people were more likely to sit with other white people and women tended to sit with other women. In South African studies, similar patterns were found. “Race” appeared particularly salient. Thus, Koen and Durrheim (2010) found high levels of racial segregation among first year university students at a South African university. Through their longitudinal study, they noted that levels of segregation increased significantly with the progression of time. An additional finding is that there were no significant levels of differences noted in the way in which black, white or Indian students were segregated. All three groups sat in fairly homogenous patterns. Keizan and Duncan (2010) conducted an observational study of adolescents at play and found the dominant pattern to be one of “race” based self-segregation. In a subsequent study where a focus group was conducted with adolescents of the same school, the teenagers confirmed the racialised segregation patterns.

In another longitudinal study with Master of Business Administration students in the United States of America, Mollica, Gray and Treviño (2003) noted there was no significant change in homophily among various racial group networks even though recruitment efforts to diversify the student pool were undertaken in order to form heterogeneous classes and study teams. Durrheim *et al.*, (2004) earlier argued that while demographic desegregation had occurred in the student population of universities, “true” integration remained elusive as the various groups maintained spatial segregation. For

Koen and Durrheim (2010, p.461), “higher-level integration at the university masks lower level segregation”. Macro changes in student demographics thus create illusory contact which is absent at the micro everyday level.

Similar patterns were noted by Dixon and Durrheim (2001) when they studied intergroup interactions at a South African beach. In this regard they found that beach goers maintained racially homogenous interaction through the aid of territorial and spatial barriers. An additional finding by Koen and Durrheim (2010) was that a higher density of students in the lecture theatre led to increased levels of segregation. Hallinan and Smith (1985) observed that an increase in same “race” presence led to increased segregation. A similar finding was made by Clack *et al.*, (2005) in the United Kingdom. They found that a university cafeteria was characterised by marked segregation between its white patrons and those of Asian origin.

The concept of habitus not been productively used in organizational psychology. Here, it will be applied to understand how people occupy space. The concept is useful in explaining homophily. This concept might be understood in terms of the disposition acquired through training to engage in very particular activities when in specific settings. Through both effort and training the individual is soon able to act in expected ways when confronted by a situation such that this becomes effortless and second nature over time. This leads to habituated forms of conduct (Swartz, 2002). Habitus as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1990) is a theory of action seeking to explain how certain habits form without the influence of cultural norms or other forms of obedience to socially sanctioned rules and structures. This foregrounding of human agency was a deliberate break from the structural deterministic orientation of structuralist theorists (Swartz, 2002). However, at the same time Bourdieu (1990) was also not advocating for a subjectivist stance but an approach which takes due consideration of the confluence of subjectivist internal drives and structural social influences on human action.

For Bourdieu (1990b, p.53), habitus can be seen as a collection of “principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to

their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them”. When applied to socialising ecologies the concept of habitus is useful on a number of fronts. It moves analysis away from binary conceptions and also suggests that behaviours have an unconscious and relatively unreflexive element. The dispositional reflective aspects of habitus allow individuals to engage in behaviours with the most likelihood of anticipated success based on past experiences and access to power (Swartz, 2002). People’s choices to self segregate may in part be understood within this logic. However, by working through self-selection, prevailing forms of social stratification are easily reproduced. This can also feed into self-fulfilling prophecies where people believe they are not welcome to socialise with different groups. This has a number of implications which are discussed below.

2.4.3 Workplace Implications of Segregated Social Networks and Homophily

In seeking to understand prevailing segregation patterns within various contexts, it is useful to consider the broader environment. Thus in reviewing Durrheim, Mtose and Brown (2011), Pattman (2011, p.163) posits that “in spite of a growing black middle class, there are still massive racial inequalities and, while segregation is no longer prescribed, living and recreational spaces are still racialised”. With the growth of a black middle class within the context of a country that prohibits formal segregation; continued segregation suggests that different “races” may be operating in parallel within common spaces. Macro segregation has become micro.

Following the range of studies on segregated seating patterns discussed in preceding parts of this chapter, a number of studies have also confirmed that similar patterns operate among adults in the workplace. According to McPherson *et al.*, (2001), members of most social networks tend to share similarities in “race”, sex, ethnicity, religion, age, education, and occupation. Remarking on the effects of homophily, Bielby (2012) states that these have implications that go beyond career advancement and psychosocial wellbeing. In this regard, he states that the earnings of black brokers relative to white brokers in banking may be negatively impacted by homophily. He found that the success

of brokers depended significantly on social networks and personal referrals. Thus, if affluent white clients are more comfortable with doing business with white bankers, it follows that black bankers will not get much business from white clients.

For Bielby (2012), because white communities are generally substantially wealthier than black communities, black bankers cannot compete from an equal footing. This is especially important where banker's salaries are dependent upon the commission raised from business. In the world of finance, those that bring in the most revenue ("rainmakers") come to wield great influence and power over co-workers. They often wield as much power as that of their managers in positions of formal authority in higher levels of the organisational hierarchy. In these circumstances, status and influence circulate within limited and homogenous networks. Bielby (2012) therefore makes a case for earning and power differences as a result of homophily among other things.

According to Cox and Nkomo (1991), where power asymmetries exist, those with less power generally receive less support and mentoring. They are also likely to be socially isolated and excluded from participating in powerful social networks. In a recent study of two major South African organisations, Nkomo (2011) found that the dominance of the Afrikaans language served to exclude blacks who did not speak the language from formal and informal interactions that occur in workplace. Indeed, the use of English as the language of business has yet to be problematised in the South African context. Nkomo (2011) further notes that women and blacks experienced barriers to becoming a part of the informal groups and activities during working hours, breaks and after work. As in the previous section on women, Combs (2003) explains that black women have particular challenges stemming from the identity intersection between "race" and gender. In this regard she states that the convergence of these identities may impose a "stronger effect on personal and social interactions that impact advancement opportunities" (Combs, 2003, p.390).

In a review of the literature for African American women, Combs (2003) cites a study by Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) which found that the arrival of African American women into the career of firefighting was in the context of existing bonds between white men,

African American men, and white women. This meant that African American female firefighters were in the margins of informal voluntary social interactions and networks which often served to exclude them. In this research, white female firefighters were found to leverage off their racial similarities with white males. Overall then, it would appear that African American female firefighters were disadvantaged with regard to training opportunities, “performance evaluation, group status, socialisation, and professional advancement” (Combs, 2003, p.391). She concludes that the marginal career progression of black women should be examined in relation to the implications of their out-group status in informal voluntary social networks. In addition to this analytical lens, common stereotypes of black people should be borne in mind. Thus Fernandez (1981) found that whites generally saw black people through negative stereotypes such as lazy or slow, and they viewed Asians as a model minority and associated them with intelligence and industriousness.

2.4.4 Summary

The central argument of this section is that the ways in which managers of varying ethnicities chose to socialise in micro ecologies within the workplace is located within a particular past and can be productively explained through the application of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. This means that particular sets of habits such as self-segregation derive from a disposition influenced by a number of forces including internal drives and external influences. The application of habitus is uncommon in organisational theory and it presents scope for generative analysis. However, patterns of self segregation are not unique to the workplace as they have been observed in various school settings in South Africa and abroad. This section illustrated that the effects of self segregating behaviours are not benign for groups without power. This means that progression opportunities through promotions and access to strategic networks which benefit work assignments are the preserve of powerful groups. In South Africa, the benefits of access to powerful people are skewed towards white people as they occupy relatively more senior positions than their black peers. Segregated patterns of networking thus contribute towards maintaining the status quo.

The literature that was reviewed also points towards the positive effects of homophily. The main benefit is the social and psychological effects of being among people that one identifies with and sees as an ingroup. This presents an opportunity for self-validation and creates space to counter negative effects of stereotyping by the dominant groups. For groups with less power these psychosocial benefits are however, not accompanied by advancement opportunities. On the other hand, those with power obtain benefit from both the advancement opportunities and the psychosocial effects of homophily. In closing, given our unique history, it is important to critique South African scholarship for not researching the effects of micro segregation. While Nkomo (2010) has begun some work in this area, our scholarship tends to focus on schools to the exclusion of workplaces. This signifies a relatively conservative scholarship in the field of organisational behavior.

2.5 Employment Equity Discourses, Practices and Constructions of Professional Identities

2.5.1 Identity Theories and Social Difference in South Africa

This section provides a brief summary of some of the key theories developed to explain identity in relation to individual and group identities. This is important in view of the centrality of identity to this research. While these theories inform the genealogy of identity studies, the current research applies later conceptions of identity within the post-modern milieu of identity. This review is followed by a historical examination of social difference in South Africa.

2.5.1.1 Classical Identity Theories

Identity has been defined as “both a personal and a social construct, that is, a mental representation” (van Dijk, 1998, p.119). Contemporary understandings of identity emerge from the canon of classic identity theories which largely sought to examine human behaviour in various contexts. For example, conformity studies cohered around social processes within groups. One of the early studies of group norms was conducted by Sherif whose optical illusion study found that norms and ranges developed within group situations were “closely adhered to when the subject was alone” (Brown, 1996, p.14). Zimbardo’s simulated prison experiment demonstrated how quickly individuals learn new roles (Keyser, 2001). Ash (1952) studied group pressure towards conformity and found that there was a marked pressure on individuals to move towards the group’s judgment. Milgrim’s (1974) study conducted in the 1960’s found that obedience to authority led to compliance under pressure. Studies on minority influences have also been conducted. Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed a new approach towards why groups so strongly affect individuals. They found that “the bases of peoples self-definition change in groups” in that a personal identity gives way to social identity (Brown, 1996, p.33). These classical studies bring the power of social influence into sharp relief.

Organisational diversity interventions have been largely informed by contact theory as conceptualised by Allport (1954), and social identity theory by Tajfel (Brickson, 2000). The contact hypothesis is premised on the view that contact between diverse groups will help them develop better attitudes towards one another. There are many criticisms that have been leveled against the contact hypothesis theory. Chief amongst these is the requirement of the condition of equal status in society. This poses a challenge as there is a wide social status gap that prevails in the South African workplace (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2008).

Social identity theory has as one of its aims to effectively deal with diversity, for members of diverse groups to recategorise various identities under one large superordinate organisational identity (Tajfel, 1983; Brickson, 2000). However, Brickson (2000) cautions that the superordinate identities that are primed through recategorisation might be difficult to maintain. This is because they are “very context dependent, require strong unifying goals, and may not be appropriate for large groups” (Brickson, 2000, p.83). Moreover, when these are not reinforced outside the workplace within the broader social context, they may not be sustainable. For example; a racism free workplace where all employees identify as “workers” might be undermined by experiences of racism outside of the workplace. Brickson (2000) further cautions that when superordinate identities fail, original categorisations can resurface. Moreover, when successful, assimilation pressure is likely. While the “rainbow nation” and proudly South African concepts have been proffered as superordinate identities, these paper over the huge rifts between the cross section of the South African population. Moreover, the racial categories legislated into the EE Act of 1998, make “race” a real classification and imbue it with meaning that employees and employers must wrestle with on a daily bases as a lived experience.

Following Brewer and Gardner (1996), Brickson (2000) posits that the identification process is multifaceted and dynamic. She proposes a model with three fundamental loci of self–definition. These include self as an individual, self as an interpersonal being, and self as a group member. Her model suggests that organisations that predominantly activate a personal (individual) orientation may avoid some of the negative consequences

of diversity but will not maximise its benefits. Those that evoke a collective (group) identity orientation are said to probably not achieve the upside of diversity. On the other hand those most likely to avoid negative consequences of diversity and to obtain its advantages are those that activate a relational (interpersonal) orientation (Brickson, 2000). Organisations promoting the later orientation typically resemble organic open systems characterised by fluid networks, structures, and relationships (Morgan, 2006) rather than bureaucracies.

This opens the way for a what Dudgeon and Fielder (2006) call the “third space” identity. The third space is characterised by a disruption of the dichotomy between marginalised and dominant groups and emphasises the dialectical relationship between the two (Sonn and Green, 2006). According to Dudgeon and Fielder (2006, p.12), the third space is a “liminal space that challenges polarities and disrupts the idea of pure identities”. This space is characterised by ambiguity and hybridity. The opening up of a third space suggests new signs of identity, innovative collaborations between cultures and the emergence of contestations. For this to occur there has to be critical self–reflection on social and cultural identities as well as social (re) positioning (Prillettensky and Fox, 1997; Sonn and Green, 2006). This approach appears the most productive for within the South African context as it is open to contestations which move us beyond pure identities while also being responsive to contextual challenges.

2.5.1.2 Integrated and Adapted Identities

A central task in the pursuit of empowerment is the need to make the distinction between integration and adaptation. Integration with one’s context is a distinctly human activity. Freire (1979) states that it results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality with the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality. For example, to the extent that black people and women lose their ability to make choices and are subjected to the choices of others, and because their decisions are no longer their own because they result from external prescriptions, they are not integrated. Freire (1979) classifies such people as adapted in the sense that they have adjusted. The integrated person is black person and woman as subject. On the other hand, the adaptive become

person as object. Freire (1979) states that adaptation represents a weak form of self-defense. People that adapt and adjust to situations are those that are incapable of changing reality.

Asserting that the 1970's black person was suffering from an inferiority complex, Biko argued against assimilation. Instead, he posited that "a very strong grass- roots build - up of black consciousness..." was necessary before real integration was possible (Biko (1996, p.22). He charged that integration under conditions of racism was untenable as it was full of unquestioned assumptions that embraced white values. With the criminalisation of racism, it would thus follow that integration is possible. This can however only occur within conditions of equality and mutual recognition (Fanon, 1952).

Animals do not possess self-reflexive capabilities. People on the other hand are by nature able to reflect and have a sense of historicity. Viewed in this way, adaptation is symptomatic of peoples dehumanisation as it is behaviour characteristic of the animal sphere. In the struggle against adjusting and towards integration, people are able to come closer towards attaining their full humanity. This is enabled by the creation of a space to respond to challenges imposed by the environment. In this response people are better able to dynamise, master, and humanise reality. With regard to this reality, Freire (1979, p.5) states that people "add something of their own making, by giving temporal meaning to geographic space, by creating culture". Societal and cultural mobility is essential for this interplay. It is the ability of people to participate in the creation of culture that determines their humanisation or dehumanisation; and their affirmation as subjects or reduction as objects (Freire, 1979).

In elucidating the preceding conceptualisations of integration and adaptation, what becomes clear, is that new entrants to the South African workplace either adapt or integrate (Thomas, 2002). Thomas and Robertshaw (1999, p.11-12), state that "...the assimilation generally required of new employees to a corporate environment is subtle and often unrelated to issues of performance and productivity". This implies cooption, where the dominant culture subjugates, diminishes, and converts black people and women into spectators, outmaneuvered by myths which the entrenched culture has

created. In this scenario, little or no space is created to challenge the status quo, and the dominant culture actively resists any attempts at integration.

Freire's (1979) contention that adaptation is at best a weak defense mechanism resonates with Fanon's theorisation of buying into the "masters" ideology if only to live with less internal conflict which paradoxically also heightens this conflict with the self. Bulhan (1985) posits that psychic and social development becomes undermined, suppressed, and arrested in conditions where acceptance for one's expression is absent. Another related paradox is that some of the people that are now entering the workplace as employment equity appointments were the children who possibly envied and sought to emulate their privileged white peers during apartheid. Fanon argued that as a result of the "white master" imposing his language and culture on the "black slave", the slave strove to adopt the master's "diction, outlook and behaviour" (Bulhan, 1985, p.115). Now, under the democratic paradigm, many black children in "integrated" schools actually *adapt* to the organisational culture and language of the schools (Ramphela, 2009). To illustrate this point Ramphela (2009, p.2) quotes Nigerian Professor Pai Obabya,

Education is mainly about acculturation, to be learned is to be cultured. Starting off an acculturation process with non-first language tends to lead to a situation in which the person could become knowledgeable but not cultured, and developing a feeling of belonging nowhere.

In the preceding conception, the "host" culture sees "different" as inferior in language ability and socialisation. This is evinced in the change in accents, value and belief systems. Rather than solve the problem, this leads to a worsening as they are rendered "incapable" of resistance to change. In this sense the "organisational culture" of their youth as well as their adult working years remains an "ingrained" dominant force seeking to co-opt rather than integrate. In this context, it would seem that Biko's (1996) call for a black consciousness movement appears relevant in certain sections of a democratic South Africa.

Integration on the other hand presupposes an environment that is open to challenge in recognition that black and female employees may benefit and grow from being enabled to actively represent their culture. This does not necessarily lead to the dilution of the organisation culture, but contributes to a strengthened culture better able to cater to

diverse interests. Consistent with Freire's (1979) and Biko's (1996) arguments, a space to assert and struggle with the dominant culture allows for the attainment of full humanity. It is worth noting that social life constitutes culture and hence how people make meaning out of their lives: "humans are not simply instruments for the replication of culture; rather they use their culture... as a vehicle for living, for the mutual creation of themselves" (Ingold, 1986, p.319). In this sense, the oft neglected human factor is given the prominence that it deserves and which substantially adds to the attainment of organisational goals.

It is worth noting that while many of these theories found validation in the behavioural laboratory settings where they were tested, they do not stand up to universal scrutiny when applied to various contexts. The primary factor against their application to the South African setting is the lack of equality across a number of social and economic areas. It is the community psychology theories that were developed in "third world" settings that are most applicable to the South African situation. In this regard the fostering of an environment for the emergence of "third space" (Brickson, 2000) identities is useful as it allows for contestations and multiple identities characterised by fluidity to emerge. The literature reviewed here was expanded to consider the merits of spaces which allow for integration rather than adaptation.

2.5.2 Employment Equity and Identity Constructions in South Africa

This section reviews the history of identity formations in South Africa with the focus on “race” as a key constituent factor. The focus on “race” is largely informed by the narrative of “race” politics which has been the most important factor in shaping the past century. Secondly, employment equity legislation within the post-apartheid workplace has come about in large part as a response to the racialised history. This analysis provides the backdrop to understanding identity formations in today’s workplace.

2.5.2.1 A Raced History

There are multiple ways in which “race” is understood. Some believe that it is a biological category, others see it as an aspect of observable nature, and yet others understand it as a reification and discursive category within culture (Dalal, 2002). Much of this research is built on the understanding that while “race” is devoid of “objective” reality and that it is a “social construction” (Loury, 2002) whose pernicious effects has had devastating impacts (Duncan, 2005; Radilhalo, 2007) on those of darker hues, it continues to impose itself as a material reality in the lives of South African’s (Habib and Bentley, 2008; Mamphela, 2008). In recognition of the lack of objective basis for ‘race’, following Loury (2002) and with current thought on the subject, “race” here is understood as a socially constructed form of human categorisation with no real objective basis. It is a social convention that is not justified by a deeper biological taxonomy.

Measures to eliminate discriminatory practices and to attain redistributive justice such as the Employment Equity Act of 1998 however use the language of “race” to effect the desired changes. Stevens *et al.*, (2006) have remarked on the resurgence of the language of difference in post-apartheid South Africa. Duncan (2012) notes that the increased use of “race” based identity markers is paradoxically against the efforts of non-racialist movements of the broader anti-apartheid movement including the Black Consciousness Movement which sought to eliminate divisive “race” categorisations amongst the oppressed (Biko, 1996).

At the same time, we know that “race” like all categories is “historically and socially constructed, but also a category that is “real,” that is imposed with force, and a category within which, and according to which, people must live” (Fergusson⁸, 2006, p.5). Efforts by scholars such as Gilroy (1998, 2000) and Zimitri Erasmus who in *Audacity to Think Differently* (2012), challenge us to move both legislative language and everyday talk away from “race” based categories, are caught in the double bind of eliminating undesirable categorisations which reify “race” while many South African’s find themselves stuck in “race” and class (Modisha, 2007; Seekings, 2008) based realities of continuing racism (Radilhalo, 2007). Mountain and Calvo-Gonzales (2012, p.244) have remarked on the dichotomising effect of affirmative action discourses in Brazil, “a vastly miscigenated society”. Thus they state that the manner in which affirmative action programmes are implemented “can paradoxically reinforce racialised discourses, while at the same time erasing or obscuring the articulation between race and class within local specificities in the reproduction of inequalities” (Mountain and Calvo-Gonzales (2012, p.245). For Howarth and Hook (2005, p.2), the recognition “that race and difference are *constructed*, *performatively produced* and *embodied* in particular ways that protect particular investments, particular identities and particular relations of privilege and oppression, does not mean that we can now simply deconstruct race”.

We are presented with two competing discourses; one which seeks to eliminate “race” based categories and another which reifies them while endeavoring to make positive change in the lives of those that were previously marginalised because of “race” based difference. We are also presented with reports of continuing racism in everyday experience. Comaroff and Comaroff (2003) suggest that a critical social science must take as its point of departure both inductive and deductive ways of building knowledge by taking seriously the theoretical and experiential components of the process. While they acknowledge that essences and realities exist, they urge the researcher to show how they are constructed, “how realities become real, how essences become essential, how materialities materialize” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992, p.20). Indeed they call for a return to theory as grounded theory, historically contextualised, and as problem driven

⁸ Here, Ferguson was referring to “Africa” as a category. This research applies his concept of categorisation to “race” as a social construction.

effort located in the middle of a meta-narrative and the microscopically myopic local (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2010). This research therefore takes the middle route of taking seriously the everyday experiences and realities of the participants of this research in relation to how they construct their identities within the South African context while also engaging with the theoretical complexities of identity formation.

For a better understanding of the present, the history of “race” in the world, in Africa, and in South Africa is critical. In his chapter which explores the impact of colonisation, Ghanaian scholar, Agawu (2003) details the chronology and the pernicious effects of the European forage and consequent scramble for Africa. This began in the early 1400’s with the arrival of the Portuguese in Africa. It extended into the decimation of some indigenous people such as the San (Mbeki, 1999), and huge trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 1500’s, before the culmination of the colonial agenda in the 19th century which sliced Africa into pieces of real estate to be shared amongst the colonial empires. Black labour was the exploitable and superfluous (Mbembe, 2008) commodity on which colonial outposts and cities were built. Efforts to shrug off colonialism led to some successes in the middle part of last century. In South Africa, however, the system of formalised racism known as apartheid was only still taking shape. Like its colonial predecessor, the apartheid system maintained and fed white supremacy and dominance over the black majority. These forces nurtured global whiteness both in the colonies and the metropolitan centres (Mbembe, 2008) as well as the particular form of South African whiteness which disavowed the very humanity of black people in the country (Gasa, 2007).

2.5.2.2 Identity Struggles within the Context of Oppression

“South African” identities should be understood in relation to global and local movements that have contributed to the current manifestations of identity in the workplace. While Ethiopia had held off would be Italian colonisers, she was annexed for five years and gained independence in 1941, Haiti was the first country to distinguish itself as a black republic after successfully revolting against its French oppressors in 1804 (Gates, 2012). According to Heyes (2012), it is in the second half of last century where

+we witnessed the emergence of movements that coalesced along markers of difference that had been used to oppress people hitherto on the margins of white normative society. Thus, in the United States, the civil rights movement, Native Americans struggle, feminist movements, and movements fighting for the rights of sexually marginalised groups such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people took root. In Great Britain (Mama, 1995), as in North America (hooks, 1989) black feminists began to articulate a position of difference from their white counterparts. They argued that they were marginalised within the civil rights movement (e.g. Black Panthers), and that white feminism did not address anti-racism which was a core concern of black feminists (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Here difference was splintered in both raced and gendered ways.

Elsewhere in the world, African countries were fighting against “race” based colonialism (Fanon, 1967; Bulhan, 1985). In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were fighting colonialism and for basic recognition as people (Sonn and Quale, 2012). The Māori were also fighting for full citizenship in New Zealand (Huygens, 2006). In Brazil, where non-racism ostensibly ruled, black people were organising in small numbers to reassert a racialised identity based on their experiences of racism in a “colour-blind” society (Winddance Twine, 2005; Tavares, 2010). In South Africa where colonisation had morphed into apartheid (Biko, 1996), the fight was drawn out until the last decade of the twentieth century. In the global south (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2010), alongside these struggles for “race” based freedom were gender and sexuality based fights for equality.

2.5.2.3 Identity and Loss of Power

Much of the public discourse on the transition years has focused on the optimism and “miracle” of change in South Africa. A reflective position on this period (1990 to 1999) of South Africa’s development gained momentum in the years following the presidency of Nelson Mandela, who in the public imagination, together with Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, embodied the “miracle” discourse. Rapid and drastic political change of course has major consequences on the identities of those who experience this change. The “impact

of change” discourse has in part been sidelined by the more celebrated “miracle” discourse. While economic transformation has not been in step with political change (Gqubule, 2006), considering South Africa’s past, the political changes were radical for a population that had known only white minority rule over a period of approximately three hundred years. Thus, for Anderson (1990, p.27):

[T]he collapse of a belief system can be like the end of the world. It can bring down not only the powerful, but whole systems of social roles and the concepts of personal identity that go with them. Even those who are most oppressed by a belief system often fear the loss of it. People can literally cease to know who they are... There are many people who have been thus dispossessed.

This quote largely centres the experience of those with vested interests in maintaining the old arrangements of power. In this case it is whiteness. Before the fall of apartheid, to be white meant to have absolute political power over black people. Straker (2011) notes that it is this power that has been lost, albeit that many whites retain a great deal of relative privilege. She contends that whiteness has become unsettled as it is no longer assured its privileged position. Here, we get onto shaky ground because of the problem that is inherent to whiteness studies. According to Banerjee (2008, p.28), “whiteness studies, *at its worst*, dismisses the power inequalities inherent in the concept of racism and charges the other side with victimizing, with *minoritizing*, whiteness”. Notwithstanding this criticism of whiteness studies, reflective interrogation of the assumptions of whiteness is necessary and should not be done in isolation from the “victims” of whiteness.

Steyn (2001) provides a compelling framework from which to examine the unraveling of whiteness. Like Anderson (1990) and Straker (2011), she frames these changes around the theoretical frame of loss as a postmodern displacement from old certainties. Neely (2012, p.3) notes that “status loss refers to an existing evaluation and perceived experience of loss, rather than an objective measure”. Loss can be thought of as abruptly leaving home. For Steyn (2001) home represents normative position of comfort, acceptance, belonging and ownership. Martin and Mohanty (1987, in Steyn, 2001, p.157) see home as a place of familiarity, protection, security and safety and *homogenous identity*. These secure places of home are established only through denials, exclusions,

and blindedness and represent “repressive fiction” (Steyn, 2001). Beyond the loss of political power, white people have not necessarily left home in as much as they have to share home with people who want their share of this home. New entrants who were previously the “other” that home excluded are now wanting to be part of “home”. For the old inhabitants of home, this challenges the idea and parameters of home. They are now confronted with change and a limited range of possibilities because the change is mandated from outside and from the reality of needing to inhabit a shared space which necessitates renegotiating power and re-imagining the other. Possible courses of action are flight into private entrepreneurship where one has more space to create their own rules, emigrating to another circle of whiteness, staying and resisting through powerful coalitions of whiteness and networks from the old “home”; or renegotiating identity, space and conceptions of home in ways that adjust to new conditions. The latter position requires reaching out to the “other”, living with uncertainty and openness for change and being acted upon by the world in ways which shake established conceptions of home and belonging.

A second area of loss identified by Steyn (2001, p.158) is loss of autonomy and control. She states:

[w]hereas previously white dependence on blacks was repressed and kept out of sight (largely through unfair labour practice); dependence upon Africans in the new dispensation is undeniable and public knowledge. Acknowledging interdependence requires learning humility, letting go of ungrounded feelings of self-sufficiency. Whites have to learn to trust what they have been taught to fear most.

Within this malaise and in the context of letting in the “other” into the workplace, the question of whether the organisation can continue to function with blacks as meaningful, equal (and or senior) contributors arises. Other losses include the loss of a sense of relevance, legitimacy, and loss of face. Steyn (2001) is scathing on the matter of the loss of relevance. She notes that there is a tendency to claim a subject position of marginalisation after the loss of political power. This leads to bearing a victimhood that may be false. For Steyn, loss of political power has not lead to loss of key status positions in South Africa, including some roles in the public service, private sector, and control of

most of the economy. “Marginalization” as a term thus “reflects the experience of loss of a dominant position, subjectively translated as oppression” (Steyn, 2001, p.159). The feeling of irrelevance may thus be a measure of how accustomed to power whites had become rather than a true measure of peripherality. What does it mean for whites to accept that blacks can be competent managers in the workplace? Does this make them irrelevant? Importantly for this study, Steyn (2001, p.166) notes that “tropes such as ‘standards,’ ‘merit,’ and ‘fine art’ may be employed” to the purpose of resistance and to continue liberal European values and attitudes and lifestyle.

Locating South Africa’s history of racism within its global context is meant to illustrate that while South Africa experienced unique elements of oppression, it was a part of a global forms of oppression that characterised the last two centuries. With the radical political changes that have swept through the world and South Africa in the past few decades, it is important to theorise the loss suffered by those who formally held political power. In this regard, it is important to look at the ways in which the loss of political power has been experienced by those who formally held absolute power (Steyn, 2001). The ways in which people make sense of the loss of power and attempt to hold on to other forms of power has to be theorised.

2.5.3 Employment Equity and Professional Identities: Continuities and Discontinuities

Old forms of self-identification in relation to “race”, sexuality and class are now accompanied by qualifications, repudiations and acute consciousness about how one is represented by the other. This coheres with Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard’s (2008, p.1) contention that our sense of “stable identity anchored in familiar social class hierarchies and cultural practice conventions has come under threat”. For better or for worse, South African corporate life is in the unsettling throes of change. For all its widely reported slow progress (Employment Equity Commission, 2012), detrimental effects (Solidarity, 2010), the policy of employment equity, has probably had the most pervasive impact on human resources and organisational behaviour practices in post-apartheid South Africa. This section examines the adaptations in identity formations arising from employment equity discourses and practices.

Keeping the above in mind, within a context of an active employment equity agenda, it may be important to establish the kinds of identity that emerge out of empowerment. A key question to consider is whether or not an empowerment agenda contributes to complexly fragmented identities influenced by both past and present realities. The interplay between group identity and ideology is an important element of identity. While ideology receives attention in the methodological frame of this study, it is critical to note that when a group has developed an ideology, the ideology also “defines the basis for the group’s identity” (van Dijk, 1998, p.120). This way of conceptualising identity has been developed within a community of interlocutors one of which is scholarship in social constructionism.

2.5.3.1 The Contours of Identity Politics

Within the identity politics milieu, Gordon (2006) distinguishes between a “politics of recognition” and a politics of difference. Proponents of the former seek acceptance by the dominant group in relation to culture and or politics. Politics of difference emphasises difference in that it strives for the retention of identity beyond matters of recognition. This position seeks full respect for differences that it sees as salient. Moreover, it

understands members to be inassimilable to dominant groups. In both cases, the dominant group referred to is characterised by white normativity. Gordon (2006) and Heyes (2012) understand white normativity to refer to the centering of whiteness as a way of life by which all others are benchmarked and expected to be. The white perspective on and of reality holds sway as the point of reference.

Butler (1996, 1990) conceives of identity as a performance which is achieved among constraints that “prefigure” who we are and what we do. She questions and rejects the essence of the gender binary. In her analysis, gender is something we become and is based on well-rehearsed societal scripts about what it means to be male or female. It is not only within discourse that gender takes on ascribed meaning. Conceiving of identity as something that is constantly becoming conveys a sense of process which allows for change, ambiguity, continuities across different timescales, and subjectivities enacted across momentary interactions. Following on Butler’s conception of identity as a process of “becoming”, Bangeni and Kapp (2005) caution that although identities are fluid and multiple, they are not free-floating. In this regard, identity is not something to be discarded and changed at will but is rather related to historical anchors. This does not contradict Butler’s assertion but serves as a point of clarification.

For Lemke (2008), identities are constructed both from fixed semiotic options within our cultures and its constraints and new options such as transgressive identities which subvert the normative formations of our communities. The transgressive (hooks, 1989) potential of identity allows for political work for challenging power relations in ways which create new identities but also re-inscribing others (Lemke, 2008). Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard (2008, p.6) conceive of identity thus:

Identity is realized as representational enactment (meaning), as interpersonal experience (feeling) and organized performance (acting), and as a controlled distribution (who has access to such enactment? Who are legitimate producers/consumers/overhearers, and so on of these enactments?). Identity is not beholden to one particular dimension of being, but corresponds to anything that actors (or analysts) treat as significant. ...acknowledging that people can choose to foreground different facets and timescales of social life for identity investment and self-realisation.

Identity is thus contextually contingent and takes into account significant relationships. Importantly, they alert us to the temporal nature of identity. The historical experiences and antecedents, the present and possible futures, are important contributors to identity. Within these histories, we include Butler's (1990) understanding of genealogies of gender. That which predates the subject as "natural" course. For Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard (2008), the past is a critical site for identity and seeing it purely in the interactive present is to miss out on the complex realities that constitute life.

Hall (1980) notes that "...identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past". Thus one's Asian, African, and gendered heritage is an important site of identity creation even as individuals might attempt to disassociate from that past in the present. This is not to say that identity is irreversibly tied to the past but rather that the past is an important element that has to be negotiated in the present and in interaction with other actors. Identity lacks not just fixity in the present, but also certainty about its past. In the view of poststructuralist theorists, "individual access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society" (Weedon 1992, p.95). Following Mead (1964, as cited in Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard, 2008, p.4), "identity is the constantly needing-to-be negotiated outcome of a multitude of social performances and interpretations in the now".

Writing in the *Sunday Times*, Jacobs and Wasserman (2013, April, 02) urge readers to think in creative ways about new identity formations that have emerged and are still unfolding. They however warn that "we must take into account the effects those material factors, political struggles and the inequalities of the past have on the construction of post-apartheid identities". In doing this they advocate an approach which breaks away from "simple binaries of black and white and Marxist categories of the bourgeois and the working class; and a movement towards an exploration of new schisms and new loyalties". Moreover, they observe that old categories might have taken new forms and mutations and old fault lines might operate differently under different conditions. Similarly, Agawu (2003, p.xviii) contends that we should depart from unliterary

constructions of identity and theorise identity in terms of hybridity in the postcolonial sense. Thus he states: “Postcolonial theory normalizes hybridity and thus makes possible a truer, more ethical mode of identity construction”.

While these new ways of understanding identity are recent, identity has always been complex (Lemke, 2008). In the past identity was generally understood in static and essentialising ways.

2.5.3.2 Whiteness as Identity

Winddance Twine and Gallagher’s (2008, p.6) overview of whiteness studies notes the emergence of a third wave perspective which sees whiteness as a “multiplicity of identities that are historically grounded, class specific, politically manipulated and gendered social locations that inhabit local custom and national sentiments within the context of the new global village”. They argue that although global whiteness retains many of its supremacist features, whiteness is no longer a straight forward identity. Their perspective on whiteness “rejects the implicit assumption that whiteness is only an unconditional, universal and equally experienced location of privilege and power” (Winddance Twine and Gallagher (2008, p.7). It is within this framework of whiteness that we need to understand how South African *whitenesses* are responding and manifesting in the workplace of the present. Following Steyn and Foster (2008), Straker (2011), Winddance Twine and Gallagher (2008), one might argue that while South African whiteness has not remained untouched by global interpolations of whiteness which is in dynamic flux in relation to its historic privilege, middle class South African bankers as a category of whiteness occupy the space of privilege and enclave status while at the same time consisting of inflections of perceived victimisation and a tenuous social location wrought by political changes and redress legislation such as employment equity . This identity is stuck between the different waves of whiteness identified by Winddance Twine and Gallagher (2008).

2.5.3.3 Blackness as Identity

Defining “race” and racism has been the concern of philosophers such as Appiah (1991), Garcia (1996), Blum (2002), and Shelby (2003). While taking into account Butler’s (1990) notion of the performativity of identity, this research was less interested in defining “race” as much as it took seriously the categories which South African’s themselves apply, their materiality, the history of racialisation and the legislative framework which in part constitute identity.

Apartheid sought to categorise black people as a single group under the rubric of natives, Bantu, African, non-European or non-white (Erasmus, 2012) as opposed to Europeans or white settlers. While this identity category was not dismantled, in its divide and rule strategy, the apartheid government further divided black people by emphasising ethnic categories such as Venda, Xhosa, Tswana, or Zulu amongst others (Seekings, 2008). In post-apartheid South Africa, there has been a move towards de-emphasising ethnicity in favour of consolidating an identity of blackness which is at times inclusive and exclusive of people formally identified as “Coloured”⁹ and Indian (Gasa, 2007). The fluidity in the identifications of “Coloured” and Indian people is bounded by old apartheid identifications, self-identification which at times embraces and resists connections to whiteness, while at other times embracing and resisting connections to blackness. For instance, Adhikari (2006) notes that “Coloured” identities have made a resurgent comeback in post-apartheid South Africa. In more dispersed communities outside of the Western Cape there are people previously identified as “Coloured” who have adopted a black identity both within the political elite and the rural hinterlands. African-“Coloured” boundaries are most porous when compared to categories of white and Indian South Africans. Scholars such as Ford (1996) generalise “Colouredness” to essential traits such as common culture, geography and language.

Seekings (2008) and Gibson (2004) have noted that South Africans predominantly use “race” as the primary marker of identity. They also note alarmingly low levels of

⁹ The identity category “Coloured” is used in quotations marks in recognition of its contested nature. Some people understand it as an apartheid construct meant to separate so called “Coloured” people from Africans.

inter-race association outside of formal work spaces. Friendship circles are noted to be largely racially homogenous. While identities are marked by fluidity, Mare' (2001) and Seekings (2008) note that post-apartheid legislation (Employment Equity Act of 1998; Black Economic Act of 2003) and organisational practices (Employment equity officers etc. which monitor racial representation) have contributed to the re-inscription of "race" and "race" thinking as important identity markers. Ford (1996, p.1956) warns of the development of a "competitive identity market" if South Africa rewards the demand for "race" with the benefits of preferential treatment. Others such as Stevens *et al.*, (2006) and Duncan (2012) have argued that "race" categories have become more pronounced in the post 1994 democratic dispensation. According to Seekings (2008), the non-racialism narrative of the transition years has become marginal to the two nations thesis, one white and one black (Mbeki, 1999). This has had the effect of class elision in favour of a discourse which emphasises racialised patterns of wealth.

In relation to identity formations of black managers, Modisha (2007) complicates the race/class relationship and critiques the class reductionism that often accompanies black mobility in the workplace. This position takes the complex histories of black managers into account. Modisha (2007) notes that the class position of black managers was always complex because apartheid's spatial divides ensured that they lived in working class black communities despite their corporate middle class earning status and relative power. Class is a contested terrain for black people. Thus to be white and middle class can be quite different to being black and middle class. The markings of "race" continue to have significance even when black people are in positions of management. Seekings (2008) charges that the changes in South Africa have been so significant so as to claim some level of equality. This equality is allegedly fashioned out against the backdrop of a non-consequential number of racist white South Africans and a "race" reifying policy of "affirmative action". Seekings also presents an image of a post-racist Brazil using Telles (2005) to support this argument. However, like his somewhat unnuanced views on South Africa, this stance on Brazil is not easily collaborable (see Tavares, 2010). In other words, class is not an adequate replacement for "race" and racism continues into the present.

2.5.3.4 Everyday Life and Identity

Identity is not solely the collection of histories but is also influenced by the here and now. The individual experiences and sedimented occurrences of everyday life, mundane and special, contribute to people's sense of themselves. These can serve to reinforce particular ways of identifying while challenging and possibly changing other ways of being. Describing the everyday, Stewart (2007, p.15) states that it is characterised as a space where "ideologies take place. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual at the drop of a hat". Stewart thus calls attention to the value of paying close attention to the everyday. Observing the everyday illuminates what we don't see (de Certeau, 1984). The everyday is thus an important site to examine for how people come to be and come to understand themselves. The workplace is an important place for everyday occurrences. It is in this space where stereotypes are created, acted upon, broken down, and maintained. Work is thus a place of becoming and being. Histories collide, routines are established, surprises occur, new possibilities arise, politics and family intrude, and habits are sustained in the world of work. All these are core constituents of identity.

Access to the world of the everyday is primarily through watchfulness and awareness. For Ochs (1997), various forms of narrative such as telling stories about our day provide insight into the everyday world. Narrative has the capacity to instantiate identities and positions while also probing the contours and meanings of the everyday. Paying close attention to the interview contexts and texts, as well as the organisational context in which employees operate and make sense of their subject positions can provide insight into their constructions of identity. How these identities rub against group and individual histories is an important way to understand emerging identity constructions. Employment equity permeates South African corporate discourse. Almost every online newspaper item (e.g. 2011 census results; Haffejee, 2012 on Woolworths EE job adverts) which refers to "race" leads to a barrage of commentary on employment equity and the related policy of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). These initiatives have become stigmatised as unfair, beyond merit, and indicating lack of competence (Crenshaw, 1990, Robus and McCleod, 2006). It is within this context that identity constructions are figured. The

everyday talk of employment equity is made sense of through naming and creating points of references and essences.

Having suggested how racialised and gendered identities remain important in post-apartheid South Africa and that they are unwittingly reified by policy and redress discourses, one could posit that these essentialised identities have not so much as changed but adapted to a post-apartheid context. Following scholarship (Lemke, 2008; Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard, 2008) on the fluidity of identity, other forms of identification might have been enabled and emerged as a result of new opportunities made possible by employment equity. Thus, while changes have been slow (EEC, 2012) and there are continuing constraints (Modisha, 2008), there have been real class leaps into black middle class identities, access to power, and new ways of imaging radically different futures, and identities where choice is a real possibility. As change takes hold at the “representational” plain and black “power” is normalised, the commonsense ways in which “race” is understood may change. The currency of “race” might also cease to have meaning in ways which remain relevant at the present. While Erasmus (2012) and Gilroy (2000) have argued for the demise of “race” categories, Ahmed’s (2010) provisional caution appears more apt. In this regard, she argues that it is premature to speak of the demise of “race” and that it will lose its relevance when equality has been achieved across the asymmetries which are primarily “race” based. The work of “race” as an analytical tool and as a means of effecting social justice and equality is thus still relevant.

Soudien (2013) summarises this conundrum as follows:

- Confusion is defined by ambivalence about “race” - theoretical rejection of it in the academy versus lived rehabilitation of it within it and in the everyday.
- Because “race” has no empirical or on-the-body-significance, one needs to recognise where its real significance lies. It lies in the meanings we attach to it – the meanings behind it.
- Strategic essentialism may be the short term solution with the view to its eventual demise.

While the three points summarised above do not point to a resolution, they neatly capture the parameters of the discourses between the academy and everyday life outside of the academic world.

2.5.4 Summary

The central thrust of this section has been to show that identity is fluid and subject to change depending on context and in interaction with significant others. Perhaps the way in which Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard (2008) conceive of identity is closest to this author's own orientation. However, given South Africa's past, the chapter has shown that identity is not necessarily free-floating but tied to the historic moments which inform current forms of identity. The fluidity is thus relative to the historical past. This section should therefore be read in relation to the historical account given of white and black identities in South Africa. Moreover, classical identity theories which do not take systemic inequalities into account were critiqued. For instance, a major problem of the contact hypothesis is the requirement of the condition of equal status in society. This poses a challenge as there is a wide social status gap that prevails in the South African workplace (Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2008).

The dilemma presented by ongoing use of racial categories through Employment Equity legislation was discussed. Following Soudien's (2013) presentation of the problem, the chapter calls for a dynamic holding of three positions: South African identities are marked by a very particular history of racialization; post-apartheid identity lends itself to a dynamic fluidity that is open and ever changing; and there is a need to constructively redress past suffering and its present manifestations. This is a complex balance that calls for strategic interventions that can heal past suffering so that we can more readily benefit from the inherent fluidity of identity without being perpetual prisoners of the past.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis as an Interpretative Frame and Methodology

3.1.1 An Overview

Placed against the backdrop of the well-entrenched modernist scientific paradigm (Introna and Whittaker, 2008), qualitative postmodern methodological forms of enquiry are still in the emergent phase. This is however a far cry from the early 1960's when the ontology and epistemology of the qualitative paradigm was in its infancy and struggling to escape from mimicking the hegemony of the natural sciences. Building on qualitative research, this research undertaking was broadly informed by the discourse analytical framework using discursive and critical discourse analysis. While there is debate about the differences between these two forms (e.g. van Dijk, 1998), following Wetherell (1998), this study advocates a synthesis of the two. The ontological approach of this study is broadly post-modernist and specifically post-structuralist. This is the belief that the world appears through language and is situated in discourse. What is spoken exists and therefore everything that exists is a text to be read or performed (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006).

The epistemology of postmodernism (in this case discourse analysis) posits that knowledge cannot be an accurate account of Truth because meanings cannot be fixed (Gergen, 1994). There is no independent reality; there are no facts, only interpretations and knowledge is power play. Seen through a post-structuralist lens, discourse has the power to shape reality. An important qualifier to be considered is that this does not deny the existence of realities but rather that this approach seeks to problematise the conception of dominant truths (Ezzy, 2002). Moreover, holding ideology in tandem with discourse allows for the use of discourse in light of the recognition of the existence of a non-discursive but fallible realm of reality. Purvis and Hunt (1993, p.446) describe this as "soft realism". In line with Marx's (1976) deployment of ideology, this reality is constituted by people's "objective" lived experience independent of their *thoughts* about their experience.

In postmodernism, organisations are sites for enacting power relations, oppression, irrationality, and communicative distortion (Mumby, 1988). Organisations are texts produced by and in language; we can rewrite them so as to emancipate ourselves from degradation. Organisation theory within this paradigm is concerned with deconstructing organisational texts and destabilising managerial ideologies and modernist modes of organising and theorising. This is aimed at revealing marginalised and subjugated viewpoints as well as encouraging reflexive and inclusive forms of theorising and organising (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). Moreover, the value of using discourse analysis is that it is both a conceptual position that framed the research as well as the methodology for analysis.

3.1.2 Discourse Analysis

Foucault (1969, p.49) noted that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”. Thus discourses are spoken into being in particular ways. For Parker (1999, p.3), a common way in which discourse is conceived of refers “to patterns of meaning which organise the various symbolic systems human beings inhabit, and which are necessary for us to make sense to each other”. Discourse analysis is a method of analysis within the broader area of discourse studies. Discourse studies have been defined to be about talk and text in context (van Dijk, 1997). Key theorists that have developed knowledge within these fields of thought are amongst others, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas (Fairclough, 1992). There are various types of discourse analysis.

While critical discourse analysis is the analytical methodology that was applied in this study, it is worth pointing out the various types of discourse analysis. These are conversation analysis, discursive psychology, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). These discourse analytic approaches share the centrality of language as a communicative, meaning making, constitutive medium, and critique of domination and abuse by powerful social forces (Dolon and Todoli, 2008). The distinctions between these approaches are not as great (Potter and Wetherell, 1995) as they are marked by inherent overlaps (Thompson, 1990). For example, Fairclough (1995)

sees the form and content divide as arbitrary as he understands these forms as interdependent. What follows is a brief look at the four forms of discourse analysis with a more in-depth look at CDA followed by an argument for the relevance of this form of analysis for this study.

- *Conversation Analysis:*

This form of analysis focuses exclusively on textual analysis. External factors are only considered when the text makes explicit reference to these. Fairclough (1992, p.194) defines textual analysis as involving the “form or organisation of text” or the texture. He however sees form as inextricable from content. As the field of discourse analysis has developed, there has been a general move from detailed readings of texts towards the other forms of discourse analysis outlined below. However, van Dijk (1990) and Fairclough (1992) have argued for retaining close textual analysis to be applied in tandem with more critical forms of analysis.

- *Discursive Psychology:*

This form of analysis is primarily utilised in the field of psychology. For Harre (1998) discursive psychology explores the discourses that shape people’s understanding of their own lives. Similarly, Willig (1995) notes that discursive psychology is concerned with the ways in which people utilise discursive resources such as language and other symbolic forms, and the effects of this usage. For a comprehensive account of discursive psychology, see Billig (1996), Potter and Wetherell (1992), Gergen (1996), and Harre (1998). This form of discourse analysis has been critiqued as insufficiently critical of macro ideological discourses because of its delimiting close reliance on concrete linguistic forms of resistance (van Dijk, 1998).

- *Foucauldian Discourse Analysis:*

Foucauldian discourse analysis has been influential among post-structuralists. Perhaps Fairclough (1992), Purvis and Hunt (1993) and Hook (2001) have been among the most active in bringing together Foucault’s ideas for the purpose of establishing an analytical method of Foucauldian discourse analysis. This form of analysis distinguishes itself from discursive psychology by foregrounding the role of the socio-historical

through the genealogies of knowledge production by powerful experts. The change of discourse over time is an important element of Foucault's work, particularly in his 1969 publication – *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. For Foucault, pre-established discursive forms of knowledge and power are important ways of understanding the present.

Purvis and Hunt (1993) have argued that ideology within the critical tradition of Marx should not be separated from Foucault's work. Here it is necessary to distinguish ideology from discourse. Following Purvis and Hunt (1993), contemporary uses of the concept of ideology draw from the Marxist tradition. In this respect Marx understood ideology as referring to the process through which domination and subordination (at the service of particular hidden interests) are enacted without or with minimal direct coercion. From a Foucauldian tradition, discourse on the other hand can be understood as the linguistic turn where language and other forms of social semiotics are seen as not only communicating and conveying social experience but as constitutive of social subjects (Purvis and Hunt, 1993).

Ideology is primarily *external* – linked to external interests; whereas discourse is largely an *internal* lived experience of meaning making. The two concepts are different but work together in important ways. Foucault's conception of discourse was much less linguistically based as it foregrounded the social formation of discourses. The suggestion here is that discourses are not just relative. This brings it closer to Marx's view of ideology thus allowing for a theoretical and methodological deployment of ideology and discourse. Discourse can be seen as the process and ideology may be viewed as the effect. Some discourses and ideology are connected by systems of domination (Purvis and Hunt, 1993). Habermas (1977, p.259) notes that when legitimisations of power are not articulated, "language is also ideological". We can thus have ideological discourses.

3.1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis: Power and Ideology

Parallel to the preceding analytical methods, other forms of analysis can reportedly play mutually supportive roles (Thompson, 1990). One of these is critical discourse analysis. One of the most prominent theorists in the field of CDA is van Dijk (1980, 1990, 1992, 1997, and 1998). The abuse of power and its resultant domination of certain

groups is a central theme of CDA. Similarly, Van Dijk (1998, p.1) has defined CDA as a type of discourse analytical method that primarily studies the manner in which “social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context”. Critical discourse analysts typically take a position on an issue and argue from a point of acknowledging their subjectivity (Huygens and Sonn, 2000). If discourse analysis is a way of reading (Parker 1999), critical discourse analysis is a critical way of reading. In this regard, it overtly looks out for social asymmetries and how these operate and are reproduced in everyday life (van Dijk, 1997). Parker (1999) cautions that there are no “steps” to conducting discourse analysis. Instead, every researcher creates their own method based on their reading and their interpretation of the text. This research was therefore conducted with no ready tools in hand but with the understanding that people make meaning (Seidman, 2006) of their lives through text and talk and that the task of the analysis was one of attempting to understand the meaning that participants were attaching to their experience. Here, the sensitivity to language (Parker, 1999) is central.

An understanding of power is central to the meaningful study of employment equity discourses. Thompson (1990) offers a compelling framework within which the deployment of power can be understood. In this regard, the concept of ideology is important. Thompson (1990) defines ideology as referring to the methods in which it can serve to establish and sustain relations of power which are asymmetrical. He refers to these as relations of domination. In short, ideology is defined as “meaning in service of power” (Thompson, 1990, p.7). According to Mumby and Clair (1998, p.184), for the critical discourse analyst, the emergence of ideology is not neutral but is rather tied up in the relations of power and control that characterise society. Mumby and Clair (1998) point to a three way relationship between discourse, ideology and power. They state that “discourse reproduces, creates, and challenges existing power relations; ideology is the mediating factor in this relationship, creating an interpretive frame through which discursive practices are given meaning” (Mumby and Clair, 1998, p.184). For Thompson (1990) then, the study of ideology requires an investigation of the ways in which meaning

is constructed and conveyed in symbolic forms in establishing and sustaining relations of domination.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2001), for CDA, ideology is seen as an important aspect of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. At a conceptual and methodological level, Thompson (1990) aims to shift the focus on ideology as “shared values” to understanding the complex ways in which meaning is mobilised for the maintenance of relations of domination. He argues for example that systems such as communism or feminism are not necessarily ideological but that it is rather their use and meaning in context that makes them ideological.

Thompson’s (1990) five lenses through which ideology can operate provided an important guide for examining the data of this research. These are legitimisation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification. These collectively refer to the ways in which power operates to covertly reproduce inequality and domination. The concepts are discussed in detail in the data analysis section. Janks (1998) points to some limitations of Thompson’s modes of operation of ideology. In this regard, she states that the model does not provide for a means of insubordination of those without power to contest dominance. There is no analysis of “oppositional discursive strategies such as renaming, the promotion of multi-lingualism and language varieties, oppositional reading, satirization, hypothetical play with the reversal of discursive norms, disidentification, searching for and exploiting contradictions and breaks within discourse, de-naturalisation and de-construction...” (Janks, 1998, p.210). This is because in Thompson’s conception, ideology does not operate in the disempowered as he prefers to retain the negative interpretation of ideology.

Like Janks (1998), Van Dijk (1998) challenges Thompson’s (1990) view by stating that ideology should not be limited to being only an instrument of domination. In his view, there are also ideologies of resistance, opposition, or of competition between groups with an equal distribution of power. Importantly for this research, Van Dijk (1998, p.11) states that a productive conception of ideology does not take away the “critical edge of the enterprise” of critical discourse analyses. This understanding allows for a comparison of ideologies as well as the possible changes from systems of opposition to

those of oppression and vice versa. Foucault is a leading proponent of the potential subversive use of ideology by the marginalised. He states that there is a “multiplicity of strategies in which fractions of discourse can play alternating roles,” rather than there being a single and straight forward divide between dominating and dominated discourses (Dews, 1986, p.90).

From the preceding statements, it appears that the possibilities for taking seriously participants’ meanings while tracing the operation of ideology and recognising its subversive potential and critical properties makes CDA the most appropriate frame and method to conduct this research.

3.1.4 Critical Organisational Discourse Analysis

Although this study is concerned with the deployment of power in the larger social structures, it is also interested in organisations. It is therefore important to consider how critical discourse analysis occurs in the organisational setting. Mumby and Clair (1998, p.181) define organisation as “a social collective, produced, reproduced, and transformed through the ongoing, interdependent, and goal-oriented communication practices of its members”. Organisations are created through discourse by organisational members because discourse is the principle way in which they create a coherent social reality that frames who they are. The communicative practices of members are central towards understanding organisations. In this regard, Boden (1994, cited in Mumby and Clair 1998, p.181) states that “it is through telephone calls, meetings, planning sessions, sales talks, and corridor conversations that people inform, amuse, update, gossip, review, reassess, reason, instruct, revise, argue, contest, and actually *constitute* the moments, myths and, through time, the very *structuring* of the organization” (emphasis in original).

Mumby and Clair (1998) identify two main approaches to research in organisational discourse analysis. The first is the cultural or interpretive perspective and the second is the critical perspective. What they have in common is their mutual concern with the relationship between discourse and the creation of social reality. The distinction between them is that the cultural or interpretative perspective is largely descriptive in that it is concerned with the ways in which members discursive practices contribute to the

development of shared meaning. On the other hand, the critical perspective views organisations – not as simple social collectives where shared meaning is produced, but as sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality in ways that serve their own interests (Mumby and Clair, 1998). Power and control are therefore central to this critical approach. These concepts played a central role in this research towards understanding the contested terrain of employment equity in organisations.

Boden's (1994) outline of the constitutive and structuring nature of the everyday occurrences (as articulated above) such as corridor conversations, suggests that everyday talk is political in nature. This implies that all discourse has the potential to structure relations of domination and insubordination within organisations (Mumby and Clair, 1998). This occurs through the mediation of ideology which as stated earlier, gives meaning. The critical organisational discourse analytic field suggests that there is a complex and dynamic ideological struggle in which various competing groups in organisations attempt to influence the construction of social reality rather than power as simply expressed and reproduced through discourse. Therefore, organisations don't simply reproduce themselves but exist in a fluid state or symbolic structures with multiple and competing interests, contradictions and interests (Mumby and Clair, 1998).

3.1.5 Relevance of Framework to the Study of Employment Equity

The point of departure towards using a critical discourse analysis in this research is that scholars need to reject the notion of a value-free science. For instance, a positivist scholarship that does not interrogate the historical situatedness of the South African workplace will understand the deployment of employment equity as counter intuitive and as “reverse discrimination,” and as anti-competitive. Colourblind approaches to social justice are favoured in ahistorical approaches to knowledge production. Critical theory has been acknowledged as the orientation of the marginalised as it surfaces the otherwise hidden ideological positions that seek to privilege certain people at the expense of others (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1998; Thompson, 1990; and van Dijk, 1997). This research assumes an explicitly contextual approach framed by critical enquiry into organisations.

The central task of critical discourse analysis is to examine the ways in which discourse establishes, maintains or challenges relations of power and dominance in society. This research is based on the premise that critical discourse analysts should interrogate the conditions and circumstances that are undermining or advancing the success of employment equity. This calls for an understanding of the ideological mediating factors that promote or stand in the way of a more equitable sharing of power in the workplace.

It is through working within the discourse analytical framework that this study attempts to engage with “race” more effectively. After all, employment equity in South Africa is largely “race” based because it has been necessitated by the racist character of past domination. Through this framework, the research engaged with modern forms of racism that are largely symbolic and are enacted whenever elite interests are threatened (Van Dijk, 1990; Essed, 1994). Examples can be found in new hiring’s and the discourse around affirmative action (Freedom Front Plus, 2009). A further and related justification for the use of this framework is the view that there are very little data and research results about corporate discourse on racism (Van Dijk, 1990). The strong public relations driven control over what information can leave an organisations boundaries has also made it very difficult to gain insight into the daily practices of hiring, promoting, and discriminatory practices at work. While modernist research consistently argues against stringent application of employment equity on the basis of intolerable infringement on the freedom of enterprise, this research was interested in exposing these discursive practices as potential hurdles to meaningful organisational participation.

A critical bent towards discourse sensitised the researcher to the ways in which power, knowledge and meaning are intimately related (Foucault, 1980; Parker, 1999). The mix between depth the hermeneutics favoured by Thompson (1990) and critical discourse analysis allowed for the surfacing of contradictions and resistance which the former approach does not allow for. This allowed for the surfacing of alternative meanings, subordinated meanings and resistance (Wetherall and Potter, 1987; Parker, 1999) in the research.

3.2 Methodology and Procedure

According to Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg (1992), qualitative research simultaneously grapples with two tensions. One is the broadly interpretive, postmodern, critical and feminist, and the other tension is narrowly defined as positivist, post-positivist, naturalistic conceptions, and humanist analysis. This researcher's orientation was toward the former tension which encompasses the interpretive and critical stances.

Qualitative research is defined as the interpretive study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made (Parker, 1994). There are several advantages to qualitative methodology. Firstly, it allows the researcher to pick up the nuances, uncertainty, emotional reactions and ambiguity characteristic of human interaction which is missed in some quantitative analysis (Smith, 2003). Secondly, since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis he or she is able to broaden his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication. Thirdly, this method also allows the researcher to process the data immediately, clarify and summarise material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses (Smith, 2003).

Qualitative data analysis is employed in order to illicit thick description (Geertz, 1973) and identity constructions. This is in recognition of the fact that social reality never forms a coherent whole, "it is by nature fragmentary and inconsistent" (Leach 1954, in Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992, p.23). Consistent with the tradition of critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1997), discourses are analysed for the ways in which power and patterns of domination are activated, reinscribed and resisted in the process of everyday working lives. This approach was followed in line with Essed's (1994, p.99) view that while "gathering facts and measuring how often certain racial, gender, or class patterns occur is relevant", it is not "sufficient for understanding the specifics of personal biographies and belief systems individuals adhere to in order to account for their experiences". Importantly, quantitative studies seldom have the tools to account for individual differences in experience, variations in motivations, capturing ambivalences, as well as the complexity of structure and processes (Essed, 1994).

Following Kiguwa and Canham (2010, p.72), this study understood qualitative research as that which moves significantly from prioritising the “empirical world of the objective measurable exemplar in its recognition of the limits to rationality in social research”. This research was not overtly concerned with cause and effect explanations. Rather, the research sought to explain the world of work in relation to employment equity “from the actors point of view” (Mumby, 1988). The views of the participants of this research matter and form the basis and are central to the conclusions that are reached.

For Parker (2007, p.1) predictive models of human behaviour are doomed to fail because it is human nature to change “as people reflect on who they are and who they may become”. At the same time however, following Gadamer (1975), the intension is not to reproduce the mental constructs of research participants but to interpret what they say in ways that provide new and interesting insights into the area of work that the research engages. This study was also not about how to make organisations more effective, because as Parker (2007) argues, studies which look at effectiveness also hint at ways of crushing dissent. This research thus took seriously Mumby’s (1988) articulation of the plurality of interests which make up organisational discourses and material reality. The role of the researcher in this context is to trace the various interests through the various power plays with an eye out for dominant interests or ideologies (Van Dijk, 1998). Broadly then, the research is methodologically framed by a critical orientation informed by critical discourse studies (Van Dijk, 1998), organisational communication studies (Mumby, 1988), and critical psychology (Parker, 2007).

3.3 Validity

Positivist research has given the research endeavour such concepts as objectivity, bias, reliability, and validity. With regards to objectivity, the positivist outlook requires the researcher to maintain a distance from the “subject” of study in order to try and ensure that the findings depend on the nature of what was studied rather than on who studied it or what their values and beliefs were. Although there is a close relationship between objectivity and bias, the later refers to errors of procedure (Payne and Payne, 2004). Positivist research is dependent on particular protocols one of which is

standardised procedures. The systematic application of these standardised procedures is meant to “reduce the scope of the individual to distort the findings, but also, by being transparent, allow subsequent checking on the procedures” and *replication* of studies (Payne and Payne, p.41, 2004). In this way, the systematic application of procedures allows for reliability which increases the likelihood that the same results would be found by another researcher in another context.

The preceding cornerstones of positivist research are diametrically opposed to the postmodern qualitative project. They have been critiqued on the bases that they do not take the following into account: researchers are human and their feelings and evaluations are a central part of who they are and what they bring to the research process. Studies are seldom uninformed by the researchers orientation to the world and subjectivities. Importantly, for this research, the ways in which concepts such as merit are deployed in employment equity discourses required a critical engagement with the counter-discourses emanating from participants lived experiences. These concepts and how power and ideology operate to give them meaning cannot be understood through quantitative measures. Importantly, qualitative research is particularly amenable to critical engagement, challenging of the status quo, or for the conceptualisation of alternative futures (Arribas–Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008).

On the other hand, there is room for validity in the qualitative critical discourse analysis enterprise. This ensures that the framework does not allow for an “anything goes” stance that lets researchers get away with making unsubstantiated claims. The findings of critical discourse can therefore be examined for *credibility*. According to Payne and Payne (2004), the findings should be presented and argued in such a way that those that are researched should find the interpretations that are advanced to be palatable even if they do not necessary agree with them. However, given what we know about ideology, research participants are not always conscious of the operation of domination and may not always agree with interpretative outcomes. Because qualitative research is conducted in a unique social setting and the researcher responds to events as they occur, there is no way of eliminating subjectivity. Rather, an awareness of subjectivity can be utilised as an added strength in the interpretation of data. Strategies promoting validity

and reliability that were applied to this research include *triangulation* (multiple sources of data and data collection methods to confirm or disconfirm emerging findings), *member checks* (a group discussion of general tentative interpretations was held for a plausibility check), *reflexivity* (critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions and biases), adequate engagement in data collection, and *thick and rich description* (Geertz, 1973; Merriam and Associates, 2002). In this regard, allowing the data to “speak for itself” as much as possible is a good way of ensuring that readers are able to evaluate interpretations of findings for themselves.

Other validity checks to consider are confirmability and transferability. To deal with *confirmability*, the research applied triangulation to ensure that data mined from interviews was confirmed in written responses, naturalistic observations, documents, and the group discussion. In this regard, the different data sets largely confirmed each other. This was done by first interpreting qualitative data which was later confirmed against data obtained from documents, naturalistic observations, written responses, and the group discussion. Moreover, when considering *transferability*, while the researcher’s interpretation of data is important, the use of these strategies in a repeat of this research would probably come to similar conclusions as those reached in this research. The researcher believes that another researcher utilising similar methods and tools of analysis would come to conclusions that are not much different from those of this research. This speaks to the transferability and dependability of the methods.

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Access

The participating bank from which participants were drawn was selected through the process of convenience sampling. Consent to conduct this research was sought from all four of the major banks on the understanding that the first to grant access would be used as the research site. Following multiple meetings with three of the major banks, one of these seemed most willing and supportive for the research to be conducted on its managers. The relevant consent forms were signed and the data collection commenced. The research was conducted in a single bank because it adequately served the needs of

the study. In this regard, the research was not interested in comparing and generalising the findings across banks as the primary concern is about how individual and groups of managers that work in a bank make meaning out of employment equity as it relates to their identity constructions.

3.4.2 Initial Institutional Contact

Following the Faculty of Commerce Law and Management's approval of the research proposal and the subsequent approval of the ethics application of the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), the researcher approached the bank to request permission to conduct the study. The researcher initially met with the Group Executive responsible for Human Resources at the bank. He explained the planned research and what it would entail including potential benefits to the bank. At the time of the meeting, the bank was engaged in a number of interventions involving its middle managers. These interventions were being facilitated by the Organisational Development department. The Human Resources executive introduced the researcher to the head of Organisational Development and asked her to facilitate access and liaison for the study through her department. A separate meeting with the head of Organisational Development was held to discuss the aims, parameters, timeframes and logistics of the study. Access was granted and the researcher was asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement. The organisation also signed a consent form (see Appendix 5.1) allowing the study to be conducted at the bank. After these were signed, the researcher engaged with the bank liaison person to provide him a list of potential research participants.

The researcher wrote a draft email briefly stating the purpose of the study, highlighting the organisational consent that had been obtained, outlining what participation would entail, and providing the liaison contact details as well as those of the researcher. The email was approved for circulation to the names on the potential participant list.

The researcher was allocated a work station within the Organisational Development department where he could work between interviews or at any time of his choosing

during the data collection process. The liaison person agreed to secure the researcher parking space on days that he would be conducting data collection at the organisation.

3.4.3 Initial Participant Contact

A few weeks after signing the non-disclosure agreement and organisational consent form with the bank, the researcher made initial contact with potential participants via email. The researcher randomly selected 120 names distributed according to the criteria listed in section 3.4.4 below. He then sent a personalised email to each of the 120 potential participants and asked them to indicate their interest in participating in the study. Within a week of sending the emails, approximately thirty five participants indicated interest in participating in the research. Approximately ten more indicated their intention to participate in subsequent weeks. The researcher developed an interview calendar with dates and interview times. While planning for an average of one hour per interview, he allocated an hour and thirty minutes per interview and a half an hour between interviews. He set up interview times with each of the participants according to the interview schedule/calendar. A number of iterations were made when preferred times were not available until mutually agreeable times were secured. The researcher met participants for the first time at the interviews. Some interviewees recommended that the researcher interview someone else that they thought would be interested in participating in the study. The researcher sent these potential participants the same email requesting them to participate in the research. This snowballing method added approximately seven more participants to the research. The research has therefore applied both purposive and snowballing methods in enrolling participants.

3.4.4 Initial Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

The initial inclusion and exclusion criteria of the research were guided by the research aims outlined in Chapter One. This meant that prospective participants should have been in the employment of the organisation for a minimum of two years in order to comment with some level of relevant experience and contextual knowledge. While the aim was not to get a representative sample, inclusion criteria were in part guided by an attempt to by and large match the general South African population demographics in

relation to gender and “race”. In this regard, the researcher asked the organisation to provide him with an excel spreadsheet containing prospective participants according to the following guidelines:

- The names, designations, levels of management and contact details of 200 black managers consisting of 100 males and 100 females. Of the 200, at least 10% of these should include “Coloured” and Indian employees.
- The names, designations, levels of management and contact details of 25 white females and 25 white males.
- Overall, 25% of the list should be senior managers, 60% middle managers, and 15% junior managers.
- The list should have a representative spread of people from the Johannesburg head offices dispersed sites.

The bank liaison person sent the researcher a comprehensive list of names with just over 50% more people than had been requested. Moreover, the list by and large met the requirements specified by the researcher in relation to “race”, gender, geographic representivity and seniority levels.

3.4.5 Selection of Participant Characteristics

Participants were selected based on their relevance to the study particularly with regard to maximum variation in the sample. This is can be described as purposive sampling. A smaller number of participants were included through snowballing when participants who had been interviewed made recommendations for additional people that would be of interest. A contextual discussion ensues below in order to frame the characteristics for participants’ selection.

The sample primarily consisted of people from designated groups. The sample was also made up of white males who do not form part of designated groups. Designated groups are defined by the Employment Equity Act, No.55 of 1998 as all woman, black Africans, “Coloureds”, Asians, and Chinese. While these racial labels are not accepted *de facto* without challenges and attempts to redefine them (see the literature review section

on identity for a detailed discussion), the Employment Equity Act No.55 of 1998 uses the labels as it primarily seeks to promote equity by redressing inequities of the past which were generally closely linked to these racial classifications. In this respect, through the colour bar system, apartheid effectively kept designated groups out of the mainstream economy by restricting them to unskilled employment while reserving white collar jobs for white South Africans. There is general acceptance that while designated groups were marginalised by these employment practices, there were hierarchies or segmentations of exclusion which saw the majority black population at the bottom of the hierarchy while the minority “Coloured” (biracial ancestry), and Indian (Asian ancestry) minorities received a limited form of preferential treatment slightly above that of black Africans (African ancestry). These were of course crude generalisations which sometimes did not play out according to the apartheid script. The Employment Equity Act, No.55, of 1998 has chosen to rely on these generalisations in its attempts to redress the resulting inequities.

It is also common course that women were discriminated against in the markedly patriarchal system that was apartheid (Meintjies, 1996). It is for this reason that white women have also been included within the classification of designated groups. The relative success of white women in entering management positions (17% and 23% in the organisation that is the subject of this study) has been subject to intense debate (for example, The Black Management Forum (2007), Employment Equity Commission (2006, 2007), and Ramphela (2008), Booysen (*Leader.co.za*, 2008, March 26). Chinese living in South Africa before 1994 have also recently (2008) been included as members of designated groups. This has received widespread criticism in the popular media (*The Times*, 2008, July 03) the former Minister of Labour. In sum then, there is no group of that was deliberately excluded from the study.

The racial profile of ownership and management of South African organisations at the demise of apartheid in 1994 suggests that white males were the primary beneficiaries of apartheid as they dominated these positions. White males are therefore excluded from designated groups. They are however included in this study in order to get a more inclusive and fuller understanding of employment equity. Key informants such as senior

management or employment equity managers were also interviewed as a sub-group of the sample as they typically know more about the organisation or subject area (Payne and Payne, 2004).

Attention was paid to tenure in the bank as this may influence the data set in getting deeper historical knowledge. This specific sample was deliberately selected because it is suitable and interesting and is only meant to have limited generalisations. Moreover, an attempt was made to have at least half of the final sample constituted by females. The final numbers of those interviewed are fifty participants and four key informants. The actual numbers are detailed in *Table 6* below.

Designated Groups							Non Beneficiaries	Key Informants
Black African		"Coloured"		Asian		White	White	Senior Management
Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Females	Males	
11	11	1	2	6	4	6	9	4

Table 6: Sample demographics

The sample size is relatively large for a number of reasons implicit in aspects of purposive sampling. The researcher was interested in obtaining maximum variation in the sample (Seidman, 2006). This means that the he wanted to provide a reflection of a wide variety of participants experiences in relation to geographic location (while participants from seven locations were interviewed, seventy percent of the sample was from the central main office), gender, "race", age range, varying lengths of tenure, and a range of viewpoints. This allows prospective readers to connect with the material of this study. According to Seidman (2006), maximum variation sampling is an effective strategy for interview participant selection. The sample size of 55 was arrived at through a combination of an end in the response rate from interested participants and when the researcher felt that the sample would be adequate in addressing the issues, as well as satisfying the criteria of maximum variability.

3.5 Data Collection

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) offer a range of empirical materials that can be sources of data. These include, "case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview,

observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.3). All of these are meant to contribute to the description of routine and challenging moments and meanings in people’s lives. The following data collection methods were used in the current study based on the need to triangulate data thereby enhancing the researches validity.

3.5.1 In-Depth Individual Interviews, Interview Guide and the Generation of Rich Textual Data

Individual and group lives are storied. It is through the process of facilitating and enabling story telling that we glean the meaning of peoples’ experiences. Thus Seidman (2006, p.7), posits that the process of storytelling is “essentially a meaning-making process”. In-depth individual interviews are thus a means to enabling the research participant to make and convey the meaning they associate with particular stories. Telling stories allows the teller and the listener to reflect on the details of experiences that are recounted in the interview setting. For Seidman (2006, p.9) then, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience”. This was central to this research. Here, the position taken, while cognisant of the multiple potential sources of data on employment equity, is clear that it is those who experience employment equity in a particular way, place and time that are best placed to make sense of this experience. The selection of in-depth interviews as a means to make sense of the world elevates the storyteller as the principal expert on his or her life.

Interviews are one of the most prominent forms of generating qualitative data (Mason, 1996). Payne and Payne (2004, p.129) define interviewing as “data collection in face-to-face settings, using an oral question-and-answer format which either employs the same questions in a systematic and structured way for all respondents, or allows respondents to talk about issues in less directed but discursive manner”. This research leaned towards the latter which is a combination of the semi-structured and open-ended format. Perceptions often reflect subjective realities of individuals rather than objective truths. It has been stated that the most effective method of accessing the internal worlds

of individuals is through interviews which allow the researcher to engage with the various nuances and contradictions that are central to personhood. Open ended and semi-structured interviews fall squarely within the qualitative framework which is subject to the postmodern and social constructionist traditions (Flick, 1998). There are many disadvantages to interviewing which include cost, time, compromised anonymity and confidentiality, hard to set up and manage, and bias. On the other hand some of the advantages of interviewing include contacting the correct people, handling complex material and the opportunity to seek elaboration on answers.

For the purposes of obtaining rich data for research, the questions that the researcher asks are pivotal to the usefulness of the story that emerges. Thus, for Wengraf (2001), research questions should be operationalised in a way that yields the desired richness of material. In this conception, questions should be theoretically rooted. He identifies three possible starting places in formulating research questions that are theoretically rooted. One of these is the deductive approach that has theory as its starting place which leads to subsections and finally to the individual questions. The inductive approach is one where the researcher begins by envisaging the interview setting and the questions that would be asked of the participant. Here the detail comes first. It is then followed by a linking of questions to related clusters before relating these to the broad theoretical basis which will lead to the desired information. The third approach identified by Wengraf (2001) is a combination of the two approaches where one may begin certain components deductively and others inductively. Those who use this approach sometimes organise their thinking in broad organising questions or central research questions before linking these to theoretical basis and individual research questions. They may also begin with a muddle of formed interviewer questions, theoretical questions, or central research questions.

The approach adopted in this research was broadly the third approach which begins at central research questions and combinations of deductive and inductive ways of organising. Thus, the process of formulating interview questions to get rich data for the subsection on substantive empowerment was largely initiated based on the third approach which consisted of the central research questions. The section on employment equity and merit was largely inductive as the researcher began by formulating the final interview

setting questions. The design of questions was informed by Maxwell's (1996) rule of necessity and sufficiency. This is addressed by linking the final questions to the central questions and then to the theoretical questions. The researcher set himself the task of asking if questions were necessary and if they were sufficient to get the rich material necessary for the study. Moreover, following Wengraf (2001), the researcher tried to be clear as to what he was studying and what he needed to find out about it. This helped to refine the questions further. The process was iterative as a link back to theory sometimes meant eliminating and adding questions for the interview. It is through these processes that interviews were able to elicit rich data for the study.

Interviews that are open-ended and semi-structured are different from the closed ended questions frequently used in surveys. These question formats seek to illicit a wide array of possible answers rather than a pre-defined range. This is essential if the interview is to illicit story telling about lived lives and the experiences of participants. The semi-structured interview guide suggests that coherent thought has been applied to the interview in its entirety. The semi-structured interview guide provides structure to the course of the conversation to a greater degree than open-ended interviews. The interview therefore happens within particular bounds rather than free flowing with what might be interesting to the interviewer or the interviewee. The boundedness of the semi-structured interview does however allow for follow-up, clarifications, and elaborations. These are essential features for enabling storytelling (Seidman, 2006). In the open-ended interview guide of this research, allowance was made for pursuing stories as they emerged. When these reached a conclusion, the next question either flowed from one of the previous answers or a new question on the interview guide. While general patterns emerged, here the sequence of how the interview unfolded was not important.

Three separate but related interview schedules were used in the interviews (see Appendixes 1.1 and 1.2). This means that a single interview could be subdivided into three parts. The interview schedule for the questions on employment equity was fairly open-ended, while those on empowerment and identity were semi-structured. This was primarily influenced by the theoretical framework informing the various subsections. Appendix 6.1 is the consent form that was issued for the interviews.

3.5.2 Documents

There are many examples of documents that can be utilised in the process of data collection or data generation. Documents to generate data in this research were the organisations employment equity reports, the employment equity plan, and the annual bank reports, and public statements on the subject of employment equity. It is the researcher's view that these documents are important in understanding the macro context within which individuals and groups are located.

3.5.3 Individual Reflections on Newspaper Opinion Pieces (Written Responses)

While individual reflection notes are also a form a document, they are an example of documents that are generated specifically for or through the research process (Payne and Payne, 2004). They were meant to augment the interviews in order to get a sense if different kinds of (or further) responses would be elicited from a non-interview setting where participants had extended time for reflection. Individual reflections are notes that the researcher asked the participants to make and turn in to him based on their responses to three extracts from newspaper pieces taking strong views on issues related to equity within the workplace. One of these extracts takes issue with "preferential" treatment of black people and the "marginalisation" of white people. The second extract laments the "exclusion" of black people from meaningful participation in the workplace. The third extract is by a black female who argues that she has worked hard (without being done any favours) for the opportunities that she now has. These extracts are contained in Appendix 2. Participants were asked to submit responses of between one and two pages. Appendix 5.6 is the consent form for the audio-recordings to be conducted.

3.5.4 Observations

Like the documents, reflection notes, naturalistic observation, and group discussion, this form of data collection was a small part of the study as it was used in collaboration with other methods. The researcher observed the interactions of employees in their natural work setting (e.g. in meetings, during coffee and lunch breaks in the cafeteria). As

the researcher spent a significant amount of time in the organisation, he had access to various work spaces as well as the multiple recreation and meal spaces on the banks premises. In between waiting for interviewees, walking through various departments, and taking lunch or coffee at the banks restaurant, he had multiple opportunities to observe employees in their natural work and “social” environment. The focus of the observations was however primarily within “recreation” or informal spaces such as cafeterias. He took notes of his observations. These include a focus on the “race” and gender breakdown of groups of two or more and how these cluster in particular ways, the language of communication that was used (where this was audible), and whether or not a gathering was primarily social or work related. He also observed and recorded some of the gendered or “raced” ways in which employees walked out of the banks premises to the neighbouring shops during lunch. Similar observations were made at one of the banks bars on the occasion when a participant invited the researcher to a weekly after work social.

Observation has been defined as simply watching. It is seldom done in social research except unobtrusively (Flick, 1998). This is because human behaviour is too complex to record and it isolates the researcher from what is being observed thus preventing deeper exploration. It is for these reasons that this form of data collection was used as an adjunct to other methods such as the interview. For Koen and Durrheim (2010), naturalistic observation in context has the benefit of not being influenced by social desirability responses which is the inherent disadvantage of surveys and attitude scales. On the other hand, observations may be difficult to interpret. Mason (1996) advises researchers to be clear about their reasons for using observations. In this regard the current study’s ontological perspective sees “interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these, act on them... as central” (Mason, 1996, p. 61). Following Koen and Durrheim (2010, p.454), the researcher was interested in the “microecology of segregation”. Influenced by the ethnographic approach to understanding the world (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992), the epistemological position also sees evidence from the social world as generated by observing real life settings. Bertolotti and Tagliaventi (2007) argue that naturalistic observation methods provide a perspective that data gained through surveys cannot obtain. They posit that despite the popularity of surveys to study social

networks, these cannot account for what links social actors. This is not to say that quantitative forms of understanding social networks are not useful. It is after all through the studies of Dixon and Durrheim (2004) that this problematic has been understood in South Africa.

Other studies that have researched interaction patterns in cafeteria settings include Clack, Dixon and Tredoux (2004), McCauley, Plummer, Moskalenko, and Mordkoff et al., (2001), and Schofield and Sagar (1977). Mixing naturalistic observations with interview data on the subject of informal voluntary social networking has the distinct advantage of postulating subjective accounts for the findings based on what interviewees reported. Used in combination such as has been done by Keizan and Duncan (2010), qualitative studies allow for an understanding of what accounts for observed patterns. Many studies which rely on the exclusive use of numerical quantitative accounts for ergonomic features of segregated seating and engagement are unable to understand the causes and subjective experiences of segregation (e.g. Clack, et al., 2004). Observations are included as Appendix 4 of this thesis.

3.5.5 Group Discussion

A group discussion was conducted rather than focus groups as the latter group is constituted by members who do not know one another (Payne and Payne, 2004). Discussion groups, on the other hand are made up of several people that often share common experiences and the discussion concentrates on shared meanings. Here, stress is laid in the interactive aspect of data collection (Flick, 1998). The benefits of group discussions is that they allow data collection from several people in one go. While an attempt was made to conduct two group discussions, only one was held. This was due to a lack of interest from a subgroup of the white participants. The one discussion group that was held was constituted by black participants. The group discussion was audio recorded and an assistant researcher helped to take notes and to handle the second recorder which was used in case of audio recording challenges. The audio recording was subsequently transcribed. The discussion was conducted over a period of approximately one and a half hours. The consent form for the group discussion is contained in Appendix 5.5.

3.6 Data Sequencing

The sequencing of the data collection followed table 7. It began with interviews, followed by personal reflection notes, the group discussion, and key informant interviews. Observations were conducted throughout the data collection and generation process when the researcher was on the company site. Documents were used at the point of data analysis. These various data collection methods allowed for multiple sources of information which act as both a means of verification (reliability), data triangulation, and as a form of gaining rich data.

Data Sequencing	Sources	
Interviews	Designated groups	White males
Personal reflection notes	Designated groups	White males
Observations	Designated groups	White males
Discussion group	Black participants	
Key Informant Interviews	Senior management Designated groups	EE Managers
Documents	EE Act, EE Commission Reports	Company EE plan, EE Reports

Table 7: Data sequencing and data sources

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

3.7.1 Interview Process

It is common practice for the banks employees to arrange a meeting room for meetings with their guests as most their work stations are located in open plan offices. Therefore in each case, participants arranged a meeting room for the interviews. The meeting rooms provided privacy and were conducive to speaking freely. Interviews commenced with introductions and a brief non-leading description of the study. In this regard, the researcher generally informed participants that he was both an employee of the University of the Witwatersrand and a PhD student that was interested in understanding manager’s experiences and perspectives of employment equity. In most

cases this information appeared adequate and was rarely followed up with further questions with the exception of a few participants that took an interest in the researcher's career.

The researcher went on to inform the participants that he would audio record the interview and reassured participants of the conditions of confidentiality. Here he took the opportunity to ask participants to sign the interview (Appendix 5.3) and audio-recording (Appendix 5.6) consent forms. He explained that the interview focused on three broad issues including empowerment, employment equity and identity. The researcher reassured participants that there are no incorrect answers as he was interested in their perspectives and understanding of issues related to employment equity. He began by asking some basic questions such as a restatement of their names, how long they had worked in the organisation, the name of the division of current employment, as well as a description of their role. The remainder of the interviews loosely followed the semi-structured interview schedule. The open ended nature of the interview questions allowed the researcher to ask follow up questions on relevant and interesting issues.

Interviews varied in length and ranged from thirty five minutes for the shortest and two hours and thirty minutes for the longest one. The average duration of interviews was one hour and fifteen minutes. The duration of interviews was influenced by a number of factors including the propensity of the interviewee to describe and elaborate and their levels of interest in the subject matter. In all but one case, the questions on the interview schedule were generally all addressed. The single exception was a participant that appeared to be slightly cognitively impaired and couldn't follow some questions. His interview is included for analysis because it revealed some interesting perspectives of employment equity particularly since he had worked at the bank for over twenty years.

Participants were all fluent in English. Only one Afrikaans speaking male expressed concern with his proficiency but he was able to express himself with reasonable proficiency for the purposes of the interview. The researcher is fluent in two Nguni languages (isiXhosa and isiZulu) and engaged in some preliminary banter and introductions in these languages when it was appropriate. This often served to create a

level of rapport and trust with interviewees. This was particularly salient in bridging the gendered gap with black female participants. These participants often experienced the researcher as an ally and confided information and emotional responses that he may not have otherwise obtained.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher made handwritten notes of factors that seemed important and others that he wanted to follow up on at a later point in the interview. The researcher understands interview questions, answers and processes such as decisions to highlight certain points while relegating others, as part of the co-constructed narrative of text and data. At the end of the interviews the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions of clarity as well as to inform the researcher of any further information that he may not have asked and which they thought was of relevance. This part of the interview allowed space for reflection over the interview process and was a good way to “debrief” and round up the process. Participants were thanked and asked to provide a written response to three newspaper opinion pieces which took different points of view on the matter of employment equity. They were given the articles together with the guiding questions for their reflection (Appendix 2). They were asked to submit these within two weeks of the interview. They were again assured of the voluntary and confidential nature of the exercise. In total, interviews were held over two months.

3.7.2 Post-Interview Processes

After each interview, interviews were downloaded from the audio recording directly onto the researcher’s computer. The researcher briefly listened to points that he had marked as salient and augmented his handwritten notes. He then ensured that the computer was safely code locked in order to maintain the security of the data as well as to keep it confidentially. Upon completing all the interviews, the researcher began the process of verbatim transcription of all the interviews. Throughout this process, he continued to highlight features that he thought would be salient in the analysis of the data and began some preliminary interpretive work.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical research principles were adhered to throughout the research process. These were in keeping with both the University of Witwatersrand's ethical protocols as well as those of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa. The latter is important as the researcher is affiliated to the body through his registration as a psychologist.

Formal permission was sought from the organisation. The organisation and individual participants were clearly briefed on the aims of the study, the procedures and requirements for data collection. They were asked to sign the invitation to participate, and the individual consent forms including those for interviews, discussion groups, audio recording reflection notes to the articles that they were asked to respond to. The researcher assured participants of confidentiality as no information that would lead to the identification of participants was used. All information that may identify participants was removed from the report. These include details such as: names, identity numbers, birth dates, and designations. Participants' informed consent was sought in each step of the data collection process. Participants were assured that they may refuse to answer any questions that they would prefer not to, and that they could elect to withdraw from the study at any point. All of the responses were kept confidential. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) were not seen or heard by any person in the targeted organisations at any time, and were only processed by the researcher.

The targeted sample did not belong to vulnerable categories. Although the researcher did not come across any vulnerability beyond one person with a possible cognitive impairment, after the initial interviews, he only excluded this participant who exhibited potential vulnerabilities from participating in the discussion group.

3.8.1 Informed Consent

The researcher understands informed consent to mean that prospective research participants are informed of the voluntary nature of participation as well as their right to seek further clarity, and their withdrawal from the study at any point without prejudice. The researcher explained this information to the prospective participants in the initial

email requesting participation, at the beginning of the interview, and in writing on the consent form. Moreover, he replicated this process with a written explanation and assurance of confidentiality as outlined in the appendixes.

3.8.2 Participant Rights, Risks and Benefits

Even though the population of participants in this study was not a vulnerable population, they were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any point. Risks of exposure through compromised confidentiality were outlined even though the prospective participants were informed of the stringent measures that would be taken to ensure confidentiality. Besides the potential intrinsic value of talking to someone about a topic that can be emotive for some people, there were no participant related benefits of which the researcher was aware. The benefits that might accrue to the organisation relate to getting a general sense of what some of the employees think about the empowerment processes as they relate to employment equity in the organisation. This might inform further investigations and interventions that the organisation might decide to pursue.

3.8.3 Anonymity, Confidentiality and Researcher Disclosures

The research is qualitative and anonymity was not possible to guarantee. This is because participants might have been observed in the researcher's company, their email correspondence about participation might be accessed by others, and direct quotations from transcripts might inadvertently signal their identity. Moreover, participants were not anonymous as they are known to the researcher. Individual participants are not known to the organisation as they were selected from a broader pool of names provided. Participants of the group discussion are known to each other. In the group discussion setting, both anonymity and confidentiality are not possible. The researcher has at best attempted to strip away any identifying features in the material that has been used for the research. In this regard, data from the group discussion was not attributed to individual speakers but to the group as a whole.

Participants were informed that their identities would be kept confidential as much as possible. The marginal possibility of identity exposure through a direct quotation may inadvertently reveal their identity. Participants were however assured that the researcher would decontextualise and remove information that might lead to the exposure of their identity. Certainly, great care was taken to secure maximum confidentiality.

While the subject of employment equity is contentious, there is no real harm that comes to an individual for voicing their opinion on the matter. This is evident in the regular online comments following articles addressing the subject of employment equity (e.g. Fin24, 2012, September 02). There are also regular radio debates where callers make their views known in often polarising ways. This may have been different in research concerning rape, theft or murder. However, given the commitment to preserve confidentiality, no disclosures of any potentially threatening information is released. In keeping with the research protocol of the University of the Witwatersrand, all raw data will be kept securely for a period of five years before it is safely disposed of.

In order to avoid exposing participants identity, participants are named after the order in which they are saved in Atlas ti (qualitative software programme), and by their “race” and gender e.g. P1WF (participant 1, white, female). Where a direct quote from the interview transcript is made, the Atlas ti assigned line number identifies the quote. Here page numbers are replaced by line number values. A direct quote from P1WF would therefore be presented as follows: P1WF, 110. In the same vein, where data from the participant’s reflection notes is used, the letters RN (reflection note) are added to the ‘name’, e.g. P2BF, RN. The line number is used in place of the page number. While not seeking to reify “race”, the categories of “race” and gender are used because they are key analytical categories in this paper which assist the reader in making sense of the data. In this regard, the apartheid construct of “race” is a key area of redress which requires constant engagement in the implementation of employment equity programmes. Direct quotes from the group discussion were not attributed to individual participants as they sometimes emerged as group consensus, rephrasings and articulations of continuing discussions. Quotations are therefore generally assigned as “Group Discussion” and the relevant line number.

3.9 Analysis of Data

3.9.1 Depth Hermeneutics

Interpretation is central to the qualitative tradition and its methodologies. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) outline the process of interpretation to include the creation of field notes (e.g. interview transcripts), notes and interpretations of the field text, and the re-creation of text as an interpretive document. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the processes of interpretation as is demonstrated below. However, what is core to the interpretive process is that it is both a creative and a political exercise. It is for this reason that the importance of building the case for validity was reviewed earlier. This ensures that the creative and political processes and undertakings are carefully crafted and can have a degree of defensibility.

3.9.2 Data Analysis Strategy

The research looked at the operation of power in the text. The data was coded critically with the view to identify the power formations and instances of power differentials in the transcripts and other data sources. Thus, instances of neutral engagements with gender or “race” were of less interest than those that had hidden assumptions about particular groups. In coding the data from the *Atlas ti* programme, particular attention was paid to instances of making meaning of power differentials in relation to gender and “race”. These were then organised into thematic areas loosely arranged around the key areas covered by the research questions. The system of analysis looked at what discourses were present in the text (rather than their internal syntactic structures). Lastly, the analysis was concerned with how discourses reflect and reproduce broader social discourses ideologically and how they critique or resist these ideologies.

The data analysis strategy follows Thompson’s (1990) methodological framework of depth hermeneutics of everyday life. The framework is useful for the purposes of interpreting ideology. This can be regarded as a specific form of depth hermeneutics. Its focus on the ideological aspects of symbolic forms gives the framework a distinctive critical emphasis. Here there are three primary levels of analysis which include *social*

historical analysis, formal or discursive analysis, and interpretation / re-interpretation (Thompson, 1990). These three phases and their subcategories are examined with the understanding of the ways in which meaning is used to establish and maintain unequal power relations which lead to the domination of others. The subcategories of social–historical analysis are: spatio - temporal settings, fields of interaction, social institutions, and social structure. Those of formal or discursive analysis include semiotic analysis, conversation analysis, syntactic analysis, narrative analysis, and argumentative analysis. The third level is interpretation and re-interpretation (Thompson, 1990).

- *Level 1 (Social – historical Analysis)*

At the first level, that of social – historical analysis, the emphasis is on how ideology intersects with relations of domination in the contexts in which “symbolic forms are produced and received” (Thompson, 1990, p.292). This refers to the spatio–temporal subcategory as symbolic forms are produced and received within particular locales or situations. This leads to actions and reactions within specific contexts. According to Thompson (1990), the reconstruction of these contexts is a valuable component of social–historical analysis. With regard to this research, data were analysed in conjunction with the spatio–temporal locale of the participants, i.e. the workplace. The second stage of analysis within the socio–historical level is fields of interaction. Thompson (1990, p. 282) states that a field is a space of positions and a set of trajectories which come together to determine some of the “relations between individuals and some of the opportunities available to them”. The configuration of the present workforce and many employment policies such as employment equity is directly tied to the historical past of apartheid. How the world is perceived can be understood within available schemata (Ingold, 1986; Taylor, 1989) which inform and influence the daily actions and experiences of people. This has particular relevance for the understanding of individual’s meanings of employment equity.

The third stage concerns social institutions. These are defined as “relatively stable clusters of rules and resources, together with the social relations which are established by them” (Thompson, 1990, p.282). The reconstruction of the clusters of rules, resources and relations which constitute them is necessary to analyse social institutions. Thompson

(1990) further advocates the tracing of their development through time and to examine the practices and attitudes of the individuals who act for them and within them. For the purposes of this research, it was important to source data that allow for the analysis of the social institutions which give a company specific understanding of employment equity. Social structure is the fourth stage of analysis within the socio–historical level. These are the relatively stable asymmetries within social institutions. Central to these asymmetries is the access to resources, power, and opportunities. “Race”, class, gender and ethnicity are some of the relatively durable asymmetries that characterise many contexts. In this research, “race” and gender were most salient.

- *Level 2 (Discursive Analysis)*

At the second level is formal or discursive analysis. According to Thompson (1990, p. 292), ideology focuses formal or discursive analysis on the “structural features of symbolic forms which facilitate the mobilization of meaning”. This suggests that the way in which language is used may reify certain social asymmetries and domination thus lending legitimacy to these asymmetries by projecting them as though they are permanent and natural. Discursive analysis looks beyond the socio-historical context and displays the structural features and relations using particular methods. One of these is *conversation analysis* which studies instances of interaction in actual settings of occurrence and how people produce particular order and apply conversational rules. Another method of analyses is *syntactic analysis* which is concerned with the syntax of everyday discourse. Of interest is the use of particular pronouns whose use might “imply differences in terms of power and familiarity...” (Thompson, 1990, p.288). Another methodology of studying discourse is by analysing its *narrative structure*. Here the focus is on identifying the basic characters, roles and patterns that are common to them. The final method of discursive analysis outlined by Thompson (1990) is *argumentative analysis* which is useful in political discourse. This allows various sets of assertions to be organised around themes, topics, relationships, implications, contradictions, and presuppositions (Thompson, 1990).

It should however be noted, that the discursive analytic methodology is not the main form of analysis and formed a secondary role in this research when compared to the more

critically oriented social-historical and interpretation / re-interpretation methodologies. These can be aligned to critical discourse analysis. Used on their own, discursive analytic forms can fall foul to the “fallacy of internalism” while the sole use of social-historical analysis can lead to the “fallacy of reductionism” (Thompson, 1990).

- *Level 3 (Interpretation / Re-interpretation)*

Interpretation can be understood as building upon the results of the preceding forms of analysis. The guiding principle is synthesis which involves the construction of possible meanings. According to Thompson (1990, p.290), “the process of interpretation, mediated by the methods of the depth hermeneutics approach, is simultaneously a process of re-interpretation”. This is because symbolic forms are pre-interpreted by the subjects that are studied in the social world. Importantly, Thompson (1990, p.290) points out that the critical potential of interpretation is provided as a methodological space by the “...possibility of a conflict of interpretations between lay interpretation and depth interpretation, between pre-interpretation and re-interpretation...”

Thompson (1990) infers that the extensive use of nominalised verbs and the passive form are indicative of strategies of nominalisation. He further states that “to interpret ideology is to explicate the connection between the meaning mobilised by symbolic forms and the relations of domination which that meaning serves to establish and sustain” (1990, p.293). This involves interpretation and re-interpretation or the active construction of meaning. This process synthesises the social-historical and the formal discursive analysis by demonstrating how meaning of symbolic forms serves to sustain relations of domination. Thompson (1990) states that an argument about the interrelations between meaning and power should be developed in ideological discursive analysis.

The interpretation of ideology is a risky enterprise as the meaning of symbolic forms is not given or fixed. Rather, the offering of an interpretation is to project a possible meaning. This may be one of many meanings which may even be in conflict with each other. The importance of which interpretation is proffered is in cases where interpretation may guide interventions in social life.

The three levels of modes of operation of ideology are outlined in table 8 below.

Social – historical analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spatio-temporal settings - fields of interaction - social institutions - social structure
Formal or discursive analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - semiotic analysis - conversation analysis - syntactic analysis - narrative analysis - argumentative analysis
Interpretation / re-interpretation	

Table 8 Modes of Operation of Ideology: Adapted from Thompson (1990)

3.9.3 Modes of Operation of Ideology

In addition to the broad interpretative frame outlined above, Thompson (1990) provides a framework of general modes through which ideology can operate. These are consistent with his conception of symbolic forms as intersecting with relations of power. He defines symbolic forms as “a broad range of actions and utterances, images, and texts, which are produced by subjects and recognized by them and others as meaningful constructs” (Thompson, 1990, p.59). The various lenses through which ideology can operate were utilised to examine data in this research. As identified earlier, these are legitimisation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification. By using these lenses, the study identifies the operation of various modes of ideology and discourses to sustain practices that derail empowerment of black and female workers.

Legitimation refers to claims of legitimacy framed as just and worthy of support in order to establish and sustain relations of domination. An example of legitimisation in this research is the concept of “merit”. Following Max Weber, Thompson (1990) provides three possible bases for legitimating. These are rational, traditional, and charismatic grounds. A typical strategy of symbolic construction is *rationalisation* which constructs a chain of reasoning to defend or justify social relations or institutions. *Universalisation* is another typical strategy. It presents the interests of a few powerful people as the interests of all people. It also presents access to opportunities as open to all those with the inclination and ability to succeed within them. An example is a “value free” system of meritocracy. *Narrativisation* is another claim to legitimacy. Here particular “claims are

embedded in stories which recount the past and treat the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition” Thompson (1990, p.61).

Dissimulation: This establishes and sustains relations of domination through concealment, denying, obscuring, deflecting attention, or glossing over processes or relations (Thompson, 1990). The various strategies used to achieve dissimulation may include *displacement* (referring to an object by making reference to another and thereby transferring positive or negative connotations of one term to the other object or individual). Another means of facilitating dissimulation is *euphemisation* which may be considered as the process of placing a positive spin to actions, institutions, or social relations by describing or redescribing them in positive ways. *Trope* is the third means by which dissimulation is made possible. Synecdoche and metaphor are examples of tropes. Synecdoche relies on implications based on using a part of a concept to refer to another without making the relationship explicit. This may carry positive or negative connotations. *Metaphor* is another concept that fulfills the function of a trope. Here certain features are accentuated and given enduring significance. A term or phrase may begin to stand for an object or individual for which it is not literally applicable. For example, in certain quarters in South Africa, a coconut is a metaphor for a “white acting black person”.

Unification: this refers to the creation of a form of unity that “embraces individuals in a collective identity, irrespective of the differences or divisions that might separate them” (Thompson, 1990, p.64). The conception of the term “rainbow nation” by Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu had this effect. This allows for the virtues of a colourblind approach to life to be extolled. *Standardisation* is a form of unification which establishes or sustains particular social relations. This involves symbolic forms (e.g. language) used for symbolic exchange through promoting a standard framework as shared and acceptable even in diverse and pluralistic societies. *Symbolisation of unity* entails the construction of symbols such as flags that seek to convey a collective identity throughout the population. When interwoven with narrativisation, symbolisation seeks to project a collective fate. Thompson (1990) states that symbolisation may establish and sustain relations of domination in particular circumstances.

Fragmentation: domination may also be sustained by fragmenting individuals and groups so as to prevent them from the possibility of mounting opposition to those with power. The dominant may also direct potential opposition towards those projected as evil or threatening. In apartheid South Africa, government channeled negative attention away from its evil doings by projecting black people as threatening. To achieve fragmentation, the strategy of *differentiation* is often deployed. Thompson (1990, p.65) defines differentiation as the act of placing emphasis on “distinctions, differences and divisions between individuals and groups”. This serves to effectively disunite them thereby thwarting a united and collective challenge of the dominant group. Working class labour unions thus often appeal for unity among workers so as to more effectively oppose capital. The apartheid government also worked to create disunity among black people by enforcing false differences among “Coloured” and African people. *Expurgation of the other* involves the creation of an enemy so as to politically outmaneuver him/her by calling on others to collectively resist or expurgate. In certain rural communities, old people are sometimes labeled as witches and subsequently expelled from those communities.

Reification: As the fifth conduit of ideology, reification seeks to represent “a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time” (Thompson, 1990, p.65). This situation is ahistorical as it creates a society outside of history. *Naturalisation* is a means by which reification may be obtained. For example, one way for justifying the gender inequalities in the division of labour is to attribute it to physiological differences thus wiping out a history of patriarchy. *Eternalisation* is a strategy of creating and sustaining relations of domination by portraying particular things as permanent and ever-recurring. This takes away their historical locatedness. Tradition and customs such as circumcision, male orientation to tertiary accommodation and inheritance practices are often presented as unchanging without examining when they began and with whose interests they were sustained. They are re-affirmed by symbols and repetition. Reification can also be obtained through *nominalisation* and *passivisation* which are grammatical and syntactic devices. For example, descriptions of actions and persons are turned into neutral nouns. So rather than locating individual accountability for racism, it may be said that the system was racist. The rendering of verbs into passive

form is passivisation. Thus, “the employee was dismissed,” may be silent of the fact that she was fired by the manager for asserting herself as a black female in an oppressively chauvinist environment.

Notwithstanding the strengths of this model to analyse data, the limitations alluded to by Janks (1998) and van Dijk (1998) in the opening part of this chapter are important. For this reason, the additional method of analyses examines the productive potential of ideology to contest dominance. This strategy involves using Thompson’s modes of operation of ideology in a way in which he did not intend and would probably disapprove of. In this regard, the data set is analysed for subversive counteracting of dominant ideologies in a manner consistent with critical discourse analysis. Thus, the ways in which participants may resist negative associations of employment equity and how they might re-appropriate concepts such as merit is one of the ways that ideology can be seen as generative and productive to enable resistance.

Representation of something as legitimate, worthy of support	Legitimation	Rationalisation – construction of a chain of reasoning (based on the legality of rules, sanctity of traditions) to defend or justify a set of social rules. Universalisation – institutional arrangements which serve individual interests represented as serving the interests of all. Narrativisation – claims in stories which recount the past and treat the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition, invention of traditions.
Relations of domination concealed, denied, obscured	Dissimulation	Displacement – one symbol displaced to symbol associated with it. Euphemism – redescription for +ve evaluation, naming slippage – shifting of sense Trope – the use of figurative language synecdoche – whole for part or part for whole metonymy – attribute or related characteristic of something taken for the thing itself Metaphor – application of term to an object to which it is not literally applicable.
Forms of unity which embrace individuals in collective identity, irrespective of difficulties and divisions	Unification	Standardisation Symbolic form of adapted to standard framework. Symbolisation of Unity Collective identity which overrides differences and divisions
Divide and rule	Fragmentation	Differentiation Emphasizing differences – fragmentation gaps that might unite and mount a challenge Expurgation of the other Construction of an enemy within or without which is evil, harmful or threatening, which individuals need collectively to expel or expurgate
Transitory states presented as permanent, natural outside of time – sociological and historical character eclipsed	Reification	Naturalisation – Reification Social historical state of affairs presented as natural. Externalisation Social historical phenomena portrayed as permanent and unchanging, ever – recurring customs, traditions, institutions Nominalisation / Passivisation Focus on particular 'themes' (fronting) at the expense of others, delete actors and agency, processes as things or events, elide references to time and space (tenseless)

Table 9: Modes of operation of ideology based on Thompson, J.B. (1990:60 – 67) as cited in Janks, H (1998).

3.10 Self-Reflexivity: Researcher and Participants Positionality

Self-reflexivity is a means of promoting validity and reliability. Merriam and associates (2002) view self-reflexivity as critical self-reflection with regard to worldview, assumptions, biases, the theoretical orientation, and the relationship to the research that might have an impact on the study. Following Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.23), it is worth noting that “[t]he gendered multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology), that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology) in specific ways”. This study has sought to ensure such an alignment between ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

The positioning of the researcher deserves an up-close review. This is because the researcher “sits” behind the trilogy of the ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

Self-reflexivity entails recognition of the personal story of the gendered researcher whose voice is located within a specific class, race, cultural and ethnic community (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Therefore, in understanding the “other” who is studied, the researcher must be cognisant of his or her interpretive community as this informs the interpretation of the “subject’s” responses. In this research, the researcher identifies as the “other” in that he is in many ways like the participants of his study in that he is a member of the designated groups as well as a member of the broader South African community that is actively engaged in the employment equity discourse. As a black male working in the broader arena of transformation, the researcher is both intellectually and emotionally connected to the project of employment equity and its discourses. Like other South Africans he has interrogated employment equity in relation to himself and learned to position himself in relation to the underlying principles of redress measures. This journey has also enabled the researcher to reinterpret his professional identity as inextricably tied to employment equity as he is a beneficiary of the practice.

This research is part of his ongoing attempt to go beyond the emotive debates towards a substantive engagement with the professional identities that result from empowerment. However, while the researcher shares many similarities with some of the participants, these are not absolute. For instance, he does not work for a bank and as a male he cannot claim to understand the experiences of female participants. Moreover, as a black man, he remains a racial other to the white participants and interprets their worldviews from this position. Having said this, it is important to point out that racial and gender categories do not necessarily lead to group perspectives as individual agency and experience are important features of human subjectivities. Furthermore, as argued elsewhere in this research, the ready use of social categories can essentialise groups of people in ways that cannot do justice to who they may be in their complexity and individual identities.

In order to retain sensitivity to the instruments as well as to experientially partake in the research, the researcher also maintained personal reflection notes and engaged with his advisor to unpack some of his experiences in the field. Awareness of the researcher’s

positionality as well as that of participants was therefore important. For instance, there was a ready comradeship established with black participants as they took the researcher to be an insider. Shared language also meant that they could easily and comfortably code switch into interpretative worlds available in isiXhosa and isiZulu. While the researcher does not share the gendered orientation of black females, the quality of interactions was very good and he appears to have established rapport with this group better than any of the others. The researchers' gendered positionality as a male gave him access to white males in a way that was very circumscribed with white females. In this regard, while "race" served as a point of difference, the common gendered identities created a bridge to relate to each other. On the other hand, interviews with white females were the most difficult and generally the shortest. This subset of participants generally did not warm up to the researcher in part because common identity in terms of "race" and gender were not shared. This positionality was therefore important in determining the quality of information obtained.

3.11 Summary of Methodology and Procedure

Table 10 below presents the research strategy as outlined in this chapter in relation to how it aligns to the research questions.

Research Questions	Data sources and methods	Justification
1. In what ways do discourses of merit operate to enforce or destabilise racialised and gendered stereotypes and power asymmetries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Company EE plan (documents) - EE reports (documents) - EE Act - Managers (interviews, written responses, discussion group, naturalistic observations) 	Documents provide a baseline of EE discourses at a national and company level; interviews, written responses and group discussions give insight into discourses and practices.
2. Do employment equity discourses and practices lead to substantive psychological empowerment for designated groups?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers (interviews, discussion group, reflection notes) 	Interviews, discussion group, and written responses give the researcher a sense of how designated groups understand the concept of empowerment.
3. How do gender and “race” intersect to shape professional identities of female managers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers (interviews, personal reflection notes) 	Interviews and personal reflections give the researcher a sense of how female participants understand themselves in relation the empowerment discourses.
4. How do the informal voluntary social practices of employees support or challenge the aims of employment equity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers (interviews, naturalistic observations, discussion group, personal reflection notes) 	Interviews, naturalistic observations, discussion group, and written responses assist in understanding how empowerment contribute to the professional identities of employees
5. How do the discourses and practices of employment equity influence the identity constructions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers (interviews, discussion group, written responses) - Observations 	Interviewing, having a discussion group, and written responses from participants to shed light on identity constructions.

Table 10: Research Strategy

Chapter Four: Report Findings and Discussion

Chapter Four presents and discusses the empirical data gathered. The order in which the chapter is structured is sequentially aligned to the research questions.

4.1 Employment Equity and Merit in Relation to Racialised and Gendered Stereotypes and Power Asymmetries

This section aims to address the following research question: In what ways do discourses of merit operate to enforce or destabilise racialised and gendered stereotypes and power asymmetries? The various subheadings address the research question from multiple vantage points.

As a starting place, this section analyses the numerical data from the organisations employment equity reports submitted to the Department of Labour in 2010 and 2011. The data is reported on very generally here as raw data may lead to the identification of the organisation. At the first three levels of management (top management, senior management, and middle management/professional level) white males predominate and constitute 26% of these levels of management. African males make up 8.5% and are closely followed by Indian males 8%. “Coloured” males make up a minority of 4.5%. While white females are not very well represented at the first two levels of management, in 2011 they were the biggest group of middle managers. Overall, they made up 23% of management falling just 3% short of white males. African females constituted 8%, Indian females 7.5%, and “Coloured” females 5.5%. These figures suggest that white males continue to dominate senior management but that white females are almost equal in number and form the largest group of professional/middle level managers. Together, white males and females make up just over 50% of management within this organisation. Like their white counterparts, Indian males and females are significantly above their employee active population status. Africans and “Coloureds” remain significantly underrepresented at all these levels of management.

4.1.1 Merit and its Construction in Organisational Discourses and Practices

Even though there is general acknowledgment that this organisation is serious about employment equity, a major theme which emerges from the data is that employment equity is practiced as a compliance issue rather than in the spirit of the law. It is about “chasing the numbers”. The numbers orientation that some employees speak of suggests that issues of merit are compromised.

[Bank name] has been very passionate about employment equity (P14BF, 119).

I think that the general feeling is that we are trying to tick a box rather than getting the right person (P6WF, 143).

I don't think it has moved in the right way though. It has moved in the right way statistically if I can call it that but maybe it's appropriate because we are bankers and we run everything on spreadsheets etcetera. But the spirit has not been met rather it's been the letter (P43WM, 112).

...but I have made peace with the fact that I would probably not be promoted because we have rules and we have boxes to tick (P6WF, 143).

Following on the above, it would appear that some white participants believe that in the effort to change the demographic profile of employees, more attention is paid to getting as many black people as possible and there is less focus on getting the “right” person. Merit is constructed as mutually exclusive of change. P11BF insightfully questions why competence and employment equity are mutually exclusive.

...a black person has to have an MBA for just an average normal position so you can imagine trying to apply at that level... For them its employment equity/BEE/affirmative action which is always seen as trying to promote incompetent people. And the frustration is why do you assume its incompetence? When you speak to colleagues across the board and I have had frank conversations with my white friends and to them it's like, “But they try to make incompetent people managers and whatever.” But why is it incompetent, what is that based on? How do you know that they didn't pick a competent person, (P11BF, 301)?

Ja... as I was saying a lot of it is saying we are incompetent, hired just to fill a gap for the numbers or this or that. I have no problem because I'm comfortable with the fact that if it was not legislated they wouldn't hire us (P11BF, 397).

No matter how much people can go out and do an extra mile and try to prove themselves, your mindset is that black people cannot think outside the box. Do you understand that stereotype belief? ...we are not acknowledged and they only see the capabilities in other people... (P14BF, 10).

So you find that people now come to work being in a cage because they are living up to a cultural standard of somebody else who has set personal standards as part of their management styles... (P14BF, 14).

P18BF captures the different expectations that, in her view, people have of black and white people's abilities. In the second extract below, she reflects on a prominent appointment that many (almost all people interviewed) within the organisation viewed as a classic case of tokenism.

[Laughing a little derisively in disbelief]. That's the biggest thing because whenever it's a black person, its employment equity but whenever it's a white person it's merit (P18BF, 114).

Referring to a recent appointment which led to some controversy in the organisation P18BF states:

Obviously from white staff, they saw nothing wrong with it in that, "no, no, it's an affirmative action goose that's not fit for the job and just gets given the job for precisely AA or EE targets". Black candidates are never fit for the job and whenever you have to have a black person in a position, you have to be someone who is less and you have to train them up (P18BF, 161).

Window dressing fears are closely held by black participants.

...do we give them enough support to be in those positions and not merely to just window dress? (P15BF, 143).

From some of these testimonies, it appears that the right candidate is one where employment equity does not apply. Competence is mutually exclusive from employment equity.

I would say again basically who does the job better and that is the thing that it should boil down to...Who is the right candidate for that position? I don't think that is followed, not in most cases... (P13WF, 203).

Just put them in and then try training them. That is what was happening...let's just fill that gap and then we will train him once he is there...And that doesn't work there isn't time for training (P13WF, 179).

The last quote from P18BF above is immediately proven by P13WF. Some white participants believe that black people need training. Even as P13WF holds deficit views of black people, she simultaneously recognises how unfair this might be as it traps all black people within the incompetence stereotype. Her ambivalence is captured in the second extract below. The collection of extracts appears to provide a uniform gaze by white participants at the issue of merit as it applies to black people.

There is a lot of tension with the people that get the job which is maybe unfair perception as well. The minute we hear that somebody got the position we automatically say “ahh because she is black” or because she is Coloured, or Indian, not because she is a good worker because we don’t know her (P13WF, 247).

No, it can’t be scrapped I think we do need it but it is over exaggerated. It definitely was needed but it has also been unfair... I agree there must be black managers in all places. They must be there but train them give them the training and then put them in those positions. Don’t just take them out and put them in those positions before they are ready (P13WF, 163).

Personally, I think you put more pressure on the equity person that is in the job but not suited for it than you do on the person that doesn’t get the job (P35WM, 137).

The employment equity policy is clear on its applicability for all women including white women. There were however repeated repudiations to this as all white female participants did not see themselves as beneficiaries of employment equity. While this observation is made in the chapter discussing women’s coalitions within the organisation, it bears repeating here. P13WF believes that employment equity has not played a role in her career.

I don’t believe that is true that is something I could say from experience (P13WF, 219).

There is however a sense that the organisation has made many attempts to inculcate a culture of understanding employment equity as well as the events and experiences which have necessitated the adoption of the intervention beyond compliance.

Regarding the availability of information about employment equity, P10WF states:

[T]here is a lot of visibility as I say it’s not an issue to me so I think there is plenty (P10WF, 227).

A training intervention appears to have made an impact for P10WF. She notes:

I never thought I needed more information, yet we all went to [name of training programme] which I think is a fantastic programme. I think if we can role that out further. It just helps people to be sensitive to where everybody else is in life so that we begin to gain awareness... We think all white people are privileged and they are not, and we think all black people that have been born since Mandela has been released have had equal opportunities and they haven't... (P10WF, 255).

There appear to be two contesting discourses in relation to the existence of racism and sexism in the organisation. In both cases, it is those that inhabit the dominant position that believe that neither racism nor sexism exist within the organisation. Thus, it is a white female that does not see racism and it is a white male that does not think women's opportunities are limited within the bank.

I don't see racism here (P10WF, 183).

I don't think so anymore, especially in the bank where we are in our teams and we go to the client together, it's accepted that females are managers or doing the same job. There's no "Ah, what is this woman doing here?" So it's accepted and there are no problems or issues with that (P9WM, 327).

The experience of P16BF and others such as P14BF, P11BF, and P15BF, however immediately counters both assertions as they adeptly illustrate how both gender and "race" are implicated for black women. The series of testimonies by a range of participants strongly suggests both a raced and gendered bias towards them by white and males within the organisation.

I had never been exposed to discrimination anywhere else until I started seeing it when I came here to the bank... (P14BF, 263).

I was actually called a tea girl by a client because I phoned him with regards to his account and his banker was a black gentleman and he said, "I am sick and tired when [bank name] phones me it is either I am being phoned by a garden boy or a tea lady" (P14BF, 275).

In my previous position very...uhmmmm I can't even explain it but very... it's like subliminal kind of racism and if we are talking employment equity and race in my other team, it was there (P11BF, 225).

...all boys club and people that have worked together and want to keep it that way (P15BF, 155).

But as viewed from the top, the glass ceiling. It's a blue eyed boys club

and it's very difficult for women to break into the executive space up there (P11BF, 249).

I think you have to work a lot harder than your white female counterpart or your white male counterpart... (P16BF, 194).

Unlike her white female counterpart, P13WF - a white female recognises that white privilege is still an important factor.

I think race still plays an important part in what you have and who you are I still think that being white has got advantages (P13WF, 387).

Black people's lives remind them every day of apartheid because the effects still live on (Group discussion, 350).

I think women in general but particularly if you are a black woman, you are not taken seriously because we don't know as much. What do you know, you are just an emotional being (P19BF, 257)?

4.1.2 Ways of Participating in Discourses and Practices of Meritocracy

Organisational discourses are impossible to separate from organisational members or stakeholders that constitute the organisation. Therefore, while this and the previous section are titled in a manner which suggests a disconnection from organisational and participants discourses, the attempt is to cast light on the dialectical relationship in relation to how they are not mutually exclusive. In this section, discourses of meritocracy are those that participants personalise and to some degree claim as their own rather than those spoken of abstractly and in general terms.

On a variation of a theme of demographic statistics from employment equity reports discussed in the preceding section, in the following quote we see how P10WF owns the view by lending it an affective voice and speaking in the first person. She is saddened by the "numbers" chasing.

And I think the sad thing now is that we are constrained by numbers and we can't employ so we suffer... (P10WF, 163).

...through time if we could get our education sorted out, it will come down to equal opportunity rather than a numbers based thing.... (P10WF, 291).

P14BF, a black woman, feels lost in the numbers and counterpoises this with a lack of acknowledgement of her capability.

So for me it has come to a point that I view it as not acknowledging me as being capable. It is more about having the right numbers (P14BF, 127).

Where colleagues believe in meritocracy, the competence of black people appears under constant scrutiny. P13WF adds a dose of stereotypical behaviours which she attaches to blacks as poor and slow performers. A litany of expressions of no confidence in black appointments follows.

And there is also this thing with uhmmmm, it is mainly with black people that work falls behind. I can see it with the credit manager now that was promoted into our section (P13WF, 480).

African time I don't know if it filters through to the workplace [laughs]. I said it is not everybody I know some black people who are performers and know how to do their job well, but I think there is no rush (P13WF, 484).

[T]he team below loses respect if the manager himself needs to build up the confidence (P10WF, 179).

There had been some calls before for promotions which are race based and I am going to be totally honest with you, they had to put a black person in that chair or a Coloured or an Indian. That person, I must say, was not as competent as somebody else (P13WF, 127).

You find a lot of candidates coming through from the point of employment equity and not on merit and they can't do the job. And I mean I had one and I will be honest with you it was a higher position, it was the [name of post] position of the cluster which I had applied for. I didn't get it. They brought someone from outside an employment equity black African male and he just wasn't up to the role at all (P36IM, 228).

I think it's a political agenda, I strongly believe that people should be appointed on merit. Maybe, given our history and disadvantages from 1994, maybe sure... a certain time period... Employment equity needs to be relooked at and possibly done away with, because I think people should be appointed on merit (P36IM, 224).

From the above, it is apparent that it is not only some white participants that hold views of black incompetence. Although alone in expressing such a view among black participants, below P3BM expressed the view that black females most often were given opportunities which they had not earned. He describes them as "fed". He contradicts those black women who claim to work harder than most people to prove their worth.

It's because black women are not hard workers (P3BM, 124).

Yes it's the black women who are unhappy because they have been fed so easily (P3BM, 135).

I have learnt that especially in a company like [bank name] black women are being given better exposure and nicer positions than we do and perhaps nicer money than we have [chuckles]. I have learnt that they are being fed so easily and it's so easy for them to be grumpy...especially those who are qualified (P3BM, 137).

In addition to letting in people that are not suitable performers, employment equity has led to a drop in moral and foreclosed sense of future for older white males. The paradox inherent in this is informed by the claim that older white males have disproportionately more power than other groups but they claim that their development and progression is stunted by employment equity.

If you ask me what the worst result of employment equity is... and I have seen it here at [bank name] over the past ten years. It would be the way I have seen very dynamic white males fold and become 50%, on the perception, sure true or false, that they are where they are and they not going any further. I have seen white guys, a high proportion of white middle aged guys that just fold and think they not going anywhere, and they say it's because of employment equity (P43WM, 118).

There are guys in [division name] banking that have been here for thirty years but that is as far as they are going to get. And that is not necessarily because they never had the skills to get to the next level but because they have been used, and they are bitter and they have to transfer skills ... They do get paid a lot of money and they fulfill a function. The fact is that, if they don't like it, they will have to leave too (P41WM, 85).

In recognition of the meritocratic culture within which they find themselves, black people also construct their own narratives. These largely cast attention onto whiteness and the lack of support for black people. Moreover, there appears to be a belief that some white colleagues are invested in creating black incompetence.

There is still that perception that the white male knows everything and then the white female is second because she knows everything... but she can never really be with the blue eyed boys up there. The black female knows nothing and the black males are the same like the females, you know what I mean. In a team dynamic, the white male is given more responsibility anyway. He might not be the one that everyone is reporting into but he will be given the most responsibilities and those are the frustrations (P11BF, 333).

The problem is these companies are owned overseas like we are owned by [name] they will have someone from overseas dictating terms in South Africa... They will give me someone from overseas giving me deadlines and trying to ensure that they micro manage these black people from South Africa and make her look like he or she is incompetent...(P12BM, 355).

...because if you are black and you are marginalised and you find a white counterpart who is virtually incompetent and in a very senior position, that is when you start asking questions of, should I be here or should I not be here... (P12BM, 51).

...sidelining and not being assisted and you find that the white male when he joins the company he is assisted in every aspect... You will come in the company with no support at all, and already they are thinking you're a BEE appointment and therefore lack the support (P11BF, 333).

Remarking on the support received by a white female that had recently been promoted, P12BF notes:

They were handholding this girl. And I was even thinking... if it was a black girl that had been given that opportunity, no executive would have gone to Cape Town with her or Durban and everywhere (P18BF, 100).

It is phenomenal support where white candidates are concerned, which ensures non failure, whereas with black candidates, you are on your own (P18BF, 102).

Another strong view that emerges is that close scrutiny for competence means that black employees are constantly trying to prove themselves. Some believe that this scrutiny is demoralising.

...they always have to prove themselves but they are never acknowledged so there is no room for growth for them and if there is no room for growth for people there is limited potential for them to grow and people lose interest (P14BF, 18).

You know I feel you have to prove yourself more than any other person and the other thing is that everything that you do becomes questionable as a black female... (P14BF, 91).

I always feel that I have to prove myself twenty times more than a white candidate or a white boy. Access to information. Access to meaningful roles. They come after hard work (P18BF, 116).

I don't know why people have that perception that black people are job hoppers. I don't think that it's something that you qualify for just to hop

around. There are many factors that contribute (BF15, p.167).

P12BM claims that white and Indian managers position themselves differently from black managers in relation to competence. He states:

At the top levels everywhere, Indians are the only people that claim that they are appointed based on competence whereas we know that their names will be part of the stats and they are resisters to transformation...It's out of frustration that Jimmy Manyi can say Indians have reached their stats. If he excluded them, we would be thankful. He will have done a lot of work (P12BM, 179).

4.1.3 Challenging Meritocracy in Everyday Discourses and Practices

The previous section has shown that the views of white and those black participants are quite polarised on the question merit in relation to employment equity. This part analysis the ways in which meritocratic assumptions are repudiated.

P11BF casts employment equity in its historical moorings against the backdrop of apartheid. This serves to contextualise the policy rather than cast it in a one dimensional light as a punitive intervention.

And in my view I think there is a moral need or an ethical need as to why it has to be there (P11BF, 205).

She believes that if the markets were left to their own discretion, there would be no change.

If we were to make it at level playing field and say "companies promote at your discretion" and whatever...would anything have changed from 94? Would that white female with her own prejudices from her background, change? Not because she is evil or whatever the influences in her life were and her father in the organisation. Most probably not. And they worry about the future but if we were to look at stats and that's the problem that I find with people that complain, they never look at what the stats show in terms of executive positions in South Africa...It's all still white males and next females (P11BF, 313).

For P12BM, opportunities are not favours but a right. Opportunities are earned.

Look, giving a person a chance is something else you know. What I mean by a chance that is overdue is not really a chance, it is something that

belongs to them [laughs] they should have had it a long time ago (P12BM, 91).

A major theme emerging from the data is the tension between qualifications and experience or the *qualification/experience dilemma*. This issue is taken up by a number of participants in the excerpts below. Again however, those who highlight the value of education are largely black and those who attach value to experience are white. The latter are of the view that it through experience that jobs are earned.

I can challenge you and ask you during your research, have you met any black individual in a professional environment without a qualification or a degree? The answer is no...and then you get these white females with nothing and they are sitting in those cushy jobs. Is that fair? I need to have qualifications just to have my foot into [division] and for others they don't have to have anything they will just walk straight in (P12BM, 159).

People in the bank environment don't study. I've got a number of them, and you will laugh, some of them didn't even do standard nine. So they finished school and came here because they knew someone that works here, whether it's the aunt or uncle or whatever... Let's say an MBA is required because to do this job you need to have those kinds of qualifications but then that applies to the black person...but if it is a white person then it's okay you can come without an MBA, give us your diploma from [name of a low status college] or whatever it is... (P17BF, 163).

In fact, a lot of the time, if you dig and look at their background, a lot of them are not even educated but they have that entitlement feeling that I must progress because I am naturally better than a black person. You know, the first assumption is, "well those black people that are appointed, they don't even qualify. I am better than them". Not because she knows better, but naturally as a white person she is better than them. Never mind their qualifications. Because with us, we must have qualifications, post graduate degrees, 20 years' experience. With them, all you need is a matric and 20 years' experience (P19BF, 320).

...believe me there are a whole lot of managers that are being overlooked with qualifications and experience. People were hired without those requirements into managerial roles based on that they were working here previously. I mean if you go to Wits I am sure more graduates are black than any other race. Those minority white graduates all of them will get the jobs immediately unlike the black one's, even with having been to the same school... They are given the opportunity to acquire those necessary skills whereas the black ones are not... (P12BM, 167).

The counter discourse repudiating the above emphasis on qualifications and arguing in favour of experience is presented below. The accompanying claim is that most black people lack experience.

So now perhaps people are coming off the street with degrees in hand but they haven't had work experience. So the knowledge is all there, but how to handle the pressures and urgencies and all that is something that must be learnt (P13WF, 492).

There are definitely discrepancies because there is a target that needs to be met and there are people that have been promoted that maybe have less experience or ability to do their job (P35WM, 105).

I have come a long way, but yet people that have been in the position for three years... people of colour get the promotions (P6WF, 143).

While there are those that are bothered by the connotations which come with being seen as an employment equity appointee, others see it as an important intervention in an environment which they perceive as hostile to black progression. Some black participants described how they feel about being seen as employment equity appointments in the following ways.

So I am happy with that employment equity stat, and I am happy with that because when I look at a fortunate white person compared to a fortunate black person the difference is huge (P12BM, 183).

To this he adds his own commitment to competence.

The definition of competence - doing your job in the best possible way that you can. It became a part of me and a value of mine and when I work here no matter how I feel that [bank name] will not promote me, I want to see a signature of my work saying I was here and I was competent in doing my work... (B12BM, 243).

P16BF stakes her claim forcefully for her right to be in the organisation. Here she both rejects and embraces employment equity. P12BM follows on with a similarly strong sentiment on taking ownership of the bank.

I am a professional and I deserve to be here as much as you did. I went to the same training maybe the same varsity as you, probably sat next to you during varsity and I am capable as much as you are. I have worked hard and probably harder than you to get here. I'm not here because of employment equity I worked, I went to school, I earned the right to be here and no one is doing me a favor including you as my employer

(P16BF, 207).

Well, I am very comfortable with being an employment equity candidate if it's going to give me a voice to be heard and a face in the corporate industry why not (P16BF, 211).

This is our country and this is our bank and the same values and belief of entitlement that white people have for this bank we need it [too] (B12BM, 223).

It is insulting to black people and black women in particular. It says, "you know if you black, you are not really that good. You are not good enough. You must always have somebody that supervises you because we don't trust that you are going to do a good job" (P19BF, 298).

Much as they say we are here because of affirmative action, I believe I am here because of my skills and qualifications. Maybe when I first started at [another bank], I was a number, but the reason I am here today is because of my skills (P40BM, 173).

There may be people that are absorbed as employment equity, but me I believe that I am here because I can do the job and if I was an employment equity candidate without skills and knowledge they would have fired me long time for being incompetent (P40BM, 177).

The discussion group was unanimous in the view that none of them would have the positions that they have if there was no employment equity.

Some black participants were opposed to employment equity on the basis that it dilutes their perceived sense of competence.

I actually don't like it. I want to be viewed as someone who can do the job irrespective of colour or gender.....And I don't like being used as part of those stats if I'm not really valued (P36IM, 288).

In a sense that I am very fussy when I am employed. I need to know are you looking for an affirmative action person or an individual to come and do the job immediately. If it is affirmative action I don't apply for that job because I have seen and that happened very early... when people employ others for window dressing (P17BF, 127).

I would disagree all the time with my colleagues when my manager will say "for the vacancy we have, we can't replace people with a white person or an Indian or Coloured, we have to go and find an African". It is becoming a real war in the boardroom because where do you find them, you can't find them and they are not competent and all that... (P17BF, 127).

P17BF breaks out from the general view held by other black participants. It would appear that she imbibes the deficit model of employment equity and competence as mutually exclusive. Her approach has moments of colour blindness. She continues below.

...irrespective of whether you can or can't do the job, you are there because of your colour, so that when someone checks the numbers I'm there... I'm just there to cover the number. But you have to, first before you even think of my colour explain and present me so when the person who is listening will wonder what colour I am... so you need to present me in a way that a person will think they are going to say white and then you surprise them when they see that they are black... (P17BF, 131).

From his white male perspective, P48WM explains the reported ambivalent feelings that arise out of bearing employment equity status as follows:

...they want to get in on merit okay. So for me the reality is, if I'm a black male and they say "you are an employment equity candidate"... sure but that that is a by process... but the reality is I do not want the job because I am employment equity, I want the job because I am the best person. And I think that's why they would feel a bit of ambivalence (P48WM, 102).

4.1.4 Discussion

The look behind the employment equity numbers is revealing. At the same time as it sheds light on many issues including the pace of implementation, the everyday experiences that people have, and in relation to some of the attitudinal matters, it stimulates a set of many further questions. An organisational setting allows researchers to examine the "practical or social counterpart of ideologies" (Van Dijk, 1998, p.186). Therefore, the lens used to look at employment equity here does not see particular discourses as individually based but as the operation and flow of group ideologies. However, these broad ideological strands are not necessarily "race" or gender based. Thus, the ideology underpinning meritocracy may advance white interests but other groups might have vested interests in advancing this discourse.

Employment equity remains a contentious topic in South Africa (Roberts *et al.*, 2011). Within the bank where this research was conducted, this is starkly illuminated by the issue of merit. Following Sturm and Guinier (1996) it is worth understanding if meritocratic beliefs are the final frontier of resistance for substantive "race" based equality. There are certainly some

black participants that believe that the subject of merit has sinister motivations and effects. van Dijk (1998, p.193) advises that social actors are enabled “to formulate general conclusions based on several experiences and observations”. For some white people, the way in which merit is framed assumes a number of things about black people: it generalises cases of tokenism and window dressing across all black people within the bank, it assumes that all black people lack experience, and black people are generally cast as not competent to perform optimally and need consistent support and training.

For some white participants, at the same time that incompetence is blackened, merit assumes the mantle of whiteness. This discourse not only carries the dominant ideology in South African society, but is an instance of ideological formulation. It is actively created and explained by participants. Black participants respond to assumptions of lack of merit in a number of ways. They feel the weight of the stereotypes of incompetence and feel constantly under surveillance. Foucault (1979) captures this feeling and its effects aptly when he describes the all-encompassing gaze of the dominant and powerful who set the standards. This leads them to work to constantly prove themselves thus defying the stereotypes.

Because I always feel that I have to prove myself twenty times more than a white candidate (P18BF, 116).

A number of white participants expressed views that black performance was often not at the level of white performance. However, many black participants were of the view that they felt under pressure to work extra hard. Others among them were not as optimistic because they observed that the prejudicial views hold no matter how hard they work. The second response among black participants was one of invalidating or questing how employment equity applies to them. This often comes with an acceptance of the deficit trope which sees employment equity and competence as mutually exclusive. Like their white counterparts, black participants did not necessarily hold homogenous views on this matter. Thus, others held the tension of beneficiary status in a more complex manner by acknowledging the ongoing importance of employment equity and its role in providing opportunities to them while at the same time underscoring their deservingness of their roles and claiming their competence to perform. Another set of participants responded with irritation at the stereotypes and delegitimised the view that all white

people are automatically competent. They pointed to their own experiences of observing white incompetence. Here they claimed that incompetence is not raced and merit has no colour.

While there appeared to be general acceptance that the organisation is implementing employment equity and not shying away from it, there was a pervasive sense that it was towing the government line and complying rather than owning the spirit of equity. For white participants, there was no real articulation as to how adopting the spirit of equity would unfold as the theme of colourblindness in relation to equity and merit was particularly extant among them. Many of them look forward to the day when opportunities will be given to people “purely” on merit rather than on the basis of chasing “numbers” determined by government. For them, employment equity delegitimises established notions of merit as it is perceived as mutually exclusive from competence. Van Dijk (1993, p.23) notes that when those who do not hold dominant power are hired or promoted less, “such discriminatory action will be legitimated in terms of assumed cultural, educational, or professional deficiencies, alleged problems created by minority¹⁰ group workers, or in terms of reduced competition due to the presence” of these employees. Among the white participants, there is little reflection on why the legislation was necessary in the first place. There is a sense in which history is amputated from current white discourses on employment equity. There was however a subset of the white sample that held conflictual views at the same time. For instance, P13WF expressed a deficit view of black managers but also commented on the importance of employment equity for changing the demographics of the workplace. This alludes to the fact that identities are not homogenous or internally consistent – they are constantly in flux. In line with Burr (1995), people’s identities are achieved by a subtle interweaving of many different threads.

The colourblind discourse that some participants hold strongly is based on the principle of fairness and equality of opportunity and treatment (Nkomo, 2011). Sturm and Guinier (1996) have called this “fictive fairness”. The position disregards the unequal starting places and ongoing claims of subtle discrimination by black participants. Indeed claims of racism are consistent with the SASAS Survey (2003 as cited in Friedman and Erasmus, 2008) which found that a significant number of black South African’s reported experiencing racial discrimination.

¹⁰ Van Dijk is writing about European minorities without dominant power. In the case of the South African corporate sector, most of those without organisational power are the black majority (Modisha, 2008).

P1WF states that everyone now has a fair chance and that we can't go back to the past. For her, determination for success should be internally motivated and not externally driven. van Dijk (1993) calls these "elite discourses" as they extricate experience from context. Colourblind discourses are thus accompanied by individualising claims which locate agency at the personal level without regard for the political and contextual (Haney and Hurtado, 1994). This is at odds with the view of many black participants who claim that it is contextual variables such as stereotypical views of black ability which inhibit their progression. It is however important to point out that white participants were not homogenous in holding colourblind views as was illustrated by P10WF who pointed to several instances of ongoing black disadvantage.

Colour was paradoxically important to most white females in their steadfast view that they are not beneficiaries of employment equity even though the legislation applies to all females. On the other hand many black participants and researchers (Crenshaw, 2000; Modisha, 2008) note that white females are the biggest beneficiaries of employment equity in South Africa and elsewhere. In the section examining female coalitions, the study posits two possibilities for why white women do not consider themselves to be a designated group to whom employment equity applies. The second account is relevant here. White women possibly do not see themselves as a designated group because they do not want to associate with the stereotypical discourses that come with being a beneficiary of employment equity. Seen in this light, the distancing from other designated groups also serves as dissociation from the discourse of perceived incompetence and dropping standards. It enables the consolidation of whiteness with white males rather than identification with black women. Meritocratic notions may therefore be implicated in the forms of identification that white females adopt. Lack of organisational clarity, the employment equity plan for staffing in the organisation, the meritocratic discourse of seeing employment equity as letting in substandard people, and the participants own "race" based alliances may all be related and operational in how most white female participants have come to understand employment equity.

Finally, merit is deeply implicated in the measurement of the minimum requirements of the job or what the Employment Equity Act calls "suitably qualified". This plays itself out in the qualifications/experience dilemma. As stated earlier this dilemma refers to the valuing and emphasis of either qualifications over experience on one hand, or the emphasis of experience

over qualifications on the other hand. The data in this study suggest that black participants tended to emphasise qualifications while white participants generally emphasised experience over qualifications. The motivations for these different points of emphasis may be related to self-interest Reddy *et al.*, (2011) as black employees tend to be younger and more highly qualified while white employees are generally older with more experience. Nkomo (2011) also found that white employees emphasised the value of experience and highlighted the importance of “earning” ones job. In this conception, *earning* is closely aligned to a particular form of merit which downplays qualifications. Merit can thus be said to be aligned to self-interest and preserving privilege while warding off competition. Having said this however, if the organisation is promoting black people into roles where they do not meet the experience criteria, this amounts to poor and ill-considered application of employment equity as the legislation is clear that people should meet the minimum criteria and should be supported to constantly develop their skills. Importantly though, the group discussion with participants suggested that experience and qualifications should not be pitted against each other as they are not necessarily mutually exclusive and different roles may call for particular attributes.

4.1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings generally support a view that discourses and practices of employment equity operate with a discourse of merit to enforce racialised and gendered stereotypes and power asymmetries. The discourses that were present in the text include meritocracy, competence, colourblind notions, and strategic favouring of either qualifications or experience. These discourses both reflect and reproduce broader social discourses ideologically. Thus the view that merit is the preserve of whiteness is an existing discourse which was reflected and reproduced. Some black participants also participate in the ideological reproduction of these discourses. Black participants with the support of a minority of white participants both critiqued and challenged these discourses through what was termed repudiation of the conception of colourblindness and repeated articulations of black competence. A novel discourse that arose out of the analysis is the qualifications/experience dilemma. This arises directly out of the historical context of South Africa’s past. These conclusions are supported by the following:

For some white people, the way in which merit is framed assumes a number of things about black people: it generalises cases of tokenism and window dressing across all black people within the bank, it assumes that all black people lack experience, and black people are generally cast as not competent to perform optimally and need consistent support and training. For most white participants, at the same time that incompetence is blackened, merit assumes the mantle of whiteness.

There are some black participants that believe that the subject of merit has sinister motivations and effects. It is seen as a powerful trope and smokescreen against change. Most black participants feel the weight of the stereotypes of incompetence and feel constantly under surveillance. Many black participants expressed the view that they felt under pressure to work extra hard to prove their competence. Moreover, a minority of black participants appeared to accept the deficit trope which sees employment equity and competence as mutually exclusive. Others acknowledged the ongoing importance of employment equity and its role in providing opportunities to them while at the same time underscoring their deservingness of their roles and claiming their competence to perform. Another set of participants responded with irritation at the stereotypes and delegitimises the view that all white people are automatically competent. A minority of white participants argued for the ongoing relevance of employment equity. This is a signal to the diversity of views and lack of total homogeneity.

There is a general sense that the organisation it is towing the government line and complying with employment equity rather than owning the spirit of equity. Among some white participants, colourblindness in relation to equity and merit is particularly extant. For some white participants, employment equity delegitimises established notions of merit. In reflecting on the necessity of employment equity, there is a sense in which history is amputated from current white discourses on the policy. The colourblind discourse that some participants hold strongly is based on the principle of fairness and equality of opportunity and treatment. Sturm and Guinier (1996) term this “fictive fairness”. For example, “everyone now has a fair chance and we can’t go back to the past” – P1WF. This is at odds with the view of many black participants who claim that it is contextual variables such as stereotypical views of black ability which inhibit their progression. P10WF did however break away from the dominantly held view of colourblindness as she recognized the multiple stumbling blocks in the way of some black people.

Merit is deeply implicated in the measurement of the minimum requirements of the job or what the Employment Equity Act calls “suitably qualified”. This leads to the “white experience – black qualifications dilemma”, since white’s generally emphasised experience and black’s favoured qualifications. There is a strategic favouring of one or the other since whites generally have more experience, and being “recently” qualified blacks generally have an edge on qualifications. The qualifications/experience dilemma may also reflect the near total silence or awareness of why whites have more experience. P20WM, a white male close to retirement points out that white people were able to gain this experience because they were privileged in accessing jobs during apartheid without always having the requisite qualifications. There were however others that pointed to the importance of both qualifications and experience.

Overall then, merit is contested and interpolated with racialised and gendered power plays.

4.2 Employment Equity and Substantive Psychological Empowerment

The research question that is addressed in this section is: Do discourses and practices of employment equity lead to substantive psychological empowerment? In answering this question, the analysis of the data follows the four psychological empowerment constructs starting with perceived competence, self-determination, meaning, and impact. In each case the data from interview transcripts is analysed against these constructs. The analysis follows a more thematic based analysis before a more critical lens is assumed using critical organisational studies to make sense of the findings. While employment equity is not directly addressed in most of this section, the intention is to assess the level of empowerment that employees have. This enables an understanding of the quality of employment equity that is practiced in the organisation. As is the case for all five thematic areas addressed by the research questions, particular attention is paid to the discourses that were present in the texts, their reflection and ideological reproduction of dominant societal discourses, and critiques and resistance to these ideological positions.

This section examines participants understanding of their psychological empowerment through the use of Spreitzer's (1995) four factors including meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. In this section, the research examines how participants understand the level of meaning or importance that their jobs have for them, their level of perceived competence including how they think other people rate their competence, the level of self-determination that they have in doing their work as opposed to micro-management, and finally how much impact and influence they think that they have on the team or organisational outputs. These relate directly to employment equity narratives (Sturm and Guinier, 1996). The use of Spreitzer's (1995) conception of empowerment and Zimmerman's (1995) understanding of psychological empowerment follows the popular discourses of window dressing and incompetence (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Nkomo, 2011) which often accompany employment equity initiatives. It is however worth noting that the limitation of a focus on psychological empowerment is that it shapes a specific individualistic set of responses from the participants.

4.2.1 Perceived Competence

The overarching finding in relation to perceived competence is that most people gave positive self-reports and there was generally a high level of confidence in participants self-reported ability to do their jobs. For instance, P52WM asserted that he rates his competence at 100%. While he did not qualify this statement, he reveals that he has lots of work experience as he has worked for over thirty years. P51BM identified the driving force behind both his competence and confidence as his background. This is an example of how personal narratives shape the ways in which people experience the world.

It is high and I think what pushes me is my background, basically I come from a poor background so it informs a lot of things that I do...your background sort of starts to become who you are in a sense... (P51BM, 70).

In relation to how his peers and managers rate his competence he notes the following.

Yes, very high amongst peers at my level. Probably the guys up there have a mental way of looking at colour. "Oh you, I was expecting a white guy who is this guy rate him down" [laughs], you know that kind of thing (P51BM, 74).

While he indicates uncertainty with how he may be rated by his superiors, he is skeptical of how they would rate him and believes that this would be squarely influenced by their whiteness and the attendant perceived stereotypes of black people's abilities. "Race" is foregrounded here. P51BM's general position on employment equity and how this applies to notions of competence is revealing. He hails the value of employment equity in providing him with the opportunity of access to the bank and reveals that he is under no illusions that he would have gotten his job if it was not for the opening provided by the legislation.

I would never get a chance if there was no employment equity. If affirmative action was not there, I would have not been given a chance... I don't blame these white guys. If you grew up in Kokstad or wherever, all you knew was white people you had a different view of a black guy so you would never trust their competence irrespective of whatever that happens because your mind has been conditioned that way... (P51BM, 88).

P40BM also rates his competence levels highly. He links his "exceptional" work to independence and self-determination. He feels valued for the quality of his work and believes

that his manager has confidence in his abilities. P32BM on the other hand states that his ability is dependent upon that of his colleagues and the support he receives. His work is team dependent even as he rates his own abilities between medium and high.

I do my work exceptionally well. I am from a background where you take accountability and responsibility. I don't like to be spoon-fed and to be watched (P40BM, 55).

No, he rates me highly. He really values my input (P40BM, 59).

I would say medium in terms of competency (P32BM, 27).

Yes things are not as straight up as they are but I rate myself very highly. I think given support and a free role I can do a lot more (P32BM, 39).

P50BM is of the view that competence is overshadowed and indeed obscured by employment equity. He contends:

So we tend to say the wrong things to get somebody in. We don't say, "this person delivered this project at [another bank name]". So that is why we are being covered with the same blanket. We can be a competent black but as soon as you climb up the ranks, you are not seen as competent anymore. You just another employment equity appointee (P50BM, 126).

Unlike P51BM, he believes that employment equity can be an impediment to black people.

I would have been far now if there was no employment equity (P50BM, 124).

That one, when he recruits you... when he sells your CV to his big boss, he says, "I've got this guy, his got experience, his *black, black*" [emphasis]. They always say black and best case scenario, she's black and she's female. So, I don't know, every time they present somebody, they rubber stamp BLACK. Black female (P50BM, 124).

When you are black, you get positions because you are black [Sheepishly chuckles]. How do you prove it otherwise (P50BM, 128)?

Well, we are competent. But when people see it, they don't see it as competence, they see it as, you got the position because you are black. I mean that's it. It ends there (P50BM, 130).

So there is this stigma man. There is this thing about being black. I don't know where it comes from... where you need to prove yourself beyond reasonable doubt (P50BM, 138).

P50BM appears to be arguing that employment equity has made blackness a commodity that precludes competence. This overshadows the ability and experience that people bring and competence is exclusively projected at whiteness. The last three extracts from P50BM are tinged with an acute sense of defeat. For him, “race” has become an inescapable albatross. P22BF below expresses a similar sentiment to that of P50BM. For her, there is a blurring of lines between her status as a member of two designated groups (black and female) and her competence. This leads her to be suspicious of her own levels of competence and indeed the motivations behind employing her into the role.

But it’s quite disturbing because it happens so often that you starting thinking, that maybe you are just a number to just fill the numbers for reporting purposes to just tick that box, or not... (P22BF, 256).

When asked about his competence to perform his job, P48WM begins to speak about the competence of his team rather than his personal ability. This may suggest that he has an inherent sense of confidence that white males are presumed to have. Unlike P50BM above, his competence is not under surveillance. A further reading of the following excerpt is that competence can co-exist with blackness and being female. The excerpt suggests that he implements the practice of employment equity in the correct manner. After all, the spirit of the Employment Equity Act insists on the appointment of suitably qualified people from designated groups.

I like to get people in place that... are representative but that can also do the work. For me it’s crucial. If I have a vacancy and I can’t fill it, I am not just going to fill it as a result of employment equity. I am going to try to find the candidate that displays obviously the level of expertise that I require and is representative (P48WM, 76).

P47BM expresses a high level of confidence in his ability to perform his job. He supports his views by stating that he has the requisite training and ability. His competence needs to be defended and unlike P52WM and P48WM, it cannot stand alone.

I am confident. A very confident individual and I think I have got the proper training and ability to do what I have to do. I am not arrogant about it obviously (P47BM, 37).

P45WF is less confident about her abilities as she appears to derive her sense of confidence based on the feedback she receives. This suggests an external locus of control.

It varies so because a lot of our job is thinking and it's not routine work, so the confidence depends on how it's received... So at the moment I have done a new piece of work and I'm not quite sure how it's being received. I hear it's okay but I haven't had that direct feedback that I'm doing a good job, so then my confidence is not that great (P45WF, 99).

I think there are two things. There's one from a professional point of view and if I look at it objectively, I feel I have the confidence to do my job. Then there's my personal feelings that I have to deal with day to day which are insecurities and I have to say am I good enough (P45WF, 107).

...but I have had messages coming back and people that I assist in project steering committees coming back and saying you doing well, [name] is doing well. I get the sense that I have got some credibility even though it's obviously still early (P21BF, 83).

P36IM indicates that his sense of confidence in his ability and competence has been challenged by the mechanical nature of his job and the lack of growth.

The work itself has become mechanical so maybe my confidence has slipped somewhat because you're not engaging with different people, you're not challenging yourself and not growing... (P36IM, 64).

For P43WM, confidence levels in relation to his competence in performing his role are quite high. He describes it as follows:

Err...I think my levels of confidence are quite high but I think people's expectations of the job are people's expectations but my confidence levels are quite high (P43WM, 33).

So I would hope that, to answer your question, I wouldn't know but I would hope that the outcome substantiates the competence (P41WM, 62).

He has never given me bad rating or negative feedback. It is usually positive and they say, "I like this and that, institute what you have done in other regions. Why don't I see this in other regions" (P37IM, 81)?

P41WM above suggests that the outcomes of his work should adequately speak to his competence. Similarly P43WM and P37IM indicate that they receive good feedback on their performance.

P34WF states that she is very competent in performing her job. It however soon becomes apparent that she was demoted from a more senior job when the organisation restructured its

operations. Therefore while she is correct in claiming high competence, the related empowerment in relation to meaning is tainted by this experience.

No. And there are no challenges in it because of where I come from but I do it to my best ability and still give it 100%. Just recently, in September, I got an award for my job so I put pride in everything I do even with the way I am feeling (P34WF, 71).

4.2.2 Self-determination

In relation to self-determination, while most participants reported high levels of self-determination, there are a number of people that reported that this was hampered by micro-management and lack of trust in their abilities. Self-determination was used interchangeably with flexibility in one's job, control and autonomy, and juxtaposed with micro-management.

P52WM and P46WM belong to the group that displays heightened levels of self-determination.

We are very flexible. I think most people in this department are in a position where they are trusted to do what they need to do... You can do more or less what you want as long as it is what you are employed to do and agreed you will do in your service agreement... (P52WM, 33).

I could pretty much come and go as I please as long as my work is done and nothing is missed... I can work from home if I want to or off site if I need to within limits. If I need to go, I will just let my manager know that, "I have got this meeting and that meeting I'll see you in two days' time," and he will say "sure it's fine as long as your work is done then do it"... (P46WM, 55).

P52WM believes that there are levels where micro-management is justified but argues that this is not expected at his level of seniority. At his level, he argues that most people work more than is expected of them. For Foucault (1979) working longer hours than is expected reflects that the project of effecting control and discipline over docile bodies has in fact been successful. In the following excerpt P46WM makes a similar point in relation to doing more than is required of him.

My role, I hit all the targets I can do what they ask me to do. So from the fulfillment of my expectations, I actually think that I am doing more than what they are asking me to do (P46WM, 49).

Yes on the clerical level you do need some micro managing obviously you need to do it as part of the job...but not at the level that I am in (P52WM, 35).

I mean all the people that work here, work big...I mean most of us put up at least an hour more than what is actually required by your employment agreement (P52WM, 41).

I know what has to be done and I manage it (P34WF, 87).

The level of self-determination that allows choice of what one does is seen as aligned to liking what one does.

...you can literally choose what you want to work on. Sometimes you can't but sometimes you can choose and if you have chosen, it that means you actually like it... (P31BM, 121).

For P51BM, self-determination is located in internal traits such as assertiveness. In this case, the system is unable to contain him as he puts up regular fights to protect his self-determination. He appears to have been able to carve out a space in which he can practice high self-determination.

It is very high. I think they would have picked up now that I can be very assertive and push my way through...so I have got a very strong manager we fight, we talk, and we do things (P51BM, 78).

P48WM is a manager of a specialised team. He ranks his level of autonomy and self-determination is very high.

Ummm... I am very autonomous. My boss... I just report into my manager in terms of letting him know what it is... obviously we in a technical field so I do not expect my line manager to ultimately know what I do but they check it from a sense check you know... But I am fairly autonomous and err... so I am actually... They can't micro-manage me even if they wanted to. I am fairly independent (P48WM, 62).

Like P48WM, P47BM and P37IM believe that they have a good level of autonomy and self-determination.

Well, it's, it's really formalised autonomy. Its mandate driven as you know with risk. Err... so in terms of the actual financial aspects of the job... the granting credit and financial aspects are formalised. Other aspects, I think I've got enough autonomy to do what I have to do... so ja... (P47BM, 45).

Not only from a mandate perspective, which is clearly documented, but

making calls on certain issues. People issues, create strategy and things like that... (P47BM, 47).

...there is no restriction in how you get it done, like anything that you do... (P37IM, 89).

For P45WF, self-determination is relatively high. She attributes her relative autonomy to a manager that encourages this self-determination as well as her level of seniority which comes with the latitude for decision making.

It's quite high, my manager is, I suppose, quite hands off and there when you need him, and that's one of the reasons I have job satisfaction I work very well with my manager at the moment...and he is willing to step back and let me do what I need to do within reason... But I think the position that we are in, we are quite senior and we have the ability to make decisions we don't always execute on the decision, so we a role where we need to influence people (P45WF, 123).

P43WM's autonomy and self-determination is reportedly constrained by business practices that he describes as archaic.

No, highly constrained. It goes back to the industrial age thing. And not so much constrained by methodologies or ideas, but constrained by business practices that are just archaic (P43WM, 39).

In contrast to P43WM above, while P42IF believes that her work is bound up in standard operating procedures and is target driven, like P45WF, she contends that one's managers' openness to flexibility aids self-determination in deciding on particular actions.

Look, there's... you have targets to meet and you have... there are criteria that you have to do... so I also think it depends on the area manager that you have to report into. If you have a good understanding with that person... as long as you have met the targets and have adhered to all the rules and regulations ... there's a lot of flexibility (P42IF, 73).

We have a wonderful area manager. She says... "guys, please just do the basics, and we won't have any problems, and how you meet your targets... if you do it in the first six months, I'm fine with that. Or if you do it in a month, or however you chose to do it" (P42IF, 75).

Unlike P42IF who has a "wonderful" and "flexible" manager, P18BF's manager measures performance based on "bums on seats". He has to actually see people working to be convinced that they are contributing. In this regard, she has low self-determination.

His measurement of performance is bums on seats (P18BF, 72).

P39CM is a senior manager and interactively carves out a space with his manager in which he can have the autonomy and self-determination that he believes he needs. He puts it this way:

I've got a budget. I know how much I can spend. I've got a head count. I operate within that head count... and um, generally my boss says this is what he expects and this is what he wants and we have time lines and if I need to trade anything off, I'll say, "okay, it's midyear and if you want me to do this, I'll have to stop something else". We have those debates, you know (P39CM, 64).

P28WM illustrates his autonomy in the following account.

Fairly high. Your problem in banking so often is that what you want to do has a knock on effect in many other areas...I have a level of autonomy. You are lucky I came here today because I actually work from home most of the time (P28WM, 105).

No, I am not micro managed. I think in some of the interviews that you are going to go through, you going to find a "yes I am micro managed" (P28WM, 109).

P28WM is an elderly man and has been in the banking environment for more than thirty years. He describes his level of self-determination as very high as he takes both operational and time based decisions on where and how to do his work. He does however caution that there may be a lot of people within the bank who feel micromanaged.

4.2.3 Meaning

Meaning in this context refers to the level of intrinsic importance and value that one's role has for them. It is related to self-determination, but differs in the sense that one can lack self-determination but still experience their job as meaningful in terms of its outputs. Following Spreitzer (1995) for psychological empowerment to occur, one should feel that that their role provides a sense of meaning and value. Thus employment equity beneficiaries who do not experience their roles as meaningful are prone to feel unempowered. The aims of employment equity legislation are therefore not realised in such cases. This part makes little reference to employment equity but it should be read with the preceding underlying principle in mind. P51BM unpacks his understanding of meaning by interrogating the possible gap between

ascribed status and actual status as he experiences it. Therefore, while he holds a management position, he believes that the title is empty in the absence of an ability to make decisions that matter. He sees this limitation as located within the very structure of large organisations like the bank where he works.

The only manager is someone that has got authority, if my staff member comes to me and says, "I want an increase," I can say, "ah I am going to speak to someone". So you are not a manager. Effectively you are just a coordinator of something but you are not fully a manager (P51BM, 66).

I think in general that is how I feel about my role and I would argue that everybody besides the guys on top make senior decisions that is how they feel... You are not a manager in a sense that you can't make decisions. You must follow strategy, you are operational guys... Given the size of the organisation and it is not an anomaly it is how all the banks run any big organisation would run in this version... (P51BM, 68).

P44BM derives a high sense of meaning from his role. In part this can be understood in relation to the fact that his role was relatively different from previous roles and presented a learning curve for him. Moreover, he had been in the role for just over two years at the time of the interview. One may surmise that he had not been in the role long enough to become tired of the job.

It is very important. It's actually challenging for me and in the past two years I have learnt a lot within the bank, as well as my growth within the credit department because when I left [bank name] I hadn't worked in the credit department before. I just knew a bit of it but I have grown in the last two years and that is how the importance comes in, and I think I am still growing as well (P44BM, 37).

According to P39CM, his measure of meaning is derived largely from the sheer scale and importance of his portfolio.

It's quite a big portfolio that I've got. It's the number one project from a systems convergence perspective that sits in my space. It's a three hundred and three million rand project. It's the biggest project that I co-sponsor with my boss. So I basically manage that for him (P39CM, 42).

P37IM appears to derive a great deal of meaning from his job. Beyond his current role, he has a level of certainty with the possibility of upward mobility clearly articulated. He heads an important high end client facing department and his staff require advanced technical skills.

I enjoy my job. I think I can do whole lot more but I really enjoy my job. I like what I do and the people involvement...I have been asked from a career perspective whether I want to take my bosses job sooner. The salary is nice but I don't know if I will get the satisfaction of dealing with the people I deal with. Here I deal with 100 people per day with various issues... (P37IM, 57).

P42IF displays an ambivalent relationship with her job. On the one hand, she concedes that she enjoys her job but also complains that it is all consuming and taxing. She believes that it takes a special type of person to perform in her role.

Let me start of by saying that I enjoy what I do. Um... I think it takes a special type of person to do it because it's really not glorified. [Sighs]... you are basically a fireman. You put out fires all day. I complain all the time... (P42IF, 201).

So it takes a lot for me to get up every morning [laughing]... but when I'm here that's the full me... For now, I really enjoy what I do. It would be nice to get rid of some of the politics and just let us do what we employed to do um... but ja, I do... my work fulfills me (P42IF, 19).

For P48WM, while he believes that his department has a high impact on the banks work, he states that he derives very little meaning from his particular role. Following Zimmerman (1995), this suggests partial psychological empowerment. In the excerpt following that of P48WM, P40BM also indicates that his job now has no substantive meaning beyond its financial necessity. He explains the change in meaning in relation to the fact that he was temporarily deployed to an acting role and then subsequently returned to his position. Exposure to a more senior role has seemingly dampened the level of meaning derived from the current role.

I currently just fill out forms and tick boxes. Have you done this, have you done that, have you done this, have you done that...? So obviously you know there's quite a bit of frustration. And that also adds to the level of frustration for my peers and my colleagues in my team (P48WM, 44).

Well, two years back is was important. It still is to some extent because it puts food on my table, but in terms of err... but in terms of empowering myself, I don't think I am getting much out of it. When my boss left last year I was a little bit stretched because I had to all of a sudden be a boss while at the same time do what I was doing previously (P40BM, 49).

The extracts which follow point to dissatisfaction with remaining in the same role for an "extended" period of time as this begins to erode the meaning and challenge that they expect

from meaningful employment.

Look, when I started out it was very important to me in terms of making a difference with respect to the business unit that I operate in and the wider cluster okay. It has been such but I think I have gotten to a stage where I have been quite bored in what I'm doing. There is nothing more that I can learn within the business, no value add that I actually bring to the business... (P36IM, 44).

...but once I know the work and there is no challenge to it anymore, then it becomes tedious and monotonous and it is not like waking up in the morning and saying... So then you wake up and you think "ag, another day" (P29CF, 48).

It has been constantly there it is not recent it has been there all along and I have discussed it with my seniors and managers and all you get told is to "wait, things will change" and it never comes (P29CF, 56).

For P36IM above, like P40BM, there is a sense in which he has outgrown his job and feels that his sense of meaning has been whittled down by boredom and lack of opportunity for growth. P29CF appears to feel stuck and bored in her role. She refers to her work as tedious and monotonous and explains that advancement opportunities are unavailable for her.

So I still wonder in my own head, and it's got nothing to do with [bank name]... whether I'm an [role] person or I should be doing something else. So I have... that's my own personal little battle... (P22BF, 58).

P22BF engages with the bigger question of the issue of career choices and locates this within the personal realm of struggle while delinking it from her current employer even though it is her experiences which have led her to question her fit with the role. P18BF is clearer about her sense of dislocation and lack of meaning. She locates responsibility with management at the top of the organisation for the poor sense of meaning that she derives from working in the bank. She believes that her department is plodding along without a clear sense of strategic vision and direction. She keeps her job to "feed my daughters".

Errmm... shoo.... Err... I think a sense of err... inertia. I think I am stuck in a sense of non-movement. Which stems from the top *ke*... at [bank name]. Which if I was at [another bank] I wouldn't be experiencing that. And a sense of my department just not having coordination, strategy, vision and then going out there with that. So I just feel like I am here so that I can feed my daughters (P18BF, 40).

P46WM is not in a significant management role. He describes the level of meaning that he derives from his job as follows.

Look, I could think of better things to do than get up and come to work but I don't see it as something that I dread doing. I just get up and go and do it, it has to be done (P46WM, 31).

Probably not because I think I have got a lot more talent than what I am doing at the moment... My job role is purely to monitor the three devices but my role I have done more than that for me to monitor and understand... I am not going to just sit there and assume what he is telling me is correct I need to understand... (P46WM, 35).

This description portrays the job as bland and as a necessity. It can be read as consisting of a low level of meaning for him. While he sees the job as one dimensional, he has also shown agency by taking some steps to enlarge his understanding of the processes that feed into the role.

P33CF is not challenged by her work but finds meaning in the social elements of going to work. Her sense of meaning is derived elsewhere.

...but I think for me coming to work every day is more about the people than the actual work...I must admit I love the team that I work with, I love my manager he's a great guy and I think that is why I actually do come to work (P33CF, 69).

For P41WM, work has a high level of meaning. He is the head of a strategic and important division of the bank. He states that he is personally wealthy and primarily works for self-fulfillment rather than financial need.

No, I think it's high. I have had numerous other opportunities particularly in my personal capacity. I am relatively fortunate in that regard... The fact that I am coming to work and fulfilling the role that I do is, is, is testimony to that there is fulfillment (P41WM, 24).

Additionally, P41WM contends that employment equity has deprived him of status and ascribed authority as he has had to make room for black people to sit on the important boards. He however believes that he retains "real" power by virtue of his level of responsibility. He makes a distinction between power which comes from having a powerful position and that which comes from having accountability and responsibility.

...you might have a seat at that table [gesturing], okay, but I think you

would need to differentiate that... between having a seat at the table versus having more accountability, greater... Because you can sit at the table, but there are people that sit at the table but don't have as much responsibility as I do, don't have as much accountability or influence. And I think you have to look at those two things separately. So the one is hierarchical and that gives one pedigree as opposed to structural erm, err, growth is the word (P41WM, 40).

4.2.4 Impact

Spreitzer (1995) notes that for empowerment to be realised, people should feel that their contributions make an impact on the work of the organisation. Black and female professionals who believe that their contribution does not have an impact on the team and organisation are likely to feel that they are tokens as a result of employment equity. This section explores the impact that people perceive themselves to have in performing their jobs.

P48WM believes that the team he heads has “exceptional” impact on the bank.

Oh, I tell you its quite exceptional. Because the reality of the output that we perform. It has direct input into the capital structures of the bank, it's got a direct impact on the impairment methodology or the impairment results that the banks got. I am very satisfied and happy with the work that we do (P48WM, 38).

P21BF is a relatively young black female and heads a strategically important unit within the bank. She is an example of someone who breaks the stereotypes while operating in an environment that is at times steeped in stereotypes of black women who portrayed as tokens without much influence on the success of the organisation. Her sense is that her unit has a marked impact on the bank.

I may have a smaller team but the work that we do has a profound influence on the bank (P21BF, 95).

While P36IM believes that he has made a marked impact on the businesses success, he does not feel that this has been reciprocated in relation to opportunities for progression.

...hmmmm look I think since I have been here I have contributed meaningfully to the entire business and the entire bottom line (P36IM, 88).

P47BM is a senior manager and his view of the level of impact that he has speaks to this location.

I think the most important thing is that I get an opportunity to make a difference in other people's lives, alright. I influence decisions that have an impact on the economy, being in credit. So I fully appreciate the responsibility that comes with the job besides my own personal aspirations in the long term (P47BM, 31).

He adds the following to elucidate the sense of impact that he believes he has.

Look, in previous roles, I made a good impact, okay. When I moved from [name of bank], I was head hunted for a specific role. We had to launch a product to a specific segment and we did very well and moved to a higher and... ja, I think so far so good. The impression I get is positive (P47BM, 43).

P45WF describes her level impact in relation to the perceived influence that she holds.

I think I have quite a fair impact because of the role I play in looking after the retail portfolio and strategy, and being one of the more senior team members I would say I have and then they come to me for advice...so I would say there is a fair impact I have on them (P45WF, 143).

P42IF believes that her role is essential to bringing in revenue for the bank. It is client facing and is critical for the organisations success.

No, I think the business manager's role is fairly critical because at the end of the day, the business manager is the one that is bringing in the sales and... and the income, and then that goes to the bank overall... or overall region. It grows the regions finances. So every little bit that you do counts (P42IF, 79).

P37IM rates his level of impact quite highly. His belief in impact is tied to his over-commitment to the organisation. In this regard, he recalls that his wife has in the past regularly reminded him that the bank will outlast him. He recalled earlier days when he would remain at the office all night. This blurring of lines between the personal and the work sphere is a realisation of Foucault's (1979) and Mumby's (1988) thesis of control.

I think my impact is high because I know I have got value to add. I also know that from the people I have working with me and the people working for me... I was away for a month, and like my wife reminded me many years ago that the bank will still carry on if I am not here (101[...] I

work damn hard and put in plenty hours. My staff get emails from me two, three am in the morning, sometimes Saturday night Sunday night I will be working (P37IM, 113).

While P43WM believes that his unit has an impact on the organisations outcomes, he is critical of the way the unit is viewed. He believes that it is seen as simply a compliance imposed by the regulatory body on the bank.

I think we are integral to the outcomes but it is still a grudge purchase. I don't think they look to us for leadership. They rather look at us and think, "oh they asking for more reports, more analyses, and figures, managing the risk and managing the image etcetera" (P43WM, 49).

Unlike many of the other preceding participants who rate their impact on the organisations success quite highly, P29CF feels that her impact is curtailed by the very circumscribed role within which she is limited. For her, the empowerment which should follow from being an employment equity appointment does not appear to be forthcoming.

I am actually applying a quarter of my knowledge because it is very...almost like the post office you sit there and make stamps the whole day, you know what I am saying. I am very versatile I want to do this and that. So I have got a lot of knowledge but now I am restricted to work with one product which is very frustrating (P29CF, 64).

4.2.5 Discussion

Notwithstanding its individualistic lens, psychological empowerment as espoused in empowerment literature (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995) is an ideal that sees us move closer towards the realisation of a more humane and equitable society. However, even as practitioners and researchers engage in empowerment practice and research, an awareness of the insidious, normalising and powerful moves to consolidate control by societal elites is important for more effective responses to inequality. A critical orientation to the world of organisation offered by critical discourse analysis as well as organisational communication studies is a useful tool in this dual exercise to recognise power formations, confront domination, and create empowering work places. It is this orientation that is adopted here to engage the results of this study. More specifically, if we understand organisations as non-neutral, symbolic, discursive and material sites of domination and contestation (Mumby, 1993),

how do we understand the trends regarding substantive empowerment that emerge from the data of this research? In doing this, as a critical body of work with an emancipatory impulse (Mumby, 1993; van Dijk, 1998), how does the research stay true to the dialogical approach where research participants together with the researcher are co-creators of knowledge? Moreover, how does it surface disempowering discourses?

The appeal of organisations as a site of study for psychologists and organisational theorists is the interface between the individual, the group and the organisation. Against this backdrop, the psychological construct of *meaning* as espoused by Spreitzer (1995) is concerned with the relationship between an employee's sense of value, and beliefs in their work role and how this might fulfill the needs of the organisation. This suggests that the less conflict between individual and organisational needs, the more fulfilled the individual will be and the more organisational expectations would be effectively met. The findings of this study suggest that there are employees that derive a poor sense of meaning in their work roles. In this regard, some questioned their fit with the organisation as well as their assignment to a particular role. What is striking is that for those with a poor sense of meaning, there is little effort to connect this with the larger systemic challenges that might be fueling this state of being. Even as the participant's impulse is sometimes towards individualising processes and outcomes, this has to be understood within the context of power which has it that organisations are not neutral spaces but contested sites of power. Thus, a major discourse that arises in this analysis is that of ideological neutralisation of the workplace. This leads to individuals taking personal responsibility for systemically engineered challenges. Participants do not pause to reflect on how much meaning they can realistically experience in an individualised capitalist workplace.

Moreover, individualized conceptions of empowerment beg the question of how for instance a human resources manager can implement organisationally espoused change within a context that questions the very essence of this change if the organisational instinct of the elite is threatened? van Dijk (1998, p.176) offers that elites are well versed in mouthing liberal positions in support of change but that this does not translate to acceptance of change in their everyday life interactions with "racially different others" such as bosses or colleagues. Participants such as P22BF therefore begin to question the very meaning of their roles in the face of repeated frustrations in interaction with powerful others.

While these constructs of psychological empowerment provide insight into levels of empowerment, it is also important to understand what hovers behind them in relation to possible accounts for why people experience empowerment in particular ways. Here, it is useful to view power in its multiple manifestations and operations. Foucault (1979) and Thompson (1990) provide a useful analytical lens in detailing the dissimulation of power. Their framing of power assists us to unpack the universalising features of some psychological constructs that are replicated in various studies (Spreitzer, De Jansz, Quinn, 1999). We can thus turn a critical lens to understand concepts such as *competence*, beyond their empowering potential. The term is not value neutral. Therefore, while competence is described by the participant in the way in which she perceives it, it is also influenced by the feedback and manner in which peers and managers relate their assessment of her competence. This may be done in direct or indirect forms of feedback. Subtle messaging may be important for the ways in which people see themselves. Thus what could explain the finding that female participants in this study generally reported that their competence levels were sometimes second guessed and doubted? Moreover, what does increased dependency on their superiors for validation of competence, mean for them? This may in part be explained by a sexist orientation which unsettles female employees sense of their worth. Sexist discourses are therefore reproduced within the discourse of competence. This also suggests that the substantive psychological empowerment which should accompany employment equity is falling short particularly as it relates to women.

The paucity of female senior managers within the organisation suggests that there is a male “standard” of competence which can be performed differently from that of pluralist organisations (Mumby and Putman, 1992; Mumby, 1996; Ashcraft, 2000). Notwithstanding the low number of senior female managers, it would not be fair to characterise the organisation as exclusively sexist as many participants have elsewhere commended its progressive strides in relation to instituting childcare facilities, flexible working hours, and a women’s forum among other interventions. However, following Ahmed (2009), highlighting happy truths at the expense of sad truths performs a disservice to those that continue to be dominated. The projection of the happy female manager serves particular ideological functions of hiding masculine domination. It is the role of organisational researchers to manage these tensions (Ashcraft, 2000).

Beyond the resurgent focus on employment equity (Modisha, 2007; Bezuidenhout *et al.*, 2008; Habib and Bentley, 2008), organisational studies have been negligent in studying “race” in organisations (Ashcraft and Allen, 2003). This calls for the importance of understanding the raced ways in which participants experience sustained competence scrutiny. As a participant explains: “We can be a competent black but as soon as you climb up the ranks, you are not seen as competent anymore. You just another employment equity appointee” (P50BM, 126). This sustained scrutiny of black competence is akin to Foucault’s panopticon. He notes, “inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere” (Foucault, 1979, p.195). This gaze is at once diminishing in its effects and generalising. Thus all black people are viewed with suspicion and as less than. Following Ashcraft and Allen (2003), if researchers do not interrogate how certain concepts normalise and invisibilise whiteness, interventions will focus on the visibilised “black incompetence”. The data that focuses on individual competence did not resist the ideologies of white competence. This may in some part be attributed to the framing of the construct of individual psychological empowerment.

Flexibility in working hours appears to be a universally touted character of the organisation. This appears to be in line with the generally progressive orientation of the organisation. As evidenced by the discussion on gender and “race”, this is not to say that the organisation is uniform in its application of empowering features such as self-determination and autonomy. For instance, P18BF feels that her manager must constantly see her to be convinced of her productivity. “His measurement of performance is bums on seats” (P18BF, 72). This recalls Foucault’s (1979, p.197) disciplinary mechanism which is enabled when “individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised”. The hierarchies involved in this supervision often reify (Thompson, 1990) gendered and raced domination and control. Thus, a fairly senior black woman such as P18BF can be made to feel infant like by a heavy handed white male superior. P18BF is able to critique the organisation for its tight control over her. Domination is easily obscured when certain voices are not heard in favour of the majority voice which creates an aura of legitimacy. Silencing these voices may allow the bank to make general claims to being “diverse” and progressive thus deligitimating the views of those who experience it differently.

The finding that more senior people generally felt more substantively empowered may also point to the operation of power within the organization and indeed within hierarchical capitalist systems. It is common course that seniority generally comes with relatively more power. Thus one's self-determination is vastly increased and is often accompanied by the authority to determine subordinates autonomy, scope of work and impact. Power is therefore largely hierarchically structured to serve dominant ideologies of the elite (van Dijk, 1998). However, following van Dijk (1998), it is important to point out that ideologies are not limited to class and can latch onto intersections between "race", gender and class. A review of the organization's top and senior management statistics as reported to the Department of Labour (2010, 2011) reveals that these levels of management are overwhelmingly white and male. Therefore, in support of the findings on seniority, if substantive psychological empowerment is mostly concentrated among senior managers, it follows that those most empowered are generally white and male. This is not to suggest that there are no black and female managers that are coopted within the dominant class interests and ideologies of management. For van Dijk (1998) these interests cohere around access to scarce resources such as prestige and status, knowledge, housing, identity and membership. These are important variables to consider when assessing relative levels of substantive psychological empowerment.

Mumby (2005) charges that research which dichotomises dominant power and resistance to power has the latent danger of privileging the agency of dominant formations and casting those with less power as ineffectual. He contrasts this with researchers who portray worker resistance in a romantic light and advocates a dialectical approach to control and resistance in order to understand "the ways in which the two are mutually implicative and coproductive" (Mumby, 2005, p.21). Similarly Thompson (1990) warns against nominalisation which allows for a focus on particular "themes" (fronting) at the expense of others, as this deletes actors and agency. While this research posits that there are clear ways in which substantive empowerment is more common among senior managers, it is not closed to the multiple ways in which those with less substantive empowerment resist this situation. Thus, recognising the premium that employment equity legislation has placed on them, black and female employees leave undesirable situations for other opportunities (see chapter on women and coalitions). This is not to say that "job hopping" (Nzimande and Sikhosana, 1996; Modisha, 2007) makes their lives any easier. Rather,

it illustrates that they are not without agency to resist situations where they are psychologically disempowered.

4.2.6 Conclusion

This section grappled with whether or not discourses and practices of employment equity lead to substantive psychological empowerment for designated groups.

The findings of this study suggest that there are employees that derive a poor sense of *meaning* in their work roles. In this regard, some questioned their fit with the organisation as well as their assignment to a particular role. Many managers appeared to grapple with their sense of meaning and a complex array of reasons including boredom and lack of growth opportunities are given for this reduced sense of meaning. Many of those that experienced a poor sense of meaning appeared to individualise this feeling and not interpret it relation to contextual power relations. There was very little interrogation into what meaning means within an individualist and capitalist system. Moreover, in part due to the framing of psychological empowerment as an individualistic construct, sense of meaning was not examined in relation to the social.

On the *competence* dimension of psychological empowerment, almost all participants rated their competence levels quite highly. They also reported high peer ratings. However, women managers generally reported that their competence levels were sometimes second guessed and doubted. Moreover, this cohort seemed most dependent on their superiors for validation of competence. “We can be a competent black but as soon as you climb up the ranks, you are not seen as competent anymore. You are just another employment equity appointee” (P50BM, 126). This suggests that discourses of competence shield the ideological oppression of masculinity.

Fairly high levels of *self-determination* were reported. This pattern appeared to be related to seniority as senior managers reported high levels while some junior and middle managers reported micro-management tendencies. Reporting on her managers style, P18BF (72) stated: “His measurement of performance is bums on seats”. As stated in the discussion section, the hierarchical nature of capitalist organisations shields systemic domination where pervasive forms of control are exercised across employees with black women being the most susceptible to controlling discourses.

The managers sampled in this research generally reported significant levels of *impact* on the organisations success. They did not perceive themselves to be tokens although some noted that they were aware of examples of tokenism within the organisation.

Viewed together and in relation to contextual variables, a mixed picture of substantive psychological empowerment emerges. This surfaced the importance of “race”, gender and class in helping to understand why it is for instance that certain people feel that their competence is under constant scrutiny. This research illustrated the value of dialogical approaches to understanding the personal experience of empowerment within the social forces that structure experience. Ultimately then, even as organisations employ more diverse workforces as a result of employment equity, this is not necessarily followed by substantive empowerment once people enter the workplace. A weakness in the psychological empowerment construct is that it forces individualistic sets of responses from participants. This dulls the possibility of an ideological critique of the systemic impediments to empowerment that are inherent to the system of major capitalist organisations.

4.3 Employment Equity and Identity in Relation to Intersections of “Race” and Gender among Female Managers

This section responds to the following research question: How do gender and “race” intersect to shape professional identities of female managers?

Four emergent themes are highlighted for discussion. The themes hinge on the central concern of gendered identities in relation to how equity is experienced by black and white women. As stated in chapter one, the focus on women is not to occlude or deny that males are also gendered. Rather, the relative fluidity of white women’s status compared to black women was of interest to the researcher. The researcher is aware that this focus on women leaves the relative privilege of black men unquestioned. Future research would have to explore how black males simultaneously hold positions of privilege and disadvantage. For the reasons provided above, the current study centres women participants. In relation to the four emergent themes, the first one discusses the way in which employment equity is understood in terms of who is included and who is excluded. The analysis attempts to address the discourses that lie behind the emerging understandings, how these reproduce inequality, and how they are challenged by participants. Secondly, the section explores the relationships that white females share with their white male counterparts and what this might be indicative of when considered in relation to black females. Lastly, the focus then shifts to examine black and white women’s relationships with each other in order to understand the nature of gendered coalitions that might be in place and how this bodes for future gendered relations.

4.3.1 Employment Equity Policy “Confusion”: Coalitions of Whiteness

At many different sites within the organisation, there appeared to be a general lack of understanding of whether or not white women are a designated group in relation to legislation and organisational practice. Many participants felt that only black people were a designated group and that whites in general were excluded from being beneficiaries of employment equity interventions.

I don't believe that is true [that white females benefit from employment equity] that is something I could say from experience (P19WF, 219).

When I was out of work for seven months, if I saw employment equity I wouldn't even phone that for that job (P19WF, 251).

Previously I would have, because when employment equity first came in, I thought at least I'm a white female I can still find a job. I think you start to think about it when you want to look for a job outside. But these days my view is... that we are white. Basically, it's white and black and then black females get the most points [laughs] so I don't see myself as any different to a white male at this stage whether I'm right or wrong, I'm not sure (P45WF, 395).

White women don't have the opportunity that they had three years ago (P6WF, 221).

I would imagine they give black women and they are a bit fair on them in that they understand that we need to progress them. You can't say that is equal but I wouldn't say that it's wrong because it's with compliance with the employment equity principles that we have (P10WF, 295).

As illustrated above, the white females interviewed believed that they had not benefitted from employment equity initiatives. Following the argument in the previous section on merit, it may be possible that white women have come to perceive employment equity as a "tainted discourse" which signifies lack of competence and hence may not want to be associated with it. For example, in reflecting on what she would do if she was given a job because the organisation needed a female, P1WF states:

I think they would need to advise me the reason why... If they say it's because there's too many white males or too little white females err, I'd actually not feel as though I've earned it (P1WF, 289).

This appears to be a deficit understanding of employment equity. Being employed in recognition of previous and potentially ongoing exclusion suggests that one has not earned the job. As we see below, there is also a perception that employment equity hinders white female's career progression. Reflecting on her career prospects, P4WF, a white female, identifies her "race" as an impediment.

Yes I know but I can't keep work anywhere else. Unfortunately my skin colour counts against me (P4WF, 326).

It does become a problem when I'm forced to do it because then I believe I'm being disadvantaged because of my skin (P4WF, 500).

She provides the following evidence to illustrate that she is marginalised because of her white identity:

Especially within the [name of department] area they won't even look at you. I mean, I have a close friend within the client side. He is charged specifically with bringing in people right, and when he talks to the HR person he says "look", his spoken to these people, they are primed and he says they are white. They say, "sorry we can't help you" (P4WF, 418).

Another stated:

I don't see myself as having benefited because I am a white female (P45WF, 399).

P4WF (262), a white female participant noted the following:

It's an old school network so it's the same names that come up, so if you can get yourself into that circle then you're taken care of.

While she clarified that this club was not necessarily constituted by men only, its character and operation were masculine. In her view, it is within this "boys club" where real financial power lies. It is also this club that is able to dispense patronage – "you are well taken care of". While she recognises where the power lies, it appears that her racial solidarity with white males closes her off from a critique of this concentration of power. She ironically acknowledges that she cannot access this network. She is excluded. When asked how one gets into the network, her response was: "It beats me..." (P4WF, 266). The coalitions between whiteness are evident. She believes that white males are justified in feeling like victims.

I think so, some are. I mean I sit directly in front of a person that is not happy (P4WF, 318).

Some of the other white female participants could be said to exhibit benign complicity with white patriarchy. There appears to be a level of cognitive dissonance between their lived

experience and their beliefs. They did not see differences in advancement opportunities between males and females.

...there are women in very powerful positions and they are not sidelined because they are women... (P45WF, 191).

For P4WF, white older men were particularly vulnerable to the exclusionary effects of employment equity. She appears unaware of the tension between her assertion that the boys club is primarily made up of white males and her support of white males whom she feels are the most vulnerable to employment equity. She has also taken it upon herself to protect white males. White female participants in this research therefore looked to whiteness first before they engaged with their gendered identities. For example, when asked to identify herself, P1WF, stated:

[Laughs] I think it is fairly obvious mmmm unless I'm doing something wrong [laughs] I'm not in the sun enough, no I'm joking. Well I'm a white female yes (P1WF, 258).

On the other hand, when comparing male to female colleagues, she stated:

I have to say I can speak for myself but I cannot speak for someone else. So if I sit in front of a male mmmm you can immediately feel what energy they are giving out and a lot of the times it is very dangerous because I need to hold back with certain things. Whereas if I sit in front of a female, then I can perceive a different type of energy and I can speak a lot more freely knowing that I won't offend or lead on in any way (P1WF, 421).

The preceding quote reveals a level of complexity in relation to the identification matrix. It remains unclear if the female colleagues that she feels more comfortable with include black women. Her peers were however white and a black female was her subordinate.

Reflecting on the future of employment equity in relation to the next generation of white children, P4WF and P10WF express a hope that the policy will run its course, be discontinued and things will have come "right". Here the implication is that the current situation is wrong.

No, I think things will sort themselves out. She's just five; she's got time for things to come right. Otherwise I'll encourage her to immigrate...my brothers' looking at immigrating (P4WF, 426).

I don't know, they feel that she is a woman, she will have more opportunities than a boy...um...he has also got dyslexia and that also is a

concern for them. But you know I believe that through time if we could get our education sorted out, it will come down to equal opportunity rather than a numbers based thing...it would be great being about how hard you work rather than whether you have come from a disadvantaged background or not... (P10WF, 291).

Equal opportunity in the above conception is colourblind and does not include redress. Employment equity is anxiety provoking and may be the determining factor in white families leaving the country.

In response to white women's fears about the future of their children in South Africa, P21BF, a black female responds below.

...so that does irritate me a little bit and I have heard a lot about that from my colleagues that white people don't have a future. I can equally say that. "What kind of future do my children have in a country that is crime riddled and in a country where my child will know from the age of five that he or she is black and that means you have to work twice as hard as everybody else to get an opportunity" (P21BF, 131).

While P21BF does not disagree with white females anxiety for the future of their children, she expresses irritation that they cannot appreciate the potentially greater challenges faced by black children.

4.3.2 White Women's Coalitions with White Males and Constructions of Vulnerability

White males simultaneously occupy two positions in the South African imagination. One is of a group of people that inherited accumulated privilege through "race" and gender based politics that ensured that they lead society on all indices of life including normative status. This position portrays white males as socially and economically dominant. The second position which emerged post 1994 with the loss of political power of the apartheid regime (Steyn, 2001) and the promulgation of redress legislation portrays white males as a vulnerable group whose hard earned status and wealth is under constant and growing threat. In this section, the discourses appear to support the latter position of white male vulnerability. In the following extract, we see

an example of the protective (i.e. protection from employment equity) stance that a white female participant has over her white male colleagues.

Yes, my assistant I protect him because if he's out, he's out then what? So... ja and he's my age. Yes pretty much and I've actually seen people leave because of it... (PWF4, 274).

P4WF, is however not alone in her belief that white males are justified in holding a position of victimhood. P5IF an Indian female, concurs.

...there's a justification for them to feel that way and yes there is (P5IF, 119).

Following on this she states in a somewhat alarmist manner:

I have a job today and tomorrow I don't. I don't think it is fair to just employ or like what is the opposite of employ...to layoff just because of the color of their skin. So you can't say okay, "sorry you white, you can't have a job," or "sorry you black you now you have to be CEO of this company..." (P5IF, 123).

When pressed to confirm if she knew of cases of white people being forced out of jobs in the name of employment equity, she was unable to support her statement. She stated that she had seen black people being worked out of the system for poor performance but was unable confirm the same for white people. Her statements appear to mimic the public discourses of employment equity (e.g. Fin24 readers' online comments, 2012, September 07) which crudely generalise the hounding out of white men in favour of elevating inexperienced black people to senior roles. It appears that the actual events within her immediate experience are more complex and even contradict the general discourses. For example, she states that the poorest performer in her team is a white male and that her and her colleague have to step up to cover for him.

...three of us, two of us are employment equity candidates and the other is a white candidate and it is the two of us that stepped up majorly and for him. I just felt it is a team deliverable we all need to pull our weight (P5IF, 83).

She also points out that she has a white male manager who was recently appointed to the position (P5IF, 99). This suggests that white males are still being employed into managerial roles and contradicts the popular view that they are not being hired or in fact being hounded out. In her view, white males “are in the inner ring of insiderness” within the organisation. The world of work is complex and often riddled by contradictions. However, people that were identified as Indian and “Coloured” have been characterised as having a differential response to the “in-between” status that apartheid bestowed on them (Sonn and Fisher, 2003). The relatively privileged status of Indian and “coloured” South African’s often led some of them to perpetuate oppression towards those considered inferior to themselves (i.e. black African’s). Thus these groups did not always escape the internalisation of oppression (Fanon, 1967a).

If white male privilege is being denied here, it means that white women are not in the position to see their own subjugation (Pheterson, 1986). For example P10WF, a white female, believes that she does not experience gender oppression which makes this a non-issue for her.

I’ve never noticed the gender issue and maybe that’s because it’s not an issue to me, so I would say that there is no distinction between genders. The bank has been very good in the way it includes women and from a race point of view I mean we have got some fantastic people in positions that are quite senior who are of different races and they are not put in there just as token positions so I think [bank name] is very good in that way from my perspective, and I don’t see racism here (P10WF, 183).

While participants generally ranked the bank highly on gender sensitivity and support such as child care and flexible working hours, it is rare that they would say gender equity has been achieved. This gender “blindness” is at odds with those (e.g. P8IF) that report areas of gender inequity and patriarchy. It suggests that P10WF may not see inequitable practices when they happen and may not be able to form alliances with others against sexism. In the preceding extract, P10WF goes further to state that she doesn’t “see racism here”. Like her views on gender, this potentially trivialises the experiences of those that do suffer from the effects of racial oppression (Wise, 2010). Thus Pheterson (1986, p.148) states that “internalized domination perpetuates oppression of others and alienation from oneself...” The possible alienation from her ambitions is apparent in the statement below:

The funny thing is many women don't want to progress up the ranks so we have, and I can't think of a lot of women that are in senior positions in [division name...] I could think of only one and I would say she is quite happy but the rest of us want to be specialists... so to me that is not a bank issue that women are where they want to be (P10WF, 191).

It would appear that she has convinced herself about her satisfaction and that of her colleagues, to remain in non-management roles. She does not problematise the fact that only one female colleague is a senior manager and that the others like her “voluntarily” remain as specialists. Her reading of the situation is that women are where they want to be. In line with Hacker's (1951) analyses, P10WF rationalises her status. Hacker cites the myth of the contented women who is “feminine” and happy in a subordinated role.

When asked about black female representation at senior levels within her division, she pointed to a significant black male presence and offered that black females might not be attracted to the line of work. This is seen as a matter of individual choice rather than the real possibility of systemic blockages and deterrence. Thus all this participants' responses maintain the aura of equality at all levels. This is in keeping with Pheterson's (1986) position with reference to internalised domination. She posits: “One's own humanity is thus internally restricted and one's qualities of empathy, trust, love, and openness to others and to life-enhancing work, become rigid and repressed” (1986, p.148). In this regard, P10WF is neither open to her own advancement as she is “content” with her current position, and she is unable to empathise with, or even recognise those who continue to experience challenges in relation to racism and sexism.

4.3.3 Gender Based Coalitions between White and Black

Women

The literature cited in this research calls for gender based coalitions based on the recognition of the differentiated socio-economic positions of white and black women. This study found that solidarity between these black and white women is virtually absent. Instead their relationship is characterised by suspicion, bitterness, and relational distance.

With reference to their white female counterparts, the black women quoted below stated the following:

...all white females at this point in time are very bitter... (P17BF, 167).

The whole point is I don't think they were ever not privileged... it's time to give black women an opportunity (P8IF, 209).

I think that they should be excluded [as beneficiaries of employment equity] because they were never affected in the past. If you can look generally within [the bank] there are a lot of white women who have been in management positions (P14BF, 147).

...white women should be scrapped [from the Employment Equity Act]. Gosh, I don't know because I think you have to work a lot harder than your white female counterpart or your white male counterpart... (P16BF, 191).

...but at this point in time, people are very bitter. Even the white females will say that "it's so sad in this country that I am putting my child through school and paying for the fees but I know my child is not going to get a job". That is the mentality that is there... (P17BF, 167).

The evidence presented here suggests that black women overwhelmingly believe that white females are privileged and that they should not be eligible for employment equity.

With reference to the support that a young white woman received, P18BF (100) stated that white females receive a great deal of support from white males.

...the guy that she reported to and her executive then would go to every meeting with her going forward.
[The support]...is phenomenal where white candidates are concerned, which ensures non failure whereas with black candidates, you are on your own (P18BF, 102).

White woman have gained the most (P18BF, 173).

Because ten years ago they were just trying to get white women into management, middle management, senior management to avoid taking Busi Shabalala or someone else [chuckling] (P21BF, 135).

But we also know that companies before 1994, before all of this was properly legislated, their way of affirmative action was affirming white women (P22BF, 300).

The preceding excerpt suggests that this sample of black females share an understanding that white women are ahead of them. Comparatively, P18BF quoted above believes that white

females receive the benevolence of white males in that their success is assured while black people are on their own. This echoes Biko's (1996) sentiment about black people being on their own.

However, like most narratives of people's stories, the understandings are not solely uni-dimensional and coexist with contradictions and multiple ways of seeing the same phenomena. Thus P17BF is happy to support a white woman in the executive of the bank because she symbolises female possibilities.

I mean there is one woman that we forever prayed for [name] who is our head boss and we want her to stay there because she is the only female [in the executive], and she needs to be strong enough so more females can enter that arena...At this point in time, she is the only one and she is strong so hopefully she will help everybody at [the bank]... (P17BF, 147).

So I think even for white women, it's still very difficult to break through the glass ceiling and if you black it's probably just as tough (P21BF, 135).

I think at some stage when employment equity came in, it included some white females and that is where all the transfers of businesses and stuff went to white females and all of that... White people just didn't want to lose control and I can understand... I mean you have built up a business for so long and now all of the sudden you have to give it away... (P33CF, 301).

They see successful white females as trail blazers that break the glass ceiling on behalf of all women. For P21BF, the plight of black and white women is entwined. She sees the glass ceiling as just as tough to break for both groups. The glass ceiling is gendered. While the last quote in the preceding set is critical of the transfer of power to white females, it reveals a trace of empathy for the white "coalition". She legitimates the trope of white ownership exclusively built on their hard work. She thus sees the transfer of power to white females as a means of safeguarding something that white males have "built" over a while.

The white female data lends itself to a very different reading compared to that of black women. This data is characterised by elisions and disengagement with the black female category. There is a sense in which black women are absent and at most peripheral in the narrative of white women.

For P10WF (183), women are included in the bank. However, when probed specifically about the inclusion of black women, her understanding of their inclusion is informed by a deficit orientation which is simply attributable to legislation. They are “more included”, because “we need to progress them” (P10WF, 295).

The bank has been very good the way it includes women (P10WF, 183).

While P13WF is clear in her belief that she as a white female does not benefit from affirmative measures of employment equity, she is upfront about her relationship with black females. Her understanding is that the social gulf between white females and black females is “too large”. In her view, there is no common ground. She backs this statement with the assertion that if she joined a table of black females during lunch, it would get quiet not only because there is so little common ground but also because she would not understand the language that the black women in her department speak socially.

I think we are very different, the gap is too large and we have to close that gap down...If I went and sat at their table I think everybody would go quiet not that I would understand (P13WF, 303).

...and I said, I need your address and then she was very embarrassed to give an address because it was one of those 204 or 605 Swani street and whatever so her house didn't come up because it was in some township somewhere so she would never let us know that she lives in a township so it is just Midrand... as though she doesn't stay in a township (P13WF, 472).

Excerpt 472 by P13WF presented above refers to the asymmetry's that characterise black and white female life. These reduce the points of overlap in their experience such that they cannot imagine having substantive commonalities even if they work within the same building. She imagines that her black female colleague is embarrassed about living in the township. The following excerpts from P24WF where perhaps the most directed in relation to positioning black females in the workplace. She spoke with a significant level of empathy. There are, however continuities with P13WF as her views of black women are largely predicated on a deficit understanding. Her narrative suggests that black females are in need of development, they are weighed down by cultural restrictions which prohibit them from speaking publicly, and they may

have a natural inclination to particular roles. While she acknowledges some systemic barriers, these are downplayed in favour of individualised developmental deficits.

...as individuals in a team, we need to learn that sensitivity to say, “but hang on, we have got to do a bit more.” We can’t expect them to just fit in and send them on management trainings and now they going to know...they are not going to know, they still need to be held by the hand (P24WF, 190).

...but she would never in a public forum speak up...so that could be a limiting factor because of the culture (P24WF, 230).

.....so there are less women who appear to go into [bank division] than black men, so you can’t say whether its opportunity or there’s people that choose that as a career...and that would be my take on that (P24WF, 299).

...you know maybe I am being honest and my prejudice comes out, but my concern is that people feel like a token... maybe from her side very little mentoring from a family point of view...and maybe has a degree but the language is not the same quality as everybody else so I... people see that and feel certain levels of inadequacy when you are at a business which is predominantly white and maybe English is spoken and you feel you are corrected often... (P24WF, 403).

From the excerpts above, it is evident that P24WF has taken time to think about the issues facing black females at the bank. In the final analysis however, it appears that the light in which she casts black women is not as equals. Her comparisons to childhood states raises images of childlike qualities in black women who have absent parents and are in need of modeling and development. While aspects of her assessment might be true, her views are not counterweighed with examples of strong, accomplished black females who disprove the stereotypes or who have achieved success despite the barriers that they may have encountered. Again, these do not appear to be conditions for which a gendered alliance would thrive. Alliances are by nature built by mutual recognition of strengths and not on unequal and patronising gestures.

4.3.4 Discussion

There is general confusion about white women’s beneficiary status which might be due to the banking charter or the BBEE Act of 2003 and codes which exclude white women from legislative initiatives to increase share ownership. In relation to employment equity, the

legislation includes white women as a beneficiary group for employment in recognition of the fact that the system of patriarchy denied all women equal employment opportunities. However, the “race” profile of individual organisations allows them to plan and implement an employment equity plan based on the existing and forecast demographic profile. For example, if white females are over represented within certain levels of the organisation, it is permissible for that organisation to strategically favour the under-represented group at those levels. On the other hand, if white females are under-represented, there should be a plan to remedy this. For instance, it would be conceivable for this bank to slow down its appointment of white females at middle management where they are over represented while accelerating their appointment at senior management where they are less represented. In addition to possible misinterpretations of the employment equity policy, it may be that there is a further reason for the belief that white women are not a designated group. This is acutely tied to identity in relation to notions of merit and competence. This argument is elaborated in the preceding section of the research. Here, it is sufficient to state that being perceived as an employment equity beneficiary possibly undermines one’s feelings of self-worth and sense of personal accomplishment thus casting aspersions on their merit to be in the job as well as their competence to perform the job tasks. White women appear to share the same sense of the stereotype of employment equity that some black people have as was pointed out in the section on discourses of merit.

The deficit understanding of employment equity appears widespread in the organisation from which participants were drawn. It allows white women to accomplish three tasks. One is a disavowal of supposed incompetence which comes from occupying a marginalised identity. Being “lumped” together with black people bears the risk of sharing all the stereotypes that accompany blackness. The second task is that it further destroys potential alliances with black females who are firmly identified as marginalised and needing assistance through employment equity. Lastly, it enables white women to forge alliances with white males thus perpetuating a myth of parity with that group.

Reflecting on the North American situation, Marable (2004) notes that while white women have been by far the main beneficiaries of affirmative action measures, they do not see their fate as compromised if the policy was scrapped in that country. Crenshaw (2000) notes that the heavy participation of white women in programmes targeting women is downplayed and deliberately

elided in North American discourses. She argues that their absence in the debate forces black people to bear the burden of the stereotypes associated with affirmative action measures as handouts to undeserving people. Marable states that it is apparent that white women do not share the socio-political outlook on affirmative action with Afro-American's and other minorities. Given what we know about the negative association between equity and merit, Marable (2004) highlights a study which reports that of all beneficiary groups, only eight percent of white women felt that their qualifications and competence was questioned compared to 16 percent of black females and 28 percent of black males. This may in part explain why white females find it easier to identify with white males. The evidence presented in the preceding section suggests that white women's merit to perform their jobs is assumed. The white female participants largely appeared to share a sense of solidarity with their white male counterparts rather than their fellow black female colleagues. While this was not always straightforward, racial coalitions appeared to trump gender alliances. For Frankenberg (1993, p.1), "race shapes white women's lives" in the same way that black people live "racially structured lives." If we follow Frankenberg's (1993) logic of whiteness, it is not surprising that white women strongly identify as raced because she states that whiteness is a place of structural advantage and race privilege.

Following on the above, this analysis suggests that the default position from which power is available and practiced is from the reservoir of "race" rather than gender. "Race" is the default drive which gives white women access to power in a manner that gender is unable to. In fact, a gendered orientation would put women in touch with their marginalisation and oppression (Moane, 2003). For Kiguwa (2006), identities are not mere reflections of social structures but also represent individual investments. Thus, she states that, "we may 'invest' in certain identities because we perceive them to be beneficial to us in some way" (p.24). These "investment" decisions are made by both black and white women.

The positioning of white women in relation to whiteness is not merely opportunistic but intimately tied to nodes of identity embedded in lived histories of whiteness (including fathers, husbands, brothers) and futures where white women's sons must one day carve out a space in the South African workplace. The interviews with white women revealed a fear for the futures of their sons (or nephews) in a South Africa which would potentially "continue to marginalise" white men into the foreseeable future. Employment equity was seen as central in potentially

depriving their male offspring of successful futures. Some of the participants, like some of their white male counterparts, rested their optimism of the future of their children on the belief that employment equity will soon outlive its usefulness and be discontinued by the time that their children reach the workplace. We thus see the emergence of a discourse of anxiety for the children's future. This anxiety is underpinned by fear of the loss of continued familial and generational privilege.

White males are generally constructed as vulnerable by white females. There appears to be a greater level of solidarity between white females and their male counterparts than with black females. Thus, it was apparent that there is a powerful discourse of white male victimhood that some white females are reproducing. This image of victimhood is bolstered by the image of the incoming inexperienced blacks. The counter discourse which resists this notion of white victimhood points to the employment patterns which suggest that white males are still being employed into managerial roles and this contradicts the popular view that they are not being hired or that they are in fact being hounded out. The discourse of victimhood goes hand in hand with that of merit. For Marable (2004, p.347-348), "white conservatives were able to define "merit" in a manner that would reinforce white male privilege, but in an inverted language which would make the real victims of discrimination appear to be the "racists". This draws positive attention to the "plight" of white males, and negative attention to black people who are seen as reverse discrimination opportunists.

The manner in which subordinated groups are implicated in their subjugation speaks to their complicity with dominance. With the reported rise of white women in the workplace together with their coalitions with white males, it may be argued that white women occupy a place of social and economic dominance in relation to black women and relative marginality in relation to white men. According to Pheterson (1986), those with internalised domination tend to accept a position of superiority, normalcy and self-righteousness. The sense of normalcy potentially blinds them to the inequities that might exist.

Some black women (BF11, BF16, BF18 etc.) suggested that white females operate as a buffer between white men and themselves as black females. Thus white females were seen as keeping privilege in the family. Perhaps what is more significant about this data is the depth of

feeling towards white females. There also appears to be a strong view that white females have made the most significant gains in relation to their advancement since democracy. They are portrayed as heirs to the throne of white male leadership. In a sense, if there is an inclination towards protecting the “vulnerability” of white males by white females as suggested in the preceding results section, there is a reciprocal relationship where white males actively support the progression of white females. This data thus suggests the existence of an unconscious alliance between white males and white females. Here “race” is the common denominator.

Echoing Ndlovu’s (2012) statement that “I am more than just black”; we see that some black women simultaneously identify with white females. This data set suggested that black females do not necessarily have homogenous understandings and relations to white women. There are outliers that speak passionately about the need for mutual growth of all women. There is clearly a subset of this group that shares a gendered coalition with white females. However, the majority of the black females sampled here do not share a gendered lens which is inclusive of white females. In fact, it appeared that some were outraged by the perceived differential treatment of white females. Under these conditions, is it possible to build a sustainable and equitable gender based coalition against patriarchal dominance? Black feminist theory (Beal, 1970; hooks, 1989; Harris-Perry, 2011) suggests that this is not possible under conditions where anti-racism is not shared by all members of a (gendered) group.

4.3.5 Conclusion

The social world within which we live and work is complex. To take categorical positions about how particular groups think and engage in the world is essentialist, trite and trivialises this complexity. Essed (2004, p.245) cautions against homogenising thinking patterns but equally warns that critiques of mythological homogenisations should not prevent one from “identifying values and practices as indicators of masculinity, choices as preferences for whiteness, and positions as reserved only or primarily for certain bodies and not others”. While it is useful to work with the categories of “race” and gender as tools of social analysis, this analysis was sharpened by rigorous engagement with the research participants who live in the everyday with the categorisations within the empowerment discourse of corporate South Africa. The bank which is the subject of this study has made incredible strides in the empowerment of its

employees (EEC Report, 2011, 2012). Peer reviewed mechanisms corroborate this. A closer examination of the granular day to day experiences of the empowerment practices and subjectivities however suggests that the empowerment agenda is not commonly shared or understood by all. Groups such as white women, that could potentially be powerful allies to black women in the mission of gender empowerment, appeared to distance themselves from a shared disempowered subjectivity. It appears that some of them foregrounded “race” as a common identity with white males at the expense of their gendered position as women struggling against patriarchal practices.

The intersection of “race” and gender play an important role in ordering black and white women manager’s identities. There was general confusion on the status of white females in relation to whether or not they are a designated group. While formally included in the Employment Equity Act as a designated group, all the white female participants believed that employment equity had not assisted in their appointment and their progression. Some white females expressed the view that their “race” was an impediment to their progression. “When I was out of work for seven months if I saw employment equity, I wouldn’t even phone for that job” (P13WF, 251). Possible and interrelated explanations include the following: there is lack of organisational clarity on the status of white women in relation to employment equity. White women do not see themselves as a designated group because they do not want to associate with the stereotypical discourses that come with being perceived as a beneficiary of employment equity. Seen in this light, the distancing from other designated groups also serves as dissociation from the discourse of perceived incompetence and dropping standards. It enables the consolidation of whiteness with white males rather than nodes of identification which include black women.

The white female participants largely appeared to share a sense of solidarity with their white male counterparts rather than their fellow black female colleagues. While this was not always straightforward, racial coalitions appeared to trump gender alliances. “Race” is the default drive which gives white women access to power in a manner that gender is unable to. Identifications are also intimately tied to nodes of identity embedded in lived histories of whiteness (including fathers, husbands, and brothers) and futures where white women’s sons must one day carve out a space in the South African workplace. White males were generally portrayed as vulnerable to the

unintended effects of employment equity.

Like white women, black women primarily foregrounded “race” over gender. This suggests that gender based coalitions against patriarchy are sacrificed in favour of racialised solidarity. Gender and “race” among women managers intersect in ways that shore up the salience of “race”. A constraining factor in this section is that the intersectional lens was not maximized as black males were omitted from the data set and interpretive apparatus. This inadvertently gives the impression that only white women have coalitions with the masculine other. While the relationship between black women and black males was not studied, a cursory look at the data suggests that there are strong coalitions between black women and their black male counterparts. This reinforces the view that “race” continues to be the primary point of identification. What is different in the way in which black women regard black men is that they are not seen as victims of the system. Black women appear to recognise that their gendered position places them at a distinct disadvantage in corporate South Africa.

4.4 Employment Equity and Informal Voluntary Social Practices

The research question which this section addresses is: How do the informal voluntary social practices of employees support or challenge the aims of employment equity?

This section has its basis in a body of literature which suggests that social networks and patterns of “race” and gender based integration and segregation have a bearing on psycho-social and career advancement outcomes. Patterns of microsegregation are understood through the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990b) and are thus seen as habituated practices. In an effort to understand how these patterns manifest in the organisation studied here, naturalistic observations were conducted by the researcher. The naturalistic observations as were recorded in field notes are reported in Appendix 4. This is followed by an analysis of a relatively large body of individual interviews which explored the individual participant’s accounts of what they observed and experienced in the organisation as well as their interpretations of these patterns and experiences. To a smaller degree, the data is also influenced by participant’s written responses to assigned newspaper pieces as well as data from a discussion group.

Naturalistic observations were conducted at the head office of the bank which served as the case study in the research. A total of nine documented observation sessions were conducted during the course of the research. These lasted between thirty minutes to one hour. While the researcher did not document other observations, he spent two months at the field site and was able to form a general impression of patterns of informal interaction and segregation during this time. The field notes that are reproduced almost verbatim in Appendix 4 provide a record of when observations were conducted, the duration of observations, the location of the observations, and the seating patterns of employees based on “race” and gender profiles.

While there were a series of recorded observations at one predominant site, having spent close onto two months at the bank, the researcher observed patterns in the ways in which employees socialised and engaged in common spaces such as foyers, cafeterias, tea rooms, reception areas and in the organisations grounds. These observations are infused into the data of this section.

In order to address the research question, three themes were drawn from the textual data and the observations. These are: perceptions of voluntary interactions and segregation; discourses that naturalise segregation; and informal networks and power.

4.4.1 Perceptions of Voluntary Interactions and Segregation

Participants were asked about the patterns of informal voluntary social interaction at the workplace such as lunchtime engagements and afterhours networking. Notwithstanding the use of the word “voluntary”, as pointed out in the literature review, segregation is understood through Bourdieu’s (1990b) notion of habituation. The interview questions sought to explore both the participant’s personal networking patterns as well as their broader perceptions of interactions in relation to their colleagues across their division and the bank more generally. Of particular interest were interactions across “race” and gender. This section outlines the views of participants in relation to their impressions of informal networking within the bank.

Confirming the researcher’s observations, the participants were nearly unanimous that the general pattern of informal networks was segregated along racial lines. In this regard, there were no differences noted in the responses of black and white or male and female participants.

...the socialising will take place mainly amongst the six white females and males (P53IM, 192).

I would say that its race based. Ja, definitely. If you hear about the little events that happen over weekends, it’s usually the whites with the whites, the Indians with the Indians and the blacks with the blacks there is no interracial mixing (P36IM, 164).

No, they work quite well together and there will be a laugh here or there about certain things but outside of that in terms of socialising it’s very separate (P53IM, 504).

Yeah we sometimes do and then it is always the same people or cliques (P52WM, 135).

...what happens is that people of colour seem to have lunch together and your white colleagues that have lunch together, so you still have those dynamics... (P33CF, 285).

It is usually not by invitation everybody gets to meet and you just arrive

(P52WM, 137).

Well, it's still old traditional darkies. We meet in the canteen after hours on Friday. We drink and we talk politics and some white guy comes and he will throw a nasty political joke and run away. For me, we are not that mixed yet (P50BM, 182).

[After initially stating that segregation is not racialised but interest based, he concedes that it is indeed "race" based]

[Laughing]... I think you still have that segregation along racial lines. Ja, it happens (P47BM, 121).

[Sighs]... It's largely segregated. And I think what you have is that twenty percent is very low down, okay and that's a problem (P47BM, 246).

I go out with my black colleagues [lunch time] (P44BM, 139).

You are still seeing a lot of the polarisation (P21BF, 159).

There will be pockets of it and there's cliques so it's me and my friend every lunch time and then it's generally the black people will be together, the white people will be together or the more senior people... And it's just because we are comfortable with it, it's not like we don't work with each other on the floor and it's good to have friends at work... It's not like we have to force each other to be friends but I think what would be good is to have more opportunities for sharing in the team (P45WF, 267).

While some pointed to integrated work teams that function well on this basis, the general trend was that people self-segregate when they engage socially. The preceding set of excerpts clearly suggests that employees of this bank voluntarily segregate in their social interactions.

In her written reflection on selected extracts that participants were asked to respond to P7BF (WR, 221), notes:

This is so true and I have experienced it first-hand. Then they claim that one does not network enough, hahaha. My executive practices that when they go out to play golf. I have learnt to play golf and still never was invited. When you sit in the boardroom and an idea is raised, it is just for formality more than a discussion. So I have stopped wanting to belong and I'm doing the best I know how.

There is an acute sense of futility reflected in this extract. The statement reflects a discourse of lack of belonging to powerful groups. The interaction across "race" was experienced as

superficial and limited to greeting and sharing light hearted jokes. There appeared to be dis-ease about meaningful interaction beyond formal work interactions. What little mixing P43WM observes is limited to exceptions and situations where the group is largely racially homogenous but for one person of a different “race”.

The mixing is there but it is just that greeting there and then you don’t find someone walking to the machine with a white guy. It’s just a greeting because we work together and we joke there and there (P44BM, 129).

It’s very difficult for me to mix because I am not used to most of them. The ones that I mix with are in the group that I work with (P44BM, 133).

For every time I say yes, I find an exception. So if you say to me, gender and race, I will say yes. But if you see five guys together, you will see one girl. If you see five black oak’s you will see a coloured, if you see three white oaks, you will see one black (P43WM, 137).

There always seems to be the token [Both laugh] (P43WM, 139).

In a team building event they will be completely diverse and they will really get on well. But if you ask me which three people went to [shopping centre] this morning, they will be of the same race and gender probably or the exception will be three people with the same job (P43WM, 143).

Yes or one or two that would come to lunch or coffee. The one lady that is in the committee comes because she has to be there and has no choice. There are a couple of guys, and generally its guys who are whites and no Coloureds, no Indians and no African’s which is sad...it is not lack of trying (P37IM, 205).

When I look at who is in the bar... if I hear about who is in the bar after work, I would say that it is pretty much the white people. I think the blacks leave and go home maybe one or two socialise (P34WF, 311).

There is only one lot that I know socialise and they cycle and they all white guys that cycle. They get together on weekends and nobody else that I know of gets together on weekends, not in this office no (P34WF, 319).

I don’t think there is much mixing that happens in this place the only mixing is the drinking (P33BM, 437).

...some people mix but I think with us we are still... or should I say our culture is still to stick with your own clique you know... You are not going to find really a mixed white and black you hardly see that mix.....it is

always black with black or white with white I very seldom see a mixed group... (P29CF, 204).

The group discussion generally confirmed the interview data. For instance, a group discussion participant observed:

Yes, I have observed that when we are in social settings we tend to keep to our own people. When I am with Sihle I am more myself, I don't have to be someone else. So I am comfortable talking about my struggles with him because he identifies with them. When I am with my white colleagues, we talk about artificial things if you like (Group Discussion, 312).

This participant suggests that black and white people have vastly different world views that necessitate artificial interaction as there are no areas of significant common ground and shared experience. Other group discussion members shared her views on this matter. There is clearly a discourse of lack of authenticity in relationships across "race".

The emerging discourse was that it is unusual to witness truly diverse social interactions across "race". The researchers own observations based on two months of behavioural observations, suggest that while group interactions that are primarily organised around work were generally mixed in relation to racial and gender configurations, informal voluntary social patterns were largely self-segregated along "race". If the seating patterns could be read as a discourse, we would observe that almost all these groups had people clustering around "race" in their seating patterns. The discourse observed is one of segregation. Most social groups such as those that sat at the cafeteria after working hours and at the Friday drinks session cluster around "race" and gender. Walks towards lunch break destinations were also generally clustered around "race". These were only marginally gendered. Moreover, there appear to be marked differences between the interaction within formal work assignments and those that occur voluntarily outside of work.

...blacks with Indians but whites go on their own.....and those are mostly on lunches or breakfast. You do get team events where everybody will be together because there is no choice.....I don't see a lot of interracial interaction happening (P26BM, 284).

...you get the pockets of staff members that will meet after hours and socialise but the majority of it is colour, to colour and non-mixture (P17BF, 211).

...black people will be together, the white people will be together (P10WF, 267).

Here they don't but at [a former employer] we did it every Friday and we had a bar in our office and we would socialise and they were very big on that. And you know I think that's why they mixed a lot more much more than here... (P8IF, 301).

P52WM believes that the segregation is not benign and is underlined by a discourse of resentment. He does however express hope for future generations as some at a much younger age than previous generations. This view in part recognises the historical nature of segregation and on-going underlying reasons.

There is still a lot of resentment and hatred from both sides it is going to take a long time to work its way out...and already you can see in the schools. The blacks and the whites mix and it is very different to when we were there believe me, it is different (P52WM, 53).

Unfortunately, this enthusiasm is not shared by everyone. A participant of the group discussion noted the following observations of her child's generation:

I don't think it will ever end. Fine, the kids do have white friends but they are also so black conscious. Their friendships don't carry on into adulthood. I don't know, maybe they are accepting of others but the consciousness is also there. I think in my view, it is important for them to have that black consciousness (Group Discussion, 315).

Some participants saw language as a significant barrier to informal interaction and networks. Those who cited language as a stumbling block to informal interaction were non-indigenous language speakers and only spoke English or English and Afrikaans (an indigenous language). Black participants did not share a similar sentiment as they are necessarily fluent in both English as well as the indigenous languages. The following excerpts subtly lay the responsibility for language as an exclusionary tool on those who speak indigenous languages. The stereotype of black people as loud is also proffered as a reason for homogenous social groups. Black that speak indigenous African languages are seen as exclusionary. This can be seen as a discourse of blame levelled at Africans for challenging white/English normativity. There was no reflection on the normative value associated with speaking English.

I don't think people are different I think people have the same issues whether it is at home or work. The stumbling block I think is language and you will find that especially among your black Africans...You don't understand their language and they are going off and speaking their own language so generally you don't....[clears throat]... (P53IM, 524).

It is exclusionary when people talk Afrikaans or Setswana. I wish I could learn because it can be exclusionary. I don't find it as offensive as when I go to the shop and the tellers are speaking and I think they are talking about me... [laughs]. So assume that most people speak English because they all come from different backgrounds [laughs out loud] (P45WF, 359).

It actually is irritating because black people are actually more loud when they sit and they talk and they are having fun...And then the white people sit in the lunch canteen and get irritated by that...We can't hear each other talk but that is the way that they do. So we can't sit there, we have to leave and go somewhere else... (P34WF, 299).

...and maybe he has a degree but the language is not the same quality as everybody else. So people see that and feel certain levels of inadequacy when you are at a business which is predominantly white and maybe English is spoken... (P45WF, 403).

There were a small number of participants who stated that they operated in racially integrated networks. This was often couched in naturalising and colourblind discourses. On the other hand, it highlights the lack of homogeneity in points of view and ways of being at work.

Ummm...sometimes with one or two people and it is across race. You tend to go with people that you feel more comfortable with so it's across age, Indian, race... (P53IM, 152).

I have had a lot of good black friends and good Indian friends purely from playing football and you make those acquaintances...so I don't see people for colour I see people for ability (P46WM, 168).

It's easy. It doesn't matter even if you are black or white. When we are out there, we talk at that level, we leave work aside, its all about soccer, about girlfriends [laughs] you know. Male talk, that's what we do and I would say it is across racial lines (P40BM, 97).

...and also when there are functions I make sure that I speak to everybody and I stay for drinks or you know what I mean (P33CF, 281)?

4.4.2 Naturalising Discourses

Many of the participants used a naturalising discourse to explain voluntary segregation in the social networks within which they and their colleagues operate. This is an explanatory system that says that segregation is a natural default position that people assume when they have a choice as to who to socialise with. Segregated networks are universalised and given legitimacy. In this conception “race” is the primary line of difference. To signify this difference, participants used words such as “own kind”, “in the blood” and “stick together” to legitimate voluntary segregation.

That one is natural. I have never seen an Indian mix with anybody (P32BM, 287).

People feel more comfortable with their own and that’s my perception (P53IM, 508).

...but you will find that everywhere you go, people tend to stick together than others (P52WM, 131).

It’s by race, you are not going to get away from that it has always been like that...and you are going to find that if you go anywhere all the whities stick together and the Coloureds...and we get a bit together and joke and get a drink and then it comes together again (P52WM, 133).

Like as an example, we won a trip as top achievers with a team... On the first day we go to the pool and everyone is just... ja, goes to one another [along racial lines], its’ just amazing. Because that’s where they feel most comfortable and I don’t know if that’s a good or a bad thing. It’s just natural (P41WM, 210).

So, I can tell you now, no matter what we do, I am always vocal about that. It’s in people’s blood that you know what, as much we share a smiley face, there is no way that in the future we will see real, real transformation happening (P50BM, 50).

Confirming these views, a participant from the group discussion explains in the excerpt below:

...it is not necessarily something that I plan to do, it just happens. It just naturally happens (Group Discussion, 116).

For P50BM, intermingling across “race” is a career necessity. While he forces himself to engage

with all people, he is clear that this does not come to him naturally. It is not in the “blood”. This was a rare counter discourse on this subject.

Even when there are functions, I always make sure that when I go to a function, I don’t have to stick with the... darkies in the corner because I feel comfortable to. I have to go and mingle. Even if I don’t want to I have to for the sake of mingling and networking. But you do it if you have intensions. You don’t do it because it’s natural. It doesn’t come naturally (P50BM, 182).

P48WM believes that his team members make preferences based on culture rather than “race” or even class. He observes that women are generally more inclined to interaction across culture.

Segregation... you know what... The reality is I think it is not a result of classism slash racism, or anything like that. I think it’s a cultural thing. Err... take my team as an example. I take my guys out for coffee... I can immediately see people clustering together but I really believe that’s a cultural thing. You know, white guys try to stick together with white guys... the females, and this is very interesting... females I see much more easily mixing than the males and I don’t know why that is... (P48WM, 168).

P48WM’s view is of course a minority view. He does not elaborate on what he understands to be the differences between “race” and culture especially where these overlap as is the case in his department. Similarly, P16BF prefers to see segregation as a preference that is not motivated by racial difference.

...but outside of work that is it... that is as far as our relationships go. So I don’t think it is racial it’s just personal preference I think (P16BF, 243).

P47BM understands segregation as based on social interaction based on common interests. He cites an interest in sport as an example. He also suggests that segregated social interactions are not problematic because people revert to integrated work teams within the formal work environment. For him the different realms of work and the social do not have much of a bearing on outcomes.

Errr... [sighs]... Look, I think... I don’t want to call it racialised. I have always had that debate. My ex-boss would point that out that during break the black guys are sitting there and the white guys separately... I would say “don’t stress about that”. That is the informal environment. The formal

environment reverts back to integrated teams (P47BM, 119).

Language differences are also seen as a factor for people's choices of informal voluntary social networks. This lends credence to the idea that segregation is natural. Speaking one's own language is natural and native speakers feel comfortable whereas those who do not know the language feel uncomfortable engaging in it or being in the presence of those who speak different languages. The white normativity in this discourse has a patronising element.

They still cluster and I don't know why, maybe it is preferences. I know black staff stick together and I know they speak their language (P37IM, 189).

Language is a huge barrier (P34WF, 307).

I don't know... the perception or reality you know... You speak the same language, you talk about similar things, you eat similar food, and you can talk about that...and not to say that if you black you have this type of problems and if you white you have those, everybody has financial problems and problems with their children and schooling....But maybe they feel more comfortable talking to them (P37IM, 197).

...she is very sensitive and I am very sensitive and with the language we just very different... And if she says something to me, I am almost on my hind legs already and she is not meaning it that way... (P34WF, 472).

Uhhmm there are a few. I don't know how to express this. There are a few that I feel are on the same level, that you can communicate with that have the same humour. But then there are others, maybe I don't know that they can because they don't mix if we go into the tea room now you will see all the black ladies will be sitting together the men and the women, it is very seldom that we mix... (P34WF, 295).

4.4.3 Informal Networks and Power

The naturalising discourse suggests that segregation is natural and benevolent in intent and outcome. However, like the literature on voluntary segregation, there are some participants that recognise the contentions of power inherent in informal networks. In the example below, we see that P50BM sees networking as pivotal to his career mobility.

Some of us are doing it because it is critical for our careers to network. So when there is something, you move, go there, you know. Because you

don't want to isolate yourself. That is one of the weaknesses we have, we isolate ourselves too much from the key decision makers (P50BM, 182).

Ten years, thirteen years back there was a guy called [name], an HR guy. He is somewhere in mining now. That guy used to run meetings for blacks only. I am talking 1996 at [another bank]. We used to... every Friday we used to go to the boardroom, all blacks. He used to run a meeting there. We would talk issues, "what are your issues?" I found it very... Even now, I tried to have it here but I was told, "don't even try" (P50BM, 150).

There is this guy [name] that came to [bank name]. He is a guy with a different mindset. He actually... he is a master behind a lot of blacks moving up (P50BM, 112).

From the above there is a sense in which overt discussions of "race" have been demobilised and are seen as taboo even as racialisation continues in the way in which people habituate towards others in social spaces. P48WM narrates the reasons for being friendly with one of his subordinates as seemingly circumstantial and benevolent before recognising the preferential access that this provides him relative to other subordinates. While the statements below are informed by a naturalising discourse for social segregation, they also suggest consciousness of the advantages that accrue for those who have friendships with the powerful.

I split my work life, my personal and work life. However, I am friends at a personal level with one of my direct reports okay. The reason for that is that we both have little daughters that play together and that are the same age. So that obviously, that could be a problem. So if I look at [a black subordinate] for example, unmarried single male, you know, his not necessarily going to be in the family space and things, so yes, I can understand that... But it's inevitable. You are always going to speak about work in some way because obviously there is a high level of dependency from a social interaction perspective... So I think it's actually correct that that will happen (P48WM, 176).

...naturally one would be more inclined if a promotion comes up that you appoint your friend. So I think, yes it happens that way on the golfing estate or whatever they are doing. Well if at all not socialising with my colleagues puts me at a disadvantage, then that is just something I can't help (P16BF, 251).

Because what you are talking about is just corporate politics, um... and it's going to happen. Ja, it may be more observable from the outside, it could be race based, gender based etcetera because of the society we live in. There are those people who play golf, as the expression says, and there

are those who don't. There are those you will see at a braai together and those who have drinks, and those who don't (P43WM, 149).

Past histories that latch onto social asymmetries and markers of difference also influence the make-up of informal involuntary social networks. Moreover, it would seem that tenure within the bank enhances the quality of ones networks.

The executive [meeting] will sit for six hours and then of the six people, three will go to dinner afterwards, and you know the real decisions are being made by those three. Err... and very often, it goes on past histories rather than on present facts. Those are the three that came up through the ranks together. They worked in the General Ledger department when they were doing their articles (P43WM, 149).

It's not necessarily that the clique makes those decisions. I've got colleagues... I have been at the bank for thirteen years, and I've got colleagues around the bank that I am still in contact with (P43WM, 157).

So they have this unfair advantage in that they've got this private school education and networks that they've built and when they finish school, they can call [name of senior executive] who's so and so's father. [Name of a CEO of another bank] who is so and so's granddaddy err... we don't have that... most of us (P18BF, 169).

In the sense that... it's not that people are racist per say, people have cliques, people have networks, people have been here ten to twenty years, fifteen years (P21BF, 37).

Part of the reason that people have such strong networks with each other... my counterparts and my colleagues. Their kids attend the same schools and they are able to relate at that level... the personal level, they attend braais together. So by the time they come to the workplace... Your time ends at five or six o' clock. So, how do you just invite yourself to a braai that people are having? It's just the way it is (P21BF, 163).

And you can see it... in my previous role you could see it, that people have a relationship beyond... beyond what's happening in the workplace (P21BF, 165).

There are weekend braai's attended by a selective few, the Friday afternoon drinks where strategic decisions are taken in a black person's absence because he had to rush for a taxi to Soweto or was just not invited (P19BF, WR, 45).

Many promotions are decided outside of the office premises during social events that we are not part of. Many call it “networking” but it’s just another means of positioning oneself with the right people for the right time. It’s as if work never stops, you work during office hours, and then after hours in the pretense of “socialising” (P16BF, WR, 13).

A participant whose view was shared by other members in the group discussion made this observation:

I agree that it is an advantage because of access to information and willingness to transfer their skills because the business of banking is not easy... You depend on someone to kind of assist you and hold your hand. So having a family member, I believe that it could be a huge advantage (Group Discussion, 34).

The psycho-social aspect of “race” based networks is highlighted by P31BM. For him these “cliques” provide a space to “laugh” and engage with each other in their mother tongue.

Oh yes, no the blacks have got to stick together because there are issues that you need to discuss amongst yourselves. It’s a thing that is important because we have similar backgrounds and everything you can laugh at the same things much more... So it is a very important clique to have. We also mix with the coloured chick the only problem is that we can’t speak Zulu with her [laughs] (P31BM, 409).

It is not a secret that CEOs of private sector companies play golf together. Even for the competing companies they meet together and agree on the price that will be charged to the consumer and in South African terms they charge a black consumer because they are the majority and contribute handsomely to their revenues. They also have a discussion of the pain of dealing with South African laws especially transformation (P12BM, WR, 12).

The patterns of inclusion and exclusion including the sacrifices that some people have to make to belong to a network are sometimes too much. This reflects an entrenched discourse of disengagement which could also be seen as a form of resistance to expected practice.

Or I know of someone within [the bank] actually who’s decided, she’s also cutting off. She’s just going to do her job. She’s not going to be engaged. She’s not going to be friends with anybody. She will do the minimum required for her job. She is just getting paid and that’s it (P22BF, 292).

You know, we see white people, they are doing this job and then part of

their time, they are being given exposure to this bigger role. Obviously, when that role becomes vacant, they are in a better space to apply for that. “What are the criteria you use for giving exposure to this person” (P22BF, 361)?

No there is no black male... And also the black female that has left doesn't yield any influence (P36IM, 184).

P21BF was willing to go “out of [her] way” to win over her white colleagues in order to gain recognition within their network. She describes the network as the “inner circle”. This comes with an amount of labour that one has to weigh up for oneself.

I won some of the respect because I literally went out of my way to understand my colleagues, to understand who they were, their children, know their children, and chat about the country. Irrespective of whether I agreed with them or not. I understood them as people and they understood me as a person. We forged... although not like best friends but we forged those kinds of relationships. And it's only after I did that, that I started being part of this inner circle if I may call it... But not every person is able to do that. Not every person wants to do that (P21BF, 187).

P50BM recognises the value of strategic networks. He has established a network of powerful black executives to back him up when he requires support. For him the utility value is paramount.

I happen to know top execs, black execs within [division], and I have my bossbarads (private meetings) with them, I inform them about the politics in my department and they go to the top comms with my big boss and when they are there, they are taking it from that level (P50BM, 98).

Ja, but it is not something that is obvious. It's like guerilla warfare. You fight the system politically but in a quiet manner... [t]he reality of the matter is that the people that we have running these departments are very, very vicious and they will do things that you won't even understand might have been done, so that's how I operate basically. I do my work then I coordinate with the relevant guys, to protect myself and to make them aware so... So you need to use your fellow black brothers who are up in the ranks to support you, you know (P50BM, 100).

4.4.4 Discussion

This study confirms the findings of a number of studies such as those which have found voluntary “race” based self-segregation to be pervasive across many settings such as schools (Clark *et al.*, 2005; Keizan and Duncan, 2010; Koen and Durrheim, 2010) public spaces such as the beach (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004) and workplace settings (Bertolotti and Tagliaventi, 2007). A perusal of the literature however suggests that a study which examines habituation in informal workplace seating patterns in South Africa has not been conducted. Moreover, this research went further and systematically explored managers understandings of voluntary segregation. The findings point to an overwhelming perception of segregated social interactions. While gendered segregation was noted, this was less stark than the “race” based patterns of voluntary segregation. Even the few that stated that they engaged in mixed group networks conceded that they were a minority in both senses of the word (i.e. in the organisation and in the social network). Additionally, where patterns of mixed groups were observed, there were distinct microecologies of racial segregation. This was recorded in both the naturalistic observation situation and confirmed in the interviews with participants. Where there was interaction, it can be characterised as superficial. These observations are not to deny the agency of the outliers who often said they had very utilitarian reasons for mixing across “race”.

Superficial interactions serve neither the psycho-social needs nor the career advancement aspirations that cohesive networks can provide (Ibarra, 1995). The study shows that employees self-segregated by “race” and there were well established networks and friendships that were generally racially homogenous. In an organisation such as this one, where top management was constituted by just over 61% by white males and where white people as a group made up 67% of senior management, one is able to infer that organisational authoritative and hierarchical power primarily resides in white managers hands. South African history of racial stratification means that cohesiveness is limited across black people as made up by apartheid groups as such Indian, “Coloured” and black African. This suggests that social networks might be further segregated among these categories. It is however important to point out that while micro-ecologies were observed among Indian participants, this line of segregation was not closely studied in this research. Top and senior African managers on their own constitute approximately 12%. Within

this context, it is clear that African's make up a minority within the ranks of hierarchical authority and power. Where social networks are marked by entrenched segregation, those with access to power by virtue of the people they informally associate with are therefore primarily white people. However, as was clear from the account provided by P50BM, he was able to leverage powerful black benefactors when he was threatened with what he described as unfair disciplinary measures. This signals to the existence of some influential informal black networks.

The implications that this has for the organisations employment equity interventions is that the organisation cannot rely on “naturally” occurring change that depends on organisational processes such as informal networks to grow a significant base of senior managers. The findings of this research suggest that effort should be expended to employ many more black and female senior and top managers. This will have the effect of allowing for greater scaffolding between the large gap between middle and senior management. In the context of a large enough pool of senior black managers, social networking theories suggest that those on the periphery may be absorbed into centrally significant networks which provide both psycho-social support and career development opportunities (Ibarra, 1995). The finding that the organisations employees self-segregate along racial lines also indicates that more has to be done to facilitate meaningful interracial contact. While many participants spoke highly of the organisational culture when compared to other banks that they had worked at, this does not appear to have translated to an integrated cohesive workforce.

In South Africa, there are 11 official languages. The use of these languages is distributed in the following manner. isiZulu is the most widely spoken language. It is followed by isiXhosa, while Afrikaans is the third most spoken language. English, the *de facto* language of higher education and commerce is spoken as a first language by 8.6% of the population and is the fourth most used language (Statistics South Africa, 2011). While English is the language used in formal workplace interactions within the organisation, informal engagements among social networks primarily utilise the first languages of the interlocutors. While not universal, Johannesburg based black people are relatively multilingual and speak across a number of indigenous languages in addition to English. Some Afrikaans speaking white employees speak Afrikaans when engaging amongst each other (Nkomo, 2011). A number of white and Indian participants cited language as a significant barrier to engaging socially with black participants.

There was generally no reflection on why it is that people speak their first languages other than that they may be attempting to deliberately exclude those that do not speak those languages. There was an emergent discourse of blaming African language speakers for being exclusionary. Moreover, no desire or intention to learn the languages was expressed. The subtext seemed to suggest that African language speakers should speak in English as a means of accommodating English language speakers. There is a deligitimation of African languages in favour of the legitimation and rationalisation of the use of English as the language of business and informal voluntary social interaction. For Thompson (1990) this entails the construction of a chain of reasoning to justify a particular set of social rules. It also relies on universalisation where the institutional arrangements which in reality only serve the interests of those with power but are presented as serving the interests of all. In this regard, the use of English as the language of social interaction is seen as unifying and promoting integrated social interaction.

Moreover, the expectation that English should be spoken at all times lifts the responsibility of the powerful from learning indigenous languages and normalises English as the legitimate language. The failure to interact is placed on those who speak indigenous languages in social contexts. The burden of engagement is shifted from the mono-lingual to the multi-lingual. Here, the use of English is positioned as the neutral ideal that allows for social cohesion and the dislodging of barriers maintained by African languages. The subtext is that English speakers are unifiers while indigenous language speakers are segregationists. The continued use of indigenous languages in social settings may also be seen as a way of resisting the hegemony of white/English normativity. In South Africa, the use of English is however far from neutral and benevolent. Those who speak English as a first language and study it at the “best” schools are often dominant economic elites. In a school system, business world, and global sphere that valorise English, those who attend under resourced schools and do not speak the language as a home language have differential access to the benefits that perceived English competence presents. Moreover, ignoring the two most widely spoken languages appears against “democratic” principles of group and organisational life.

At a psychological level, it is through learning and engaging in shared languages that different people enter into each other’s worlds (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). While Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1983) note the errors and misunderstandings which arise when people of

different language and ethnic backgrounds engage in speech acts, the attempts at understanding each other also lead to the mutual enlargement of social worlds. Talk is constitutive of social reality (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1983). Thus the symbolic gesture of recognising the range of languages spoken by one's colleagues can be seen as an ideological affirmation of their identity.

A prevalent discourse among the participants was that racially based voluntary social segregation was "natural". Following Bourdieu (1990b), the segregation that was observed is strictly speaking, not voluntary. It is the outcome of a confluence of dispositional factors that are socially learned and internally driven. The word "voluntary" can have the effect of depoliticising segregation. This discourse served to naturalise difference as well as the phenomenon of "race" based segregation. This has the effect of flattening the effects of segregation. Thus one can hold the view that things have always been this way, segregation is not unique to particular places, and the implication is that this phenomenon will persist. There is thus a reification of segregation as this socio historical factor is presented as natural, permanent and outside of time. The historical and sociological characteristics are thus eclipsed by an unchangeable state (Thompson, 1990). This naturalising discourse allows participants to unquestioningly engage in "race" based social ghettos. Writing on the construction of happiness, Ahmed (2007) argues that public discourses on the benefits of homogeneity such as less conflict and misunderstanding and resulting harmony and happiness, are presented in ways that exclude and "other" difference. She notes that "being amongst people from whom you differ will cause unhappiness. As such, this argument appears to withdraw social hope from the very idea of diversity – or indeed, multiculturalism as an imagined community of diverse peoples" (Ahmed, 2007, p.123). The effect that this has on some black participants was the reproduction of a discourse of disengagement and futility where they felt they would always be on the margins. In others this builds a discourse of resentment of the system and thus a resistance to white capital.

In a situation where segregation is based on "race" differences, the psycho-social benefits of voluntary segregation are not counterbalanced with the utility value of career advancement that accrues through social networks. In this context, white employees disproportionately benefit from influential informal networks while most black employees engage in relatively powerless networks. Pluralistic societies including South Africa have generally had acrimonious histories

of social upheaval characterised by ethnic violence and racism. This is a historical fact that shapes current social relations across historically entrenched social difference. Allport (1954) and a range of social psychologists studying group relations have attempted to understand markers of difference and ways of bridging these. The conditions of equality among groups which Allport (1954) saw as important have yet to be substantively realised. These inequalities are masked by democratic narratives. It is only when the surface truths are probed that we begin to understand why it is that a participant states the following:

It has to do with being uncomfortable with other races (P32BM, 291).

4.4.5 Conclusion

This part of the research sought to understand how the informal voluntary social practices of employees support or challenge the aims of employment equity. The findings overwhelmingly suggest that informal habituated voluntary social interactions are organised around “race” and that these are only marginally gendered. Where mixed groups exist, seating patterns suggest that they are characterised by micro-ecologies of segregation within the broader group. These patterns lend themselves to what other studies have argued is potentially career limiting for non-dominant groups. Thus, the promotions and advancement which are facilitated by informal interactions might not accrue to dominant groups while homophily assists dominant groups to advance their careers. Some of the findings supporting the view that organisational informal voluntary social practices lend to segregation are as follows.

Where social networks are marked by entrenched segregation, those with access to power by virtue of the people they informally associate with are therefore primarily white managers. Even though black social networks derive little power for career mobility, there is evidence that members of these networks receive psychosocial benefit from their voluntary segregated association. While women are less segregated in their informal interactions, segregation patterns suggest that they operate in relatively powerless networks when compared to white males. There is a small emerging group of black managers that is strategically leveraging on networks with the limited but growing number of black senior managers within the organisation.

Language was cited as a significant barrier to diverse social groups. The burden to change language and accommodate difference was however primarily placed on black managers. Most participants naturalised segregated social interaction. There was thus a reification of segregation as this socio historical factor was presented as natural, permanent and outside of time. The historical and sociological characteristics are thus eclipsed by an unchangeable state. This naturalising discourse allows participants to unquestioningly engage in “race” based social ghettos. Both black and white participants contributed to this naturalising discourse in different ways.

Overall then, segregated social networks suggest that there is little room for socially enhanced career mobility for those with less organisational power. Moreover, the seemingly “voluntary” nature of segregation hides the habituated nature of this choice to mix with different socially constructed groups. There is thus a need to repolitisise segregated social networks.

4.5 Employment Equity Discourses, Practices and Constructions of Professional Identities

This section sets out to address the following research question: How do the discourses and practices of employment equity influence the identity constructions of managers in a major bank?

While the analysis of data recognises and remains open to the multiple ways in which identities are constituted and expressed, this analysis looks at identity from three intersecting influences. These include the ways in which South Africa's history of racialisation, the organisational and socio-political discourses, and the people upon whom employment equity has a direct impact through the everyday life of work, influence identity. This analysis is framed against Bangeni and Kapp's (2005, p.4) contention that people "constantly reposition themselves in relation to past and present interactions and individual emotions such as excitement, insecurity, nostalgia, loss, fear, and desire". The macro discourse framing these issues is employment equity – the facilitative agent for black people and women entering and progressing in the workplace.

4.5.1 Locations in Relation to the Available Identity Categories

Participants revealed a number of ways of thinking about the identity categories that have been and continue to be used to describe them in South Africa. For example, P27BM delineates the "race" categories¹¹ to differentiate between what he calls "us real blacks" and other groups that are legally considered black. This articulation is against the Black Consciousness Movement's construction of inclusive blackness (Biko, 1996). Moreover, this reflects the tension and somewhat artificial and clumsy nature of "race" labeling. Both the biological discourse of "race" and the slipperiness of these labels and their vulnerability to legal intervention are captured in the statement.

Because I feel the real imbalance is with us real black people and that is

¹¹ In South Africa, "race" categories differentiate between black and white. Included within the broad category of black are African's, "Coloured's" and Indians. Within legal discourse on redress, Chinese people have recently been added to this category in recognition of discrimination that they experienced during the apartheid period.

where I see it. And now the legal term of that if you are Indian, Chinese if you are “Coloured” you are all black... (P27BM, 187).

P1WF resists labeling associated with “race” and gender and opts for being “human”. In line with her views of being human, she argues for colour blindness in relation to employment, advancement and promotion practices. However, when later asked if she identifies as a particular category, she stated that she would hope it is obvious that she is a white woman.

In contrast, P6WF is clear that her identity categories are important to her. She characterises these as inescapable.

I can't get away from the fact that I'm a female, white and I am Afrikaans (P6WF, 227).

They are all important because we all have our own identity and nobody can take that away from you and nobody should take it away from you (P6WF, 247).

P13WF appears to foregrounds her activist and ascribed identity. When asked how she identifies herself, she responded: “A gay white female” (P13WF, 10). Of the sample of 55 participants, she is one of only two people who asserted their sexuality as identity markers. Therefore while P13WF positively asserts her lesbian identity, she also asserts her whiteness in a manner that forecloses reflexivity on this strand of her identity. Her other utterances suggest that she distances herself from black people at her workplace.

P18BF strategically asserts her gender and “race” as the most important identity features. When asked why she foregrounds these aspects of her identity, she claims them with the view of “saving” them from positions of deficit in the public imagination. In some ways she is like P13WF who asserts her lesbian sexuality as an act of activism. They both seek to reclaim or rehabilitate the derogated identities to which they ascribe. In the extract below P18BF is in part claiming “race” and gendered solidarity with black men and black women to the exclusion of white females.

Err... because of all the bad vibes... that have been attributed to black women, black people in general and black women mhlambi (maybe) by

default. I would like to see more black women who are doing it but not because they black but because they really can (P18BF, 230).

I don't think you can at the moment... You can't shy away as a black person... from the mandate that we have. To ensure that systematic constraints that are put in private sector and wherever, you know, are broken down (P18BF, 230).

I identify firstly just as black... (P18BF, 232).

P18BF appears driven to activism around her choice of identity. For her, blackness it is a mantle that must be worn and championed until “systematic constraints are [...] broken down”. This signifies a discourse of identity reclamation and activism. Gender takes second place in this struggle for breaking down barriers associated with blackness.

I would want them to see, here's a black female who's going to bring in that perspective. And I'm not necessarily saying that I am here to represent the views of black females. But I would also not want to sit there and pretend that I am not a black female, you know (P22BF, 334).

“You will be a spokesperson for all black people, or a spokesperson for all females.” Now, I can't take that responsibility. Because black people are individuals but also, when I sit in meetings, I do invariably put on that hat, where invariably I feel like I have to protect Africans or I feel I have to protect females. You know. Or I have to defend, whether consciously or not (P22BF, 334).

For P22BF above, both “race” and gender are important parts of her workplace identity. Their intersection is important to her. She recognises that these are important factors which inform her practice. Like P18BF, identity is strategically called upon to accomplish the work of activism in the workplace. P22BF however prioritises neither her “race” nor her gender above the other but sees them as interwoven parts of her identity construction.

P11BF notes that for better or for worse and whether one ascribes to a particular identity or not, an identity is given to one in South Africa. She comes bearing an identity laden with stereotypes that she believes she has to disprove.

...in South Africa you're first black, when you walk into a room, then secondly you're a female... (429).

P16BF shares P11BF's contention that South African's are indelibly marked by “race”. Thus

even if she did not want such categorisation, she notes:

Not a day goes by that I'm not reminded that I am black and you could walk into a shop at Woolies and a black person will serve a white person before you (P16BF, 215).

Yes, you are reminded of your blackness every day. Obviously, never in a direct way. It's the kind of stuff... I can't find the words for it (Group Discussion, 53).

For P16BF and a member of the group discussion, these reminders are not benign but are laden with stereotypical and prejudicial beliefs and practices.

...my gender, I'm female and I am always fragile... because you go into a lift and yes he is being polite, ladies first, so it's inevitable that I will be reminded of my race, of my gender... And at the end of the day I am black, I am female and I really accept that it is part of me and I am happy with that (P16BF, 215).

Other participants describe themselves as follows:

Religion first, then male, then Indian I suppose (P23IM, 275).

As white male, grey hair (P28WM, 329).

...yes there could be some acknowledgment that I am black but the fact that I am Zulu doesn't matter. What matters most to me is that I am a black man (P26BM, 298).

...but in the workplace it is not an issue and it shouldn't be. I am just talking socially that identity that I am a black person but in the workplace, I don't think it is an issue and I don't think it should come in an equation anywhere (P26BM, 302).

While there appear to be strongly racialised identities, there was also the sense that identity is complex and unsettled. Religion is also foregrounded as an important identity marker by P23IM. For P28WM, in addition to his "race" and gender, age was an important variable as he was about to retire at the time of the interview. Generally participants did not reject or question their racialisation. They did however express unease with the limitations that identity categories place on them. Moreover, for some of the participants, there were moments and contexts when "race" and gender are valued and others when these categories are unimportant. P14BF and P21BF

expressed both unhappiness with assigned categories as well the limitations that these impose on them and how they influence the mindsets of other people.

I am not comfortable with them because they are not who I am and they limit me and they create demarcations for me. And that is why we tend to perceive people according to those pigeon holes because they tend to even create mindsets for people to start perceiving people in certain ways (P14BF, 219).

I don't want my colour, my gender, my ethnic cultural background you know, to be my measuring stick (P21BF, 173).

In contrast to P18BF who foregrounds her "race" before her gender, P21BF below sees "race" as secondary and as being almost inconsequential.

So, I think, I think as a woman foremost in my personal life. I see myself as a resilient woman. A woman with purpose and direction. The fact that I am black is almost secondary to me. I just happen to be black (P21BF, 177).

This signaled differences in how black women of similar social class identified themselves. They foregrounded different aspects of their identities as important in the workplace.

P27AM, an African man was the only immigrant that participated in this study. He articulated the question of identity as one of pan Africanism and outside of "race". Ultimately, he appealed to an identity of humanness and geography which he saw as transcending "race" and gender.

My typical response is I am an African (P27AM, 243).

For me being a human being is more important than being of whatever race or gender being human and treating a human being like she is a fellow human being whether she is female or it is a male or whatever colour (P27AM, 255).

4.5.2 Identities under Siege

Identities which feel under siege are those that are perceived to be losing old key defining features of which dominance is a significant aspect. The broader societal changes of democratisation as well as the internal, organisational discourses of change are important

contributing factors to these identities. In a manner related to the victimhood discourse described in the section on gender, there was thus a strong discourse of whiteness under siege.

“Yes, my assistant I protect him because if he is out, he is out then what”
(P4WF, 274)?

In this participants mind, the constructions of the stakes involved in identity were clear. She believed that white men should guard their jobs closely because this is their last chance. When asked if white women need employment equity, she revealed that she also feels besieged. The quotes below illuminate rigid understanding of “race” where black signifies privilege and opportunity while whiteness is displaced. P4WF says that the last refuge of white women may be to marry black men. Perhaps most revealing is P4WF’s reproduction of the biological racist belief that children resulting from black and white unions upsets the rules of raising the children.

I should just leave because you don’t want me, so let me go, there you go. No wonder I can’t get employment elsewhere I mean I’m in here so I watch my p’z and q’z so I don’t get kicked out (P4WF, 438).

Let’s marry into a black family or Coloured family or whatever because at least then I’ll be supported and maintained never mind the poor white guy you know. So if I have kids through that thing how will I raise my child now because we don’t have a clear view... (P4WF, 466).

Not unlike P4WF, P6WF believed that blackness has currency and that it enables job hopping.

...white people left but what we are seeing is that the people of colour we are employing leave quicker than how they landed because they job hop, because they can... (P6WF, 139).

She contrasted this world of opportunity accruing to blackness with her own supposed foreclosed future, a future which she perceives as under siege.

...but I have made peace with the fact that I would probably not be promoted because we have rules and we have boxes to tick... (P6WF, 146).

For P4WF blackness is consistent with a script of unaccomplished developmental identities.

...you’re having steering committees that are being devised now to address

a shortcoming of individuals. So instead of the person who is supposed to be in the position you now have got a team of people cloaked telling the person what to do (P4WF, 286).

...third rate for arguments sake, who is the next qualifying person in the business just so that you can fulfill your quota (P4WF, 459).

In her view black people require consistent advice and operate as stalking managers who rely on “others” in the form of advisory committees, to do their work for them. The subtext is that black managers are tokens and “third rate” people whose sole role is to fill quotas.

...in some cases they have taken on people for jobs they were not ready for. And I think that is setting someone up for failure. I think there have been genuine instances like that... and all you need is one or two examples and that’s when people say, “you see, you bring black people into positions and next thing they can’t cope, they are incompetent” (P21BF, 121).

In the extract above, P21BF in part acknowledged that there are cases where black people are appointed into roles that they are not ready or equipped for. Her view was that these are not common occurrences but they have the effect of proving the stereotype and lending it credence. For P18BF, there are also white people that are appointed into positions that they might not be suited to.

In relation to the broader theme of the discussion concerned with alienation and identities under siege, a close examination of white male employees is provided here. P9WM identifies as a white Afrikaans speaking man. He was working out his notice period post resignation at the time of the interview. He believed that he had been repeatedly overlooked due to his status as a white male. Ironically, he resigned because he had found another job. This suggests that opportunities may still be available to white males despite their belief to the contrary.

Well...I’ve been in situations where there were positions available I was the only one on the shortlist with all the necessary skills and err...they would just say we need black people...it happened four times already... (P9WM, 83).

P9WM has considered leaving South Africa for Australia.

Ja, definitely about three years ago we were on our way to Australia... for the first time over crime and forward looking at my career and then we sit

with big worry that when they grow up and you stay here now and they leave and you can't go with because you're too old and don't have enough money... (P9WM, 126).

P9WM defines himself as a father who lives for his kids. This is the most important aspect of his identity that he foregrounded. He however feels strongly about his culture.

A father, I live for my kids.... (P9WM, 192).

My culture is important, probably gender and race as well but I don't really worry about that. With all these things going on in the news, changes in the schooling systems and universities, you get the sense that your losing your identity and you're going to lose your language and your culture because history is being rewritten... and I mean we have got all the name changes and ja...we losing stuff (P9WM, 194).

Interviewer: And you feel your culture is almost under attack?

P9WM (196): Ja, but I think so should the Zulu's and the Xhosa's as well because we are losing a lot... but what I don't understand is why would you take somebody else's stuff and make it yours. We have all these new stadiums in your names you know. I think there's enough opportunity to go forward build your own stuff and give your own names and say, "see it" and say, "you know I drove this project therefore my name is on it".

Renaming streets and buildings bearing Afrikaans names reaffirms a white identity that understands itself as under siege.

There is a level of diversity in views even among people who identify as Afrikaans. Thus P52WM, a white Afrikaans speaking male in his fifties, downplays the role of culture and equates it to ideology. The element of dialecticism is not necessary "race" based as there is heterogeneity within groups that are often understood as sharing the same outlook.

No, uhmmm I think the biggest danger for society and mankind are people that strive for ideology or culture...everyone has their value systems and cultures. I don't particularly think that the Afrikaner values or systems is any better than any other culture and system....I don't go to cultural feasts and pump my chest about being a boer. Some people are fuckin mad... (P52WM, 111).

P52WM does share the view that white males are under threat. He however understands the threat from a competitive perspective due to the increased pool of skilled black people. In the

second excerpt below, this participant extended the sense of threat to include Indian and “Coloured” people whom he terms fellow minorities.

No they should, they have every reason to be worried because it is obvious that whites are really such a minority with generic black including everyone else besides whites....and the economy being so small... (P52WM, 79).

I think it is probably Coloureds and Indians too. They also should face it that we are the minority and the first person that will get the job will be a black person regardless...and because again there are few jobs available where is the job going to go to (P52WM, 81)?

P48WM supports the view that white males opportunities have dwindled.

I am talking from my team perspective... um... the guys within my team... the white guys okay, very stable... because the reality is you know, if you a white male okay... you are gonna... it's going to be more difficult for you to find a job. Whereas you know, if you are a black African male or female or whatever the case may be... it's going to be a little easier for you... as a result of employment equity... you know... (P48WM, 90).

Black employees are aware of the whiteness under siege discourse and they relate to it in various ways. For P21BF, there is empathy towards this discourse.

They would pass comments that they have no future or their kids have no future but I understood where they were coming from (P21BF, 187).

It would appear that white people were not alone in feeling under siege. While many participants were complementary of the organisations culture, there was a sense that all organisational cultures are difficult for black people to thrive within.

I have had to adjust myself to that culture and deal with my own turmoil and inertia and feeling that this was not working. But I also realised that you can't keep on running. You know people always say that black people move for money. Sometimes it's just the culture. I realised that you can't keep on moving because it's the same everywhere (P21BF, 199).

The problem is not recruitment. We get people in but we lose just as many in less than a year. So we recruit thirty people and we lose twenty eight people. It's quite shocking. They took us through the stats at the Employment Equity Forum, it's really a problem (P21BF, 241).

For a participant in the group discussion, the corporate culture is white.

Corporate is a white culture, and unless you can find a way... the word is
– adapt (Group Discussion, 59).

4.5.3 The Impact of History on Identity

The projected identity that some black female participants perceive themselves to be a part of through the eyes of white males is that of the domestic worker. While these black women obviously do not identify with the projected identity, they bear its weight. The stigmatisation is essentially related to lack of respect, asymmetrical and patronising relations.

Then you get it from the white male who in my personal view... the only black females they have dealt with have been their maids. Now the expectation is that they have to take these black female colleagues seriously. She is telling you that she is educated and telling you what to do...there's a general lack of respect from that group (P11BF, 277).

...but the white males really find it difficult to kind of like engage and place you in their lives basically (P11BF, 281).

Their view of the black person is someone who is cleaning tables or at reception and suddenly now you have to relate to those people as your equals (P21BF, 109).

They have only been used to black people as a domestic, a gardener, a cashier. And now suddenly to have to equate them as either your boss, your equal, subordinate... they can't make that connection (P21BF, 235).

We have to understand that most white people only knew blacks as a kitchen girl or a garden boy in terms of having any conversations. And that is their paradigm (Group Discussion, 102).

...us black people become very defensive (P11BF, 317).

The preceding excerpts suggests that some of the participants experience their everyday life through being cast as domestic workers which are among the most powerless positions in society. P11BF's response is defensiveness and militarised guardedness.

History is also implicated in the way in which people choose to identify today. Thus, while P47BM tends to shy away from identity politics, he concedes that "race" is important to him for

historical reasons. The historied character of “race” is an important characteristic to bear in mind when debating the value of discarding “race” categories.

Look ja...[laughs]. Race is important I guess. And purely because of where we come from. Don't forget, don't make an issue, but at the same time, I think it's important that we know our history. We were not a normal society, and people must not forget... If you do something wrong, you always want it to be forgotten (P47BM, 208).

A group participant makes the following observation:

Black people generally focus on the past and white people on the present because it is convenient for both. Black people's lives remind them every day of apartheid because the effects still live on (Group Discussion, 122).

P12BM believes that the history and cultural identity of black people holds back their advancement as only white cultural capital is valued. He provides the following illustrative example to make his point by imagining the thought process of a white manager contemplating the promotion of staff in his team.

“You know what Thabo is fine he is a good lad, he is respectful whenever I ask him to do things he does them and he never questions anything I do Whereas Robby on the other hand questions everything that I do and he asks me questions. I see a leader in him because he is more vibrant. ...Other than Thabo who is always sitting there.” So a whole lot of things that have killed us as black people is our culture. A culture of not questioning, a culture of not fighting, of not having rights and other people having superior rights and nodding and saying we can't do anything...(P12BM, 187).

Sometimes I have... we have this take a girl child to work type of thing and we bring in grade twelve young girls. One of the things I tell them is, “when you come into corporate, forget all that your mother taught you”. But it's bad, why should you forget all your mother taught you, you know (P22BF, 369)?

P22BF, a human resources executive in another division shares P12BM's views. In their assessment, an acquiescing way of engagement is interpreted as a lack of vibrancy and cultural capital that are valued attributes in corporate South Africa. For P12BM, hard work and diligence are not necessarily the most valued attributes as people are rewarded for gregarious and forceful personalities when management opportunities arise.

Some participants have suggested that cultural capital is historical and is in part conveyed in subtle things like the accents that people have. Thus, P21BF notes:

So, having an accent, to me is, is really immaterial. But I do see sometimes that white people just tend to switch off... the light switch just suddenly switches off. If you find a black person unfortunately who has a problem getting their point across and it is compounded by this heavy accent (P21BF, 149).

I want to say that speaking well for me means speaking with an accent, with a twang. In actual fact I think there is a big misconception that if you speak with a twang, you are intelligent. If you went to private school, you are intelligent, which is not always the case. So what happens is that when I come and I speak with my African accent... so I pronounce rand as rund instead of rand. So automatically I am sized down to, you know. I am reduced to average or even below that. So speaking well for me in actual fact literally means, sounding white. And also identifying with what they do (Group Discussion, 204).

P21BF herself has an accent that might be said to be honed by private school education. While she appears ambivalent about the value of accents, she acknowledges the role of language as a particular form of selecting out who is heard and who is not. Thus, in her view, those who are unable to “put sentences together” cannot get their points across. They are not at the mercy of the interpreters; they are simply not heard as their listeners “just tend to switch off”. There are of course counter discourses to which language is core in asserting a subaltern African identity. These were discussed in the preceding section that looked at racial practices in social interaction within the workplace.

If you are very articulate with your English, they often confuse it with intelligence. And I have asked guys before, “go learn Zulu or something that is not your first language. Does the fact that you don’t pronounce it properly or articulate it, mean that you are not intelligent?” So I am very, very careful not to get caught up and confuse the issues (P47BM, 190).

I think that I still get a lot of that in the sense that often I go to a meeting and just keep quiet until it’s my turn to speak. Because you can see people talking above your head and talking, talking, talking, talking as if you don’t exist until you say something (P21BF, 169).

The speaking well bit is still a barrier. I have seen people who struggle to get the opportunity to put their point across. Given time they would put

their point across but people don't get the opportunity to do that. It can be sad especially when somebody says something at the beginning of the meeting and by the end of the meeting somebody comes and works it out and repeats the point as their idea... and the person sitting back and afterwards saying, "but I said that, but I said that..." I hear this all the time but it's too late (Group Discussion, 209).

It would however appear that there is something more than just language and accent which legitimises which voices can be heard. The extracts above suggest that there may be gendered and raced inflections which contribute to who speaks above whose head. P21BF is clearly familiar with being spoken over as though she does not exist despite her seniority within the organisation. She has to assert her voice in order to prove her existence within these spaces.

4.5.4 Outsider – Insider Identities through Assimilation and Adaption

The preceding discussions about language have illustrated that there is a pronounced pressure to assimilate to organisational norms or dominant expectations of speaking English even in social interactions.

The group discussion engaged with the issue of assimilation pressure as shown in the following excerpts.

If you can adapt into that culture. So that is all that matters.... How intelligent you are is not very important... it is second best. It's not going to determine how successful you are. I think everybody who is here has a certain level of intelligence. So your intelligence gets you the position but that does not mean you will be successful. It's about this whole culture and how you integrate into it (Group Discussion, 171).

P22BF is particularly concerned about the pressure towards assimilation as opposed to integration which would lead to productive change. In her view, continuities of old ways of being are stronger than the discontinuities wrought by demographic changes in corporate South Africa.

And I think one of my challenges, is, what happens to us when we come into these organisations, do we assimilate and... you must really explore this one because I worry about... where I see a lot of black execs coming into organisations and then they just assimilate to the corporate culture,

they don't change anything... (P22BF, 260).

So, I remain an outsider in so many respects, in terms of my race, my gender, my marital status, my everything... you know (P22BF, 278).

While organisations are recalcitrant in the face of change by maintaining their identities and reproducing themselves through the people they employ and their everyday practices, they also shift in certain ways to adapt to change.

With reference to how she experiences herself in relation to fellow employees at a social level, P22BF states the following:

I hate those [work socials] with a passion, because I just feel that I have nothing to talk about socially with people at work. I mean, let's talk in a meeting in the business about what needs to be done and that's it. Please, let's not chit chat, you know. Tea times, lunch times, after work, away sessions, I am just like "ooh", I want to pull my hair out, you know. I feel like, must we do this (P22BF, 278)?

I'm very aware of that, that I am excluding myself from the inner circle and I don't know what's the answer to that and I think... part of my thinking has always been, do I belong in corporate South Africa? And very often the answer is no (P22BF, 288).

...people either absolutely leave and say, "I can't do this faking anymore", you know (P22BF, 294).

The excerpts reveal a sense in which she feels profoundly socially alienated from the organisation. She has a visceral reaction to engaging socially beyond formal business. "I want to pull my hair out, you know." As a senior manager within a big division of the bank, this is revealing. She is acutely aware of the fact that this is not good for her career prospects but remains at a loss as to what to do about it. Her conclusion is that she might not belong to this world. "...do I belong in corporate South Africa? And very often the answer is no".

A white male and a white female employee offer different perspectives on this. For P52WM, this is normal and not necessarily based on "race" or gender. While this may be true, it also serves to disavow and invalidate the particularism of the experience shared by P22BF.

That is just a lot of bull, wherever you go and wherever you work it is just a bunch of people they either get on or they don't... (P52WM, 95).

A white female employee offers the following as to why black people might feel like outsiders.

...and you truly expect them to come out of Tembisa living in a shack their whole lives, go to a school in Tembisa, and then walk into a corporate culture, and act like the rest of us...you cannot do that (P24WF, 194).

While empathic, this interpretation has a condescending tone and is informed by a deficit reading of black experiences. In essence, she believes that black people's prior experiences do not prepare them for the corporate culture. Her portrayal of corporate culture is of a static culture that black people need to get to grips with. Her choice of words provides clear markers of those who have outsider status – “them” and those with insider status – “the rest of us”. She marks white women as the insider “rest of us” and black people as them – those who come out of living in shacks in Tembisa all their lives. This trope condenses all black trajectories as uniformly originating from the shacks. It leaves no room for the existence of middle class black people who have had relatively good education and who might not have lived in shacks.

P24WF relates how she was surprised to learn that a black female colleague of hers did not feel like part of the team.

It was a rude awakening for us we went on a [name of programme] training and she made the comment to say “you know what I am in the team but I don't feel part of the team, and you are really not helping and supporting me” (P24WF, 186).

On the other hand, another white female, was more perceptive. In the excerpt below, she problematises fixed understandings that people have of each other. She credits both her Christian ethic and the diversity workshop that the company initiated for employees, for her sensitivity to different life experiences.

...we think all white people are privileged and they are not and we think all black people that have been born since Mandela has been released have had equal opportunities and they haven't.... (P45WF, 255).

As shown in the section on women's discourses, organisational discourses on employment equity are important in shaping employees sense of belonging within the organisation. Thus for this

Indian identifying male, employment equity feels like an additional pressure with exclusionary undertones as he feels stagnant and overlooked.

No what I'm saying is that in practice we might be legislated as being part of employment equity but in terms of the story I just told you now you must hire black African. So in practice I feel we fall outside of that you know... (P53IM, 552).

There was however a strong discourse of this bank being cast as a safe haven and characterised by the best organisational culture. A dominant narrative was that those who have left often seek to return.

I know a lot of oaks have actually left and come back, so it may be that people actually like to work here and it is a nice place to work so you don't have to be threatened like in [another bank]...some people have hit rock bottom but it is a good place to work at (P52WM, 183).

For P51BM, the organisation is white. He believes that this should not even be up for debate as no one in the correct frame of mind would freely hand over an organisation to someone else.

To a certain level if I worked hard for something why would I give it to you for free? And that is a white man's mind so they will afford you opportunities here but not entirely and that is what should go through the black man's head that you are not going to get these things for free...So it was started by their forefathers they have got the right to stick to it and hold on to it so I agree with them (P51BM, 112).

4.5.5 Discussion

No one within the organisation that is the subject of this research has not been touched by the changes occurring in the broader society and within the organisation itself. Participants within this study generally did not exhibit neat or uncomplicated ways of identification. Particular nodes of identity were accentuated in strategic ways. This suggests that there were discourses of activism and identity reclamation in operation. These can be understood as discourses of resistance that utilize strategic essentialism to fight prejudices. For example, a participant made it clear that she was white, female and lesbian. A black female participant indicated that she foregrounds her "race" because the fight for racial justice is ongoing. Another asserted her gendered identity as she felt that it was a woman that she was most disadvantaged and spoken

over in ways that rendered invisible to male interlocutors. A participant that identified as an Indian male insisted that it was his Hindu religion that gave him a sense of meaning and value in the world. Male participants did not assert their gendered identity in ways connoting that this was a central part of their identity. The strategic choice of foregrounding particular ideas of selfhood can be seen as a strategic insistence on calling attention to a part of self that is marginalised within the society and the organisation. This might be described as an activist orientation to seek equity and justice along this plane of identification. Identities that are under threat from social sanction driven by homophobic conservatism and prejudice may adopt an activist stance and are asserted as a point of contestation and pride. Identity is multidimensional and characterised by complexity and different motivations. Oppressive and liberating discourses can reside side by side. Lemke (2008) and hooks (1989) point to the transgressive politics of marginalised forms of identification.

While “race” was problematised most, it was seldom repudiated. There was a discourse of the unavoidability of “race”. The group discussion noted: “you are reminded of your blackness everyday”. At best, it was held uneasily as a self-evident and a given part of identity that cannot be shaken off or denied. However, it is worth noting that categorisation is never just innocent and that it does ideological work. Reflecting the paradox of change, while a black female participant laments the effects of categorisation, she also “accepts” the categories of “race” and gender. It would seem that she would not want the categories to be removed but to change the values ascribed to these.

Some of the white female participants portrayed colour blindness towards the black other. Thus for them, while “race” was given, it did not matter and was of no great significance. For example, this allowed PIWF to argue that she did not believe in employment equity because “race” was not a factor in her world. For her, employment equity was illogical because it gives meaning to something (i.e. “race”) that she does not recognise as important. This suggests that the steadfast belief in the lack of significance of “race” can provide justification for the illogic of employment equity. In this view, the world of work is characterised by equal opportunity and is free of discrimination. While some black female participants expressed a wish for “race” to have less significance, they felt that it marked them in very negative ways. In this regard they felt that

they attracted negative stereotypes which portray them as incompetent and undeserving of the roles that they occupy. Crenshaw (2000) signals to a similar challenge in the United States of America.

Robus and Macleod (2006) found that “race” discourses in South African higher education are framed in relation to black failure and white excellence. Contrary to popular employment equity discourses which portray black women as the most “privileged and sought after” group within corporate South Africa, some black women believe that “race” can be more damaging than it is rewarding. In this respect, the motif of the domestic worker is telling. Most of the black women interviewed felt that white males struggle to view them as equals and look at them through the prism of the domestic worker – the image that they are most familiar with. The markings and weight of history make imposed identities unavoidable. Thus for some black women participants, not only is identity borne in categories such as “race” and gender, but these categories are inscribed with particular historical meanings which are laden with deficit notions of being. For a black female participant, it is only after she speaks that she is able to sway perceptions in a favourable light. For her, competence and merit are not assumed.

Employees measure themselves up against “the organisation”. The organisation can be said to have an undertone of white normativity. What emerges from these measuring up comparisons is sometimes a fit, misfit or simultaneous coexistence of the two conditions. Employees may also try to negotiate the organisational systems of belief such that they engage with it on their terms. What may emerge is a hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) characterised by straddling a number of subject positions which include elements of integration and aspects of assimilation. Adaptation may be activated at other moments. This may lead to a productive tension of existence within the organisational space. For P22BF, there are clear identity markers along which she perceives herself to be an outsider within the organisation. With regard to “race” and gender, she is of the view that being black and female marks her as an outsider. The implication is that white males are the ultimate insiders. She also believes the fact that she is unmarried serves to amplify her outsider status. Here presumably those who are married fit the organisational profile of respectability more closely. Of course drawing clean lines between organisations and the broader social world is unhelpful as organisations mirror the societies within which they operate. These points of alienation may exist in her social world but might be heightened within the

organisation. The statement in the excerpt above speaks to an overwhelming sense of not fitting in. There is an acute sense of heaviness in her conclusion to the statement "...my everything, you know."

Having said this, it is worth considering Essed's (1994) caution when she stated that black women should not be understood as a monolithic group. She notes that "one cannot simplistically speak of a black women's point of view on issues of oppression and resistance" (Essed, 1994, p.99).

Another major discourse emanating from this research on employee identity in the workplace is that of loss and identities under siege. While change comes with gains such as democracy and transparency, it invariably also comes with a sense of loss for a past characterised by certainties (Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard, 2008), privileges (Steyn, 2001; Straker, 2011), and even a nostalgia for a "simpler" way of life (Dlamini, 2010). For example, P6WF did not contest an identity characterised by everyday naming practices. She claimed these as important to her and holds onto them with a level of tenacity of one who believes that "even" this may be taken away. Loss appears to haunt her sense of being. The official numbers (EEC, 2013) might not support the narrative of white loss but some white peoples' lived experiences suggest acute loss framed around the loss of language and culture (the receding importance of Afrikaans). Others felt that white people and white males in particular were under siege as they were reportedly not being employed anymore. Moreover, some felt that white males have to ensure that they don't lose their jobs as their employment and promotion prospects were curtailed by employment equity requirements.

P9WM discussion about leaving the country should be read within the white emigration discourse of South Africa and its underlying ideological work. The vast majority of those who emigrated from South Africa just prior to the change to democracy and those who have left subsequently are white South African's who have primarily moved to Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA (SAMP, 2000). Among some of the reasons given for emigration from South Africa, are the high crime rate and the lack of opportunity for white males. Between 1987 and 1997, 233,000 people left South Africa (SAMP, 2000). In 2000, 83% of white people were opposed to affirmative action measures and many cited this as one of the primary push factors for emigration. The future of their children was seen as another important

factor for emigration by 73% of white people intending to leave (SAMP, 2000). It would appear that an identity which sees itself as under siege, seeks a way out.

To some degree, employment equity signals the displacement of whiteness and echoes Steyn's (2001) conception of loss. The drop in the significance of the Afrikaans language is a palpable symbol of loss for some Afrikaans speaking whites. While culture might also be a broad rubric which includes "race", it is worth noting that Afrikaner culture in relation to language has historically been very important to white Afrikaans speaking people (Giliomee, 2003). P9WM sees the renaming of landmarks as another indication of identity encroachment. For P9WM, infrastructure that was built during white Afrikaner rule belongs to Afrikaners and is their pride whereas all post 1994 construction belongs to black people. There is no sense of shared pasts and futures. For him, it not conceivable that black labour is in part responsible for apartheid South Africa's development. In the same vein, Afrikaners cannot be seen as contributors to democratic South Africa. In a palpable lament of his people's fate, he says, "we are losing stuff". Name changes act as symbolic losses of political and social dominance.

Changes do not only impact on one segment of the employees. In this respect, ironically, some black women also feel under siege. Some explain the phenomenon of "job hopping" as fundamentally related to how they are treated in corporate South Africa as a whole. This group believes that they are treated with contempt and disrespect in relation to what they have to offer. Their skills set is often questioned, they are subtly undermined and they are not heard at meetings. The employment equity discourse not only casts the other as incompetent and undeserving, but creates fault lines characterised by fear and suspicion in relation to job security and mobility. As mentioned earlier, a major theme was the shadow of the image of black women as domestic workers. The early site of the domestic worker is colonial and apartheid South Africa. White people needed to be served in their daily lives. The asymmetry in the relationship between white people and their domestic workers was a function of "race", gender and class. Notwithstanding the current proliferation of domestic workers at the service of black homeowners and the new laws to safeguard domestic workers from exploitation, the relationship still remains asymmetrical (Ally, 2011). It is therefore telling that P11BF and P21BF feel that they are perceived and treated like domestic workers with no authority. This has nothing to do with their objective status as managers with ascribed power.

Some participants expressed the view that African cultural expectations were potentially limiting for success in corporate South Africa (e.g. P12BM). This refers to a history of respect in African culture coupled with learned timidity through apartheid authoritarian culture which required black people to serve without questioning. Following Kress (1989) and Gee (1990), Bangeni and Kapp (2005) note that newcomers are required to attain a level of acceptable proficiency in organisational discourses including language, culture, behaviour and ways of speaking. The pressure for assimilation through “white sounding accents” was a prominent concern for some participants. We should be clear that those whose accents do not have cultural purchase in the world of white normative values, do have other languages in which they are fluent. These languages are however not valued. The apartheid past that ensured that African languages would remain submerged and unimportant has direct continuities in democratic South Africa’s workplaces. In relation to cultural and linguistic capital, those who were valued in the past, continue to be valued now. While not a prerequisite, for black people to have purchase, they have to craft the English language in a way that demonstrates that they are competent.

However, P12BM’s casting of “our culture” in a particular way bears the risk of essentialising “black culture” as one dimensional. While he’s general perception might be correct, this is however not always the case. For example, P20BF argues that she was raised to ask questions and assert herself. If we are to take seriously the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of black people, a South African black culture probably does not exist. Not all black people do not get ahead in corporate South Africa. Some have acquired the cultural capital and assimilation attributes that are valued by the industry. Still others have ensured that they are noticed and that their ambition is rewarded.

The organisational culture of the bank in relation to its programmatic interventions such as discussion groups, surveys, child care facilities, training and development opportunities, and concern for the environment are viewed very favourably and often ranked as the most important attributes when compared to similar institutions. There was however a sense emanating from black participants that while they appreciated many of these interventions, the everyday lived experience suggested that blacks were organisational outsiders and that whites were insiders. Patterns of professional and social interaction were most suggestive of these outsider-insider identities. Markers of belonging and not belonging include “race”, gender, language and accent,

previous schools attended, and levels of participation in social networks at work. There was however a prevailing sense of multiplicity (Lemke, 2008) and in-betweenity (Bangeni and Kapp, 2005) wherein some employees feel like they belong some of the time and occasions of alienation at other times.

In line with post-modern theorisations of identity (Lemke, 2002a), this research has found that while old apartheid forms of expression live on in this organisation, these are complicated in the daily business of living and working. They take on new meanings which are not always positive and some people are marked more than others. At times, in the attempt repudiate the meanings associated with particular stereotypes like black incompetence that accompany identity constructs, these are further accentuated and entrenched, e.g. “I am black and proud”. On other occasions, when class and education background between black and white colleagues cohere, there may be a displacement of stable identity formations. On these occasions these overlapping interests may enable black males to penetrate white male social networks and what may emerge might be a more productive way of seeing oneself. The results suggest a slippage between resisting and embracing categories of gender and “race”. While one can be a white woman and human, her self-evident ascription to “race” as given is not reflexive of the relative advantaging and disadvantaging of this category in apartheid, post-apartheid South Africa, and in her place of work. Thus Iedama and Caldas-Coulthard (2010, p.1), state the “rapidly reconstituting nature of interpersonal, social and organisational spheres and associated conducts, express the idea that social life is losing stability and certainty as to who we can be and what we can do and say”.

Even as shifts are noted, these movements appear to be towards the place of whiteness. Thus, language and accent habitually involve black people speaking in ways that have white normative (Gordon, 2006) currency. White participants did not suggest ways in which they might have attempted to learn African languages or making concerted efforts to understand the narratives of black disadvantage. From the participating sample, it appears that black women feel most marginal to the organisational identity. History seems to mark them most obviously. In this regard, many underscored the feeling of being perceived as domestic workers in the ways in which some people related to them. This is encapsulated by some black women who relate incidences of being ignored, unheard and whose contribution is tarnished by preexisting assumptions of incompetence.

4.5.6 Conclusion

This section sought to address how the discourses and practices of employment equity influence the identity constructions of managers in the bank where the research was conducted.

Participants primarily located themselves within the available racialised identity categories. Those who resisted racialised identities generally embraced a colour-blind discourse which disregarded the social meanings associated with “race” categories. Others foregrounded marginalised identities such as “blackness”, the intersection between gender and “race”, and lesbian sexual identities. These identities were used as activist strategies to call to affirm the identities and to call attention to their ongoing marginalisation. These can be seen as discourses of resistance.

There was a strong discourse of loss which was articulated as identities under siege. These identities were chiefly those with a past characterised by dominance which has been threatened by employment equity discourses and practices. The emigration patterns of white males and their families were attributed to their opposition to employment equity practices. While this group is largely constituted by white males, black females also complained of bearing the brunt of ongoing discrimination resulting from their location in the intersection of being both black and female. In some ways therefore, the discourse of victimhood was claimed by most parties.

The ways in which history impacts upon present day identity discourses was foregrounded by black participants. Thus black women claimed that the stereotypical view of black women as domestic workers was difficult to shake off even in the workplace. Viewed in this way, they felt that some white colleagues struggle to see them as equals. Black women felt most peripheral to the organisation culture and felt like they were the most marginalised. Many recognised the political capital that accrued with assimilation into the dominant culture but resisted this pressure to assimilate. This often meant that many felt socially alienated from organisational practices. Some black participants believed that their cultural attributes were not valued within the banking environment while those of white managers were rewarded.

A small minority of participants interrogated ascribed identities and interpreted them as socially constructed. They saw them as necessary for short term redress but ultimately hoped

essentialised identities would be dropped in the long run. Employment equity discourses and practices have had a major impact on how participants view themselves and on how they perceive others. It has been constitutive of identity in important ways. While the impact of these discourses and practices has generally been unsettling and disruptive, it presents potential for deep introspection and reimagined ways of identifying.

Workplace identities are marked by both continuities and discontinuities. The imprint of history on how people identify and relate to each other was apparent in the data from this research. There was however a strong sense in which employees at the bank being studied, are going through fundamental change in the ways in which they understand themselves and each other in the present. This can be seen as resulting from a number of contemporary changes, chief among which is the real way in which the organisation is grappling with employment equity. Black employees are grappling with assimilation pressures which reportedly valorise white norms while some white participants of this research confront perceived diminishing privilege and opportunity. Change is being driven from outside and inside and employees are responding in a variety of ways which recapitulate repressive identities, craft new ways of being, and fashion a transgressive politics of identity. In summary then, it may be more appropriate to speak of new meanings and adaptations emerging within workplace identities as they are influenced by employment equity discourses and practices.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Post-apartheid South Africa is confronted by the reality of translating aspiration into practice in order to realise the dreams of non-racialism and equal and meaningful participation in the economic life of the country. Both the non-racial and equity discourses are at play in the daily lives of managers in the organisation that is the subject of this research. The underlying motivations and manner in which the discourses are deployed have been the preoccupation of this research. Like its black economic empowerment counterpart, employment equity is a controversial post-apartheid policy enmeshed within at least three schools of thought. The one school of thought is vociferously against the policy and charges it with discrimination against white people and white males in particular. For instance, Solidarity (2008) labels employment equity as reverse discrimination. Another set of critics which hold the second position, see the policy and its practice as reifying apartheid “race” categories (Erasmus, 2012) thus rolling back the gains of non-racialism which many fought for during apartheid. They advocate new ways of measuring disadvantage. The third position is one of support for the policy and an increasing impatience with its reported slow progress in the private sector and banking in particular (EEC, 2007, 2012). This research has investigated the discourses amongst managers at a bank guided by a pragmatic orientation which recognises the existence of the policy and its social justice origins and intentions.

In recognition of the reported pace of change of the South African workforce, this research was interested in the experiences of managers which go beyond the numbers. Thus, while the annual publication of the EEC Report brings attention to the rate at which designated groups are entering management positions, this research was informed by an interest in the lived experiences of those who live employment equity and constitute the workplace. The research was driven by the need to understand what employment equity means to a select sample of managers at a bank.

5.1 Summary of Research Findings

The summary of research findings seeks to recount the story of employment equity in the organisation from which data was gathered. While the intention is not to tell a linear story as the subject is complex and multifaceted, the presentation of this story coheres sequentially around

the research questions. To begin with, it is worth restating that employment equity occupies an elevated place of interest in the South African imagination. For employees working in South African organisations, employment equity has become unavoidable. Certainly, the organisations documents and the participants suggest that the subject is a major preoccupation. This research was interested in what the discourses and practices of employment equity were and how these come to constitute identity. According to Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard (2008, p.6), identity is “not beholden to one particular dimension of being, but corresponds to anything that actors (or analysts) treat as significant. ...acknowledging that people can choose to foreground different facets and timescales of social life for identity investment and self-realisation”. As we see in this summary, employment equity was treated as significant in various ways. The story below is about the meanings that organisational actors attribute to what they regard as significant in their lives.

5.2 Employment Equity and Merit in Relation to Racialised and Gendered Stereotypes and Power Asymmetries

Meritocratic views of seeing the world of work are prevalent in the organisation. It would seem that merit has been coopted by dominant groups in ordering society. Moreover, discourses of merit have come to be a signature feature of modern workplaces. For Sturm and Guinier (1996) and Haney and Hurtado (1994) discourses of meritocracy have come to take on meanings of set ways and paths of doing things. These often exclude other forms of knowledge and experiences thus casting some as meritorious and others as underserving incompetents (Nkomo, 2011). Castilla (2008) adeptly demonstrates that meritocracy can function to maintain the status quo where inequities prevail. Therefore, those most invested in maintaining privilege become the most ardent champions of limited notions of merit and gatekeepers for who can belong to the organisation.

This research found that meritocratic assumptions of competence appeared coloured by “race” and were held in polarising ways by black and white participants. Merit appeared to reinforce racialised and gendered conceptions of merit where black competence was scrutinised because of deficit employment equity discourses. The ideological work of meritocracy is to imbue whiteness with competence and blackness with lack of competence and ability.

Employment equity therefore appears counterintuitive to the meritocratic expectations of most white participants.

Employment equity status was held in a complex way by black participants. In this regard, many asserted their competence while also acknowledging the importance of the policy in providing access to opportunities. Others combine a deficit approach to equity which sees it as incompatible with competence. This is an instance which revealed an internalisation of negative tropes which entail being unable to reconcile a remedial action seeking to promote equity and parity while also allowing for the appointment of only suitably qualified individuals that are currently underrepresented. There were however some black participants who took a pragmatic view by recognising the value of employment equity in advancing their careers within a sector that many claimed is hostile to inclusion. They contended that they are confident in their own abilities and understand prejudice as coming from a place of insecurity and threatened privilege. However, even this does not appear to remove the prevailing sense of surveillance that many black participants experience. Competence has to be performed under the gaze of the watchful other.

Some black participants retold instances of racism and sexism which they experienced in the workplace. Thus the view that they are reminded of their blackness every day and the strong feeling of black women being imagined as domestic workers. A participant put it as follows: “you are reminded of your blackness everyday” (Group Discussion, 79). However, when asked about their perceptions of the existence of racism and sexism, a number of white participants stated that racism and sexism are not practiced in the organisation. They largely argued for a discourse of colourblindness and some claimed not to see “race” or colour. This contradiction of black and some female participants invalidates their experience. Identities that emerge from denial are characterised by alienation, distrust and marginalisation from the dominant culture while perpetuating white normativity.

A major finding of this research was an underlying denial of the detrimental effects of apartheid on blacks in South Africa. This is bolstered by a tacit acceptance that blacks were their rightful place all along. Attempts towards parity thus upset the accepted order of things.

Another finding was that white women did not consider themselves to be beneficiaries of employment equity. While there are a number of probable reasons for this, one of those suggested in this research is the need for white women to dissociate with the negative associations of employment equity which could potentially cast them as incompetent employees who have been given preferential and thus unfair opportunity. Other possible reasons for this distancing from employment equity were discussed in the section which looks at women's coalitions.

A finding from an examination of discourses on merit was what this researcher has dubbed the "qualification/experience dilemma". This revealed polarised views between white and black participants. In this division, black participants highlighted the virtue of educational qualifications while a number of white participants appeared to favour the importance of experience as the primary means to earning opportunity. While there were participants particularly in the extended group discussion who stated that both attributes are important to banking, the division was stark in the individual interviews. The subtext was that white participants have earned (Nkomo, 2011) their positions by virtue of long years of experience that some have within the organisation relative to some black participants. This suggests that some black participants in positions of prominence have not earned their roles. Again, employment equity was seen as disrupting the order of things.

The findings are summarised in Table 11 on the following page.

Summary of Findings: Employment Equity and Merit	
EE, Merit and Stereotypes	For some white people, the way in which merit is framed assumes a number of things about black people: it generalises cases of tokenism and window dressing across all black people within the bank, it assumes that all black people lack experience and black people are generally cast as not competent to perform optimally and need consistent support and training.
EE, Competence and “Race”	For some white participants, at the same time that incompetence is blackened, merit assumes the mantle of whiteness. This discourse was however challenged by some black participants who pointed to some white examples of incompetence. While there were dominant racialised patterns, participants were not homogenous in holding deficit views of black competence.
Influence and Impact of Stereotypes	Most black participants felt the weight of the stereotypes of incompetence and felt constantly under surveillance. Many black participants expressed the view that they felt under pressure to work extra hard to prove their competence. A minority of black participants appeared to accept the deficit trope which sees employment equity and competence as mutually exclusive. Others acknowledge the ongoing importance of employment equity and its role in providing opportunities to them while at the same time underscoring their deservingness of their roles and claiming their competence to perform. In a counter discourse, another set of participants responds with irritation at the stereotypes and asserted their competence. A minority of white participants also expressed the view that competence is not “race” based.
Colourblind Discourses	Among some white participants, colourblindness in relation to equity and merit is particularly extant. For some white participants, employment equity delegitimises established notions of merit. In reflecting on the necessity of employment equity, there is a sense in which history is amputated from current white discourses on the policy. There was a white discourse that suggested the denial of apartheid and its detrimental effects as though implying that black people have been in their rightful place all along.
White Experience – Black Qualifications Dilemma	Merit is deeply implicated in the measurement of the minimum requirements of the job or what the Employment Equity Act calls “suitably qualified”. This leads to the white experience–black qualifications dilemma, since white’s generally emphasised experience and black’s favoured qualifications. There is a strategic favouring of one or the other since whites generally have more experience, and being “recently” qualified blacks have an edge on qualifications. Favouring experience appears to elide the reality of how whites gained the experience in the first place (deliberate exclusion of black people). There are others that point to the importance of both attributes.

Table 11: Summary of findings – Employment Equity and Merit

5.3 Employment Equity and Substantive Psychological Empowerment

Implicit in employment equity is the notion of empowerment. In this regard, the meaning of empowerment is spelled out in the EEA, 55 of 1998. This definition goes beyond initial inclusion through employment and extends to training, support, non-discrimination and advancement opportunities throughout one's career. Goonesekere (2007) describes this as substantive empowerment. Some of the characteristics of substantive empowerment are: the acknowledgement that there is a problem which in turn means that groups start off from a different baseline which necessitates redress, negative stereotypes are harmful, and "race" and gender neutrality come in the way of change. This research looked at substantive empowerment through the lens of psychological empowerment as advanced by Spreitzer (1995). Both designated and non-designated groups were looked at here.

Zimmerman (1995) notes that some people might feel psychologically empowered along some dimensions while feeling disempowered along others. In this regard, while most managers noted that they felt that they had the requisite levels of competence to perform the job, others did not feel that their jobs gave them sufficient meaning and fulfillment. Moreover, while others reported that they made a positive impact on the team and organisation, some of these felt that their autonomy and self-determination was constrained. This reflects relative psychological empowerment at most. In addition this might suggest that employment equity has only partial success within this organisation. This perspective broadens the discussion from monitoring who is employed (as reported by the Employment Equity Commission and Labour Force Surveys) and directs focus towards how empowered one is after he or she is employed. The limitation of the concept of psychological empowerment is that it is individualistic and forces participants to think about empowerment attributes individually thus minimising their ability to respond to the systemic inhibitors inherent to capitalist systems. The following findings should therefore be read in relation to this limitation.

Seniority appeared to have a marked relationship with increased levels of psychological empowerment. Here, presumably the more senior one is, the more self-determination, flexibility to fashion one's own role in a meaningful way one has. Moreover, seniority provides a clearer vantage point to see the level of impact. Additionally, seniority often means the role is one of

coordinating teams and departmental efforts and interfacing with other departments. In these situations, the feedback on the level of impact is generally instantaneous. Moreover, those in positions of authority receive ready validation of their competence by virtue of the seniority of the role they are in. Thus, it seems that achieving seniority is related to recognition of competence. Seniority appears to be more important than “race” in relation to one’s levels of psychological empowerment. Of course since nearly 70% of senior and top managers are white, “race” and seniority often go together. However, while most participants found little meaning in their jobs and were unhappy with their “junior” roles, they found meaning in the social interactive realm of their work experience. This reinforces the view that while authoritative power enhances empowerment, it is not a prerequisite. Beyond the alienation felt by mostly black women, participants did not challenge the capitalist system and its hierarchical deployment of power which favours a minority of people.

Female participants mostly appeared to be less psychologically empowered than their male counterparts. Differences appeared strongest in relation to perceived meaning and competence. Furthermore, black females in senior positions reported more challenges to their levels of meaning in particular. Relative to their black male and white female counterparts, black female senior managers generally did not feel substantively empowered despite their seniority. There was a strong discourse of alienation and perceived lack of fit to the organisation among this cohort of managers. Black women also appeared to resist dominant discourses most.

Female participants generally reported that their competence levels were sometimes second guessed and doubted. This led some of them to develop increased dependency on their superiors for validation of competence. The implication here is that female participants have a less secure sense of psychological empowerment and the organisation needs a gendered lens to ensure that women are provided leadership opportunities and supported in those roles in the same way that males are. Masculine normativity might need to be dismantled in a way that takes both men and women’s needs into account. As was shown in the literature on social interactions, women generally receive fewer networking opportunities which can also account for the observed need for validation which males may get on the golf course for instance. Women’s forums to consider alternative structures and support systems might be needed in this organisation.

As reported in various parts of this research, some black participants reported that their levels of competence were constantly under scrutiny as their blackness suggested that they were appointed because of employment equity. This implied that that their competence could not be easily validated. This appeared to have a bearing on their reported levels of substantive empowerment.

Summary of Findings: Employment Equity and Substantive Psychological Empowerment	
Meaning as Psychological Empowerment	While most managers stated that they derived a high sense of meaning, there are managers that derive a poor sense of <i>meaning</i> in their work roles. In this regard, some questioned their fit with the organisation as well as their assignment to a particular role. Many of those that experienced a poor sense of meaning appeared to individualise this feeling and not interpret it in relation to contextual power relations. This may in some part be attributed to the individualising nature of psychological empowerment and the responses elicited by the questions.
Competence as Psychological Empowerment	On the <i>competence</i> dimension of psychological empowerment, almost all participants rated their competence levels quite highly. They also reported high peer ratings. However, women managers generally reported that their competence levels were sometimes second guessed and doubted. Moreover, this cohort seemed most dependent on their superiors for validation of competence. This may in part be explained by a sexist orientation which unsettles female employees sense of their worth. Sexist discourses are therefore reproduced within the discourse of of competence.
Self-Determination as Psychological Empowerment	Fairly high levels of <i>self-determination</i> were reported. This pattern appeared to be related to seniority as senior managers reported high levels while some junior and middle managers reported micro-management tendencies.
Impact as Psychological Empowerment	The managers sampled in this research generally reported significant levels of <i>impact</i> on the organisations success. They did not perceive themselves to be tokens although some noted that they were aware of examples of tokenism within the organisation.
Conclusion	Even as organisations employ more diverse workforces as a result of employment equity, this is not necessarily followed by substantive empowerment once people enter the workplace. A mixed picture is presented and it is influenced by “race”, gender, and seniority.

Table 12: Summary of findings – Employment Equity and Substantive Psychological Empowerment

Overall, while many believed that the organisation was doing a lot to promote empowerment; this was not always experienced as substantive empowerment in their lived experience. This suggests that there is a gap between empowerment and substantive empowerment. Clearly then, there is an apparent need to explicate the link between employment equity and substantive

psychological empowerment where employees are meaningfully engaged within their places of work.

The findings are captured in table 12 above.

5.4 Employment Equity in Relation to Intersections of “Race” and Gender among Female Managers

In a patriarchal world, women are generally subjected to gender oppression which is particularly pernicious and limiting of their advancement in the workplace (Gasa, 2007). Women’s movements have historically played a pivotal role in organising against patriarchy (Bahati Kuuma, 2002). Black women feminists have argued that black females’ struggles should be understood through the lens of intersectionality which sees black women’s raced and gendered identity position as constitutive of their domination (Crenshaw, 1991). They posited that white women only have to deal with sexism while they have had to fight both sexism and racism. In this research then, the researcher sought to explore how black and white women perceive themselves, understand their common challenges, and relate to each other and their differential position in relation to employment equity.

One of the main findings was that there is a general sense of uncertainty as to white women’s status as a designated group within the organisation. While males and black women appeared uncertain about the status of white females, white women participants however seemed unanimous in holding the view that they are not a designated group. For them, their experiences and organisational discourses and practices made it apparent that they are not a designated group. This view appears to contradict the organisations employment equity report which states that white females are only second to white males in their representation from middle to top management. Moreover, the research found that there appeared to be a widespread deficit understanding of employment equity among white women in the organisation from which participants were drawn. The researcher posited a few reasons that potentially account for white females distancing from employment equity. One is that based on the numbers, the organisation might be applying employment equity in a manner that seeks to balance the employee demographic profile. This does not mean that a ban is placed on employing and promoting white women as there are still areas where they are underrepresented. Rather it suggests that there is an effort to slow down their appointment into areas where they are overrepresented while continuing to advance them in areas of underrepresentation.

Following on the above, the findings suggested that white women’s deficit view allows white women to accomplish three tasks. One is a disavowal of supposed incompetence which comes

from occupying a marginalised gendered identity. Being “lumped” together with black people bears the risk of sharing all the stereotypes that accompany blackness. The second task is that it further destroys potential alliances with black females who are firmly identified as marginalised and needing assistance through employment equity. Lastly, it enables white women to forge alliances with white males thus perpetuating a myth of parity with that group. The research found that white women who could potentially be powerful allies to black women in the mission of gender empowerment appeared to distance themselves from a shared disempowered subjectivity. It appeared that they foregrounded “race” as a common identity with white males at the expense of their gendered position as women struggling against patriarchal practices. These identity “choices” may be understood as arising from deeply entrenched historical and mutually reinforcing alliances for the maintenance of privilege. For Frankenberg’s (1993), it is not surprising that white women strongly identify as raced because she states that whiteness is a place of structural advantage and race privilege.

If white women seemed unwilling or reluctant to form alliances with their black female counterparts, what was the position of black women towards white women? At the outset, it became apparent that black women were also not ready to align themselves to white women. Black female participants viewed their white female counterparts as privileged, supported by white males, and significantly more advantaged than they are. They saw white females as holding the position of second most powerful after white males. Given their shared “race” and past of collective struggle against white domination, black women felt better aligned to black men than they did to white women. Even as their social position as the most marginalised group makes gender “inescapable” from who they are, black women also appeared to foreground a discourse of a racial identity before a gendered one. There were however some exceptions to this as two women asserted their gender above “race”. The general trend was also premised on the belief that the fight against societal racism continues to be a common struggle. Their struggles with racism continued to be the primary site of meaning making.

A finding related to the above is that empowerment has taken on the mantle of deficit where merit and competence are mutually exclusive from “aided” access to opportunity. Many black women therefore struggle to perform identities of competence against the macro discourses of racist and sexist understandings of employment equity. It is, however, important to note that

there was also a strong counter discourse which sought to resist tropes of competence that were deliberately exclusionary and based on fictive fairness (Sturm and Guinier, 1996).

In sum, the findings detailed here suggest that women within the organisation are divided along racial lines. They primarily identify as “raced” and have primary allegiance to males of their own “race”. In view of the aims of employment equity to advance women within the workplace, this research found that a lack of solidarity among women has the danger of forestalling their mutual advancement. It weakens their course as women.

Table 13 below provides a summary of the findings.

Summary of Findings: Employment Equity Discourses and the intersections of “race” and gender	
Policy “confusion”	There was general confusion on the status of white females in relation to whether or not they are a designated group. While formally included in the Employment Equity Act as a designated group, all the white female participants believed that employment equity had not assisted in their appointment and their progression. Some white females expressed the view that their “race” was an impediment to their progression.
Coalitions of whiteness	The white female participants largely appeared to be in coalition with their white male counterparts rather than their fellow black female colleagues. While this was not always straightforward, racial solidarities appeared to trump gender alliances.
Histories and identity	“Race” is the default drive which gives white women access to power in a manner that gender is unable to. Identifications are also intimately tied to nodes of identity embedded in lived histories of whiteness (including fathers, husbands, and brothers) and futures where white women’s sons must one day carve out a space in the South African workplace. White males were generally portrayed as vulnerable to the unintended effects of employment equity. This was termed a discourse of vulnerability.
Salience of “race”	Like white women, black women primarily foregrounded “race” over gender. This suggests that gender based coalitions against patriarchy are sacrificed in favour of racialised solidarity. There were however a minority of notable exceptions that saw “race” as personally unimportant.
Intersections of vulnerability	Gender and “race” among women managers intersect in ways that shore up the salience of “race”. Black women are most vulnerable to the effects of negative stereotyping from employment equity discourses.

Table 13: Summary of findings – Employment Equity and intersections of “race” and gender

5.5 Employment Equity and Informal Voluntary Social Practices and Professional Identities

How we socialise is not a benign activity but has implications for both our career advancement and our psychological wellbeing (Burt, 1992; Ibarra, 1995). It is limiting to draw a line between formal working hours and informal interactions that rub up against work activities such as drinks, work related social events, weekend tennis and golf games with colleagues, children's birthday parties where some colleagues are present, because these are all activities with potential beneficial spin offs for one's career. Several findings, many of which largely confirm those in the literature are presented here.

Naturalistic observations suggest that employees within the organisation that is the subject of this research largely socialise in racially segregated ways. This confirms the homophily claim by Koen and Durrheim (2010). For them, homophily is the finding that people are drawn to others that look like them. This presents as a negative factor for those who are less dominant within organisations because it means that they do not have opportunity to network with dominant others. Bourdieu's (1990b) notion of habitus suggests that the choices that people make to occupy space and engage in particular ways is not voluntary or natural but is a habituated disposition that is both socially and psychologically determined.

While gender seemed to play a role in the seating patterns of employees, "race" appeared to be the primary driver of self-segregation. Where groups generally seemed diverse, seating patterns of diverse groups in cafeterias were generally marked by micro forms of segregation within diverse groups. In other words, people tended to sit next to others of a similar "race" even when they were at a table with diverse "races" (see observations four in Appendix 4). This is an important finding to consider for organisations committed to substantive change. Therefore, while organisations can claim points for good representation of previously underrepresented groups, it is possible that these groups are not integrating in a meaningful way. They are not really talking to each other across the chasm of racial difference even as they inhabit the same space.

Almost all participants in this study confirmed the dominant findings of the naturalistic observations. In this regard managers reported that nearly all social interactions in the workplace

and particularly during after hour networking occurred within segregated groups. The small minority that stated that they did not socialise in segregated spaces conceded that they were a minority and that they actively sought out networks that were “different” from them. These participants would therefore be the minority in groups that were otherwise homogeneous. It is, however, important to point out that these outliers are a significant counter discourse of resistance to racialised social practices. There seemed to be no difference with regard to which “race” groups are more integrated or more segregated. Thus, black networks were as segregated as white networks.

Another significant finding was that there appeared to be a pervasive discourse that naturalised segregated networking. Thus many participants stated that segregated informal networks were a matter of preference that was a natural manifestation. This discourse suggests that the trend is universal, static and therefore not subject to change. Even those who socialised across “race” networks felt that it was not easy and was driven by utilitarian needs of making work life easier and supporting career development prospects. A number of participants made the connection between the quality of networks and the political mileage that accrues differentially based on who one is friends with. Thus, Burt (1992) has found that professional mobility is aided by having a diverse social network which includes people senior to oneself within the organisational hierarchy. There was some consciousness among a few participants about the limited benefits they could derive from exclusively black networks as they generally do not have the long links to an elite past which is accessible to their white peers. The career development prospects were articulated more cogently than the psycho-social advantages of networking. Some black women spoke affirmatively of weekend meetings that they sometimes have with other black females within the organisation. One woman described her meetings as a support group of sorts even though she wryly observed that it largely served more as a farewell group for the high numbers of black women that she saw leaving the organisation.

Finally, the research found that beyond the naturalising discourses, a number of participants understood the persistence of segregation in relation to South Africa’s past of formal segregation. Some pointed to continuing raced social asymmetries and a perceived gulf between the black and the white lived experience. A group discussion participant ended off on a pessimistic but reflective note:

The question is: do we want to be integrated? My answer is no. Why should we be integrated (Group Discussion)?

The findings are summarised in table 14 below.

Summary of Findings: Employment Equity Practices and Voluntary Segregation and Advancement	
Voluntary segregation	Where social networks are marked by entrenched segregation, those with access to power by virtue of the people they informally associate with are therefore primarily white managers. In recognition of the value of powerful networks, some black participants strategically utilised their relationships with senior black managers.
Psychosocial benefits	Even though black social networks derive little power for career mobility, there is evidence that members of these networks receive psychosocial benefit from their voluntary segregated association.
Women and Power	While women are less segregated in their informal interactions, segregation patterns suggest that they operate in relatively powerless networks when compared to white males. A limitation of this research was that it did not interrogate the privileges derived by black men relative to black females.
Language as a barrier	Language was cited as a significant barrier to diverse social groups. The burden to change language and accommodate difference was however primarily placed on black managers. This also contributed to the discourse of naturalising segregation.
Naturalising segregation	Most participants naturalised segregated social interaction. There was thus a reification of segregation as this socio historical factor was presented as natural, permanent and outside of time. The historical and sociological characteristics are thus eclipsed by an unchangeable state. This naturalising discourse allows participants to unquestioningly engage in “race” based social ghettos.

Table 14: Employment Equity Practices and Voluntary Segregation and Advancement

5.6 Employment Equity Discourses, Practises and Constructions of Professional Identities

As pointed out in the opening part of this concluding chapter, the underlying premise of this research is that managers at a bank are so steeped in the discourses of employment equity and its practices that it has come to constitute who they are. Change from exclusive apartheid policies towards democratic inclusive practices forced South African's to reevaluate who they were and what they were becoming in the various spheres of their lives, including the workplace. This coheres with Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard's (2008, p.1) contention that our sense of "stable identity anchored in familiar social class hierarchies and cultural practice conventions has come under threat". It is therefore worth restating that South African corporate life is in the unsettling throes of change. This research narrowed the focus of the broad arena of change by applying the lens of employment equity.

If identity is constituted by both continuities and discontinuities, this research found that there is a sense in which identities that are framed around apartheid era categories have remained resilient. Indications are that identities are reinforced by both employment equity discourses and practices and the reported experiences of marginalisation of black participants. Many black participants appeared to have assumed an activist identity which is framed around defending and thus entrenching particular constructions of blackness and gender. This research framed this as a discourse of resistance to the ideology of whiteness. This can be observed in the narratives of those who reaffirm black competence and ability. Both "race" and gender are important parts of workplace identity. Radilhalo (2007) and Duncan (2005) contend that "race" as a construct continues to impose itself as a material reality in the lives of South African's and its effects are felt more by those of darker hues (Habib and Bentley, 2008; Mamphela, 2008). On the other hand, for white participants who claimed to be colourblind, racism and sexism do not exist. These colourblind discourses have implications for how people relate across their points of perceived difference and what they do about marginality and dominance.

Identities are however not always straight forward as some are marked by a sense of being unsettled by discontinuities from past forms of identity. Some of the discontinuities with the past are accounted for by class mobility, empowerment, and regular engagement with difference, all of which can be attributed to employment equity. There is a developing discourse of openness to

understanding the world view of the other. This allows people to acknowledge that not all white people are privileged and that the end of apartheid did not mean the end of black disadvantage.

However, even as shifts in ways of identifying are noted, these movements largely appear to be towards the place of whiteness. Thus, language and accent habitually involve black people speaking in ways that have white normative (Gordon, 2006) currency. White participants did not suggest ways in which they might have attempted to learn African languages or made concerted efforts to understand the narratives of black disadvantage and continued marginalisation.

However, even though whiteness appears to be co-opting some black people through assimilation, there was a strong discourse of loss. A minority of white participants exhibited identity constructions which this research has characterised as “under siege”. Identities which feel under siege are those that are perceived to be losing old key defining features of which dominance is a significant aspect. Straker (2011), Steyn (2001) and Anderson (1990) document the meaning of whiteness when it feels under threat. Defensiveness, retreating, victimhood, and seeking to consolidate privilege are some of the features of threatened identities.

A participant in the group discussion summarised his views on victimhood as follows:

As black people we feel unfulfilled with what we have whereas white people want to continue having the most. We are not satisfied, they are not satisfied. We want to get to where they are, they want to stay ahead. Everybody is a victim. They are a victim of employment equity and blacks are a victim of apartheid (Group Discussion, 65).

Perhaps one of the most important findings of this research was that despite legislative interventions, racialisation remains a major force. Thus, despite feelings of disempowerment, loss, and threat, white males continue their dominance. The underlying discourse has been to lament racialisation without dealing with the dominance of white male leadership. The old power asymmetries have sort refuge behind a new guise of victimhood without substantive change. The discourse of victimhood appears to have broadened to include most groups, even those that retain their privilege.

From the participating sample of managers, it appears that black women felt most marginal to the organisational identity. History seems to mark them most obviously. In this regard, many underscored the feeling of being perceived as domestic workers in the ways in which some

people related to them. This is encapsulated in women’s accounts of incidents of being ignored, unheard and whose contribution is tarnished by preexisting assumptions of incompetence. In this regard, there is a sense in which history lives on in the present.

Summary of Findings: Employment Equity Discourses, Practices and Identity Constructions	
Essentialised Categories and Colourblindness	Participants primarily located themselves within the available racialised identity categories. Those who resisted racialised identities generally embraced a colour-blind outlook which disregarded the social meanings associated with “race” categories.
Foregrounded Marginalised identities	Most black participants and those of sexual minorities foregrounded marginalised identities such as “blackness”, the intersection between gender and “race”, and lesbian sexual identities. These identities were used as activist strategies to call to affirm the identities and to call attention to their ongoing marginalisation. This was termed a discourse of resistance and activism.
Identities under Siege	There was a strong discourse of loss which was articulated as identities under siege. These identities were chiefly those with a past characterised by dominance which has been threatened by employment equity discourses and practices. While this group is largely constituted by white males, black females also complained of bearing the brunt of ongoing discrimination resulting from their location in the intersection of being both black and female. In some ways therefore, victimhood was claimed by most parties. The discourse of victimhood appears to have broadened to include most groups, even those that retain their privilege.
Historical Continuities	The ways in which history impacts upon present day identity discourses was foregrounded by black participants. Thus black women claimed that the stereotypical view of black women as domestic workers was difficult to shake off even in the workplace. Viewed in this way, they felt that some white colleagues struggle to see them as equals.
Discourses as Constitutive of Identity	Employment equity discourses and practices have had a major impact on how participants view themselves and on how they perceive others. It has been constitutive of identity in important ways. While the impact of these discourses and practices has generally been unsettling and disruptive, it presents potential for deep introspection and reimagined ways of identifying.

Table 15: Employment Equity Discourses, Practises and Professional Identity Constructions

To conclude then, the mark of employment equity looms large within the bank that participated in this research. Not only has the bank experienced its most sustained period of change within the past few years but this change has left an indelible mark on the people who work there. The changes wrought by employment equity have necessitated individual reflection about the individual and the groups place within the organisation. This reflection is one that is necessarily informed by history and its impact on the present and future. While resistance to change in order

to maintain old forms of privilege and social asymmetries still exists within the organisation, there is an atmosphere of engagement and a real sense in which employees are grappling with new ways of being. Old ways of identifying co-exist with new forms of identity that are not as strongly attached to essentialised categories. Table 15 above summarises the findings.

5.7 Implications of the Findings

Employment equity is not a neutral discourse in South Africa. It is riddled by multiple discourses which serve to complicate both what it means as well as its implementation. The individual and group meanings attached to employment equity have to be unpacked and engaged as a point of intervention at organisational, policy, and theoretical levels. Discussions about what constitutes merit and its accompanying tropes are urgently required. Further research on what the merit and colourblind discourses seek to shield, needs to be undertaken in South Africa.

In addition, beyond the regular use of the word, human resources practitioners and line managers need to reflect on what it means to be empowered from multiple perspectives. Substantive empowerment from the manager's subject position should be a key constituting factor in this reimagining of the meaning of empowerment. Here, flows of power and its reproduction have to be surfaced. While employment equity is not necessarily an "us" and "them" phenomenon, its discourses strongly point to "race" based articulations of reality including the maintenance of privilege. Furthermore, "race" emerged as a strong point of identification. The manner in which this manifested among female participants suggests that women's potential for across "race" coalition building to counter patriarchy, is significantly weakened. A closer study of the nature of relationships between white and black women is required. The inequalities between black men and women need closer scrutiny to understand the patriarchal drivers which propel unequal progression within organisations. Interventions within banking and the private sector generally, need to reimagine how they understand "race" and gender and engage in deep interventions which look beyond the surface non-racialism discourses which sometimes mask major fault lines.

The findings imply that the work of employment equity needs to shift from administration (logging the numbers) towards engaging with what it means to be substantively empowered. While substantive empowerment may vary from individual to individual, Zimmerman (2005),

Spreitzer (1996) and Mumby (1993) outline a few commonalities that should be seen as the starting place for psychologically empowered employees. Importantly, interventions should not take on individualistic forms which circumvent systemic change to narrow interests of capitalism. Research and interventions should link employment equity and related empowerment practices as envisioned by the Employment Equity Act, No.55 of 1998. Moreover, this research implies that practitioners and researchers should analyse the stereotypical discourses which latch onto employment equity in order to prevent them from festering and driving further divisions along old fault lines of identity.

Popular discourses on women and employment equity have not been matched by the requisite research. This research has found a large gap between black and white females within the organisation. This implies that the struggle to collectively deal with gender asymmetries is weakened. The seniority of white females relative to black women is problematic and needs to be remedied as a matter of urgency to prevent further degeneration of relationships. Equal energy needs to be expended in understanding the inequality between black males and their female counterparts. A further implication is that the organisation needs to have a tandem strategy to both employ more black senior managers while ensuring that micro-segregation (in diverse spaces) does not negatively impact the substantive psychological empowerment agenda. Focused programmatic interventions informed by research are necessary to engage with the pervasive patterns of voluntary micro-segregations observed and reported by participants.

5.7.1 Implications for Organisational Theory

In forecasting the desired direction for the field of organisational studies, Mumby (1993) calls for more “secondary analysis” of specific organisational phenomena using critical analysis of coherent organisational studies literature. This he believes leads to greater “epistemological reflexivity” for the examination of assumptions underlying relations to power. Following Foucault’s (1979) and Mumby’s (1993) injunction to understand the operation of power, this research examined how organisations deploy their people through techniques of control even through supposedly empowering discourses such as employment equity. In doing this, key lessons for organisational theory emerged.

The research makes apparent the porous boundaries between organisations and society in relation to how they co-constitute each other through dominant discourses of what constitutes the “good” and capable citizen and manager. The power of employment equity discourses in this role of creating the “good” employee who has “merit” has not received sustained scholarly attention. This silence implicates organisational theory in the complicity of creating deficit discourses of people that have historically been in the margins of organisational life. These include groups such as blacks, females, and people with disabilities. This research therefore turned the spotlight onto these groups to illustrate how current dominant power asymmetries are maintained within present day constructions of empowerment discourses. In other words, the very means through which change is meant to be achieved have been tainted through mutating tropes so as to threaten change towards a more socially just society. The place of historical analysis needs to be foregrounded by organisational theorists. This will enable us to understand the implications of findings which point to the sense that a significant amount of the population appears to be in denial of the detrimental effects of apartheid.

5.7.2 Implications for Organisational Psychology

The research contended that there is a limited stock of tools within the field of organisational psychology which allows for a critical outlook on gender and “race”. Bolder research into power formations in organisations is required if we are to take Mumby’s (1993, p. 22) injunction seriously when he states that “it is at the level of the everyday that the relations of power are chronically reproduced”. This research sought to push the boundaries of how organisations are studied as well as what is studied. The ethical hinges of the discipline are generally compromised by its often uncritical service to organisations and capital. The conflict of interest is most stark when organisational psychologists are deeply embedded within the very organisations which are sometimes culpable for reproducing gendered and racialised asymmetries.

Critical theories allow us to deconstruct the ways in which practices of inequality are instantiated while allowing us to reconstruct empowering behaviours that centre experiences that have been marginalised within organisations. Community psychology has a well-developed tradition of empowering psychologies that have drawn from post-colonial studies. The value of feminist theories in particular, is the multidimensional approach taken to analyse inequity

through what has come to be known as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). It is these psychologies and theoretical outlooks that should be drawn on in order to create an ethical and reflexive study of organisations using critical methodologies (van Dijk, 1998 and Thompson, 1990). This research serves to illustrate to what ends a critical outlook can be utilised in order to engage with important everyday and taken for granted organisational matters. This all implies that the frames of reference for organizational psychology will benefit from an expansion of boundaries to include critical theories.

5.8 Limitations of the Research

Given the large volume of data obtained in the data collection process, it is apparent that not all the data was utilised and there remains much scope to engage with other aspects of employment equity. This is an inherent limitation of most empirical research and qualitative research in particular (Mason, 1996). This does not preclude the usefulness of various elements of the research in different contexts.

Furthermore, a more focused examination of documentary evidence could have been performed. However a decision was taken to utilise interview data as the primary form of evidence while using other sources such as written responses, naturalistic observations, group discussions, and documents as secondary data. Given these limitations, the findings present only partial perspective based on the data that was analysed and the methodological decisions to focus on some sources more than others. Interpretation is a subjective process as it is a social construction. It is important to add that the different data sources as well as the extant literature suggest high internal consistency within this study and similar qualitative analysis would likely come to similar conclusions. Additionally, the research adhered to validity criteria as outlined in the methodology section. There is no guarantee that interviewees always answered truthfully. This limitation was balanced off by conducting many interviews as well by triangulating with other data sources.

Only the banking industry was researched. This suggests that no generalisations of the findings of this research can be made to other industries. Furthermore, data from the managers of only one organisation was utilised in this research. This is a limitation because given the differences in context, it was impossible to have data from managers of another organisation that

could serve as a comparison. It is therefore difficult to extrapolate the findings of this study more broadly to the South African banking industry. Furthermore, while very rich data was obtained from the interviews, chairs of employment equity forums were not interviewed. These might have provided more perspectival knowledge and insight into the formal workings of employment equity within the organisation. A discussion group was only held with the black participants. Similar discussion groups with white participants would have given further depth to this work. Despite the offer to use a white researcher to conduct the discussion group, a lack of interest from white participants meant that it was not possible to conduct these group discussions. Additionally, two key informants were interviewed but the researcher chose to integrate the data from their interviews into the bigger pool of interviews in order to secure their confidentiality. Further to this, key defining stories emerged in the process of data collection. An analysis of these would have strengthened the research considerably but again ensuring the anonymity of the organisation was an important compromise and these rich stories had to be jettisoned in the final research.

Diversity dimensions such as language, sexuality, culture, and religion were not explored in this research. This can be seen as a substantial limitation. However, following Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard (2008, p.6), “Identity is not beholden to one particular dimension of being, but corresponds to anything that actors (or analysts) treat as significant ...acknowledging that people can choose to foreground different facets and timescales of social life for identity investment and self-realisation”. Thus “race” and gender were treated as most relevant by the research participants. There are a number of possible explanations for this. The dominance of these identity dimensions may have been triggered by the research questions, the researcher’s orientation, and South African contextual variables located in a unique history of formalised racialisation of work, politics, and relationships. This could have led to “race” becoming the default position of society. Moreover, the very existence of employment equity may foreground “race” and gender based identifications.

The intersectional dimension of this study was compromised by a limited engagement with the narratives of black males as a group. The fact that other groups such as white and black females were studied might suggest that black males are not gendered. This was not the intention but nevertheless future research would have to interrogate the ways in which black males are

privileged, disadvantaged, and how they see themselves in relation to black women and other groups. Another key limitation was the use of the psychological empowerment lens to understand empowerment as they prompted participants to individualise challenges that were primarily systemic. This is not to suggest that the information obtained was not useful but rather to acknowledge that it has inherent limitations.

5.9 Future Directions

Smaller studies beyond the PhD thesis project may be required to examine aspects of this research with greater focus. For example, research into voluntary or habituated segregation in corporate organisational networks has not been conducted in the South African setting. This research may need to be taken forward beyond the current study. This study has taken an innovative lens into the subject of employment equity. There is however significant scope to expand on these ideas as well as to explore them in different contexts such as higher education and the construction sector among others. Moreover, as pointed out above, a significant amount of the data set was not utilised. Future research could therefore engage with this data more meaningfully. Additionally, a deeper analysis should surface how “race” and seniority interpolates gender.

Disability remains under researched. A similar study on employment equity with a focus on disability would be a useful exercise for generating new knowledge in the area. Conducting follow up research including follow up interviews and discussion groups with white participants would be a useful way of taking this work forward as it will give further depth in perspective. A quantitative study looking at similar issues across the banking industry would shed some important insight and serve to augment this research.

There are many diversity dimensions beyond “race”, gender, and disability. Others include but are not limited to religion, cultural background, language, ethnicity/”tribal” identities, and sexuality. These diversity dimensions were not explored in this research. This leaves much scope for future research. Finally, a closer look at possible differences between groups designated as African, Indian and “Coloured” is important work to look at in future.

5.10 Concluding Comments

Even as we take seriously the injunction that identity is never complete, and ever changing (Gqola, 2013; Hall, 1996), ignoring the central role of “race” in ongoing social asymmetries in organisational and social life is to fail those whose markings identify them as generally less powerful. The continuing dominance by the same group who steered organisations at the senior levels during apartheid has various possible explanations. These have only partially engaged with in this research. It is clear however, that while employment equity, the primary policy instrument for change, has spurred change within the South African workplace; it has also become a tainted discourse. It is weighed down by discourses which seek to maintain hegemonic power formations and the preservation of privilege. Discourses of victimhood have grown to include even those who retain power. Significant discourses of resistance by traditionally marginalised groups where however noted.

The backlash against employment equity serves to counter changes which are largely socially just and largely historically fair. Moreover, the countervailing discourses against change largely operate in ways that obscure their visibility and meaning. It is through methods such as critical discourse analysis that these are surfaced and named. However, unlike international contexts such as the United States of America, South Africa has a strong legislative environment and the will of the majority of her people to ensure a socially just outcome following a painful past. This research has demonstrated that bolder research into the workplace is required. For this to happen, research methods that enable researchers to probe taken for granted truths which shield power formations should be applied. Finally, for more informed interventions and carefully considered options, research on employment equity needs to keep apace and occasionally be ahead of the practice within organisations. It would seem that what remains to be done after further research is an orientation to action that should result in meaningful change so that substantive empowerment is obtained and evenly distributed among all employees.

What we have at the end of this research is a set of deliberations, arguments, openings, and sign posts for what it might mean to be a manager in a bank grappling with employment equity in everyday life. The research is presented in a manner that unsettles final answers and invites engagement with bankers, researchers, legislators, interest groups and the public at large. The

research aimed to ask new questions by broadening the stakes and reach in how employment equity is generally conceived of. Ultimately, the research illustrates that employment equity is more than a public debate. Rather, it reaches into a painful and divisive history, profoundly constitutes the present, and provides insight into our complex selves in the process of becoming. What we do with it now may serve as a compass for our collective futures.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Empowerment Schedules

Appendix 1.1 Interview Schedules

Empowerment¹² Interview Schedule for Designated Groups and White Males

Meaning

1. How important to you is the work that you do?
2. How personally meaningful to you are the job activities that you do?
3. How meaningful to you is the work that you do?

Competence

1. What is your level of confidence in your ability to do your work?
2. How self – assured are you in your capabilities to perform your work activities?
3. To what extent have you mastered the skills necessary to do your job?
4. How do your peers rate your competence?

Self – Determination

1. How much autonomy do you have in determining how you do your job?
2. How much leverage do you have in deciding on how you go about your job?
3. How much opportunity do you have for independence and freedom in how you do your job?

Impact

1. What level of impact do you have on what happens in your department?
2. How much control do you have over what happens in your department?
3. Can you describe the level of influence that you have over what happens in your department?

¹² Interview Schedule (Based on Spreitzer's (1995) Questionnaire)

Empowerment Interview Schedule¹³

Interview Schedule for Designated Groups (African and black)

1. Have you considered leaving your job in the past year? Why? If so why and what has prevented you from leaving?
2. If you measure your mobility within the bank against your white peers that you were at the same level with in 2007, would you say that they have progressed faster, slower or at the same pace as yourself? What would you attribute similarities or differences to?
3. Do you think that your salary and benefits are any more or less than your white peers?
4. If there are any marked differences, what would you say accounts for these?
5. Do you socialise with your peers and manager (white and black) after hours and / or on weekends?
6. If you do not, what would you attribute this to?
7. Are you aware of anyone that does socialise with peers after hours and / or on weekends? What you say the reason for this is?
8. Would you say your work friends are diverse? Do you socialise with other black people or white people only?
9. Do you believe that the banks symbolism reflects who you are? How so?
10. If not, what would you like to be done to make it speak to your values and way of life?
11. How far do you think the bank has come with regard to employment equity since you joined it?
12. Are you happy with this pace?
13. What would you do differently?

¹³ The empowerment interview schedules are based on Spreitzer's (1995) questionnaire

14. What do you feel about being seen as a beneficiary of EE?
15. How would you describe the training and development support that you have received?
16. What for you was the defining moment of working with this bank (one high and one low)?

Empowerment Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule for white males

1. What do you understand the role of employment equity to be?
2. How do you perceive Affirmative Action?
 - 2.1 Why?
3. Do you support or disagree with the way it is practised in your organisation?
 - 3.1 What would you do differently?
4. How have you personally experienced (the effects of) employment equity?
5. Do you think that employment equity will stifle your growth in this organisation?
 - 5.1 Why do you think so / or not?
6. Do you see a moral case for or against employment equity?
 - 6.1 Explain?
7. What do you think are the greatest enablers for employment equity in your organisation?
8. What do you think are the greatest impediments to employment equity in your organisation?
9. If you agree that there is a moral case for employment equity, how would you apply it?
10. What do you think your role is in enabling the application of employment equity?
11. Do white men have a role to play in enabling employment equity – if so what is that role?
 - 11.1 If not, why not?
12. If you were asked to be the employment equity champion for your organisation, what would you feel about this role and how would you interpret your work?
13. Are there certain benefits or disadvantages that come with your identity as a white male?
14. Are salaries relatively equal between all race groups at the same level or are there discrepancies in favour of one group?
15. Are your promotion prospects better or worse than a black person's?
16. Do you socialise with your peers and manager (white and black) after hours and / or on weekends?
17. If you do not, what would you attribute this to?
18. Are you aware of anyone that does socialize with peers after hours and / or on weekends?

18.1 What you say the reason for this is?

19. Would you say your work friends are diverse? Do you socialise with other black people or white people only?

20. How would you describe the training and development support that you have received?

21. What for you was the defining moment of working with this bank (one high and one low)?

Empowerment Interview Schedule

Interview schedule for White Females

1. What do you understand the role of employment equity to be?
2. How do you perceive Affirmative Action?
 - 2.1 Why?
3. Do you support or disagree with the way it is practised in your organisation?
 - 3.1 What would you do differently?
4. How have you personally experienced (the effects of) employment equity?
5. Do you think that employment equity will stifle or enable your growth in this organisation?
 - 5.1 Why do you think so / or not?
6. Do you see a moral case for or against employment equity?
 - 6.1 Explain?
7. What do you think are the greatest enablers for employment equity in your organisation?
8. What do you think are the greatest impediments to employment equity in your organisation?
9. If you agree that there is a moral case for employment equity, how would you apply it?
10. What do you think your role is in enabling the application of employment equity?
11. As a white woman, do you feel that you are equally deserving of employment equity redress benefits?
12. The DG of Labour has called for white females to be excluded as a designated group as they have grown way beyond their EAP status at management levels. What do you think about this call?
13. What do you think may have enabled white females to do “well” in moving to management roles when compared to other designated groups such as black females?

14. If you were asked to be the employment equity champion for your organisation, what would you feel about this role and how would you interpret your work?
15. What do you feel about being seen as a beneficiary of EE?
16. How would you describe the training and development support that you have received?
17. What for you was the defining moment of working with this bank (one high and one low)?

Appendix 1.2: Identity Interview Schedule

Individual Identity

Interview Schedule for Designated Groups and White Males

- 1.1 What are the identity markers that most closely define who you are?
- 1.2 Is your “race” as important as your ethnicity, gender etc.?
- 1.3 Why, or why not?
- 1.4 Are you always conscious of your gender as a primary marker of who you are, or do you call on it under specific circumstances?
- 1.5 If your gender is foregrounded, why do you think this is the case? If not, under what circumstances do you activate your gender identity and why?
- 1.6 If asked who you are, what is your typical response?

Group Identity

- 2.1 What is the typical make up (“race”, gender, number) of a project team in this organisation / department?
- 2.2 In the past year, how many opportunities have you had to work alone, in pairs of two or in teams bigger than two? Why do you think this was the case? How much choice did you have in this?
- 2.3 What do you most closely identify with: your organisation, your division (unit), your team, your work mate?
- 2.4 Do you prefer to celebrate important events such as your birthday, the completion of a project / task or a career milestone with your organisation, your division (unit), your team, your work mate, or alone.

Interpersonal / Relational Identity

- 3.1 How much agency do you feel that you have in choosing your own identity?

- 3.2 What situations and spaces best enable the choice of your own identity (home, community, work)?
- 3.3 Do you think that a person can actually choose their identity?
- 3.4 Is choice of identity a desirable thing for you?
- 3.5 What identity markers would you choose if you could? Why?
- 3.6 Do you prefer to work alone, in a bigger team, or as a pair with another colleague? Why?
- 3.7 What are the strengths of working in pairs in comparison to working alone, or in groups?

Appendix 2: Written Responses to Newspaper Extracts

Please read the 3 short extracts below from various newspaper articles that have appeared in the South African media over the past few years. Please write a personal response of one to two pages (or more).

Your responses should consider how you locate yourself in relation to the extracts.

Reflect on your personal experiences that reinforce or refute the extracts.

Please remember that your responses will not be used in a manner that will identify you and that confidentiality will be maintained. Please email your responses in two weeks to hugo.canham@wits.ac.za

Extract 1:

“In spite of paying 40% of my salary to government, 14% for value added tax, 5% towards personal insurance and private security, and 5% towards my children’s education, I am prejudiced when I apply for employment because I am white. I do not qualify for any subsidies or grants to start a business as these are reserved for previously disadvantaged individuals.

I am white. I am proud to be white. I owe nothing to anybody. Everything I have, I have earned on my own without any handout from anyone. I was not party to any “apartheid” vote, nor did I benefit from that regime. My schooling was paid for by my father out of his own hard-earned, after-tax money, not from any government handout.

In spite of this, it is implied that I “owe a vast moral debt” because of “black forgiveness and generosity.” I am now emigrating to England because my wife is British and her family lives there...”

Extract 2:

“Then there is the covert struggle, the war that begins every time you enter the gates of the company or organization you work for. The forces of change, driven by the principles of democracy, justice, equality, freedom and rights, have delivered you to the organization among unwilling partners to the changes. Unable to employ the tactics of the good old days, they devise new strategies to deal with you. They refuse to see you, hear you or acknowledge your presence. You become, in their eyes, invisible – pastless, presenceless, futureless, and mindless.

There are the informal networks that you are not part of. Plans are hatched over red wine at weekends that exclude you. These weekend “informal gatherings” are where career pathing, promotions, ideas and activities are discussed and decided, with the mandatory office meeting a mere token for the formalization of the rule of the clique. Many still believe that blacks want it all – for free, delivered to them on a platter, without sweat or sacrifice. Few ever pause to see

their prejudice and role in shattering dreams, in creating organizational climates that demotivate and exclude...”

Extract 3:

“When we raise issues around racism, white people tend to brand us as divisive and not embracing of the new South Africa. I am an African. I am a woman. I hail from the rural hillsides of the Eastern Cape. I have never been to a Model C school. Yet I know enough, I am an expert in my field, I have skills tucked under my wings that would surprise even you. Do not be impressed when you hear me talk. My kind, if you take time to listen, are like me. Most are better. They work hard to meet their goals...”

Appendix 3: Group Discussion Question Guide

The focus group was open ended and followed the thread of conversation although it was loosely guided by questions were drawn from the major themes emanating from the interviews and observations.

Examples of some of the questions were:

- How would you characterise social interaction patterns with regard to gender and “race” or other identity markers?
- What is your experience in relation to the above?
- Do you consider white females as Employment Equity beneficiaries?
- The white females that were interviewed did not feel that they benefit from Employment Equity. What are your thoughts about this?
- It seems that more senior people believe that there have been significant changes in the bank than is believed by middle and junior managers interviewed? What do you think?
- Black women appear most unhappy? Do you agree with this sentiment? Why?
- What identity categories do you most identify with (e.g. “race”, gender, ethnic group, disability status, sexuality)?
- From the interviews conducted, it seems that “race” is the primary marker of identity marker. What would you say is responsible for this?

Appendix 4: Naturalistic Observation Field Notes

Observation One

Location - Head Office at the Main Cafeteria

22 October 2010 mid-morning (one hour)

Outside patio on a spring day

- Five tables occupied by an average of three people each
- Two of the five tables had mixed groups, two had only white people, and one had only black people
- One of the mixed tables had three females. Two of them were black and one was white. The discussion appeared animated
- The interaction at the various tables appeared to be mostly social although it is not possible to discount the possibility that some were working
- The music that was playing in the background was 1980's white pop
- The waiting staff were black South Africans

Observation Two

Location – Head Office at the main entrance/exit towards the neighbouring shopping centre

22 October 2010

Observations were made at the beginning of lunch time. Observations lasted for about thirty minutes.

The researcher was stationed in the reception area observing the racial and gendered configurations of people as they exited and entered the banking premises. Most of these appeared to be on the way to or from getting lunch across the road. People primarily walked in pairs of two or alone and to avoid counting visitors, only people walking in pairs or more were recorded.

- A group of four white females
- Three Indian people consisting of two Indian females and one male
- Two African females with one “Coloured” female
- One African female and one “Coloured” female
- One Indian female and one “Coloured” female
- Two Indian females

- One African female and a “Coloured” female

The configurations noted above were consistent with the general way in which people exited and entered the building.

Observation Three

Location - Head Office at Large Cafeteria in the patio

22 October 2010 Lunch time (one hour)

The atmosphere appeared very relaxed and being a Friday, most people were dressed in casual attire and some were having drinks and beers.

- The bigger groups of three and more were generally mixed and the laughter and fun atmosphere suggested that discussions were primarily of an informal and social nature
- The seating configurations in the groups were generally racially based with white people sitting next to each other and African near African. For example, this was the case in the group of eight people which had four black, three white, and one Indian person.
- At a table of five there were two “Coloured” females, one white male and two African females
- Another table had two white males who appeared to be in their fifties and were formally dressed
- A table with seven people had three Indian males, one white female, one white male and two black males. The seating configurations consisted of people of the same race sitting next to each other

Observation Four

Location - Head Office at the Large Cafeteria

27 October 2010 from 10h15 (thirty minutes)

Outside patio area

- One big group consisting of two white males, two white females, one Indian male, one “Coloured” male. They appeared to be discussing a work in a relaxed mood. They could have been a team

- One Indian female and one “Coloured” female
- Two white females
- Three white females

Observation Five

Location - Head office at the large cafeteria in the patio

October 2010 from 17h00 – 18h00

The researcher spoke to the manager about the music that plays at the café and who makes the playlist choices. The manager stated that it was played to create an ambiance and that he played mostly 1980’s pop music because everyone identified with it. The song, “Don’t worry, be happy” was playing in the background during this conversation. The music was primarily international and from the USA and the UK.

- Two black males
- One “Coloured” and one African male
- Two white males
- One white and one “Coloured” female
- Two white females
- Two white males
- One “Coloured” male and one white female

Observation Six

Location - Head office at one of the divisional staff rooms

03 November 2010

The researcher witnessed a tense exchange at the end of an interview with one of the participants. The altercation was between a young white female employee and a black cleaner or caterer (she wore a contracting company uniform). They were arguing in raised voices about a cup. The cup appeared to have belonged to the white female and the other woman had broken, lost, disposed of, or stolen the cup. Among other things said, the white female stated: “You must not interfere with what doesn’t belong to you”. The black female appeared equally irritated and

spoke in a raised voice stating: “that’s why I apologised and I have said that I am going to buy the cup”. The disagreement was still ongoing when the researcher had to leave.

Observation Seven

Location - Head office at the large cafeteria in the patio

11 November 2010 from 16h30 – 17h30

The groups sitting at the tables appeared to be having social drinks after work. The atmosphere was significantly more relaxed than during regular working hours and most people seemed to be having alcoholic drinks.

- One white male and one white female engaged in a conversation and speaking Afrikaans
- One African male, one “Coloured” male, one Indian male speaking in English
- One African male and one African female
- One African male and an Indian male
- One white female and one white male
- Five white females
- Two white females who are joined by an Indian male from one of the other tables. The three of them began working when he joined them
- A group of three older white men (in their 50’s) together with one white female in suits standing and talking in the cafeteria. They had the look of executives about them
- One black female having a drink sitting alone
- One black male working at the table
- Two white males
- Two white females, two Indian males, one African male. They looked like a work team

Note: At tea time and lunch time there were in general some black females at the cafeteria but almost none appear to socialise after hours.

At this point the researcher had become familiar to the reception staff at the two main entrances to the bank and they know him by name.

Observation Eight

Bank Division Bar

12 November 2010 – late afternoon

After an interview with a participant on a Friday afternoon, the participant invited the researcher to the weekly drinks that the division hosted in the building. She extended the invitation after the researcher informed her that he was also conducting observations as she felt that the drinks social would provide a good opportunity for observations.

The crowd was boisterous and rowdy and it was apparent that they were ushering in the weekend. Talk was social and light hearted. There were coincidentally three people that had previously been interviewed and seated at the table that the researcher joined.

- The table that the researcher joined consisted of a mixed group but “Coloured” females were the majority
- There was a table of about five all white males
- Two big tables were mixed but it was apparent that blacks were clumped together and whites also tended to sit together

Observation Nine

Location - Head office at the large cafeteria in the patio

16 November 2010 from 11h30 – 12h30

Outside patio area

- One black female and one black male
- One black female
- Two white females
- One white female and one white male
- Three white males (at a nearby table and they were talking about rugby)
- One white female
- One white female and one white male
- Two white males (they were at a neighbouring table and the older man was advising/discussing work with the younger man)

- One black male
- Two groups of smokers were standing at a distance in the quad area. One group was of white females only while the other consisted exclusively of Indian females

Appendix 5 Consent Documents

Appendix 5.1: Organisation Permission to Conduct Research



WITS BUSINESS SCHOOL

University of the
Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 1456

Fax: (011) 717 1463

Dear Head of Human Resources

My name is Hugo Canham and I am currently pursuing my Doctoral degree in Management at the University of the Witwatersrand. To complete my degree I am required to conduct research and to write a research thesis that accounts for 100% of my mark. The aim of this research is to understand whether Employment Equity (EE) in its current form is leading to “real” psychological empowerment amongst designated groups and depowerment (enabling of employment equity) amongst white males. I would like to invite your employees to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by myself, at a time and place that is convenient for employees. The interview will last for approximately 1 hour. With their permission these interviews will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Selected participants will be asked to keep journals and others will be asked to participate in group discussions. Parts of some of the group discussions will be audio and video recorded. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of the participants responses will be kept confidential and no information that could identify them would be included in the research theses. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in the organisation at any time, and will only be processed by myself or a research assistant. Participants may refuse to answer any questions they would prefer not to, and they may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

Your employee’s participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to the pool of knowledge in the area of EE. In particular, it proposes to provide a constructive way forward in the implementation of EE by promoting “real” empowerment as well as meaningfully engage with the role of white men in enhancing EE.

I would appreciate it if you could please grant me permission to gain access to the employees in your organisation to request their participation. This research could possibly be published and it could therefore be used to add on to the pool of knowledge. Outcomes of this study could aid in understanding how the process of meaningful transformation could be improved in South African organisations. Kindly sign below to grant me permission to conduct the study.

Kind Regards

Hugo Canham
Wits University

PhD Student

011717146 / 0829289051

Hugo.canham@wits.ac.za

Dr. Christoph Maier
Wits University

Supervisor

0824675096

christoph.maier@comazo.de

Please complete the slip below:

This letter confirms that I, Dr./Mr/Mrs/Ms _____, grant

Hugo Canham permission to conduct research in this organisation.

Signature: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5.2: Participant Information Sheet



WITS BUSINESS SCHOOL

University of the
Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050

Tel: (011) 717 1456

Fax: (011) 717 1463

Dear Bank Employee

My name is Hugo Canham and I am currently pursuing my Doctoral degree in Management at the University of the Witwatersrand's Business School. To complete my degree I am required to conduct research and to write a research thesis that accounts for 100% of my mark. The aim of this research is to understand whether Employment Equity (EE) in its current form is leading to real psychological empowerment amongst designated groups and depowerment (enabling of employment equity) amongst white males. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by me at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will last for approximately 1 hour. With your permission these interviews will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. Selected participants will be asked to keep journals and others will be asked to participate in group discussions. Parts of the group discussions will be audio and video recorded. Participation is voluntary, and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept confidential and no information that could identify you will be included in the research theses. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by myself and a research assistant. You may refuse to answer any questions that you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

If you choose to participate in the study please contact me at the email address below.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to the pool of knowledge in the area of EE. In particular, it proposes to provide a constructive way forward in the implementation of EE by promoting "real" empowerment as well as meaningfully engage with the role of white men in enhancing EE.

This research could possibly be published and it will therefore be used to add on to the pool of knowledge. Outcomes of this study could aid in understanding how the process of meaningful transformation could be improved in South African organisations.

Kind Regards,

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Wits University

PhD Student

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Appendix 5.3: Consent Form: Interview

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Hugo Canham for his study on Employment Equity (empowerment and depowerment). I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions 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, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix 5.4: Consent Form: Written Responses to Newspaper Extracts

I _____ consent to keeping a journal, a copy of which will be given to Hugo Canham for his study on Employment Equity (empowerment and depowerment). I understand that:

- Writing this journal is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions 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, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix 5.5: Consent Form - Group Discussion

I _____ consent to participating in a group discussion facilitated by Hugo Canham for his study on Employment Equity (empowerment and depowerment). I understand that:

- Participation in this group discussion is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions 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, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix 5.6: Consent Form - Audio Recording

I _____ consent to my interview with Hugo Canham for his study on Employment Equity (empowerment and depowerment) being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.
- Exact quotation may be used in the final report.

Signed _____

Date _____