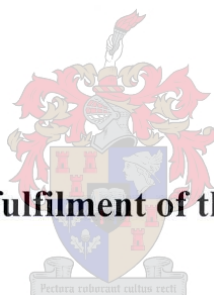


**MARCHING TO A DIFFERENT BEAT:
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DIVERSITY
WITH MINORITY WOMEN STUDENTS AT
A HISTORICALLY WHITE UNIVERSITY**

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SUPERVISOR: Professor D. Daniels

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and had not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any other university for a degree.

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Signature

1 - 12 - 2005
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Date

ABSTRACT

Transformation of South Africa's historically white universities is evidenced by a diversification of their student and staff populations. The transition from exclusion to inclusion of minority cultures in these university campuses has not been without its challenges for those students. This study provides a record of the experiences of five coloured women who are undergraduate students at Stellenbosch University (SU), a predominantly white institution. The approach used is feminist, grounded participatory action research.

Despite institutional policy initiatives, the Coloured undergraduate students in the study did not experience the university environment as inclusive. What emerged was that the women had an acute awareness of othernesses and their own minority status. Factors such as the small number of minority students and the absence of symbols or icons that reflect and acknowledge the presence of diverse cultures exacerbate their feeling of being in the minority or 'tolerated otherness'. The women experienced SU as a university where established practices and traditions continue despite the changing demographics of the student population. This type of organisational culture in which covert and overt resistance to transformation is the norm acts as a constraint on the political will to move from policy to practice and entrenches the marginalisation of minority groups.

The study found that integration is left largely to personal initiative. Personal variables such as resilience, strategies for coping with stress and the resolution of identity issues, appear to play a key role in academic success. However, academic success is not always accompanied by successful social integration. Social isolation was found to have a negative impact on personal and academic confidence.

Although the women in the study have had relatively negative experiences of transformation, their willingness to engage in reflexive praxis and dialogue could serve as a challenge to SU to engage in a process which acknowledges the concerns, resistance and experience of all role-players.

OPSOMMING

Die transformasie van histories-blanke Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite word gekenmerk aan die diversifisering van hulle studente en personeel. Hierdie proses vind plaas deur die geleidelike wegbeweeg van die algehele uitsluiting van die minderheidsgroepe op die betrokke kampusse tot hulle volledige insluiting by alle bedrywighede. Dié proses is nie sonder uitdagings vir die betrokke studente nie. In hierdie studie word die ervarings beskryf van vyf bruin vroulike voorgraadse studente aan die Stellenbosch Universiteit (US), 'n oorwegend-blanke tersiêre instelling. Vir hierdie studie is 'n feministiese benadering wat gebaseer is op deelnemende aksienavorsing gebruik.

Ten spyte van institusionele beleidsinisiatiewe om genoemde transformasie te bespoeding, het die voorgraadse bruin studente wat aan hierdie studie deelgeneem het, nie die universiteitsomgewing as inklusief ervaar nie. Dit het eerder duidelik geword dat die dames baie bewus was van hulle andersheid en hulle minderheidstatus. Faktore soos die klein aantal minderheidstudente en die afwesigheid van simbole of ikone wat die teenwoordigheid van diverse kulture reflekteer en erken, het hulle ervaring as behorende tot 'n minderheidsgroep versterk. Die dames het die US ervaar as 'n universiteit waar ingewortelde praktyke en tradisies voortgesit word ten spyte van die veranderende demografie van die studentebevolking. Hierdie soort organisatoriese kultuur waar bedekte en openlike teenstand tot transformasie die norm is, plaas 'n demper op die politieke gewilligheid om van beleid na praktyk te beweeg en verdiep die marginalisering van minderheidsgroepe.

Die bevindings van die studie is dat integrasie grootliks oorgelaat word aan persoonlike inisiatiewe. Persoonlikeheidseienskappe soos gedetermineerde optrede, die benutting van strategieë om stres te hanteer en identiteitskrisisse op te los, speel blykbaar 'n sleutelrol in akademiese sukses. Akademiese sukses loop egter nie altyd hand aan hand met sosiale integrasie nie. Daar is bevind dat sosiale isolasie 'n negatiewe impak op persoonlike en akademiese vertroue het.

Alhoewel die ervarings van die dames wat aan die studie deelgeneem het relatief negatiewe was ten opsigte van transformasie, was hulle tog gewillig om deel te neem aan die reflektiewe praxis en dialoog. Hierdie feit dien as 'n uitdaging aan die Stellenbosch Universiteit om betrokke te raak by 'n proses waarin die bekommernisse, weerstande en ervarings van alle rolspelers hanteer word.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Ten years into South Africa's democracy, the University of Stellenbosch like all historically white institutions, is under increasing pressure to have a student and worker corps that is more representative of the demographics of the country. Similar to other historically white institutions, the University of Stellenbosch has set in place policies and practices that are aimed at fast tracking the diversification and transformation process at the institution. This study is about diversity. It is a critical interpretative inquiry into the experiences of undergraduate students who are a minority due to their race and gender at this historically white Afrikaans institution. This study is delimited to coloured undergraduate women students' experiences of transformation at Stellenbosch University, a historically white Afrikaans tertiary institution.

Stellenbosch University is the oldest Afrikaans university, with an institutional culture that is still predominantly white, Christian and Afrikaans. The institution, through its language plan and policy, continues to position itself on a platform that sees the promotion of Afrikaans as one of its primary responsibilities. It has however, in its new strategic plan, conceded that this process needs to go hand in hand with the diversification of its staff and student corps (Brink, 2003). According to university documentation, the focus of transformation is primarily on changing the demographic profile of the student and staff corps through the recruitment of people from the white, African, Coloured and Indian races, classifications that were inherited from the apartheid era. The university has identified Africans, Coloureds, Indians, women and people with disabilities as groups that will be targeted in the diversification process (<http://www.sun.ac.za/university/diversiteit.htm>, 10.06.2004). The University's rector, Professor C. Brink (and the management of the institution) hope that this will facilitate the attainment of another of the universities strategic goals, namely, to prepare all its students to live and work in a multicultural society.

The experiences of Coloured women students, as a minority population, could become lost due to a misconception that their shared language and religious affiliation with the dominant culture, makes them less likely to feel alienated. The study wants to give voice to Coloured undergraduate women who could be doubly marginalized by their race and gender in this institution. It hopes to add to the limited pool of research about coloured women, by coloured women for coloured women. This study delimits itself to the experience of coloured undergraduate women students at the University of Stellenbosch, it does not presume to speak for all coloured women at HWIs in South Africa. The feminist school stresses the importance of acknowledging women's diverse positions, struggles, oppressions and strengths that take place in a complex web of historical and cultural locations (Collins, 1991). This view of the heterogeneous nature of women's experience and reality is often ignored. The way in which we experience life and loss is strongly influenced by variables such as race, culture, gender, sexual identity and material privilege (Dulwich Centre, 2004).

By engaging in a narrative research process that acknowledges and honours these women's experiences, I would be able to add to the skills and knowledge that inform meaningful participation. Hope and Timmel (in Morkel, 2002:15) equate participation with dialogue. According to them, "dialogue is based on people sharing their own perceptions of a problem, offering their opinions and ideas and having the opportunity to make decisions or recommendations". They also express the belief that in order for people to break the culture of silence, they need enhanced self-confidence. Self-confidence is said to be enhanced when people experience that their opinions and views are valued and that they are able to make a contribution to the operations of the institution.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

How well we are able to function in any context depends on our understanding of the relationship between personal agency and conditions of power and privilege that are operational in that environment. According to the facilitators at the Dulwich Centre (2004) only through exploring the "operations of privilege" in the context in which we function, will we be able to fully appreciate people's efforts to work and live within the context of these constraints and to resist them. People often experience decreased personal agency when privileged operations are not made visible, because the

tendency is to understand that constraints are due to individual, group or cultural deficits. When we locate the problem within ourselves, we may operate from a "position of shame" which in turn may limit our will to resist. By becoming aware of the "operations of power and privilege" we create opportunities for increased sensitisation to the factors that create constraints on peoples' lives and in the process we open up dialogue to address them.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As a student at the university it is my perception that over the past three years, the University of Stellenbosch has stepped up its diversification programme. My experience as a coloured woman, student and intern psychologist at the university suggests that the vision and guiding policy of transformation, while impressive on paper, is not always being experienced meaningfully at grassroots level. This made me question to what extent this is influenced by how the institution, is dealing with increasing pressure to transform and I wondered whether the current institutional transformation process is being steered by a new political will or if it is simply a survival strategy?

An institution's understanding of the need for transformation is influenced by its attitude and commitment to the process. However, an academic understanding of the issues does not constitute an authentic commitment to the process of transformation. A change in attitude is important for meaningful transformation. This change is encouraged when we create platforms where all role players can express their fears, experiences, aspirations, opinions and knowledges.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to explore the perceptions and experiences of a group of Coloured female undergraduate students, a group, which according to university documents, is the fastest growing group of minority students on the Stellenbosch University campuses (<http://www.sun.ac.za/university/statistiek/stats.html>, 08.06.2004). Though the theoretical population for the study will be all coloured women undergraduate students, a purposive sample of five women was selected from this population for inclusion in this study. They were purposively selected from coloured women students who have used the various services of the University's Student Counselling and Development centre and whom the researcher anticipated would provide rich narratives on their experiences as students.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a qualitative study that used the participatory action research approach. The participatory action research method has as its focus the creation of conditions for "often devalued knowledges and skills to be identified, rendered more visible and honoured". By creating an environment that acknowledges and creates a platform for the 'sophistication of these knowledges and skills' to surface we can create opportunities for these wisdoms to be utilized in creating opportunities for more 'culturally and community sensitive appropriate options for action' (White, 2003:2). By engaging in this method of research a platform was created for the participants to experience the power of being heard. As such, they became protagonists of their development as students.

The participatory action research approach can be placed within the Critical Research Paradigm. According to Brown and Tandon (cited in Babbi & Mouton, 2001), participatory action research can be seen as an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work and action. It adopts an unequivocally political stance which aims to empower disenfranchised and marginalized groups to take action to change their lives (Cornwell & Jewkes cited in Babbi & Mouton, 2001). This move towards transformation is facilitated by a process of self reflection and critical awareness raising of participants of their social reality and their capacity to transform it by their cognizant action.

Through this methodology it was anticipated that undergraduate coloured women would critically reflect on their experiences as coloured women students at the University of Stellenbosch in an effort to discover the meaning their experiences hold for them, and to collaboratively deal with challenges that stem from them. According to Callahan and Elliot (cited in Rapmund & Moore, 2002:6) traditional methods of research are often too restrictive to "capture the complexity inherent in experiences and therefore a free narrative approach, which has as its point of inquiry the study of human experience from within the context of human experience may be more meaningful" and would facilitate refining effective intervention within this population.

According to Mouton (2003:150) qualitative methods are used in order to "gain understanding and insight into the life worlds of research participants". This study

hoped to do this through interacting with women about how their experience at the institution resonates with the reality of their lives.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study was guided by the critical paradigm, using a qualitative approach which according to Mouton (2003:195) has the potential to "supplement and reorient our current understanding" of a situation.

This study can be described as an exploratory and descriptive journey concerned mainly with the collection of rich textual data. The process started with an extensive literature review of current literature related to the field of study.

Data was obtained through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with participants. These interview formats enabled me to explore the experiences of the women in detail. Smit (2003:4) suggests using semi-structured interviews initially as a way of exploring "defined areas of interest". Themes in these initial interviews served as a basic guide for later narrative conversations that assisted me in understanding the participants from their own perspectives. Throughout the process, transcriptions and field notes were shared with my supervisor and the participants as a mechanism for refining the research process. To allow for transparency and ownership of the process by participants, the transcription of the interviews were made available to them to verify the information. Babbi and Mouton (2001) stress the importance of the research process unfolding in a manner that is responsive to the emerging data. This study used an interpretive analysis approach, using open and axial coding. I engaged the participants in an ongoing process of collaborative analysis, interpretation and meaning giving (Babbi & Mouton, 2001). According to White (2003) this process provides an opportunity for the exploration of emerging ideas, creating opportunities for the telling and re-telling of experiences that create opportunities for healing through the witnessing and validation of personal experience. This process also creates an opportunity for empowerment through the process of 'transport' (experiencing your life experiences serving as and instrument of learning for others).

1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All aspects of the process were conducted with due respect for the rights and dignity of the participants. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their participation through their anonymity and to this end all names and identifying characteristics were masked in the final report.

According to Altheide and Johnson in (Morkel, 2001:17), validity-as-reflexive-accounting places the researcher, the topic, and the sense-making process in interaction. They emphasize the ethical responsibility of the researcher to provide the audience with a candid statement about "where the author is coming from". The ethics and practice of positioning assists in overcoming the inflexibility of language and creates opportunities for different types of identities and ideas of race, culture and gender to emerge (Marcus in Morkel, 2001).

Participants in the study were informed that they will, on request, be allowed full access to the transcripts and final copy of the thesis before publication.

1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis will be presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 was an introduction to the study and outlined the focus of the research, the motivation for the study, the objectives of the study/the rationale for the study as well as the statement of the research problem. This chapter also introduced the methodology used, limitations and delimitations of the study, addresses ethical issues and presents organisation of the study. Chapter 2 has as its focus, a review of current literature pertaining to the research problem. Chapter 3 is a presentation and discussion of the research design and methodology. In Chapter 4, I will present and discuss the information collected during the research conversations and analysed in the study. The main conclusions of the study will be summarised, discussed and interpreted, and where appropriate recommendations will be made for further research and practice or policy related to the research problem/focus area in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will provide a review of the literature which shaped the theoretical framework of the study. This will include a discussion of the literature which guided my thinking and the methodology I selected as well as that pertaining to the key factors in the adjustment of students of colour at predominantly white institutions. I start off by sketching a background within which higher education transformation is taking place.

2.2 BACKGROUND

South Africa is seen as an emerging democracy that is faced with the challenge of ensuring ongoing social, political and economic transformation and development. Addressing the legacy of apartheid requires intervention on a number of levels and terrains. Higher Education has been earmarked as a key role player in the consolidation of democracy in South Africa because of its perceived potential to play both a re-distributive social and economic function by training the next generation of professionals. This perception is supported by policy related to Higher Education and its role in society. Current trends in policy suggest that institutions of Higher Education in South Africa should have as their core competencies, creating an environment that is conducive to strengthening democracy, redressing inequalities, alleviating poverty, the production of social critics, the generation of innovations, and the promotion of economic development, which should all contribute to an educated citizenry (Norris, 2001; Flavish, 2003). Hofmeyr and Buckland (in Flavish, 2003), however, caution that government is not the sole determiner of change in education systems; they suggest that the dynamics within an institution and its relationship with the broader social and political context play a critical role in determining the type and pace of change within that particular institution.

2.2.1 Legislation

A policy of equity and redress requires resolute intervention in the different levels of the working and social life of South Africa to rectify the consequences of past discrimination. The government deems that institutions of Higher Education are strategically placed to assist in this process and so concerted interventions have been initiated at these institutions in an effort to eradicate historical deficits (Norris, 2001). Mengu (2003) presents a similar view in arguing that universities have a strategic role to play in the shaping or reshaping of a culture or society.

The intervention aimed at transforming Higher Education so it could serve the needs of the country's emerging democracy and economy was steered by a variety of parliamentary legislation. The overall guiding document in this transformatory process is the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108/1996). Some of the other legislation related to transformation and this particular study include, The Higher Education Act (Act101/1997), The Skills Development Act (Act 97/1998), The Employment Equity Act (Act55/1998) and the Basic Conditions of Service Act (Act 7/1997). According to the Council on Higher Education (2001), transformation at these institutions needs to facilitate the process that enables the personal aspirations of individuals and the social development of society to be met while at the same time ensuring the continued development of high level skills and knowledge that are needed for the growth of a modern economy to be met within a reasonable time frame.

Section 9 of the South African Constitution, which prohibits unfair discrimination on the basis of inter alia race, sex and gender, is of central importance to this study which explores how race and gender impact on the women's experience. The prohibition against unfair discrimination informs various other pieces of legislation related to the transformation or diversification of institutions of Higher Learning. In Section 1 of the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998, women, black people¹ and people with disabilities are identified as belonging to the designated groups targeted for redress. Section 13 of this act calls for employers to implement affirmative action measures to ensure that suitably qualified persons from designated groups have equal employment and training opportunities.

¹ This term is used to refer to all people who are not white

2.2.2 Transformation

Addressing past imbalances entails transformation. Transformation in this sense is a form of strategic intentional alteration to bring about significant organisational change both in ethos and practice (Norris, 2001). According to Gourley and Kirsten (in Fourie, 1999:277), it conveys a "sense of radical change, of a metamorphosis which needs to take place; and implies much more than cosmetic changes, window dressing or strategic moves; it is a moral imperative deeply footed and driven by the will-to-truth and cognitive transcendence".

Transformation in Higher Education in South Africa is taking place against the backdrop of an ongoing broader political and socio-economic movement aimed at redressing social, economic and legislative imbalances inherited from the apartheid era. Education is an emotive and highly contested terrain rife with tension as a legacy of apartheid. Post 1994, the government brief for the transformation of education in this sector is that it "is to reflect the changes that are taking place in our society and to strengthen the values and practices of our new democracy ..." and, that "... this is not negotiable" (Bengu, 1997:2). Transformation as a consequence of democracy is therefore considered to be a process in which institutions develop and maintain an environment in which all the role players are afforded an equal opportunity to develop to their full potential and make a meaningful contribution to the institution and its objectives. The purpose of transformation in Higher Education should then not only involve affirmative action but also the diversification of the institution, its structures and practices and the development and recognition of new and common values. Some academic theorists consider that this move is only possible if all stakeholders and role-players undergo a change in mindset. This shift would entail the sensitisation or reorientation of these stakeholders and role-players to the need for change, the process of this change and how these changes will impact on the people, process and practices of the institution (Fourie, 1999; Daniels, 2001; Norris, 2001). I argue that after eleven years of democracy many institutions continue to face the challenge of bridging the gap between the democratic ideals of policy and the practical implementation of policy, this view is supported by the literature. Attempts to bridge this gap are characterized by transformation agendas that essentially focus on affirmative action, changes in institutional governance, restructuring curricula, a change in the focus of research and community service. The literature reviewed seems to suggest that despite



political pressure and institutional initiatives, transformation is still perceived by many to be moving at a "snail's pace" (Fourie, 1999; Bolsman & Uys, 2001; Daniels, 2001).

2.2.3 Organisational culture

Organisational culture can be defined as the way in which an organisation conducts itself and the beliefs, values and assumptions that guide its operations (Havenga in Norris, 2001). It plays an important role in meaningful transformation. In order to ensure effective and lasting transformation an organisation should engage in an ongoing process of attempting to understand the prevailing organisational culture and ways in which aspects of that culture could impede or encourage the process of transformation.

Roheim (2002:2) stresses the importance of acknowledging that "relations of power and privilege shape institutional practices, economic structures, legal systems, family relations, the ... indeed all realms of life." She reminds us that the relations and practices of power that influence our lives are often invisible to us and stresses the importance of being proactive in our consideration of how relations of power may operate to create advantages for some and deny these advantages to others. Within the context of South Africa and its journey towards addressing past imbalances and perceptions of power, there is the continuing need to remain vigilant about power operations and how we fit into these operations. This is important to ensure that our expectations, our cultural ways and our ways thinking are not imposed on others in our environment. This process of ongoing examination should entail encouraging active engagement around real and perceived challenges, in which we strive to create platforms which encourage free and open debate, commitment, individual and organisational reflection (Roheim, 2002; White, 2003).

As a designated agent of both social and economic change in South Africa, institutions of Higher Education should be actively creating a climate which embraces diversity through its policies, attitudes and practices. One of the benchmarks of an institution's commitment to transformation is the significant presence of academic staff and students of colour. By ensuring this type of diversity in its populace an organisation creates an environment that assuages an unaccommodating culture in which the value assigned to faculty work and research related to diversity is

minimised and stereotyping which adversely affects expectations from students prevails (Norris 2001, Niemann & Maruyama, 2001; Daniels, 2001).

A diverse workforce and student population enhance an awareness of how power and privilege operate within an institution. This in turn leads to an appreciation of the circumstances that place limitations on people's lives and their efforts to function or resist these within the context of their daily lives (Roheim, 2002; Daniels, 2001).

2.2.4 Affirmative action

Education is thus viewed as an important vehicle for social transformation and the redress of economic imbalances created by South Africa's apartheid past. Resolute intervention by means of legislation has ensured the diversification of social, educational and economic institutions. One of the key mechanisms employed in this process has been affirmative action. Fuhr in Norris (2001) defines affirmative action as a process which aims to create a workforce that reflects the demographic realities of the society in which it operates. It implies the creation of a race conscious paradigm and discourse at institutions, which are serious about acting as agents of change and making a contribution to this emerging democracy and economy through the promotion and development of members of those groups who have borne the brunt of past institutionalised discriminatory practices (Norris, 2001; Niemann & Maruyama, 2005). However, Crosby and Van De Veer (in Niemann & Maruyama, 2005) caution that one cannot assume that the adoption of affirmative action policies and practices will ensure a significant presence of academic staff and students of colour in higher education. Although affirmative action policies and practices have essentially been the primary policy used to increase the access of ethnic/racial minorities to higher education, one needs to remain vigilant that redress does not merely become a numbers game. Bowen and Bok (1998) contend that one of the strongest arguments for affirmative action at Higher Education Institutions is the impact it has on the creation of diversity. This point of view is shared by Persico (in Niemann & Maruyama, 2005), who considers that the primary purpose of affirmative action is the creation of institutions that ensure that people from diverse backgrounds engage in the sharing of knowledge, attitudes and skills that are only attainable through an education experience that occurs without loss of culture or self. Although all institutions have in place an affirmative action and/or diversification policy, there appears to be a great deal of ambivalence in the attitudes and beliefs of Higher

Education Institutions with regard to diversity. The ripple effect of this is ambivalent practices and policies related to diversity and opportunities for redress (Niemann & Maruyama, 2005). One of the aims of this study was to explore the possible impact of this ambivalence on the day-to-day experiences of a group of minority women students at a historically white institution. Nacoste and Lehman (in Niemann & Maruyama, 2005) caution that in this type of environment an admission policy which focuses strongly on race may potentially stigmatise all students that fit particular racial profiles. Other students may assume that all students from the designated groups were admitted through affirmative action rather than because of other criteria such as personal attributes, qualifications, and need.

2.2.5 Diversity

As previously stated, Higher Education Institutions are seen as having a key role in the reconstruction and development of South Africa. Many researchers contend that the only way, in which these institutions can become proactive in ensuring the upward mobility of all South Africans, is to develop an appreciation of the need for diversity and an understanding of how the process needs to be managed in order for it to be effective (Norris, 2001). Havenga (in Norris, 2001:22) points out that "diversity starts with a realisation of diverse interest ... the very essence of the organisation and its culture must be renegotiated and re-conceptualized from a perspective other than the dominant culture". This view is supported by Roosevelt-Thomas (in Norris 2001) who emphasizes the importance of developing a clear understanding of what managing diversity entails. In his view this means enabling all members of an institution to perform to their potential. Affirmative action has a central role to play in setting the scene for change and enabling diversity. However, it should only be considered a transitional tool in the long-term diversification process.

Ambivalence about diversity, often makes it a thorny issue at institutions because of a perception that in the process one group benefits at the expense of another (Kravitz & Plantaniia; Niemann & Dovidio in Niemann & Maruyama, 2005). Daniels (2001) suggests that one way of addressing this ambivalence would be to embrace *Putman's* Theory of Social Capital. This theory suggests that the more opportunities people have for working together, the more likely they are to learn to trust each other and the better off they will be both individually and collectively.

There are a number of benefits to having a more diverse institutional population, some of these include the creation of a learning environment in which critical thinking, interactions with other groups and contact among equals is promoted. This should then in turn create a culture of learning in which students are challenged to consider alternative viewpoints and develop tolerance for difference. In South Africa legislation requires that institutions set in place initiatives that facilitate all students having a positive experience of Higher Education. These initiatives should have as focal points, efforts to improve retention, self-confidence, leadership and interpersonal skills among all role-players (Daniels, 2001; Light, 2001; Niemann & Maruyama, 2005).

A commitment to transformation and redress confronts institutions with the need for change. Change is often a challenging and uncomfortable process that requires a reflection on beliefs, attitudes and practice and then to set in place mechanisms for changing those aspects of an institution that are not in line with the dominant ethos or discourse of socio-political and economic transformation.

2.2.6 Transformation at Stellenbosch University

The process of transformation is guided by legislation and a need to become part of the new democracy that is South Africa. This is the view expressed in the university's strategic plan and the one espoused by the university management on public platforms. Du Plessis (2003:3), describes the Higher Education environment in South Africa as being guided by The National Plan for Higher Education in which 5 key policy goals were identified to guide the transformation of Higher Education in South Africa. She lists them as follows:

- To increase access and to produce graduates with the skills and competencies necessary to meet the human resource needs of the country. These must include, in particular, women and the disabled.
- To promote equity through ensuring that student and staff profiles reflect the demographic composition of South African society.
- Given the apartheid legacy, there is a long way to be travelled before the social composition of academic and management personnel will approximate that of the general SA population.
- To ensure diversity through mission and programme differentiation.

- To build high-level research capacity.
- To restructure and consolidate the institutional landscape to get rid of the fragmentation, inequalities and inefficiencies of the apartheid past and to enable the establishment of South African institutions with the vision and values of a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society.

Stellenbosch was considered to be one of the forerunners of Higher Education in South Africa, because of "perceptions of greater stability, a better reputation, and a higher quality education" and the university's continued "enrolment stability with steadily growing student numbers in both undergraduate as well as postgraduate courses" (Du Plessis, 2003:6). According to Du Plessis the first coloured students were admitted to SU in 1979, despite the fact that it was contrary to government policy at the time. Current government policy is adamant that Higher Education institutions reflect the diverse demographics of society. In an attempt to comply with current government policy that Higher Education institutions reflect the diverse demographics of society, the university has adopted a strategic plan to take the university into the new millennium. This process is guided by the vision of the university and is outlined by the rector as; striving for excellence and participation, which entails the university continuing to strive for academic excellence and playing an active role in the development of South Africa and its people. Although the primary focus should remain the academic, the university should also strive to create a populace that is more reflective of the demographic realities of South Africa. Central to the vision of the university is the continuing promotion of Afrikaans as an academic language (Brink, 2003).

In order to comply with the vision, one of the key aspects has been a diversification of the institution. This process is described by the Rector as one in which diversity does not remain focused on race but embraces all aspects of difference in South Africa. Some of the differences he highlights are gender, socio-economic background, ability and ideas. He cautions that diversity should not be viewed as "a hindrance or a danger to quality. Nor is it in opposition to quality. Diversity is one of the necessary conditions for quality" (Brink in Du Plessis, 2003:7).

Du Plessis recognizes SU strategic role in the transformation process as follows:

Anybody with a sense of history can see that we in South Africa are in the centre of a laboratory in which the experiments for the new world order are

being conducted. We want to rise above our small-town base, minority language, and an unhappy political history, to international standing (2003:10).

2.3 AREAS OF CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS OF COLOUR AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITIES

Research shows that students of colour face many challenges within historically white institutions (Liebenberg & Houston, 2000; Zegeye, Liebenberg & Houston, 2000; Bufton, 2003; Gay, 2004; Jones, 2004; Shih, 2004; Noguera & Akom, 2005). Besides the usual developmental tasks and adjustment challenges that all university students face, minority students at predominantly white universities face unique stressors that often hinder their ability to interact and cope effectively in the university environment. Some of the additional problems suggested by research include, recurrent problems of covert and overt hostility and racism, poor rapport with faculty, inadequate social lives and academic failure.

A Gibson and Gouws study quoted in Zegeye *et al.* (2000) suggests that most South Africans continue to use racial or ethnic terms when describing themselves. They suggest that failure to acknowledge this is tantamount to underestimating the role that racial and ethnic identities have played in shaping historical struggles (Zegeye *et al.*, 2000:178). One of the primary tasks then in attempting to accommodate diversity is an acknowledgment that heterogeneity is part of the natural order of things and does not necessarily represent a threat to the democratic process.

One of the ways in which the current government has attempted to deal with redress of past imbalances, has been to retain certain apartheid identities through the use of affirmative action and black economic empowerment. Grobbelaar (in Zegeye *et al.*, 2000:178), however, cautions that: "Strategies that aim at equitable and affirming outcomes for all groups could reinforce racial identification in certain ways ..." For him there is a real danger that people may fall back into the organic or laager like comfort of group mobilizing identities that in the process could contribute to the undermining of the transformation and equity. This view is supported by Zegeye *et al.* (2000:178), who emphasize the importance of an ongoing engagement with heterogeneity and unity in order to counter the "potential for sub-groups based on ethnic, cultural, linguistic, racial, religious, regional class or caste identities to feel excluded". They suggest then the dilemma faced by researchers, is how to ensure that

marginalised communities and their challenges are recognized without propagating apartheid labels. Research that then acknowledges the importance of striving to understand the role that heterogeneity plays in transformation necessitates more than an interest on the part of people to tell their stories in order to reaffirm themselves. It entails a meticulous consideration of why people's histories and culture are meaningful and important and why they have an integrity that is worth safeguarding, while at the same time subjecting it to progressive enhancement. They emphasise the importance of groups maintaining their own integrity without in the process encroaching on the integrity and well-being of others (Zegeye *et al.*, 2000).

This study will consider some of the challenges that students of colour at predominantly white universities experience. A number of factors that have a bearing on students performance and outcomes emerged from the literature. These include, variables such as the students' background, their adaptation to the new environment, the coping strategies they employ, their perceptions of the availability of social support or lack thereof. Other factors mentioned include having few black classmates, constricted or difficult relationships with faculty, experiences of racial discrimination, and an ever-present perception of a lack of control over the environment and experiences within that environment.

The findings in Malefo's study (2000) suggest that an interaction between various variables such as; background and personal attributes, adjustment problems, and the development of maladaptive coping strategies may serve to place students of colour at predominantly white universities at additional risk for poor academic performance and psychological distress.

The literature suggests that an important factor in adjustment is the school background of students. The kind of school students' attended affects the both student and academic perception of how well prepared they are for university. Parents often perceive the education available to their children at schools situated in historically disadvantaged communities as inadequate and not responsive to the needs of their children. If they are able to afford it, they often opt for schools that are perceived to be better off in terms of quality and funding (Noguera & Akom, 2005). It seems that children who attend schools in disadvantaged communities are often considered to be less equipped academically than their counterparts who have attended white or more privileged schools. An additional challenge for students from this type of school

background is that they are often stigmatized as problems and challenges from the start (Noguera & Akom, 2005). According to Bufton (2003), research has shown that many students from this type of background have related feelings of being impostors in the University environment. This she interprets as being tied to their perception of having the wrong kind of background, the wrong experiences and the wrong kind of intelligence.

Another factor relates to perceptions of minority status within a university setting. Affirmative action and equity legislation have led to an increase in the number of black students attending historically white universities. The presence of these students at these institutions is often considered by them and some other sectors as being a political statement of transformation. Not everybody is equally happy about the need for or the process of transformation. However, being aware of the negative attitudes and prejudices of others does not inevitably result in the internalisation of these judgments (Shih, 2004). Research cited in Shih (2004) suggests that some minority students develop coping strategies and skills which help them to challenge perceptions associated with their minority status, and use these to ensure academic success and achieve their goals. Fleming (in Malefo, 2000) suggests that these coping skills are strengthened by the student's ability to access supportive community on campus. This supportive community usually consists of the student's peers, faculty staff like professional counsellors who offer responsive counselling, and supportive lecturers. These all serve as a useful support system that mediates the stress experienced by these students.

Another area of challenge for minority students, as suggested by Gay (2004) is problematic popularity. She describes problematic popularity as the inclusion of members of the minority student population to represent diversity on committees, programmes and promotional initiatives. Involvement, or the invitation to become involved, is often given with little consideration as to whether the person has the competencies that the task requires. These invitations are usually issued by people in positions of influence. Recipients feel that they cannot refuse the invitation without negative political consequences. This often results in the students finding themselves in a situation in which they may experience their participation as, "window dressing, tokenism or symbolic participation without having substantive influence on the course of events" (Gay, 2004:284).

2.3.1 Academic factors

Research suggests that there are a number of factors that can mitigate academic performance. Among these are educational background, motivational factors, expectation of performance, self esteem and levels of preparation. Another important variable is faculty attitudes and behaviours. A key factor is feedback from lecturers and tutors which can have a major impact on students' perceptions of their skills and abilities. When lecturers do not give the required help, students can experience this as lack of support. However, the converse is also true. Sometimes the lecturers may give so much assistance that it undermines students' confidence. The behaviour of and interaction with peers and lecturers can exacerbate feelings of intellectual isolation, which are common among students of colour at predominantly white universities. These feelings can also be exacerbated when minority students feel that their world experience is not acknowledged or that they are compelled to act as a reference source for information about minority groups. It may cause students to resort to not making contributions in class. Their silence is often perceived as a lack of capacity or interest. However, Gay (2004:274) argues that these silences are "often an attempt to diffuse intellectual isolation" and that choosing not to participate in their classes should be seen as a defence mechanism rather than an act of free choice. Bufton (2003) makes a similar point. She contends that students experience a sense of having to adopt a different persona in which they felt compelled to change fundamental aspects of themselves. In this process they run the risk of developing identity crises (Bufton, 2003; Gay, 2004).

Language is another area of challenge. There is a difference in the type of language used in various socio-economic contexts and often the gap between the language spoken generally and academic language is quite big and intimidating to people from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Students may experience a feeling of speaking in a foreign language when adopting an academic stance and even when students become fairly competent in the use of the academic language this feeling of otherness may persist. One of the participants in a study conducted by Bufton (2003) describes this feeling as almost always being aware of and checking that she was using the correct kind of spoken language in various situations. To speak academic language often heralds a change in identity with which the student may not be comfortable (Bufton, 2003; Gay, 2004; Noguera & Akom, 2005). Another related

factor is social integration. Mann (in Bufton, 2003) equates the experience of most students entering the higher education arena with those of tourist:

... crossing the borders of a new country, they have to deal with the bureaucracy of checkpoints, or matriculation, they may have limited knowledge of the local language and customs and are alone ... the experience of alienation arises from being in a place where those in power have the potential to impose their particular ways of perceiving and understanding.

This sense of isolation may inhibit participation and thus prevent students from establishing or widening their social support bases. According to Herrero and Garcia (2004), research has found that widening social networks can play an important role in strengthening the young person's resilience. Widening social networks appear to enable the young person to access new information and resources which are beneficial to them. They also contend that taking part in structured social interaction assists students in feeling a sense of connectedness and belonging that helps to enrich their experience. However, a perception of difference may inhibit participation and result in marginalisation (Bufton, 2003). Gay (2004:267) proposes a definition of marginalisation:

Marginalisation does not mean a sense of internalised negative perceptions of self-identity or lack of competence on the part of the student, rather it deals with goodness-of-fit issues between the needs, interests and skills of students of colour and institutional priorities and protocols; cultural, racial, ethnic and social differences; lack of culturally relevant academic and social support systems; and maintaining one's ethnic identity and cultural integrity.

She goes on to list two other forms of marginalisation experienced by students of colour at a predominantly white university; they are isolation and benign neglect. Isolation in this context refers to both physical and culturally isolation. The small number of students of colour may mean that these students may experience physical isolation reinforcing the feelings of lack of fit, in which the person's

perception of being out of place is suffused with feelings of being outsiders as they hover on the margins of social groups ... although they are in the vicinity where these events occur, they may not feel that they are major players, they are on the sidelines, watching the action instead of participating fully in the process" (Gay, 2004:67).

Cultural isolation refers to the lack of icons and symbols relating to minorities at predominantly white institutions. Icons and symbols in this sense are reflected in curriculum content, the names of buildings, the artwork on display, the topics and speakers in lecture series. The absence or very limited provision of social and cultural

gathering places for minority groups often serves to strengthen the perception that students of colour are 'guests' in a world that is not their own and so they may rarely experience a sense of ownership or belonging at their university (Gay, 2004). Malefo (2000) argues that this approach is often justified on the basis that students of colour need to adapt to the white university environment. This he suggests then appears to place the onus of transformation on the minorities and exempts the institutions from meaningful adaptation to accommodate the growing diversity of its student population. Turner and Meyers (2000) also caution against these institutions adopting an attitude of apparent cordiality which may perpetuate the sense of being guests and not full members of the institution. In benign neglect, students are deprived of meaningful and critical feedback on their academic performance because of academic staff attitudes and behaviours (Bufton, 2003; Gay, 2004). Ray (in Bufton, 2003) speaks of students then experiencing a pervasive feeling of not getting it right.

Having to deal with this type of stressor takes emotional and intellectual energy that the literature suggests could be more effectively used to ensure successful academic performance. It increases stress in an already stressful situation. Students also frequently experience loneliness and an increased sense of disjunction in which their values, perspectives and assumptions are continuously challenged (Malefo, 2000; Bufton, 2003; Gay, 2004).

2.3.2 Personal Variables

Personal variables refer to the interplay between personal histories and traits that have created the unique tapestry of individual lives. Situational determinants like socio-economic, family and educational backgrounds and life events or experiences provide a frame of reference which may serve to mobilize or inhibit willingness to access support services (Schultz & Tomkins in Herrero & Garcia, 2004). This frame of reference serves as a base for the development of coping strategies needed to deal with the stigmatisation imposed on minorities by virtue of their race, gender, socio-economic circumstances, disabilities, etc. Research into overcoming the disadvantages associated with stigma or stereotyping, suggest that the development of effective coping strategies "compensate for the stigma ... [and] these skills help them to achieve their goals and overcome disadvantages" (Shih, 2004:177-178). The development of resilience is considered a key self protective strategy to overcome stigma and chronic stressors in ones' environment. Findings made by Stevens (2003)

also suggest that increased confidence results in a sense of autonomy, a positive change in individuals' perception of themselves and their ability as well as greater *self-understanding*. The literature further suggests that the principle of reflexive practice is important to this process of personal growth and empowerment.

Closely tied to confidence is a sense of who we are or our sense of self. Bufton, (2003) argues that this is affected by the spectrum of social relationships in which we distinguish our similarities or differences with others and the social context in which we function. This view is supported by Weeks (1990) who contends that identity is about belonging, and is strongly influenced by what you have in common with some people and by what differentiates you from others. Selfhood and identity are closely tied to social influences which help to form and sustain them. Social relationships and functioning are also influenced by personal variables such as, "the experience of psychological distress, personal agency, personal interest and motivation" (Herrero & Garcia, 2004:709). The development of selfhood can thus be seen to be related to personal variables like self-efficacy and praxis in relation to personal and social histories as well as the affiliations or memberships that people hold in various groups. However, we should be cautious about drawing conclusions as these groups are often products of the past and therefore come with a set of notions about who or what membership to that group entails (Strauss in Bufton, 2003).

Many students from historically disadvantaged communities may be the first in their families and communities to attend university, so there are no role models or mentors from within that environment to guide the student in terms of personal and academic challenges and expectations the student will face (Pendris, 2005). Being admitted to a tertiary institution may give rise to scenarios in which the community come to view them as both a success and unacceptably superior (Scott in Pendris, 2005). Bufton, (2003) is of the opinion that this type of scenario may cause ambivalence about where they fit into their communities. She suggests that this could be related to students having a sense of having moved on and of losing common ground because of exposure to new experiences but still identifying with a value system and historical experiences which provide a safety net and creates a resistance to letting go. She cautions that these students may experience confusion about their identity. This sense of disjunction may create a situation in which they feel they have to live separate lives or develop separate personas in order to fit in with both their old and new worlds.

Financial constraints are another area of challenge for students from previously disadvantaged communities. Pendris (2005), argues that the "sheer financial struggle *to pay for tuition* is an enormous challenge for formerly disadvantaged students". She argues that the primary reason for this is that "racial segregation locked communities out of certain sectors of the economy and also prevented them from being exposed to aspects of modern culture which varsity newcomers are assumed to be familiar with." She contends that the financial challenges faced by students from historically disadvantaged communities do not end with financial provision at university but continues into "an equally demanding set of expectations ... after graduation". Their education then is not only about personal development but is often about improving the quality of life of the family.

2.4 SUMMARY

This chapter was primarily an exploration of the literature related to the socio-political context in which transformation in Higher Education is taking place in South Africa. It explored initiatives entered into by SU and identified some of the challenges that students from previously disadvantaged minority groups might face at predominantly white universities.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

"I am tired of people here thinking that all coloured women are the same, when will they see me as more than just a coloured woman?" This view a young undergraduate student shared with me at a workshop pricked my curiosity about how this group of woman of colour, who could be perceived as marginalised due to gender and racial classification, were experiencing their academic journey at SU. I reflected on my own experiences and stories of being challenged with this homogeneous consciousness, and her need to give voice to her uniqueness resonated with me.

The question that focused my research was: How are coloured undergraduate women experiencing Stellenbosch University? I chose to explore this topic through the narratives and stories of coloured undergraduate women's experiences at SU. I particularly listened for the challenges they encountered and how they dealt with these. The questioning micro-map, or interview guide, covered personal background, scholastic background, academic and other experiences at SU and what had helped or hindered their adjustment to life at SU.

As a qualitative researcher who is interested in the views of women on diversity at a predominantly white South African university, I wanted to create a space for voices of coloured women to be heard and honoured. I explored various research paradigms and while reflecting on which research paradigm would be best suited for the study I intended, I realised that the most important aspect of the study for me, was to present the stories of this group of women in a respectful and accountable way. The qualitative research paradigm and more specifically the participatory action research approach seemed to be flexible and I thought that it would allow the research process and curiosity to develop and change as the conversations with the participants evolved (Scrimgeour, 2002).

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study is guided by the post-modern and social construction discourses. In research conducted in this school of thought, the researcher is encouraged to take an explicitly critical and political stance in relation to discourses that are portrayed as ultimate truths and which serve to maintain oppressive power relations (Burr, 1995). Freedman and Combs (1996) summarise the four core beliefs of post-modern modern philosophy as follows: reality is socially constructed; realities are constituted through language; realities are organized and maintained through narrative and there are no essential truths.

3.3 THEORETICAL UNDER PINNING OF THE STUDY

A study which is about giving voice to marginal groups should engage a research methodology and practices that create a space in which these voices can be magnified. To this end, this study is essentially guided by the post modern paradigm and social construction discourses. According to Burr (1996), the researcher within this approach is encouraged to take an explicitly "critical, progressive and political stance to the truth claims made by discourses which help maintain oppressive power relations and because they focus on language, social organisation and the role of subjectivity".

Freedman and Combs (1996) summarise the four core beliefs of post-modern modern philosophy as being that reality is socially constructed; realities are constituted through language; realities are organized and maintained through narrative and there are no essential truths. Sharing the epistemology that the researcher has chosen is important. As Brueggmenann (cited in Viljoen, 2001:9) says, "A perspective has the power to make sense out of the rawness of experienced life, even though it cannot be 'proven' or absolutely established". In this school of thought, there is no ultimate truth; post modernism embraces a more interpretive approach to knowledge. In this approach, there is no right or wrong but an acceptance that there are multiple representations of truth. This then leaves space for questioning and personal preference to surface. In this process a space is thus created in which all stories are valid and there is a shift in focus from asking 'what is truth?' to asking 'whose truth?' (Kotze, 2000; Norris, 2001; Viljoen, 2001; Scrimgeour, 2002). Any study then that hopes to create a platform for participants' voices and experiences to be honoured, needs to "respect the ways in which participants construct their knowledge of the

world they live in, the way in which they see 'truth' and how their social processes of language sustain these knowledges" (Viljoen, 2001:10).

3.3.1 Social construction discourse

A second discourse that guided this study is that of social construction. Social construction theory suggests that our understanding the world in which we live is constructed through interaction with others and the world in which we live. Social construction theory is interested in the effects of people's assumptions on their lives and experiences (Freedman & Coombs, 1996). The main principle of social construction discourse can thus be viewed as the way 'social realities' are constructed by members of a culture as they interact with each other from generation to generation and day to day. That is, societies construct the lenses through which their members interpret the world. "These realities provide the beliefs, practices, words and experiences from which we make up our lives or constitute ourselves" (Freedman & Coombs, 1996:33).

3.3.2 The influence of feminist thought and practice

This study aimed to provide insight into the lived realities of a group of coloured woman students at a historically white institution which aims to create an environment that is reflective of the country's emerging democracy. An important discourse that helped frame this study is that of feminism. According to Maguire (2000), feminist and action research share a declared purpose to work for democratisation and social justice. This view is supported by Fiornza (in Viljoen, 2001:17) who argues that feminist ideologies provide a "theoretical framework and intellectual space for transforming kyriarchal knowledges and deeply inculcated values of oppression" for research conducted within the South African context. This is because feminist ideologies tend to be inclusive of the oppressed and the marginalised. Feminist inspired participatory research aims to create a platform through which the marginalised groups are able to articulate their points of view and to pierce the culture of silence among marginalised groups and in so doing to challenge the status quo (Freire, 1995).

In feminist inspired participatory action research, the emphasis is on research as praxis. According to Kincheloe (1991) this entails using research to help all those taking part in the study to gain a better understanding of their situation and to move to

do something to change their situation. Research is then a process which allows people to get together around shared current concerns, problems and issues in a way *that will allow them to achieve accord* about how to deal with or address these challenges (Kemmis, 1993). This view is supported by Reinharz (1992:177) who contends that engaging in this type of research process enables the researcher to "learn from people and not just about them". Maguire (2000) aligns herself with this view and stresses the importance of feminist inspired research in the process of creating a platform for the voices of women to be heard and to celebrate the diverse positions, strengths and experiences of women that operate in an intricate web of historical and cultural settings.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

As previously stated the primary aim of this study is to explore how a group of coloured woman students make meaning of their experiences at this institution. Therefore, a qualitative research approach in which one attempts to make sense of or interpret peoples' experiences in terms of the meanings they attach to them seemed the most suitable. It is an approach which also acknowledges the interplay between the researcher, the focus of the study and the limitations that impact on the study.

This method of inquiry is thus one which explores the meaning-making process of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Nieuwemeyer, 2002). The relationship between experiences and meaning making is central to this study; I am interested in people and their lived reality. In order to honour and give voice to that reality, I could not engage in a process that would entail unearthing an objective reality or ultimate truth. The most appropriate vehicle for this inquiry would, according to Burr (1996) be a qualitative study because one of the elemental aims of qualitative research is not the search for the truth but rather an acceptance of the existence of many different constructions of events. Freedman and Coombs (1996) are of the opinion that our knowledge of the world in which we live is strongly influenced by our interaction with others and the world in which we live. Cultural and historical perspectives influence our understanding of the world and our experiences in it. This view was of particular interest to me as this study has as one of its aims the exploration of the impact of transformation on a minority group of students at a historically white institution.

My readings and experience as an intern therapist has helped me to realize that there is no one truth or reality. Qualitative research, according to Merriam (1991), is based on the assumption that there are multiple realities, that the world is not an objective interpretation, but a function of personal interaction and perception. Knowledge is therefore inherently contextual, local and pluralistic. This method of research could then be viewed as an approach, which is exploratory, inductive and which emphasizes process rather than product. The key area of interest is how people make sense of their lives and how they structure their social worlds. In a study such as this, it is therefore vital to respect the ways in which participants construct their knowledges of the world they live in and the way in which they see "truth" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1996; Viljoen, 2002).

3.4.1 Participatory Action Research

For this study a participatory action research design was proposed. Participatory action research methodology adopts an explicitly political stance that has as a primary focus the empowerment of disenfranchised and marginalised groups. The purpose would be to encourage the participants to take action to transform their lives. Transformation or action is thought to be encouraged by engaging in a process of self reflection of their social reality and a critical awareness of their ability to transform it by their conscious action. (Cornwell & Jewkes and Rohman cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This view is supported by McTaggart (1989:1) who describes participatory action research as a process in which critical intelligence is used to inform action and that this allows social action to become praxis, or critically informed committed action. Participatory action research thus attempts to create a platform for people to reflect on and share their stories and experiences within the context of their personal and social history (Curr cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Kemis (1996) describes this as the commitment of participatory action research to social action through a critical engagement that has at its core trying to critically appreciate and advance the way things are in relation to how they could be better. The insight gained in the process serves to empower. Obtaining the data or the process of knowledge creation is not considered to be an end in itself, but should rather be viewed as a means to empowerment (Reason in Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The process of data collection therefore has as its focus information collection and the conscientisation of participants through collective enquiry and reflection. Such a

process will allow participants in the study to become proactive in the progression of their communities and in defence of their own class and group interests (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The process of research is then aimed at helping to build communities of people who are committed to informing themselves about the "relationship between circumstance, action and consequence" and in the process free themselves from personal and institutional constraints that inhibit their power to live by their "legitimate and freely chosen social values" (McTaggart, 1989:1).

Another important aspect of participatory action research is the acknowledgement of the importance of local knowledge. Babbie and Mouton 1999, view this as a process that raises the profile of local wisdom, common sense and expertise of the participants in a way that allows them to be respected honoured and celebrated. Participatory action research then has as a focus not only the recognition of the validity of local knowledge, but it also aims to reinforce and in the process, restore the status of this knowledge. The narrative therapy practice of re-authoring conversations is well suited to action-oriented research as it explores the stories which make up people's lives and considers these in terms of both action and consciousness (White 1995). Sax (2002), who supports this view, argues that the interplay between action and meaning allow people to intentionally explore and develop new and preferred ways of being and thinking that influence their lives and relationships. It also provides the reflective space in which people can step back and explore the meaning that informs particular actions. Throughout the research process, I reflected on how the knowledge generated in the course of this study would be used and of what value the research would be to those being studied. Babbie and Mouton (1999) are of the opinion that participatory action research should remain accountable and should encourage action that is supportive of participants and which leads to the improvement of their practices or situations.

Moving to new and improved action involves a creative moment of transformation. This supports Wadsworth's (1998) view that all research involves some form of resultant action that invariably leads somewhere even if it is not far from where it started or only a small number of people are consciously aware of it. The process of research involves decision making; participatory action researchers engage in a process of conscious decision making that is inevitably value driven and that will impact on the inquiry and its findings. Some of the areas of decision making that

impact on a study include which questions will be asked, who will form part of the population, which phenomena will be observed and action will or will not be taken (Wadsworth, 1998). The decision making remains an ongoing aspect of participatory action research and involves a continuous spiral of planning, observing, reflecting and then revising plans. This spiral, known as the Lewinian action/reflection spiral, creates a space in which issues and understandings on the one hand and the practices on the other will develop and evolve (McTaggart, 1989; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). This spiral highlights the fact that research inevitably results in action – even the decision not to change is seen as action (Wadsworth, 1998).

3.4.2 Narratives

People live storied lives and according to McLaren (in Walker, 2003:2) "we both speak our narratives and are spoken to through narratives as we shape our identities as social actors and both respond to and constrain the identities of others". These narratives or stories we hear about ourselves and the stories we tell about ourselves, help us to make meaning of our lived experiences. White (2003) contends that communities have a cache of wisdom about life and skills of living which are relevant to the various situations they currently have to contend with. He proposes that this wisdom includes maps that guide people's journey through life and which assist in making transitions and helps to resolve difficulty situations along the route. However, the relevance of this knowledge and skills in the current situation may become obscured or masked or devalued. Merckel (2002) and Walker (2003) concur with this view and express the opinion that more often than not women's voices are marginalised and not heard. Using narratives in inquiry can thus allow research practices that acknowledge, celebrate and recognise the experiences of the participants. The narrative texts that are generated in the process can serve to transform "silence into dialogue, open out the ambiguities of the everyday, tease out the seamless labelling of the oppressed and capture the unruliness of human action" (Walker, 2003:3). White (1999) supports this view and stresses the importance of creating spaces in which these often devalued knowledges and skills can be identified, made more visible, in a process that richly describes and honours their experience. Freire (1995) argues that by listening to people we are empowering them. The stories of women of colour have often been marginalised and Merckel (2001:17), stresses the importance of "black women's need to reclaim the right to tell their stories" because it

is important to listen to people about what is important to them (Josselson in Smythe & Murray, 2000). Narrative work can allow us to uncover often obscured ways in *which dominant discourses influence and mould us*. In an effort to dissect these, it becomes important to that "at issue this is the need to interrogate and locate narrative texts in and for educational research and pedagogy within frameworks that are critical, feminist and anti-racist" (Walker, 2003:3). Researchers using narratives should aspire to being maximally inclusive in their work in order to guard against the possible systemic bias which disadvantages unpopular voices. The narrative researcher should endeavour to present a study that is personal and social; captures past, present and future (continuity) and is combined with the notion of place and situations (contextualisation). The study would be one which asks questions, collects field notes derives interpretations and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues. Studies in this genre should also ensure that these issues are addressed not only by looking at an event but by considering its past and its future. Walker (2003:4) takes the view that inquiry using narrative supports a view of educational knowledge as a dynamic process that encourages critiquing the stories we hear and tell. Furthermore, this does not make our knowledge less trustworthy, but rather by welcoming continued review and revisiting as new perspectives emerge, the research attempts to remain true to the process of research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Gottlieb & Lasser, 2001; Merkel, 2001; Walker, 2003).

3.5 GAINING ACCESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS

The study commenced in May 2004 when I made the initial contact with the participants. My first contact was a telephonic conversation in which I invited them to a briefing or introductory interview. I met each of them in my office at the Student Counseling offices during which I explained or informed the potential participants as to the purpose of the study, the course of the research process and what would be expected of them. At this time we also discussed issues of confidentiality and consent. During this session I also created an opportunity for participants to ask any questions or express any concerns that they may have. The session ended with us scheduling a time for the individual interview as well as looking at a tentative dates for the focus group session. The individual sessions took place over three weeks and sessions lasted between an hour and 90 minutes. A two-month period elapsed between the individual

interviews and the focus group session. At the informal gathering a month after the focus group session, the progress of the study was discussed.

3.5.1 Sampling

In qualitative research the sample size is kept small because the purpose of the study is not generalisation of the findings but rather to provide a rich description of these women's experiences at the University of Stellenbosch. Merriam (1998:61-62) suggests the use of purposive sampling, a technique she says that will provide an "information rich sample". The purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sampling technique that involves a non-random sampling of subjects. This is aimed at achieving a broad variation in participants' contributions, so it is important to be specific about the inclusion criteria. This view is supported by Merckel (2001) who suggests that one of the primary inclusion criteria should be participants who would enrich the study. Participants in the study should add to the study by being able to provide rich descriptions of what is being studied. They should be able to articulate their experiences and be willing to give rich and sensitive accounts of these (Wilson & Hutchinson in Moore & Rapmound, 2002). The inclusion criteria for this study were as follows:

1. Participants had to be female
2. Participants had to be full time undergraduate students at the University of Stellenbosch
3. Participants had to be coloured.

All the participants in the study were known to me through the Centre for Student Counselling. My prior contact with them was as clients of Student Counselling and I had identified them as possible participants who could provide rich descriptions that would allow me to discover, understand and gain insight into coloured women's experiences as students on the campus of Stellenbosch University.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data for this study were primarily collected by means of semi-structured in-depth individual interviews and a focus group session. Before the actual data collection process began, the five participants were invited to individual briefing sessions in which information about the aims of the study and the process of data collection was

explained. During this session, permission was obtained from the women to participate in the study and to record the sessions. The data capturing process was *explained to them and they were informed* that they would be allowed to review the transcription. Because the study and data collection process would stretch over several months, participants were informed of the time involved and together we reached agreement on the date, time and venue of the interviews. The individual interviews were conducted in my office at student counselling because it was private and the interviews could take place without interruptions. The focus group session took place in a training room at the Unit for Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University.

3.6.1 In-depth individual interviews

The individual interview, according to Babbie and Mouton (2001), is one of the most commonly used data collection methods in qualitative research. This method in essence creates a platform for interaction between the interviewer and interviewees that allows the interviewer access to the interviewees' world. The interviewer allows the interviewees to speak from their own experiences while using a flexible topic guide to ensure that information shared during the interview remains focused on issues, which are considered relevant to the study (Sax, 2000; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Merckel, 2001).

I concur with Weiss (in Merckel, 2001) that interviewing gives us an entrée to the internal world of participants, particularly the nature of their social lives, their perceptions, how these perceptions are interpreted and how these experiences affect their thoughts and feelings about their experiences and themselves. Since this study was essentially about a group of women's experience at an institution, I felt that this method of data collection would be the ideal tool to access the lived experiences of the participants.

During the interview process, it is incumbent upon the interviewer to create an atmosphere in which participants feel that their experiences are valued and honoured. One of the major challenges I experienced was maintaining the balance between allowing the sharing of respondent's experiences and perceptions while ensuring that their comments related back to the study. The qualitative approach proposes that the interview be a process that is flexible, interactive and continuous. To this end, Babbie and Mouton (2001) advocate the avoidance of using a predetermined format in which

specified questions are asked in a particular order. Research conversations in this study focused on broad themes that were introduced as part of the natural flow of the *research conversation*. This appeared to put respondents at ease and as the interviews progressed, their initial reticence gave way to more natural and spontaneous responses and rich descriptions of participants lived worlds and how they react to them (Kvale in Lovits & Seidel, 1999). A qualitative approach emphasizes the importance of being sensitive and using effective communication skills in the interviewing process. I relied heavily on the basic therapeutic principles of creating an environment in which respondents experienced unconditional positive regard, and attentive and empathetic listening. I employed "curious questioning", which allowed participants to verbalize how they made meaning out of particular experiences, and also provided an opportunity for the clarification and expansion of statements made during the course of the interview (White, 1999). Creating this type of environment necessitated establishing rapport with interviewees. The initial information interviews helped in this process. However a personal challenge was maintaining a distance that would allow me to remain objective in recording these women's experiences in a way that would not compromise the study or their stories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Babbie and Mouton (2001) caution that one should guard against allowing the research conversations to degenerate into normal conversations. They also stress the need to remain vigilant during questioning, because the way in which we ask the questions may subtly bias the answers we get. I attempted to counter or monitor this by engaging in regular debriefing sessions with my supervisor and a colleague who later assisted me in the focus group interview. At the end of their individual interviews some respondents reflected that even though they had found the interview a challenging process, they were leaving with food for thought and were keen to be part of the focus group session.

3.6.2 Focus Group Interview

After the individual interview sessions were completed, and the initial data analysis had been done, a session was arranged where all the participants were brought together. The purpose of this session was to create a space for women's diverse voices and personal experiences to be heard and validated. I hoped the process would allow an opportunity for the women to listen to each others stories, to reflect on them and to allow for shared analysis of their stories and experiences. Feminist based philosophy

emphasise the importance of creating these supportive and challenging relationships in order to facilitate, silence breaking (Maguire, 2000). The focus group session was seen as *this space*.

The focus group sessions took place in a training room at the Department of Educational Psychology and lasted for nearly two hours. Before the commencement of the focus group session participants met each other informally. I felt that this was important as it would set the scene for creating an atmosphere in which participants could feel safe to share their feelings and experiences. We made use of nametags to enable participants to address each other by name and to create awareness and encourage acknowledgement. I felt that this was particularly important as one of the themes that had emerged in some of the interviews related to not being acknowledged or directly addressed.

Using a focus group session as part of my data gathering process appealed to me because it created an opportunity for people to get together and create meaning among themselves instead of on their own. A major advantage of this approach lies in the ability of the focus group interviews to proffer express suggestion of the congruence and divergence in the women's views and experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

A focus group is defined as an in-depth, open ended group interview in which two or three umbrella questions linked to the research topic inform the group discussion. During the course of the interview participants are asked to reflect on these questions and to hear other participant's responses to these questions. Throughout the session participants are encouraged to talk to one another, ask questions, share stories and comment on others experiences and views. A key function of the interviewer is thus to create a context in which people consider their own views in relation to others. As group interaction is a fundamental part of this method, the researcher needs to remain conscious of the influence of group dynamics and make sure that all participants are afforded an opportunity to contribute to the research conversation.

In this study, it necessitated managing the more confident and articulate members of the group while ensuring that the quieter participants partook fully (Kritzing, 1996 in Robinson, 1999; Morgan, 1993; Patton, 1990). The participants in this study easily established an atmosphere that valued and honoured the experiences and reflections of all the participants. As the researcher I could then comfortably adopt the role of

structured eavesdropper. Powney (in Robinson, 1999), considers this to be a role in which the interviewer takes 'a backseat' while skilfully directing and encouraging the *flow of discussion over important areas related to the research.*

3.6.3 Outsider witness

The outsider witness co-facilitated reflection at the end of the focus group session and provided an opportunity in the session for the individual acknowledgement of the participants by recognising their individual preferred ways of being, their values, commitments, hopes and dreams (Fox & Tench, 2003; Sax, 2000). Fox and Tench (2003) take the view that this process also creates an opportunity for participants and the outsider witness to share their responses to what they have heard and the aspects of their own experiences with which this resonated. The process allowed participants to share their reflections on their own and others experience and in the process find common ground upon which to build their shared discoveries (Sax, 2000).

The outsider witness is part of a reflection process associated with a definitional ceremony in narrative therapy. According to Meyerhoff (in Carey & Russell, 2003:2), "definitional ceremonies provide opportunities for being seen and in one's own terms garnering witnesses to one's worth, validity and being". The person acting as the outsider witness acknowledges how she has been moved by what she has witnessed, when she explains why this is so. When she explains how her life will be different as a consequence, this is often powerfully therapeutic. White (in Carey & Russell, 2003:4) states that this allows participants an opportunity to experience that their "story is valuable to others or I'd never thought that others might benefit from the telling of my story". Fox and Tench (2003:2) outline the guidelines that can be drawn on to facilitate this process as

- acknowledging the experience of the person at the centre;
- acknowledging their preferred ways of being, their values, commitments, hopes and dreams;
- acknowledging our own responses to what we had heard and the aspects of our own experience which gave rise to those responses (resonance);
- acknowledging how our lives had been affected by what we had heard (transport).

The outsider witness acts as a witness and sits outside of the interview session and uses the above guide for specific listening in which they make deliberate links with the participants around shared values and commitments (Carey & Russell, 2003; Fox & Tench, 2003; Lobovits & Seidel, 1999). Even though the researcher and participants share a co-relational relationship, both parties remain conscious of the fact that the researcher is the channel through which the liberating knowledges will be shared with others.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The process and methods of data collection in qualitative research elicit a wealth of rich descriptive data (Mouton, 1996). Once the interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed, the analysis of the data began (Strauss & Huberman in Weiss, 1994). During the data collection phase, I had already become aware of broad themes and categories that could emerge during analysis. However I remained mindful of the caution by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:152) that "the social constructionist is opposed to imposing preconceived categories and measuring instruments on the research".

In my interaction with the raw data, I was guided by Terre Blanche and Skelly's (1999) suggested phases of analysis and interpretation. The first step of my process became an in-depth study of the transcripts. This entailed repeated readings and making diagrams and brainstorming which assisted in increased familiarity with the content of the transcripts. This enabled me to get to know the material well enough to know what kind of themes would emerge and how my interpretation of the data would be supported by the raw material (Terre Blanche & Skelly, 1999). The second and third steps occurred simultaneously and involved the identification of themes and the coding of material. Emerging themes and categories were identified and codes were allocated. Miles and Huberman (1984:57) are of the opinion that a "code is used to indicate a segment of words that occur most regularly in data; in order to cluster segments that relate to particular themes". These clusters are then used in the analysis and interpretation of the data and form the basis for the unfolding story that will be told by the researcher. The codes were assigned according to category, themes and related sub-themes (see Appendix A). The transcripts were reread a number of times and themes were decoded using the code key (see example in Appendix B). These

were then recorded in tables according to the assigned category (see example in Appendix C). Where a subject did not fit into a theme or category a new one was created. The next stage involved the careful and detailed examination of themes in order to establish similarities and differences. This process was repeated until no new findings emerged. The last step involved writing up my version of the interpretations and in this process I remained conscious of the importance of staying with the participants stories, to be respectful and coming to understand their storied experience when analyzing their very personal stories. Interpretive analysis is to stay as close to the raw data as possible and to interpret from a position of empathic understanding (Terre Blanche & Skelly, 1999).

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the process at any time. I felt that it was imperative to establish a relationship of mutual respect, trust and collaboration between the participants and me as the study was potentially political. According to Durheim and Wassenaar (1999), ethical considerations are central to ensuring the protection of the rights and welfare of participants. To this end they suggest an adherence to three key ethical principles.

The first principle is autonomy. Participation in the study must be voluntary and all participants need to give their informed consent. Participants should be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and that they have a right to anonymity. During the course of my intake interview, I informed them of the above and assured participants that all direct identifying information would be removed from the audio-tapes and transcripts and that pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names. I also assured them that the visual data would be used for the thesis purposes only and that it would not be accessible to anyone outside of the study.

Non-male fiancé the second principle is a process in which the researcher needs to consider possible risks to the participant because of their participation. For some of the participants in the study this was a real issue because of the sensitive nature of the information they felt they would be sharing and the fact that the findings of this study would be published as part of a thesis. I attempted to counteract these fears by emphasizing my commitment to anonymity and confidentiality.

Ben fiancé, the third principle states the importance of there being some benefits to participating in the study. By participating in the study, the participants had the opportunity to have their experiences heard and validated. There was also the possibility of creating a vehicle for shared experience, an opportunity to learn and share from each other and the potential for mobilisation into action.

Trust and confidentiality were key elements of my research. Participants were also assured of access to all transcripts and audio and visual recordings in which they had participated. Altheide and Johnson (in Morkel 2000) stress the ethical responsibility of the researcher to provide the reader with a clear statement about where she positions herself in the study. McTaggart (in Morkel, 2002) concurs that this practice fits the feminist research practice of 'positioning'. I attempted to be clear about my interest in the field of research and my position within the socio-political context of my study.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Merriam (1996) stresses the importance of providing knowledge which is valid and reliable and presenting it in an ethical and objective manner. One of the suggestions she makes is leaving an audit trail. This view is supported by Guba and Lincoln (1989), who suggest that the audit trail include all recorded material (video and audio tapes), verbatim transcripts, a copy of the interview schedule and examples of data analysis practises. They also suggest the use of peer debriefing, which is a process in which the researcher shares her ideas with a colleague or supervisor outside the context of the research process. I made every effort to have planning and debriefing sessions with my study supervisor and a trusted colleague. In this process I attempted to strengthen validity of the data that had been collected as well as the reliability of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I discuss the findings of my study. I start off by providing the context in which the study was conducted. In order to establish the context in which the study was conducted I provide a brief demographic description of the participants of the study. I then go on to discuss the practical issues related to the implementation of the study and to sketch the time frames within which the study was conducted. This is followed by a description of the process I engaged in order to identify categories and themes in the data and do an analysis. The chapter ends with a presentation of data relating to the identified categories and themes.

4.1.1 The participants of the study

The population from which the participants were drawn was undergraduate women students at the University of Stellenbosch who were from the Coloured race group. The woman ranged in age from 20 to 22, with one of the participants falling outside of that range. At 30 years of age, she does not fit the norm of the undergraduate student. For this study on diversity senior students were purposefully selected because they were thought to have had some experience of being students at Stellenbosch University past the initial adjustment phase that first-years undergo.

Table 4.1 below presents a summary of the participants' background and current year of study.

Table 4.1: Demographics

PARTICIPANT	AGE	PLACE OF ORIGIN	YEAR OF STUDY	SCHOOL TYPE	RESIDENCE
Iyanla	20	Cape Flats (Western Cape)	2	Historically Coloured	University Residence (Hostel)
Alyce	22	Boland	3	Former Model C	Lives at home and commutes daily
Sher	23	Windhoek, Namibia	3	Private-independent	Semi-private University Residence (Flat)
Oprah	20	Cape Flats (Western Cape)	2	Historically Coloured	University Residence (Hostel)
Therese	30	Northern Cape	3	Historically Coloured	Private – Shares with Relative

The women came from varying socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Three of them had completed their schooling at historically Coloured schools in the Western Cape and Northern Cape, two at schools in working class communities and the other in a more middle class community. Alyce, one of the participants, had been at a former Model C school in the Boland, while Sher had attended a private independent school in Namibia. Their diverse backgrounds could be indicative of diversity within a group of students that could be presumed to be homogenous.

4.2 CHOOSING STELLENBOSCH

I set out to find what had made them decide to attend the University of Stellenbosch and not one of the other higher education institutions. As part of its diversification initiative the SU has set in place a recruitment strategy to facilitate access to the institution by population groups not traditionally associated with it. This process involves marketing the University of Stellenbosch at schools and offering financial assistance incentives to prospective students from these designated groups. Of the participants, only Oprah had been recruited in this way. Alyce, who had attended a former Model C high school, stated that the school has historic links with Stellenbosch University and serves as a feeder school for it. She had initially financed her studies initially with a private loan bursary and subsequently with university loans. Sher and Iyanla had chosen to attend Stellenbosch University after exploring various options. Their parents were covering the full cost of their studies. Therese, the mature student, had been encouraged to apply to the University of Stellenbosch, after her local minister interceded on her behalf and facilitated her admission to her

programme of study. Initially she secured her own private bursary and once at Stellenbosch University she continued to finance her studies through government *loans and university merit bursaries*. Despite outside financial assistance to some of the participants, all stated that they were dependent on their families for some form of financial support.

The participants in the study had various living arrangements. Two of them, Iyanla and Oprah were living in official university ladies residences. Sher lived in a bachelor flat in a semi-private university residence, Therese shared a garden cottage with a relative and Alyce lived at home and used public transport to commute to campus daily.

While reflecting on the demographic data related to these participants, I was struck by how diverse and unique their combination of circumstances was. I was reminded that to simply view the participants in this study as a group of "minority women" would "trivialise the complexity of their lives and experiences" (Chan, 2002:2).

4.3 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

The individual sessions took place over three weeks and sessions lasted between one and 90 minutes. A two-month period elapsed between the individual interviews and the focus group session.

The focus group sessions took place in a training room at the Department of Educational Psychology and lasted for close on two hours. Before the commencement of the focus group session participants met each other informally. I felt that this was important as it would set the scene for creating an atmosphere in which participants could feel safe enough to share their feelings and experiences. We made use of nametags to enable participants to address each other by name and to create awareness and an acknowledgement. I felt that this was particularly important as one of the themes that had emerged in some of the interviews related to not being acknowledged or directly addressed. Because this session was being video taped, I felt it important to discuss issues of confidentiality once more and to assure participants that my supervisor and I would be the only ones with access to the videotape. At this point, the participants were introduced to Gee, who would be co-facilitating the session. Gee was a graduate Psychology intern whose role in the research process was to co-facilitate the session. Initially the interview was guided by themes that had

emerged from the individual interviews. The dynamic of the group however determined the direction and sequence of discussion.

4.4 THE MOTIVATION TO SUCCEED

All the participants in the study appeared to have a strong sense of where they come from and an understanding of how their personal histories had influenced their experience of campus life. In response to a question about what she considered to have helped her cope as student at US, Therese stressed qualities that she had learnt from her parents, such as "*om deur te druk, deurstettingsvermoë en om hard te werk*" [persevering and working hard] when things got challenging for her, she recalled her mother's words "*Maak nie saak wat jy doen nie, om dit wat jy doen goed te doen.*" [It does not matter what you do, you need to do it well]. The support of family was a common thread. Sher and Iyanla stated that they spoke to their parents regularly about the challenges they face and valued their input and motivation.

Three of the five women expected their adjustment to US to be challenging. Alyce, however, stated that she thought that coming from a previously Model C school created unrealistic expectations about the ease with which they would adapt to life at SU. Her comment was that "it gives you false hope". She went on to say:

I think that if I had come from a Coloured school ... you are so afraid of not living up to ... or not having enough, enough background that you basically prepare yourself for it. You don't sit there with false hope.

She based her opinion on friends from previously Coloured schools that were doing better at US than she was. This was supported by Iyanla and Oprah's response to how they thought their backgrounds had facilitated their adjustment to SU. Both stated that coming from a Coloured school did motivate them to be successful. When I asked Oprah what she thought had helped her to bridge the gap, she responded:

I've got courage ... also because I know I can't screw things up. I have to make it work, because if I'm not going to make it work, where am I going to go. I don't picture myself working in a factory ... this is all that there is, I have to make it work.

This resolve to survive at SU, despite socio-economic challenges was shared by Therese and Iyanla. They stated that because of perceptions about their backgrounds

as a handicap, they were motivated to "prove themselves". When I probed by asking who Oprah felt the need to prove herself to, she responded:

to myself ... to make myself and other people realise that I actually can achieve goals that I'm better than I thought I was. So I have to constantly prove myself, which can become tiring when all I want to do is enjoy myself.

All of the women stated that internalising the aim to prove yourself had at times negatively affected their self-concept and had often resulted in them doubting their ability to cope socially and academically. Alyce, said that she often felt that no matter how hard you try, things are out of your hands. She stated that negative feelings from school had spilled over into university and she felt overwhelmed:

Everybody is just, you know on the right track I was trying to follow there and I was trying to do what they wanted me to and ... sometimes I still don't know what they want from me.

The other four participants stated that they had all felt like Alyce at times. However, their responses were also related to having to deal with the various challenges by assessing what it is was they were having difficulty with, exploring the options for help or support available and making use of them. All of them cited the need for perseverance and creative problem solving. An example was provided by Oprah. Living in university housing can be expensive for cash-strapped Coloured students. She had avoided the embarrassment of explaining that she could not afford to accept some social invitations by saying that she had other things to do. This example appears to reflect the attitude she had adapted to life, which is "life is what you make of it. We always have a choice". She shared this sentiment, in that instead of continuing to "moan" about the lack of inter-cultural socialising, she took it upon herself to organise small multi-cultural gatherings.

All of the women faced challenges to their self-concepts and confidence. Four of the five had dealt with this by personal praxis: Stop, reflect and decide on a course of action. This suggests a sense of personal agency. Alyce, however, stated that she often felt that there was very little one could do to change the outcome of certain situations. She held the view that, "they know exactly everything about you" and "they decide should we pass her or not". She became very emotional when she shared these perceptions and stated that she had decided to access institutional based support

structures in an effort to address this feeling of powerlessness. Oprah also made use of and continues to use Student Counselling services. Though the other three did not access *institutional* support structures, family, faith and close friendships served as support networks.

I then asked them what motivated them to succeed at university. Therese stated that she felt her being at SU was related to her faith and belief that she was answering a religious calling and this strengthened her in trying times. She said that she was here because she had liked the town and was interested in a career in Psychology. The remaining three participants stated that being at university was not only about personal development and academic success but that higher education was seen as a route to providing a better socio-economic life for themselves and their families.

From the research conversations it appears that participants sometimes felt that being at a historically white university was a double-edged sword. But that despite the challenges being at a historically white university presented, they were very aware of how privileged they were to have access to higher education, especially when weighed against the awareness of the limited opportunities in some of their communities of origin. Their perception though was that survival at US entailed them remaining aware of how their own and other people's perceptions of their ability to cope personally and academically required independent thinking, assertiveness and creative problem solving.

4.4.1 Experiencing the academic environment

The participants in the study had very similar but had varied ways of interpreting their experiences. Though they came from diverse backgrounds and experiences, some of the key themes that emerged from these conversations on academic matters during the decoding process were the impact of the attitudes and perceptions of academic staff, school background, academic support and language. These will be discussed in the subsections that follow. Verbatim quotations will be used to highlight the women's experiences.

4.4.1.1 Faculty attitude and perceptions

Everyone participating in the study felt that the attitudes, expectations and approachability of lecturers varied greatly. The women stated that they were often unclear initially about what was expected from them, particularly in written

assignments. Iyanla had experienced this lack of clarity particularly in relation to the content and style requirements of assignments. Oprah said that she had only *understood what was expected of her* once she had had a counselling session at the Student Counselling Centre. I was curious as to why the participants did not seek clarity or help from their lecturers so I explored with them their perceptions of the approachability of lecturers. Once again there was consensus that approachability varied from lecturer to lecturer and faculty to faculty but that lecturers generally were not very helpful when it came to helping students make the adjustment from school to university. Iyanla highlighted the difference by referring to a woman lecturer in one of the faculties who proudly proclaims herself, a feminist yet is not very approachable:

... we have like, there's a feminist there as well. She, it's like she is really unapproachable. She's very like, 'I'm doing my work and that's it'. There is nothing more to it. But some people they are like nice. The Psychology people, we're almost like sisters.

Oprah stated that she found most of her lecturers helpful and that she often went back to them when she did not understand something. This she did either personally or electronically. She did, however, mention that the level of help varied from "too little to too much":

Some were helpful, but others assumed that I should know what was going on. That I should be able to handle it because I am here ... Ja, they were quite helpful some of them, lecturers to the point where it actually sickened me because (nervous giggle) ... ja, sometimes they made me feel that I can't do anything for myself because of that.

I asked her if this has had any kind of influence on her perception of herself as a student. She said that it had often made her doubt her ability, "I actually asked myself, how did I get here, although my matric results were quite good". Alyce supported the view that lecturers expected you to know certain things, and felt that this was even more so once they found out what kind of school you had attended. I then asked her if she thought lecturers had different expectations of students who had attended previous model C schools as opposed to those who had attended historically Coloured schools. Her response was:

I think so ... Because they expect you to know stuff. I know because I've been to a lecturer and I sat down with her and she asked me questions about, you know, which school I had attended.

When she found out which school Alyce had attended, the lecturer responded, "OH, OH, so you must know stuff or how much did you get in High School. I told her that I *got like 70 or 80 percent* for this. She then said, 'No, no, this wouldn't be a problem for you'. Alyce then said that she thought students from historically Coloured schools received more help, especially if they lived in what are considered to be historically disadvantaged communities. Alyce felt that the type of school you had attended and where you live influenced the lecturers' perceptions and expectations of you. This view was supported by all of the other participants. However, they were of the opinion that this sometimes worked against you. She expressed increasing agitation with lecturers and peers alike that feel free to comment that she is "not as Coloured" because she is reasonably "well informed and opinionated". From their responses of how lecturers reacted to them and their backgrounds, it would appear that 'Coloured' was equated with ill-informed and without opinion. When I asked Iyanla, how she thought coming from a historically Coloured school background had affected academic perceptions and/or expectations of her, her posture became rigid, "I think they had some idea that you're dumb or something but I kind of like proved to them ..." I found out during the course of the interview that she had obtained a number of distinctions during her first year of study.

4.4.1.2 Their perceived views of the preparedness of Coloured students

The women seemed very sensitized to the perceptions of others about their academic performance at university. When I explored with them their views on the way in which school had prepared them for university, four of the five participants stated that they felt that school had not adequately prepared them for their first year of academic life. They cited inadequate exposure, unrealistic expectations, lack of critical thinking skills and ineffective study methods. The fifth participant, Sher, who had attended an independent international school, felt that doing her A-levels had made her academic transition to university easier when compared to her fellow participants.

Alyce, the previous Model C school product held expectations, that attending such a school would facilitate an easier transition into tertiary education, This was not the case, as she had had difficulty, bridging the gap from high school to university. She saw her university experience as a continuation of high school, a place where she had experienced difficulty integrating into the socio-academic culture of her school. She stated that for her "it's the same as high school. ... the same situation, the same not

doing stuff and the same disappointment in academics". I asked Alyce to explain what she meant by disappointment, and she went on to explain that when she transferred to *the Model C* high school, from a historically Coloured primary school, she had been an A-aggregate pupil. She was placed in the A class with all the gifted pupils," but could not maintain the pace. In her matric year, "they forced me to lower, uh, to go to a lower grade from Higher Grade Maths ... and for me this was a disappointment". I then asked her if she thought this had in anyway influenced her experience at university, and she said that it had had a "big impact" because "I got here with a Standard Grade A which is nothing and to me everybody was more qualified, more experienced ..."

This comment of Alyce's relates to what, Iyanla a product of a Coloured high school had said in an earlier interview, about the admissions criteria at US. She had been reflecting on the fact that she sometimes felt "only the best Coloureds are here ... you hear when they're speaking about school that they got A's ... but I was never one of those, I mean who got A's at school?" Iyanla felt that her first year was challenging because the school she had attended had not prepared her "academically ... for varsity life". Therese, being nearly a decade older than the rest wondered if the sense of disadvantage and lack she experiences is related to her school background or the fact that she had gone to school in a different era. Hers was an era characterized by political unrest in schools.

The perception of being at an academic disadvantage when compared to Model C students, both white and black, held by the three participants, appears to have served as an impetus to work harder and achieve academically. Oprah stated that she passed all her subjects in her first year. Iyanla obtained 7 distinctions, despite at first feeling that she "had to work harder than the rest of them ... I felt stupid". Therese also successfully completed here first year as did Sher. Alyce repeated her first year as did Oprah's roommate, both Model C products.

4.4.1.3 Role-players in academic support

All the participants had had access to some kind of academic support, be it in the form of academic support programmers organized by the Student Counselling service, faculty based or university residence related. However two of the five participants cited personal reticence in wanting to acknowledge the need for help or seeking it

initially. Therese mentioned that only later in her studies she felt "die vrymoedigheid" [*have the confidence*] to ask for help. She stated that despite uncertainty about how to *approach the work* or having difficulty in understanding subject content, she reverted to old ways of coping and learning, normally a trial and error approach. Alyce, the Model C product, suggested that her reluctance to seek or identify the type of support she needed stemmed from her experiences at school. There, she felt:

... you don't have support, like you don't have the support where people encourage you to do the stuff, and they just leave it to your own

...

I then asked her about her experiences of support while at US. "I did have support, but not the right kind for me at the right time". She became fairly emotional at this stage of the interview and I asked her to explain what she meant. She went on to explain that when she did seek help, "they assumed that, uh, it was because I am Coloured or black or whatever ...". Her perception was that race and cultural adaptation were placed at the forefront of the support, whereas she felt she needed help with the "nitty gritty around academics". She said that living off campus was a disadvantage for her as those people living in university residences received better support, especially from their peers. Both Oprah and Iyanla, who ascribed part of their academic survival to hostel-based peer support, validated this perception. "I learnt from people in my res, like what they were doing. I worked with seniors and stuff". The university residence adviser peer support system played an important role in Iyanla's process, providing her with access to someone who took a personal interest in her and helped her academically. She continued:

"my raadgewer was a Political Science Honours student ... so she could really help me like with stuff".

Iyanla said she initially was unaware of the academic support programmes and facilities available on campus. She only later became aware of and accessed support after hearing about them from "one of my dormies". Oprah endorsed what Iyanla had said about hostel-based peer support and went on to add that the peer adviser also liaised with the families of students in residence, giving them regular updates about the students personal and academic adjustment.

Therese had access to faculty based academic support in her first year and made use of academic mentoring in subjects in which she had had no experience:

... in die eerste jaar het ek gereeld saam met haar huis toe gegaan en dan het ons nou maar 'n uur of twee gesit met die Hebreëus tot ek aan die gang gekom het. Dit het my goed gedoen. [... I went to her home regularly during the first year. We then spent an hour or two doing Hebrew. We did this till I was able to help myself. It helped me.]

All the participants in the study had had experiences of positive inter-racial academic working partnerships. The peer academic support provided crossed ethnic barriers. An interesting comment by three of the five participants was that they did not get much academic support from other Coloured students. Alyce said that she thought competitiveness and the pressure to succeed, made it difficult to be concerned about the well-being of others: "we just focus on what we need to do to succeed". Therese, the academically strong student, felt that her Coloured classmates' perception of favouritism to her lecturers had hampered working relations with her Coloured classmates.

4.4.1.4 Language

Two of the participants in the study were English mother-tongue speakers. I asked them how they were being accommodated academically as second language learners. Sher said that her faculty had been very accommodating, "My faculty is very accommodating towards students, perhaps it is because the degree we are studying is of such a nature that it has to be English based to keep up with the rest of the world". However she went on to recall a visit to a lecture in another faculty where this attitude was not shared.

The B Comm. faculty ... they're not very accommodating of English speaking people at all ... I was actually in a class once because I wanted to see the difference and stuff and a student put up her hand and said, 'You know, but sir, this is all in Afrikaans, can I get the English version'. He just said: 'Did you not read the Taalbeleid, this is an Afrikaans University and we lecture here in Afrikaans'.

Iyanla felt that her academic life was being made more difficult because her "notes don't come in English anymore" and she had to "physically sit there in class and translate the Afrikaans while the man is speaking". She also mentioned that she was dependent on her hostel peers to assist her with translation, "This one girl even translates my notes into English for me. She is Afrikaans, so without her I don't know what I would do". Iyanla went on to say that "the language thing definitely affects my academics because I have to put in much more time because I have to translate first". I

then asked her if her lecturers were not supposed to be making notes available in English as well. Her reply was: "They don't. I have to do it myself". In response, I *asked her if there was any way in which she could address this*. She replied, "Mm, because we have this language policy, like it is Afrikaans and it is Afrikaans". I interpreted her comment to mean that she felt that she did not have a choice.

The Afrikaans-speaking participants said that having an Afrikaans background definitely counted in their favour. Oprah also referred to the language policy and the difficulty some of her English-speaking friends were having with language.

... my black friends can't understand Afrikaans to save their lives. A lot of them, what they do is they go to class and because the text books are English, they follow out of there.

She said that even though some of them were able to speak Afrikaans they had difficulty understanding "academic Afrikaans. There is a big difference".

Iyanla's mother tongue is English, and she had had a number of problems related to language. One of the primary challenges she had had to deal with was the need to adjust to the use of more formal academic language and style than she is used to. She mentioned becoming agitated because one of her tutors kept on telling her to pay attention to her use of language, especially, grammar:

I asked her: 'Why do you keep on gramming me the whole time. I'm reading my stuff over, doing spelling checks as well as grammar I mean, I knew I was always good in English, according to my teacher, so I thought, no I'm okay, and stuff but here it's not okay any more'.

When I asked Iyanla how this had made her feel, she responded with: "Again I felt stupid. It was like here we go again, what next".

4.4.1.5 Academic Aspirations

Four of the five participants aspired to do post-graduate study. Of the four Iyanla was adamant that she would only be staying at US for as long as it took to complete her undergraduate studies. She would rather continue her studies at the University of the Western Cape or the University of Cape Town because she felt:

I will be more appreciated there; my work will be more appreciated. I would like to do my Honours in Psychology or Political Science, but not here.

I found out that her resolve to study elsewhere was supported by two Coloured postgraduate students who had cited racism as one of the primary reasons for *continuing their studies elsewhere*. She said:

... both of them were doing their Honours last year and both of them are doing their Masters at UCT. They said enough is enough, they can't handle it anymore, the racism, the faculties and stuff".

4.4.2 Social contextual conditions

4.4.2.1 Financial pressures within academic life

Coming from financially challenging backgrounds, monetary and financial considerations permeated many of their activities and the decisions that the women in this study took. There was a strong sentiment that you were at US at great expense and sacrifice to your family. In Iyanla's words, "I knew I can't waste money". Academic work was a priority for them as reflected in the comment: "*Jy swat, uh, so dit is jou eerste prioriteit,*" [you are here to study, so that should be your first priority). All of them were motivated to work hard and stay focused because the cost of failing was too high. "If you fail, it costs you money, it costs a year, it takes a lot", said Alyce. An incentive to perform well academically was the possibility of accessing or maintaining bursaries and loans to ease the financial pressure.

When I enquired how the participants were financing their studies, three informed me that they were totally dependent on bursaries and loans to cover the costs of tuition and accommodation. Therese's family, for example, could not contribute any money towards her studies:

voedsel gewys maar nie finansies nie. ... Daar is nie 'n manier wat my pa kan help nie, hulle sukkel eintlik om net aan die gang te bly ... Ek meen my pa het Saterdag 75 geword maar hy moet nog werk. Hy moet nog baie hard werk. Hulle maak nog baie staat op sy inkomste wat nie baie is nie, so ek vat maar my studies op myself. [they give me food, not money. There is no way that my father can assist me financially, they are struggling financially. He turned 75 on Saturday but still has to work. He works very hard and they depend on his income which is not very much, so I am taking responsibility for my studies.]

The women had different sources of financial assistance. Therese financed her studies by holding down two student assistantships; Alyce had a part-time weekend job as well as a holiday job to help cover her day-to-day expenses; Oprah

depended on her grandmother and sister for support with the basic day-to-day expenses and worked during her holidays to finance her participation in some of *the social activities at her residence*. Sher and Iyanla were supported by their parents who covered the cost of their studies. However, both of them expressed the need to make some contribution to their studies. When I explored this with each of them, Sher stated that her father was adamant that he had made provision for her to study as long as she wanted and that he was not happy with any suggestion that she would provide for herself. I found out in the course of the interview that Iyanla's mother was working abroad to finance her studies. She said that this was necessary despite her parents having attempted to make provisions for her studies. Iyanla commented that she felt guilty and had tried to ease the burden on her parents by trying to earn academic merit awards, "I can't waste money ... I put a lot of money into university and I couldn't get a bursary". Iyanla had become very disheartened last year because she had "worked really hard and I got like seven distinctions and still didn't get a bursary". The reason she had been given for not receiving a bursary, was that her mother's "income was too high". She said that on paper it might seem to be so, but in reality it was not.

All the participants mentioned that the issue of bursaries was a contentious one and was often the source of a lot of tension. They stated that the dominant perception on campus was that people of colour received bursaries not because of academic merit but because of their race:

I know a lot of Coloured girls that have bursaries who say there's a feeling from their white counterparts, like, they don't deserve it, it's only because of colour.

She felt that without bursaries, many people of colour would not have access to SU. This view was shared by all the participants. They felt that this awareness of financial constraints and financial dependence on US, created a sense of "you have to be grateful to be here" and that this may result in people not wanting to challenge the system, in a sense not wanting to bite the hand that feeds them. Therese's comment supports this viewpoint, "Jy probeer maar altyd jou kant skoon hou en reg hou".

4.4.2.2 "Minority participation and transformation is all an experiment"

All the participants in the study spoke of the minority status that they had been assigned and expressed a strong awareness of their being tolerated by the majority. I

probed this mindset. According to Alyce minority participation and transformation were all an "experiment" in which the people most affected were often excluded from the decisions that were made. This view was supported by Iyanla, Oprah and Sher. Iyanla's comment was:

... they don't want to be over crowded by black people ... they still like living in the old world and not having to deal with reality.

Sher expressed similar sentiments on the need for transformation: "I think it would be an embarrassment for an institution like this not to have all those people represented here". She went on to say that she was not a firm believer in the quota system or affirmative action as it was currently being applied because "if you don't base it on academics ... then not all of them (students) are going to cope". She expressed the view that people coming to university had multiple stressors to cope with and so not being equipped to cope academically was setting them up for failure. However, she added, "I accept that if you don't have it (affirmative action) then you won't have minority groups entering this university".

All the participants stated that the first thing people saw when looking at them was their race. According to Iyanla, people sometimes become so sensitive about it that "you" felt deprived of natural interaction. She said that hyper-sensitivity about genuineness ruled interactions. She cited the example of hostel-based peer support, where they tried very hard. However, the perception among herself and her friends was that "they (the hostel peer advisers) have an added responsibility, they have to do it. The others (the general student populations) just don't see the need". (p14)

4.4.2.3 Transformation, Affirmative Action and the Coloured student

In response to questions relating to how they thought members of the dominant culture perceived the need for affirmative action and the quota system, there was consensus that the need for it was understood but that people were not necessarily happy about it. All of them expressed anger and frustration at what they perceived to be a lack of commitment to effective transformation. These expressed this as follows:

aan die een kant is ek baie bly dat daar vandag regstellende aksie is. Ek dink net dit is reg dat dinge reggestel moet word. Ek is nie altyd gelukkig oor baie van die attitude daar agter nie, en die benadering.

[on the one hand, I am happy that there is affirmative action. But I am not always happy with the attitude and approach to it.]

All of the women shared the perception that people from the dominant culture thought they were at SU because of affirmative action and not on merit. When I explored their responses to this perception what emerged was that they all felt the need to and had challenged this perception. Iyanla's way of challenging this perception was that she "worked harder than the rest of them ... I proved to them ... I got seven distinctions". Oprah stated that the need to "constantly prove yourself ... can be tiring". Similarly, Alyce expressed the view that this need to prove that you deserved to be here academically and the prevailing perception that people of colour were only here because of affirmative action made failure hard to deal with. She described failing her my first year, "as a slap in my face ... I had proved them right, type of thing". I found this an interesting comment and probed what had caused her to feel that way. Her perception was that white students saw it as a privilege for her to study at SU. According to Alyce, "the way they look at you, to me it feels like they're looking at me saying yea, okay you're not actually supposed to be here but let's see how you do".

An interesting viewpoint that surfaced was that part of the responsibility for the slow pace of transformation should be placed at the feet of the minority groups. They held the view that minority students were too passive and needed to become more assertive about resisting the perpetuation of the status quo. Sher's perception was that, "Coloured people don't say much. They feel that this is the way things are and they're not going to change". According to her this robbed them of agency. Alyce and Therese confirmed this observation. Alyce felt that there was very little that could be done to change things and Therese felt life was easier if you, "*probeer maar altyd jou kant skoon en reg hou.*" [always keep your nose clean and try to tow the line]. Their attitude might be linked to a view all held that one walked a fine line between being considered a collaborator and being branded a troublemaker.

4.4.2.4 Social integration

Social integration can be described as how comfortable and accommodated one feels within a social context. This process is usually facilitated by personal and environmental factors. All the women reported instances or perceptions of "not fitting". Alyce described it as being on the outside looking in. She often felt like she did not belong and that she had very little in common with the students at SU. She

explained that there was a marked difference between her and their experience with and exposure to various things. She continued that she had felt this way at school *where she had not become part of any extra-curricular activities because of financial constraints, and:*

I was so scared because everybody that was there already knew what they were doing ... I was so scared I would fail and people would look at me.

This sense of being on the periphery of student life was shared by three other participants. One of the reasons they gave for this was the low number of students of colour in classes and hostels. Oprah expressed the view that sometimes even though people were from the same ethnic group, they were often not from the same socio-economic class and so did not "always understand what I had to deal with". She felt misunderstood due to her different background and a lack of shared interests. This sense of isolation is an experience common among first year students, but for the participants of this study it appeared to be compounded by variables of race, social class and feelings of displacement. This sense of isolation seems to have developed or been experienced differently by the participants. Alyce stated that during orientation when she had first got to SU, she enjoyed the interaction, activities and was assured that she "would fit in just perfectly". This sense of connection, she stated, was eroded by the fact that she did not live on campus and had to commute everyday. She continued that those students who lived on campus had a better sense of being a part of things and therefore had a much more positive experience of being at US.

Iyanla and Oprah agreed that living in the university residences did allow easier access to peer support and on-campus facilities but spoke of a social isolation and marginalisation in which their culture, music and interests were rarely acknowledged. Iyanla traced her feelings of isolation and alienation back to orientation. Her perception of this rite of passage was:

Initiation was really an experience and a half ... you are supposed to make friends during that time but I felt so alone and so isolated. I could see these white people, they were really enjoying this whole thing of 'sokkies' and all that but for me it was more like a culture shock.

She continued that initiation was tough for her and stated that things like the men and women hostel social activities around securing a date for some of the traditional

functions were often awkward because, "five guys are going to come and here we are ten". Interracial dating appears not to have been an option at that stage. When I asked Oprah how she had experienced the orientation/initiation activities, she responded that though she found aspects of it irritating because she was not very traditional, she liked the emphasis on building unity because she liked "belonging somewhere".

Living in university accommodation had helped Oprah, Iyanla and Sher to establish support networks. However, they had experiences of not having their presence acknowledged and that these experiences had the effect of making them feel invisible. Iyanla's neighbours in the hostel walked past her on campus without acknowledging her. Therese stated that she had grown tired of people addressing her white friend who was standing next to her and acting as if she was not there. She went on to say that she had taken a determined stance to force them to acknowledge her presence:

Kom ek in dan groet ek, of jy nou wil groet of nie is jou saak. [I have decided to greet people, I am not bothered about whether or not they return the greeting.]

She stated that common courtesy was something she valued and she had decided to claim it as her right.

The data revealed that marginalisation and rejection could not only be ascribed to the actions of white students; their Coloured peer group also played a role. Three of them had experienced Coloured students as tending to form cliques and placing a great deal of pressure on each other to conform to an unwritten code of conduct. Sher's words reflect her experience:

... they don't like me, I think it's because I don't speak Afrikaans. ... they are so judgemental, I find that we Coloured people are so hard on ourselves.

Iyanla said that every time you tried something that was considered to be a 'white thing' you were branded a "coconut", which is a description used for Coloured people who aspire to be white. She said she had experienced the Coloured group as a closed group with a reluctance to try new or different things. Iyanla had no Coloured women in her intimate friendship circle at SU, only African women. Oprah's experiences were different, which she ascribed to the fact that she was not "only with one group at a time, I usually move around". She enjoyed interacting with people from different

races and different countries and found being on campus, "absolutely exciting, a little like having your own exchange programme without ever having left South Africa".

Financial constraints were offered as inhibiting social participation and hampering integration. In Sher's view people sometimes used financial constraints as an excuse. Although she acknowledged that some of the social activities on campus were fairly expensive, people often generalised this as a way of remaining in their comfort zones and imposing limits on their participation. However, she later also stated that she was aware that the high cost attached to some of the social and cultural activities could be viewed as a covert attempt at keeping these activities exclusive.

4.4.2.5 *Negative traumatic experiences*

All of the participants had at least one negative experience that they could relate to their minority status on campus. Therese, the academic brilliant student relayed an experience that should have been a source of pride and joy, but which ended up being quite a traumatic experience which she equated with feeling:

baie minderwaardig, ek was baie ongelukkig want ek het gedink ek het die gemeenskap teleurgestel. Ek het gevoel ek het die gemeenskap verraaai. [very inferior, I was very unhappy because I thought that I had let my community down. It felt as if I had betrayed them.]

She had won a very prestigious university academic award. Instead of focusing on this and lauding her for the personal and academic hard work and achievement, the institution minimised her accomplishments by a sensationalised focus on her race and socio-economic background. The experience undermined her self-confidence and self-efficacy and:

skielik vee jy al daai goed uit die weg uit en dink dis oor jy Coloured is. [suddenly you discount all those things and think that you got it because you are Coloured.]

Similarly, Sher recounted an experience when her academic ability was equated with "not as Coloured as other people", when she did well academically. She stated that this experience resulted in her experiencing self-doubt and disjunction between who she thought she was and other people's perceptions of her based on her ethnic heritage. Iyanla expressed confusion at what she perceived to be double standards. She stated that she had been led to believe that if she worked hard and achieved well academically she would be in line for financial support in the form of academic merit

bursaries. She recounted her disappointment when despite seven distinctions at the end of her first year she was told she did not qualify because of her parents' income. This strengthened her sense of discomfort that had initially stemmed from her sense that she had been accepted at the university despite having lower marks in matric than some of her on campus peers. "Again I felt, what more do I have to do to prove that I am worthy of this place". She added that her self-confidence was negatively impacted by this experience and that she had had to work hard to stay positive and motivated.

Alyce related a story of having challenged a lecturer about the content of a lecture. She said that it was the first time in nearly three years that she had dared to speak in class. The reason that she had been silent till then was because of continued negative responses by lecturers in her first year and her perceptions of the difference with which they treated white, Coloured and black students:

... in my first year, I asked questions like crazy. I wasn't worried about anybody, I was here to study, I wanted to know, but after asking a question, they made me feel like I was stupid and then the white person next to me asked the same question and its like answered in a different way. I never asked questions after that again ... until this year, three years later.

When I asked her what was different this time round, she responded that she had been prepared for class and had had the textbook to back her up. However, it had still taken her half of the lecture to build up the courage to ask the question. The lecture gave her positive feedback. When I asked her how that had felt, her response was: "I felt sjoe! At least that wasn't my mistake".

Negative experiences in interactions with white students and lecturers at the US appear to have had a negative impact on the participants' self-concept and appear to have required reflection and resolve to return to a state of well-being.

4.4.2.6 Incidents of racism

Although some of the experiences recounted in the previous theme could be related to some form of racism, all of the participants provided specific experiences of racism. All of them recall references to being "quotas", a term they view as dehumanising and disempowering. All of them expressed frustration and anger about the implication that the only reason they were officially students at SU was because of affirmative action. Sher stated that she felt SU people were fixated on race. Although she had been aware

of her ethnic heritage before coming, she had never been so exposed to blatant stereotyping. Iyanla supported this perception and stated that although she was aware of stereotyping, quite often, it was hard to challenge because so much of it was covert, or as phrased by her, "It is very undercover". She used as example the responsibilities assigned to senior members on hostel committees. She stated that the seniors working on these committees usually received the more responsible tasks and worked with the money. However, this had not been her experience:

I'm doing all the stupid things ... all the hands on work ... they do the more responsible work like working with the money. They think I'm going to steal the money.

This theme of people of colour as thieves or suspects is evident in the way they responded to other incidents of theft or when things went astray in the hostel.

... somebody is going to say its stolen and then they are going to focus on us, it is like all eyes on us. Like we would steal their stuff.

According to Iyanla, she and her friends had often wondered if they were being paranoid. I then asked her if they had ever addressed this issue. They had but their charges of prejudice had always been denied and that just compounded their confusion. Therese supported the view that a lot of the racism experienced at US was covert. She referred to it as being "*in die lig*" [up in the air]. Talking about race was uncomfortable and the general feeling was that that everyone hoped it would just sort itself out.

... there are a few people who voice their opinion about this whole colour issue. ... other people even if they are racist, they don't, it's not said openly anymore.

Oprah cited a more overt racist experience that was, according to her, "just one hell of a shock". She recounted an incident that had taken place during a regularly monthly hostel meeting. She stated that the theme that night was proudly South African. A couple of Afrikaans girls stood up and started singing Die Stem, the old national anthem associated with Apartheid South Africa, which had made some of the girls of colour extremely upset. Another Afrikaans girl (not part of the group that had sung) later approached her and said, "but ja, that's what we all grew up with. Her response was to inform the girl that":

... you did, but all (Coloured) of us didn't. I don't recognise it. It doesn't mean anything to me. One of the Coloured students whose father had been an activist threatened to go to the newspapers if something like that ever happened again. I found out later that the "*huismoeder* [matron] was very upset about the incident and told the girls never to sing Die Stem again.

Alyce revealed that a girl in a mixed race tutorial group had got up and said that she was "pure bred and would never mix". Though she could not remember the context of the conversation she would not forget that incident. This insensitivity to the impact of behaviour, tradition and symbolism reminiscent of the apartheid past on people of colour was something that all the participants had encountered at some or other stage of their time at US.

4.4.2.7 Peers

All the women in the study stated that they had different types of experiences with the different racial groups on campus. All of the participants, however, spoke of a lack of support from within their own ethnic peer group. And all but Oprah provided examples of marginalisation from within the Coloured peer group. When I explored possible reasons for this, Sher's perception was that the Coloured group were not very tolerant of people from within their ranks who made waves and did not conform to an unwritten code of conduct. This view was supported by Iyanla when she reflected on the need for people of colour to get more involved in on-campus social and cultural activities. She stated that when she challenged her Coloured peers to "stop being so narrow minded" about attending activities they viewed as "a white thing", they accused her of being a "coconut", which was really hard for her. Accusations like that, though they angered her did not stop her from participating in events she found interesting even if it often meant that she was one of two Coloureds there. Alyce felt that the primary reason for lack of support in this peer group was competitiveness and the pressure on Coloured students to succeed. Alyce's perception was that white students had more fun because many of them come to SU with their friends from school, have more time for extra-mural activities and generally had a more carefree time.

Three of the five participants had perceptions of differences between the way in which English and Afrikaans speaking whites responded to people of colour. All of them view English-speaking whites as being more open and tolerant of difference. In

Sher's view this was because Afrikaners often have limited experience of interacting with people of colour on an equal footing, and she cited the example of an acquaintance whose only contact with Coloured people before coming to SU had been the workers on their farm. She also said that parents of these students often did not encourage interracial interaction and she shared a story about the cool reception she had received when visiting an Afrikaner friend at her family farm. Her perception was that though this student might be open to bridging the interracial divide, she did not think her parents "would be very accepting" of it. Although Oprah concurred with the view, she cautioned against stereotyping and suggests that "if we do not want to be stereotyped, we should guard against stereotypes and judge people as individuals".

4.4.2.8 *Cross-cultural contact*

Inter-racial contact academically is unavoidable. However, the data reveals that social interaction was very limited for this group, and was left up to individuals. In response to a question I asked Alyce about the amount and type of interracial contact she experienced on campus, she responded as follows: "[In] the orientation week, there was lots of interaction, which was quite nice and I looked forward to being here". However, reality did not live up to expectation and the friendships she thought she had made during orientation fizzled into acquaintances. Iyanla and Sher felt that not much had changed and that beyond providing an opportunity for encouraging interracial interaction very little was being done to facilitate the process of cross-cultural contact. Oprah concurred that most inter-racial events and interaction were a matter of individual initiative. Therese stated that most of her inter-racial interaction was limited to academic or faculty-related activities and that she had got tired of frequently being the only person of colour at these functions.

4.4.2.9 *The hidden costs of extra-curricular activities*

None of the participants were involved in any structured extra-curricular activities at the time of the research. When I explored this with them it emerged that the lack of involvement was related to their financial circumstances. Alyce spoke of the "hidden costs" and also stated that she spent most of her free time working to support herself financially. Therese and Oprah stated that academic work had to be their primary focus. Oprah did, however, mention that she occasionally became involved in hostel activities and quite enjoyed working on the dance committee and the hostel

newsletter. Sher stated that when she had made an attempt to participate, she had chosen a faculty based society but had withdrawn because she had become frustrated by the lack of social awareness. She had soon realised that her reason for wanting to get involved differed from those of her fellow students:

They had all this money and they would organise dinners and things, but in their society. To me it was just a misuse of funds.

4.4.2.10 Social life

The participants agreed that most students socialised along racially-defined lines. Sher's view is that nothing much had changed:

... the policies are laid down and every now and again studies are done and people are so open to change, but there is no change. The white people stick together and you still have the Afrikaner uhm culture and tradition. Coloured people stick together and a few black people kind of, you know, go with Coloured people so uhm, there's no change.

According to them, most social and cultural activities organised on campus did not reflect the diverse interests and cultures of the student population. "It makes you uncomfortable with certain aspects of our culture not represented properly. We say they have to change and you have to compromise on simple things like music". Sher supported this view, but suggested that it was a two-way process:

They don't accommodate us and we don't accommodate them I think it is tradition based ... like heritage is tradition you know. This is con and I think, you know, people cling to that".

Once more she said that people of colour were not very assertive about the need for change or inclusion. The others had also mentioned that minority students did not seem to make too much fuss about the status quo being maintained. When I asked Sher why she thought minority students made such a little attempt to bring about change, her response was:

I think, part of it is just attitude, we just feel like you know what is the point. ... This is the way it's been done forever.

The stressors that emerged when I probed what they considered to be the ones which impacted on their experience were: a sense of academic pressure compounded by perceptions of being token affirmative action candidates, peer pressure, a feeling of

powerlessness to bring about change, perceptions of an organisational culture resistant to change, covert racism (felt this made it particularly hard to challenge) and financial constraints.

4.4.2.11 Social Support Networks

One of the primary challenges cited by all the participants was the need to establish new campus community-based networks. Sher, Oprah and Iyanla felt that living in university residences had helped to facilitate the process for them. They had established friendships through the contacts made at the residences. Therese was sharing private accommodation with her sister who served as her primary support system at US and she never mentioned having a peer social system. According to Alyce white students had an advantage in that many of them arrived at university with an established support base. Establishing a peer support system was harder for people of colour because they came "from everywhere basically". She continued that despite the perception that "we're all alike, we're not. ... we don't experience the same things and we don't see stuff the same".

4.4.3 Coming together as women

The conversation in the session where all the women were brought together for the first time was guided by the broad question related to the challenges they faced at SU. The conversation focused on their experience as members of a minority group, and the way forward. During this session, it was interesting to note the smiles of recognition and understanding, sometimes almost relief that feelings, experiences and perceptions were shared.

In response to a question about what they considered the greatest challenge Coloured women at SU faced, the unanimous response was race. Their gender and ethnicity attracted a lot of attention and various responses both from among themselves and other races. Their own perceptions and a view of the perception of others place a considerable pressure on them to disprove perceptions of tokenism.

... the mere fact that you are a Coloured women, everybody's attention is immediately fixed on you. So they watch your performance.

This view is shared by many of their Coloured friends who think that their ethnicity is the primary reason they are here. All the participants were in tacit agreement and there was a lot of head nodding. Three of the five women felt that despite having

performed well at school and having a fair sense of academic self-efficacy, they still felt pressure to disapprove perceptions of tokenism by excelling academically. The perception that minorities were tokens was highlighted by their continuous citing of and focusing on the racial ratios at SU. The women revealed an acute awareness of the disparity in numbers and three of them mentioned that they had found the small number of Coloured students overwhelming. All of the women said that they had expected to be a minority but had not realised how much in the minority they would be. Therese stated:

toe ek hier kom was ek oorweldig omdat daar meer witmense was as wat ek verwag het". [when I got her, I was overwhelmed because there were more white people than I expected.]

The disparity in numbers added to feelings and perceptions of minority and tokenism. This disparity was also suggested as a possible reason for resistance to interracial mixing. This is exacerbated by the fact that the Coloureds that are at SU have chosen to group together. Alyce disagreed that being part of a minority added pressure. She felt that Coloured people put pressure on themselves and that there was very little pressure from other races to perform. She went on to say that there was a lot of rivalry among Coloureds students because they had to be competitive – they had to be better, to improve their odds in the job market. The other women agreed that there are a very limited number of opportunities for Coloured women in the job market. According to Oprah the marginalisation of Coloureds is historical. She pointed out that there were debates regarding the positioning and relationships, both before and after 1994 about black and white. According to her, Coloureds never really featured in these debates and therefore the opportunities for Coloureds remain limited. The women agreed that some people had this perception but maintained that as a Coloured woman you were always aware of the perception that presence is the result of a "quota" system, which in turn influenced your self-confidence even when you were performing reasonably well academically. Oprah was supported by three of the women when she shared the opinion that one often had a sense that the university cared more about getting the statistics right, ensuring that quotas are met than they do about the people who make up these statistics.

Sher said that "first thing people see when they look at you is Coloured", a perception that was supported by everyone in the group. She continued that her experience in

Namibia had made it hard for her to deal with the fact that South Africans don't appear to be able to "look past colour and language barriers". After 10 years into democracy, Oprah found this "pathetic". Therese, the more mature of the women, stated that before coming to SU, she had felt comfortable with her racial identity and that race and inter-racial interaction had no longer been an issue for her because she had had extensive inter racial contact in a variety of settings. However, she had been "naïve" to believe that coming here would only be about academic performance, as *"iewers langs die pad het ek besef dit is nie so eenvoudig nie"*. [somewhere along the line I realised that it was not so simple.] She concurs with the view that SU does not allow you to forget where you come from. Therese continued that it was hard to deal with. Because you were not accepted and respected for the person you are, there was always a label attached to you. All the participants agreed that labelling and the preconceived notions or assumptions that accompanied this often made being at SU very challenging. All the women shared experiences of how labels and peoples' perceptions about what that label implies had had a negative impact of their self-concept and self-confidence and had created an identity crisis at the beginning. They felt that these had compounded their initial adjustment. It later emerged that labelling was not only based or attached by other ethnic groups but that all of the women had also borne the brunt of intra-group labelling. Oprah commented that Coloured students, labelled other Coloured students according to their mother tongue, socio-economic background (these perceptions were usually based on whether or not you had attended Model C), and whether or not you came from an urban or rural background. She appeared shocked by this and wondered aloud how Coloureds could hope to fight oppression when they were oppressing each other. Though she found this information disturbing it had clarified the marginalisation and "nastiness" she had experienced within this group. Iyanla had resisted being put in a "box" and had been a victim of unfair "labelling" within this group. Later she stated that though she strongly opposed this labelling practice, she had herself made judgements and assumptions based on these intra-group labels. She recalled an incident in which she had made assumptions about a fellow HK Coloured member who had slighted her socially:

I found out about her because I wanted to make a better judgement ... I found out she played netball for Maties ... and realised all her life she has been with white people, shame its different for her.

Later in the conversation, it emerged that up until Sher had drawn her attention to the consequences of these assumptions, she had not considered it an issue. All the women concurred how easy it was to fall into the trap of labelling and its accompanying assumptions and acknowledged an awareness of how destructive this was on a personal and institutional level. The women shared the view that labelling inhibited risk-taking and participation.

Therese mentioned that it had been a challenge for her to resist these labels, as the institution often used labels and the resulting stereotyping to their advantage. She shared with the group her anger and disappointment with the University after she had won a prestigious academic award. What emerged was that in the publicity surrounding the award she had won, she was portrayed as a "*arme kleurling meisie van 'n plattelandse dorp*". [poor Coloured girl from a rural town.] She stated that she had felt that the focus had been shifted from her achievement to her race, gender and where she came from.

Dit was eers nie vir my a issue nie, nou worstel ek met dit, om verby die label van arme kleurling meisie van 'n platteland dorp te kom. Nou is hulle issues." [It was not an issue for me at first, but now I have to grapple with the label of being a poor Coloured girl from a rural town. Now they are issues.]

She continued that the hype created around this had made her feel as if she had betrayed and denigrated her background and all it had meant to her.

All the women stated that they had been overwhelmed by the disparity in numbers and only once they started studying at SU did they realise how much of a minority they were. The participants felt that this added to the perception that people of colour are quotas and tokens. They shared the opinion that the small numbers of people of colour reinforces feeling of being in the minority and not really being part of the mainstream. Oprah, suggested the numbers disparity as a possible reason for the resistance to inter-racial mixing and the grouping together by Coloured students. Alyce supported this perception and Iyanla suggested this as a possible cause for what she calls an internal battle between a group identity and just being accepted as a person. Oprah then added that other than issues relating to where one fits in, "you feel you are here because you are Coloured" and said that this increased the pressure on perform academically. Three in the group experienced tremendous pressure to do well

in order to disprove the perception that they had received special concessions because they were Coloured. All three of these participants were from traditionally Coloured schools. Sher, felt she had no qualms about "deserving to be" as she had felt more than adequately equipped to cope academically. It was the social adjustment she had problems with. Although Oprah's Matric results had been good and that she had felt more than ready to cope academically, she still initially experienced an awareness of stereotypes and speculation around "quota and tokenism", and this had undermined her confidence.

Alyce disagreed that there was pressure from the environment to achieve, and stated "you cause your own pressure". Her compulsion to prove herself was market related. She was of the opinion that it was not enough to be equal. You had to be better if you wanted to be competitive in the job market. When I explored this idea in the group, Alyce said there were a limited number of jobs and places for Coloured women. This perception was shared by two of the other participants.

4.4.3.1 Experiences of isolation or marginalisation

All of the participants cited instances of culture shock related to cultural and traditional SU activities. They share a strong sense that they were merely being tolerated and that very little in the environment and traditions had changed to accommodate diversity. Minority groups resist participating in activities and any thing that is branded a "white thing". Those who take part in these activities risk chastisement from their Coloured peers and being labelled a sell-out, or a wannabe, or being called "a coconut". At this point the conversation returned to labelling and the difficulty all people at SU had moving beyond those labels Iyanla and Oprah spoke about resistance they had experienced from their friends about coming to a "boere" university (the label given to a conservative Afrikaner university). The women spoke about the difficulty they experienced between trying to maintain their own cultural/ethnic identity in the absence of a support structure while still trying to be a SU student.

The participants also shared a perception that living in university accommodation made participation in campus life easier but acknowledged that it too had its challenges. Those living in university accommodation felt that though efforts were being made to be a "little" more inclusive, often times policy did not translate into

practice. They felt that the small numbers of people of colour living in university residences, the separation of races in more intimate living spaces (roommates/*flatmates*) and social practices were not aiding the process. Oprah, who served on her residence's diversity committee, had questioned why no black first year students had been allocated places in their residence and why the allocation of roommates was still along racial lines. She was referred to administration for an explanation. She supported the point about the allocation of accommodations along racial lines and told of her experience with racial profiling in the allocation of accommodation. Alyce suggested a reason for this dragging of feet when it came to real change related to "people not wanting to move out of their comfort zones". According to Therese white people did not want to talk about it and that this causes frustration and creates a sense of not wanting to acknowledge problems created by the past. There was an attitude of "*dit het niks met my te doen nie, dit het nou gebeur kom ons gaan aan*". [I had nothing to do with it, it happened lets move on.] She spoke of a resistance to introducing or addressing things that were uncomfortable and she recounted an experience she had on a committee targeted with ensuring more diversity. Her suggested speaker and topic were rejected because of her white housemates' discomfort with it. Some of the white members on the committee even lectured her about, "*hoe hierdie generasie word in alles geskok en hoe traumaties dit vir hulle is*". [how this generation was shocked into everything and how traumatic it was for them.] She stated that that experience had left her feeling misunderstood and insensitive and that her participation in that committee had been inhibited by that incident. She disagreed with the attitude of 'we are only willing to do that with which we are comfortable' as it stifles progress. She felt not enough platforms were created for people to practice what they learn or to challenge practices that are divisive. She stated the importance of all members of SU, not "accept(ing) ignorance as an excuse" for inactivity and the continuation of divisive practices.

4.4.3.2 Racist Experiences

All of them have had experiences of racism as students. Three of them had experienced both overt and covert racism and the others had been subjected to a more covert type of racism. The participants said that all these experiences had left them feeling confused, angry and "stripped of their humanity". Oprah recounted an incident that had happened a few weeks previously. She stated that she had been in a group of

women from various races at an SU social activity, when they walked past a group of young men who made extremely derogatory racist comments, like "*Ek haat hotnots*". [I hate Hotnots.] She remembers the white women in the group being very apologetic at the time. Though she had felt it best to say nothing at the time she continues to feel:

stripped of my humanity, I felt so degraded ... racist incidents have an impact on you, it leaves a psychological chip on your shoulder (the people who do this) are so ignorant, they don't even realise that.

She had earlier stated that although the incident remains with her she had not told anybody in authority about it because she did not see how anything would be done about it. It became instead a situation in which she had to "rediscover her inner pride" and had to work around the "anger and fear" of being exposed to such a situation. Therese stated that she had been subjected to her white classmates not greeting or acknowledging her presence and how it had become an almost daily battle for her in which she stated the need to assert herself. They had to accept that she was there to stay, and that she was not willing to disappear or hide from them, an attitude that was validated by all women present in the group. She asserted the importance of ensuring that these incidents were made public and that ignorance should not be accepted as an answer. Again she referred to the race profiling system used in the allocation of accommodation and the need to draw to the attention of people implementing these practices how their practices could be perceived as racist. Oprah and Iyanla showed their agreement and concurred that a valuable opportunity to break down stereotypes was being lost by this practice. All the women expressed a need for minority groups such as Coloured women to become more assertive about addressing these issues and suggested alternatives. Therese recounted how she had grown tired of being disrespected in daily courtesies like not being acknowledged and greeted and had taken to forcing people to acknowledge her by greeting them first. Oprah cautioned that in the process, minorities should not be thrown off course by suggestions that doing things differently would "mess with tradition". All the women in the study mentioned that they were disconcerted by the fact that a lot of the overt and covert racist experiences that they had been subjected to had been perpetrated by young people, people who as Oprah put it, "basically know about apartheid from stories".

4.4.3.3 Impact of perceptions of socio-economic and school background

Values and coping strategies that children learnt from their family background carried over into their lives as students at SU. All had solid support systems and an awareness of family expectations and perceptions of making a better life for all. Four of the women were aware that they are able to be role-models in their families and communities. Oprah came from a community that had many social problems. There were not many positive role models in her community and she hoped that her success would let "other people know there is hope, you can get out of there". She had always held the view that it is more difficult for Coloured and African people to succeed than for her white peers who grew up in environments that were encouraging and with the knowledge that provision had been made for their future. Oprah also stated that despite her often difficult socio-economic challenges, she had learnt to value knowledge and herself, as it had made her more street smart than her white peers, said that she often felt sorry for her white friends because they had lived such sheltered and protected lives. She thought this made them vulnerable to social realities.

They were very aware of the privilege of being able to access higher education and had plans to give back to their community, and to show them that someone from their community had been successful. Sher wanted to be a role model for her siblings, whom she felt had "led such a sheltered life". However she also valued her family support and good educational background which helped her to be assertive, to challenge ignorance and injustice. Alyce's Model C school experience, had worked both for and against her. It had made her question people's motives more, had impacted her academic self-efficacy which had resulted in her feeling overwhelmed by academic expectations at SU. She said that it was interesting to hear how everybody else felt that "it was not just about me, what I'm doing will have an impact on people coming" she continued that she "thought it had already been done for her".

Acceptance of preconceived classification or labelling resulted in additional labels such as the one shared by Oprah, "I am one of the Coloureds that is not really Coloured "I am English, I do not have a bursary, I am materially better off compared to my other friends, ...".

4.4.3.4 *The way forward*

The majority of the young women felt able to make a positive contribution towards transformation. They stated that there was the awareness, gained from experience, that it had to start with an awareness and acceptance of yourself and who you are, According to Oprah it is important to value yourself. Iyanla stated the importance of "learning new things all the time and to continue to challenge your thoughts and perceptions". The women endorsed the need to challenge themselves and improve risk taking, both socially and academically. Being more reflective, assertive and proactive were also seen as key coping strategies. Oprah stated:

when I hit rock bottom, I think, am I going to rise from the ashes once again? ... you have to rise up again. You have to rise up again. You have to make things work for you.

Therese validated this viewpoint and added the importance of not allowing stereotyped or negative perceptions to stand in the way of development and growth. She suggested that platforms like the focus group in this study could be valuable in, raising awareness that you are not alone Alyce was the only participant who remained sceptical about minorities being able to instigate any meaningful change.

4.4.3.5 *Outsider witness*

As part of this process of reflection, Gee, an intern psychologist and graduate student at the university who had been observing from behind a one way mirror joined the group. She shared with the women the aspects of their stories that had resonated with her personal experience as a Coloured woman studying at SU. She addressed each woman individually in the presence of the rest of the group. This was an emotional experience and a process that was experienced by them as the validation of them and the stories that they told of their experiences as Coloured women students at the SU.

Gee asked them to compare their experiences to a developing photograph. She stated that this metaphor reminded her of their individual and group process. Gee told the group that she had found the entire session an "overwhelming and powerful experience", but explained that she would speak on what each of the women had shared, and how it made her a "survivor" in the process.

She addressed Sher's statement on how the women were affected by the perception that they were mere "tokens". Her "I deserve to be here", represented a positive

attitude and a proactive stance as she realised that her being here was not accidental but rather that she deserved to be at SU and was capable of being there.

Alyce's view that she was very dependent on "divine intervention" was an emotional acknowledgement of what she valued and considered important. Faith and religion played an important part in acknowledgement. She felt it important that Alyce acknowledge the part her personal effort had played in ensuring her access to SU and giving her staying power.

Gee focused on Iyanla's acknowledgement of the role her family and community played in her motivation and success. She also stated that their role in motivating Iyanla to want make a difference to both her family, community of origin and SU community was an important variable in making a change. Oprah's drive to be a role-model in her community and to raise awareness resonated strongly with her and her need to engender hope in others.

Therese, "*jou stories en geloof het so uitgestaan*" [your stories and faith stood out]. Her assertion to be acknowledged as a unique person and to continue to challenge people to acknowledged that she is more than a label but that she is a person of character.

She then connected their experiences and related how as Coloured women students they need to support each other to "grow there together". She next encouraged them to move past the labels, "the problem-saturated story" and focus on the limitations that buying into those labels placed on the individual. She then invited them to move to a place where they could "re-author our stories". This she described as a process in which you engaged in "taking back practices". Processes in which you challenged negative perceptions held by the self and others and engaged in pro-active practices that challenged these negative ways of thinking. Gee acknowledged the various ways in which the women were already engaging in 'taking back practices' by using critical praxis in their daily engagement with all aspects of life at SU. She encouraged them to remain motivated to challenge limiting ways of thinking both within their own ethnic group and those among other groups. She reminded them that they were women of substance who were making a difference.

There was agreement amongst them that participating in this reflective session had helped create a platform for them to share their stories and experiences; it had helped

them to become aware of commonalities and differences and a strengthening of the view that there are others who share their experiences and that they are more than just *a statistic*. Therese presented the view that the process also created a strong sense of connection, purpose and a sense of making a difference. This view was supported by all the participants.

4.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the themes that were identified within the data were identified and presented. It seems that no one variable impacts on the women's experience. Although there are commonalities in the perceptions and experiences of each of the women, there is a unique interaction of intrinsic and extrinsic variables that make up the lived experience of individuals.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study, I explored the experiences of a group of coloured undergraduate women students at Stellenbosch University. In the course of the study I hoped to create a space in which the women could voice their unique lived reality individually and as a group. In the process I hoped to find out how the women's experiences differed or were similar, which personal and institutional variables impacted on their experiences and what enabled or limited their functioning within the context of SU.

The data collection process created an incredible opportunity to engage undergraduate coloured women around their experiences as students at SU. The themes served as topics to be reflected on and the group session for validation of feelings, perceptions and experiences. This became a space for the women to share the lessons that they had learned and to share ideas about how to deal with the various challenges encountered. The process validated the view that when dealing with any group of people it would be extremely disrespectful and naïve to assume homogeneity. Each person's experience and personal make up ensures unique combination of coping mechanisms, expectations and skills. Though there are commonalities in what they experienced as students, these experiences should always be seen in context. As the instrument of this research and a coloured woman, I had to confront my own preconceived ideas about the key challenges these women would be confronted with. Some of the findings confirmed expectations; others raised awareness and opened my eyes to new issues.

The process that I followed was an action research process. The following figure illustrates my processes within this study.

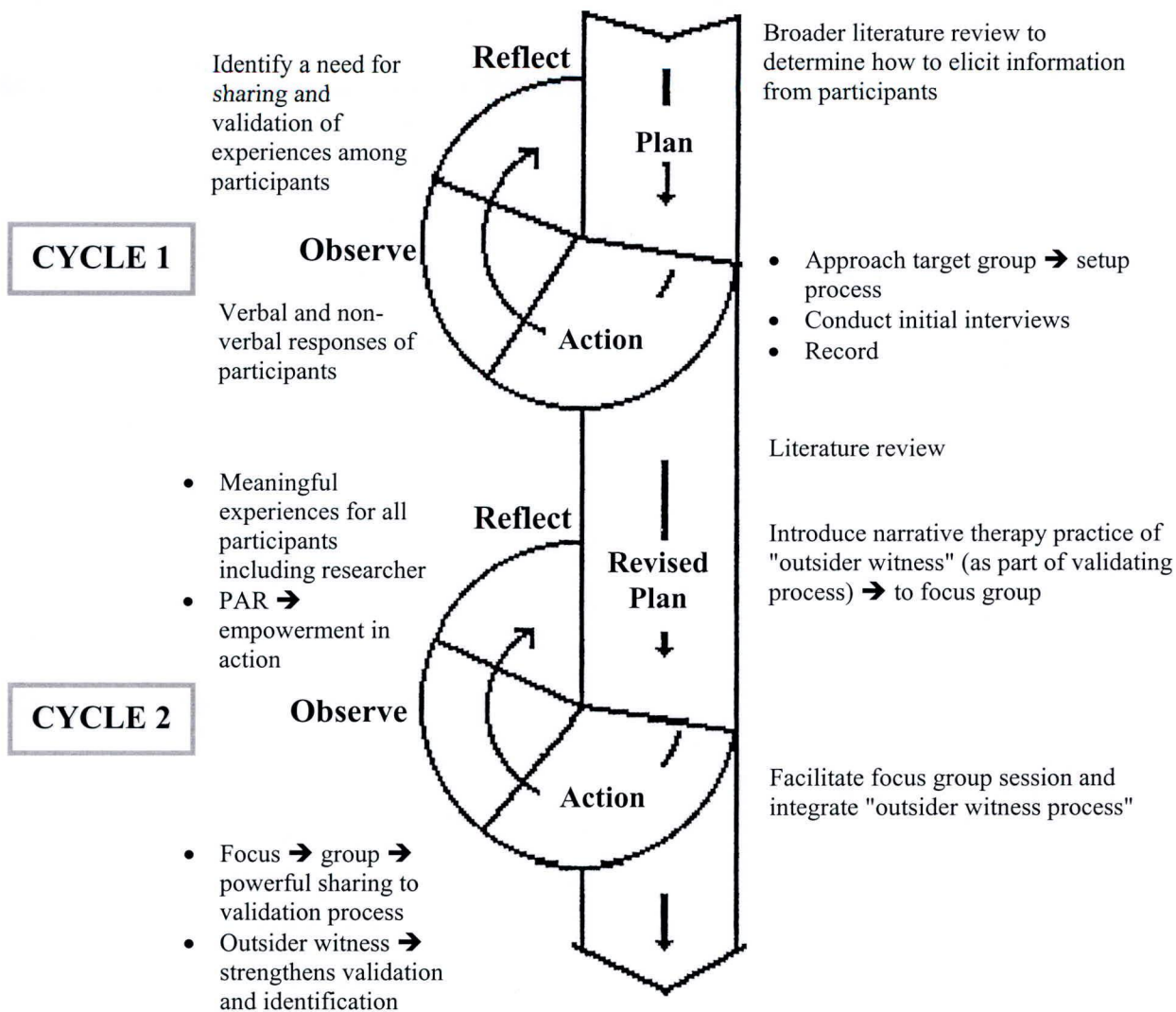


FIGURE 1: Cyclical process of my action research process based on Stephen Kemmis's Model

5.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

In this study insight was gained into the challenges the women experienced on various levels. The findings were consistent with those from previous studies quoted in the literature review in chapter 2. For the purposes of this discussion the findings were banded together under the headings social contextual, academic and personal challenges.

5.2.1 Social Contextual

The women were all of the opinion that living in university residences provides a greater opportunity for integration into all aspects of university life. Three of the participants lived in university residences and felt that this was true in some regards, e.g. increased access to peer support, both structured and informal but also pointed out that living in the residences often brought socio-economic and cultural differences more sharply into focus. These participants felt that the university's policy and profiling practices when allocating accommodation, engendered separatism instead of encouraging natural integration. Two of them had actively challenged this practice. They raised a concern that the integration of living space still appeared to be dependent on the willingness of individuals to engage in a process that encouraged change or integration. This response could be a reflection of the resistance to transformation within the organisational culture. Resistance is often the result of a reluctance to acknowledge the need for change or discomfit with the processes through which change is implemented. The women were of the opinion that the 'snails pace of transformation' can be tied to resistance from within the dominant culture to address anything that causes discomfit. They expressed the view that a measure of discomfit was necessary for meaningful change to occur. The women suggested that by encouraging, open dialogue in which people felt free to share their concerns and listen to those of others was one of the ways in which the institution could guard against becoming complacent about the policies they have in place to guide the transformation process. The women stressed the importance of the institution staying abreast of how these policies are experienced by the people they are aimed at. These considered dialogue a matter of urgency because she fears that "sweeping those things with which we are uncomfortable under the rug", has the potential to create explosive conditions. There was consensus among the women that actively encouraging

integration and challenging practices that work to counter transformation should not be left to individual initiative, but should be an orchestrated effort with a built in *system of checks and balances* which monitor and support the move from policy to practice.

My preconceived notion that students who had attended ex-Model C schools would have an easier time integrating socially and academically was dispelled by Alyce's experience and stories the other women told about their friends who had attended these types of schools. Alyce, the only ex-Model C product in the study, stated that she had experienced social and academic difficulties since her first year at SU. From anecdotes shared by the other participants it was apparent that there were other Model C products from within the coloured group who were experiencing similar problems to Alyce. The women mentioned that people from this group, with whom they were friendly, were also not performing as well as they were academically and shared that people from this group were also more inclined to belong to exclusively coloured cliques. This would then appear to challenge the assumption that an ex- Model C coloured student, who had had an earlier exposure to a mixed student population and access to better education facilities would enjoy an advantage over those from the traditionally coloured township schools. I found it interesting to note that whilst the other women in the study stated that they had never been as aware of their ethnicity as when they became SU students, Alyce came in very suspicious of the motives of anyone engaged in interracial friendships. It would seem as if her SU experience was a continuation of her high school experience.

At undergraduate level, social activities are synonymous with on-campus living. There was variation among the women in the level and type of participation in various aspects of student life. Of the women, Alyce, freely acknowledges that a fear of rejection and people not being genuine inhibits her willingness to "put herself out there". She admits to very limited participation in any activities other than those directly related to her academic programme. She listed commuting and financial constraints together with negative experiences in the past as inhibitors to her involvement. It would appear as if this contributes negatively to her experience of herself as a student at SU. The other participants of the study seem to exhibit better adjustment strategies, however, even their experiences have been challenging. Iyanla for example has decided to address her "fears of change" and inhibited risk taking and

has used the residence in which she lives to challenge both herself and the status quo. She has been encouraged in this process by peers in residence from both the dominant and minority cultures. This has created an opportunity to experience incidents where she feels that people are judging her based on who she is and what she does rather than simply as a coloured woman. With this kind of motivation and support, she stood for the HK (Hostel committee) and was elected to serve on this structure by her peers. It appears to be important to her that her election was due to support from a bigger group than just the minority representation in her hostel. Her election by a diverse student body instead of just by her coloured peers has empowered her to initiate changes at residence level that compels the acknowledgment of the diverse make-up of its residents. It has changed her perception of herself having being elected on to this structure merely as a token to one in which she views herself as someone who is strategically placed to make a meaningful contribution to facilitating change.

Therese, an academically gifted student who has been the recipient of a prestigious academic award, has had her profile raised as a result of receiving this award and the publicity around it. Therese has been recruited to represent the minority interest on diversity committees but has often felt that she was included on these because she was seen to be representative of the coloured group and not because of her personal skills. She recalled often being made to feel like an insensitive reactionary "who wants to make transformation more traumatic than it has already been for young white people" in the dominant culture on campus. Gay (2004) refers to this as problematic popularity. Gay's findings support Therese's feelings of tokenism, of not having her contributions valued and an overriding feeling of powerlessness to institute change. Two of the participants deal with this by choosing participation on their own terms and have taken marked stands against what they perceive to be an institutional lack of commitment to real integration. So, for example, both of them have challenged the administrative practice of keeping races separate in their allocation of on campus accommodation. This stance is reflective of what they perceive to be the gap between diversity policy and practice.

Studying at SU has been a culture shock for most of the participants and they are unanimous in their agreement that there is very little physical or cultural evidence of the diverse nature of the SU community. Other studies have shown that such an experience often contributes to a sense of social and academic isolation and that the

absence of icons or symbols representing minority cultures act as a constant reminder of 'otherness'. This sense of 'otherness' can have a negative impact on the self-concept and confidence of minority groups. All the women in this study shared an experience of otherness and the resulting sense of confusion this created around racial identity, self-identity, abilities and integration. Alyce spoke of fearing 'a betrayal of your kind' if you took part in anything that was considered a white thing. All of the women spoke of a disregard for difference in the activities organized on campus and a continuation of traditional social activities that were foreign to the minority student population. Music seemed to be a contentious issue in social activities, an adherence to traditional practices or cultural icons of the dominant culture at the expense of minorities are perceived as indicative of resistance from within the organisational culture to transformation. These are the often insensitive messages that reinforce the perception of minorities being guests who have to be tolerated in order to conform to the demands of a changing society. Iyanla did however mention that in her residence they were introducing small changes, such as a blend of different types of music at residence socials.

There appears to be a lot of inter-group dynamics around the coloured ethnic minority on campus. Sher, a Coloured, from a neighbouring country, admits that ignorance about these dynamics caused her a lot of confusion and even resulted in her marginalisation from within this minority group. The divisive categories that exist within this group were language (English or Afrikaans), origin (urban or rural), school type (Model C or other school) and financial (bursary or not). In addition, some would even be perceived as not fitting these categories, such as Sher, who coloured and white students had referred to as "not so coloured" as she came from a more privileged background. All the women were of the opinion that coloured students put a lot of pressure on each other and were even harder on each other than people from the dominant culture were. There was a strong tendency to form cliques among this sub-culture and membership often depended on resisting or conforming to the expectations within the sub-culture. Those resisting and participating in campus activities or doing white things are often branded coconuts or accused of wanting to be white. Acceptance into the more popular sections of the sub-culture was determined by "material possessions" such as what type of cell phone you had and what you wore. They suggest that this creates unnecessary financial pressure and

increases the experience of marginalisation. Iyanla said that the flip side is also true, because if you have a car as she does, and dress differently, you are also seen as *different, even when you aspire not to be*. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire (1986 in Viljoen, 2001:71) argues that the oppressed instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors or sub-oppressors. All the women stated the need for identifying with this minority group and the need for them to be supportive of each other. This they tied to a need for maintaining a positive racial identity and being able to stand up as a minority.

The study found that those living in residence seem to have more cross-cultural social interaction. One of the most persistent challenges in these environments continues to be social activities which are geared to white cultural activities. They also felt that they were better placed to initiate change. Sher believes that when "we share intimate space"; it is easier to address ignorance and prejudice as you encounter it. Three of the women felt that though overtures had been made towards them in terms of social interaction, they often felt at an economic disadvantage and did not enjoy the experience of being the only member of their race at these functions. Gay (2004) reflects that the small numbers of students of colour at predominantly white institutions and the lack of cultural symbols or practices that reflect their cultural heritage contribute to the sense of marginalisation and isolation. All of the participants experienced English speaking whites on campus to be more open to new experiences than their Afrikaans speaking counterparts. The women shared the view that their Afrikaner peers willingness to cross the racial divide was largely influenced by their family's perceptions of interracial contact and suggested that they were also inhibited by a limited exposure to people of colour as social equals.

Some of the women equated minority inclusion at SU to a social experiment. They may be right, especially if one considers the statement made by Du Plessis at a conference in Adelaide, when she said: "Anybody with a sense of history can see that we in South Africa are in the centre of a laboratory in which the experiments for the new world order are being conducted" (Du Plessis, 2003:2).

5.2.2 Academic

The participants' academic or school background seems not to have had a major impact on their success at SU. Contrary to a popular belief amongst students that

Model C schools prepare students better for university than coloured schools do, the findings suggest that the participant from such a school had had a harder time *adapting to SU*. Private schooling and an additional university preparation year appeared to have assisted the academic performance of one participant. The three women who had attended historically coloured schools, said that though they had not felt academically equipped when they started at SU, their determination to succeed was fuelled by a resolve to disprove stereotypical expectations of failure. Findings in a study conducted by Shih (2004:178) suggest that one of the key strategies stigmatised individuals adopt to compensate for a stereotypic perception is "to try harder by being more persistent or assertive". Perceptions that students who have attended more advantaged schools will experience easier social and academic adaptation, did not appear to be true for this group. Attending an ex-Model C had created expectations by the participant, her family and SU lecturers of her being better equipped to cope. These expectations caused some hesitation in acknowledging and seeking the correct help. The women who had attended coloured schools found that when they sought help, it was more readily available, as the environment expected them to need help. They however found the low expectations and often patronizing help, disempowering. The women suggested that these diminished expectations and the prevailing perceptions that they would not be able to cope successfully at SU negatively affected their self-confidence and made them doubt their academic self-efficacy.

Personal variables together with a streetwise approach played a big role in helping the women to identify their academic needs and to seek the relevant help. Iyanla's struggle with Afrikaans as an academic language had a positive spin off in that she established a friendship with a white student who helps her to translate her lecture notes. The participants' experience of an inconsistency in the application of the language policy, made English speaking students feel disadvantaged when they were compelled to translate notes from Afrikaans to English. This often entailed depending on the goodwill of their Afrikaans speaking peers, which in turn reinforced the idea of not quite measuring up to the expectations for academic success. This once again suggests a gap in the move from policy to practice in that they are enrolled as English students, but then they are expected to cope in Afrikaans. The students, who are caught up in this political game, often become victims of hidden agendas. This

highlights the need for platforms where students concerns will be heard and acted upon. The correct political will to implement change means that organisations need to look past policy to attitude. Open, ongoing dialogue is sought by the women. They were adamant about the need for arenas to be created that allow the powers that be to speak with the people about their needs and experiences instead of speaking about them and for them. Freire (1995), in his effort to facilitate conscientisation argues that by dealing in voices, we are affecting power relations and that when we listen to people, we empower them. He goes on to say that in order to hear anything worthwhile, the power dynamics that exists between the context and the people within it have to be examined. This could be a way to reduce the perception that coloured women students have that they are part of a socio-political experiment and could indicate the commitment of SU to real transformation that is in keeping with the rest of society.

5.2.3 Personal Variables

All the women mentioned that the focus and preconceived ideas related to their race at some stage caused confusion about racial identity and had a negative affect on their self confidence. Some appeared to have recovered from this better than others. Studies relating to resisting stereotypes, suggest that those who develop coping strategies to compensate for stereotyping often use these skills to help them to achieve their goals and overcome disadvantages associated with the stigma (Shih, 2004). Of the coping strategies that the participants used, family and their unwavering support appeared to be key to their survival at SU. They shared both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences with them. One of the key skills in those women that appeared to enjoy a measure of social and academic success was the ability to establish social support networks. For two of the women this involved a close intimate group of friends, for a third it involved a sibling and for a fourth it entailed accessing different types of social networks as and when she needed them. The fifth women, the one with the academic and social problems, appeared to have difficulty accessing social support networks and saw herself as an observer.

Personal praxis seemed to have played a key role in the women assessing their needs, putting into place a plan to access help and then assessing the appropriateness of that action and acting to stick with or change it. One of the women did not fit this profile. Though she had accessed institutional support, she had felt that the help she had

received was not what she needed at that time. She was the participant from the Afrikaans Model C School and best matched the profile of minority group most likely to adjust successfully to SU. Though she was assured at orientation that she would "fit right in", that was not her experience, as she stayed the observer, never the participant. Risk taking is central to the task of learning new things, and it is my sense that this participant feared rejection if she did not succeed.

Assertiveness appears to be another quality that assisted the women's adjustment at SU. She felt that it was imperative to assert your right to be accepted as a person and your right to be seen as a student with the same rights and challenges as any other student. The women underlined the importance of resisting patronisation and standing against injustice. This standing up to or resistance often did not happen on a grand scale, though each one quoted examples of resistance such as challenging accommodation placement, unfair stereotyping or perceived racist actions in residence. Even Alyce, who described herself as an observer mentioned finding her voice when she challenged a lecturer in class. Though all the women had experienced situations in which they doubted their personal agency, they had been able to assert it in others. Their revelations are interpreted as a progression to a developing sense of confidence and empowerment after the initial experiences of self-doubt. This confidence leads to a greater sense of direction which reinforces the sense of empowerment that allows one to "challenge perceived injustice and inconsistencies through reasoned argument, secure in one's own opinions, and one has a voice in many new arenas" (Stevens, 2003:244).

It would thus appear that a combination of variables impacted on the experience of the women at SU. I concur with the women in their opinion that many of the challenges or barriers to learning and living at SU could be addressed when individuals become willing to step outside of their comfort zones, talk about things that may be uncomfortable and which may challenge us to think about our actions, beliefs and attitudes. However it remains incumbent upon organisations to create a welcoming environment. A welcoming environment is one that honours cultural diversity by creating a diverse institutional climate, establishing institutional commitment, and creating a culturally diverse faculty, administration and student body (Daniel, 2002; Norris, 2001; Viljoen, 2001).

5.3 PERSONAL SPACE, REFLECTIONS AND CONFRONTATIONS WITH SELF

This study challenged my own preconceptions and stereotypical thinking. This was brought to my awareness when I shared with my supervisor how surprised I was that the students from the historically disadvantaged schools and communities appeared to be coping better than the participant from the Afrikaans Model C background. I shared with her my confusion about this woman whom the literature would have us believe would be the ideal candidate for successful integration at an institution like SU. I struggled with coming to terms with the fact that she appeared to have had the most difficulty with the transition from school to university and that she appeared to feel marginalised within her own ethnic group and the dominant culture. My experiences with this highlighted potential bias and I was glad for numerous opportunities to engage with my supervisor around this. I felt that even thinking or having issue with these factors, was dishonouring Alyce, I was glad for the safety net the raw data allowed me in being able to constantly refer back and support themes from this. The process of data analysis helped me to realise how easy it was to fall into the trap of dishonouring the spirit of feminist based research. It also helped me to realise that I could not remain distant to the subject and the participants. Fortunately acknowledging my position within the research process and the proviso in qualitative research that points to the fact that the researcher and researched do not remain removed from each other but influence and impact each other. My commitment as a womanist scholar should always be about acknowledging the indomitable spirit of people. The paradigm cautions that we guard against minimizing the uniqueness of the individual and her experiences. It purports that we always endeavour to live and work consciously, that we remain aware of how what we think and do impacts on others.

The individual interviews created a space in which participants shared their individual experiences with me. They came into this process willing to share openly and honestly the joyful and painful experiences. It could be that their eagerness to be part of this study was tied to their valuing a process that allowed them to share their experiences as a distinct ethnic minority. During this phase of the study, I conducted a semi-structured interview that was guided by five areas; namely personal background, scholastic background, academic and other experiences at SU and what had helped or

hindered their adjustment to life at SU. I attempted to introduce each of these areas of focus as a natural part of the research conversation and generally took my cue from *the participants*.

An expected outcome of participatory research is that participants benefit from the research. All of the women at various stages of the process shared that they had found the process empowering, this was in keeping with Maguire's (2000:59) view that action research grounded in feminism, be a process that allows participants to "listen, share, interrupt, question and challenge, interpret, shake their heads sideways or nod in affirmation, get distracted, seek clarification and possibly end up somewhere initially unforeseen" The focus group phase allowed for an emergence of an 'alternative or preferred story' by bringing to the fore descriptions of courage, competence and perseverance. This search for alternatives enabled the participants to take a stand against the dominant discourse around coloured women, Morgan (2000:14) says that this process enables us to "create in conversations stories of identity that will assist ... to break from the influence of problems, they are facing". Friedman and Combs (1996:16) support this view when they argue that "within new stories, people can live out new ... self images, ... new possibilities for relationships ... and new futures". By resisting the dominant discourses based on their race and gender these women claimed their agency, and took a stand against the problem. All the women shared personal stories of resistance which highlighted commonalities and also highlighted their uniqueness. Their different approaches and "shared meaning making process ... open(ed) up new possibilities for action ... (cause them to) revise relationship with their problems ... and open their eyes to various alternatives" (White, 1995:23).

A painful part of a reflective process is being confronted with one's own prejudices and the role you play in perpetuating the status quo. It was interesting to note the dynamics of interaction as the women were confronted with and challenged to view things from different perspectives. An interaction that stood out was a dialogue between Iyanla and Sher in which Sher, in response to a perception that Iyanla had had about a coloured ex-Model C student, shared how painful it was to be at the receiving end of such prejudice. Iyanla later stated that she felt uncomfortable being cast in the role of oppressor and had not thought of her actions or thoughts in this regard. Later Iyanla shared how this interaction had given her a new perspective and

insight into how sometimes without meaning to we impose the very stereotypes that we find so inhibiting on to others without due regard of how this impacts on the person. This is aligned with an important aspect of feminist based research, viz, increased conscientisation or awareness raising of all participants in the study.

The outsider witness session that allowed a co-facilitator, to share with the women what had stood out for her in their experience was experienced by all of them to be a very empowering process. She acknowledged each of the women and their stories, she then highlighted instances in which they had shown personal agency and where they had stood against injustice.

Data analysis was a long process which required a number of readings of the transcripts. I found it interesting to note how my memory and aspects of emergent themes were often different from the reality in the text. Engaging with the raw data and supervision helped me to be conscious of possible bias in the decoding process. Doing the literature review had also made me aware of the importance of identifying potential bias and pitfalls in the study. I was challenged on many personal and professional levels in the process. The articles which I read as part of my literature review and engaging with the women's experience both in the data collection and data analysis processes, reminded me very much of my own experiences as a coloured women student at SU. What remained with me, is the need for women of colour to step out and be role models for the younger women in our wake. These young women are so aware of the lack of role-models and the need for them that everything they do, appears to permeated by an awareness that what they do will impact on those that are still to come. Alyce's statement, "I thought it had already been done", I think highlights this sense of those who went before not having done much to challenge the status quo and that the challenge was now theirs to embrace

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Any higher education organisation that professes to be transforming in line with the democratic principles of South Africa has to create an environment that welcomes and celebrates the demographic realities of this country. When I speak about demographic realities, I am not only referring to numbers but also to the spirit of that phrase. Remaining true to the spirit of transformation post 1994, historically white institutions such as Stellenbosch University should be actively developing an institutional culture

and environment in which the icons, symbols and practices of all students are visible, appreciated and celebrated. This would suggest conscious efforts to increase *sensitivity* about how traditional practices reminiscent of a past and that may be associated with oppression may send messages that are counter productive to the message of transformation. This process should include concrete and structuralised diversity and sensitivity training programmes that afford people at all levels of the institution an opportunity to express their fears, concerns and experiences of the transformation process. This is a very personal process that forces people to assess long held beliefs, and it is anticipated that it could be met with resistance, given the feminist maxim of the personal being political. It would be in the best interest of all members of SU and society at large to create platforms and processes which allow all people to be heard and to allow them a space to have their feelings validated. We cannot wish challenges away or attempt to move through the process with blinkers on, research has proven that people's attitudes play a key role in enabling organisational transformation.

The first coloured students were admitted to SU in 1979 (Du Plessis, 2004) and yet more that 25 years down the line the number of undergraduate students at SU remains below 25%. With many ex-Model C schools now fully integrated and stated government and SU initiatives at redressing schooling deficits among previously disadvantaged communities, one is left wondering why this growth is not reflected in the number of coloured students at the SU. It could suggest that not enough is being done by the institution to welcome other races onto the SU campus. It therefore remains incumbent upon SU to make a more concerted effort to increase the number of people from other race groups attending the university, we are more than 10 years into democracy and still the institution's undergraduate figures are a long way from reflecting the demographic realities of South Africa. This institution cannot afford to be viewed as the personal enclave of a white minority, it would be counter productive to the valuable role it continues to play in assisting the nation to become more academically and economically competitive.

Tradition has a place, but it should not become a shield used to resist transformation.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study delimited itself to the experiences of undergraduate women students from the Coloured group only; further research is needed to determine whether other minorities have similar or differing experiences at SU. It would be interesting to explore with the broader minority population which aspects of campus life they experience as the most marginalising. How could the university adapt its organisational attitude, culture and practices so that none of the diverse groups, including the dominant culture, feel sacrificed?

An important area of research that was outside of the parameters of this study is that of minority alienation. The "District Six" phenomenon in the Neelsie recreation centre, where coloured students have selected a small area on the periphery of the main arena as an area in which they congregate and socialise, warrants in-depth research into why a large part of this campus minority student population is emulating apartheid style segregation on a desegregated campus. Finally, research into how the dominant white student population is experiencing this transformation process is also needed. Research about these areas could make an important contribution towards addressing the assumption that the university policies are often removed from the views of the people at grass roots level.

5.6 CONCLUSION

In this study I applied narrative ideas and practices to a feminist inspired participatory action research design to find out what the experiences are of a group of coloured undergraduate women studying at SU. The design included the creation of a space where the women could collectively reflect on their experiences and consult with each other about what they had learnt along the way. This reflective process was an effort for this minority group to have their experiences validated by others who are in similar situations as well as to create opportunities to collaborate as women. Though minorities are often viewed as a homogeneous group based on their race and gender, their experiences and interpretations were very varied and were strongly influenced by a unique set of personal, background and institutional variables.

The study's findings highlighted the importance of engendering an increased awareness of the organisational culture and practices that work to counter the transformation agenda. Transformation will not be truly successful; unless the powers

that be understand how their policies and decisions are experienced by those it purports to serve. Such insights can only be gained through ongoing dialogue that creates a platform for all knowledge, fears and experiences to be honoured. Stereotyping of any kind is harmful and in the process of this study, it became apparent that the stigma a label carried was divisive and had the potential to undermine the self-confidence and performance of those who are the targets of prejudice. The ripple effect from the research conversations also appears to have raised the consciousness of the participants, and this was manifested in self-reflection and personal steps taken by the individuals. As a researcher I was always conscious of Bird's (2001:10) view that we can expose power relations when "we can research the effort of the silence, the difficulty, the sense of being overwhelmed ... and challenging the panic that comes with expectations and the critical ideas that act to silence".

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**APPENDIX A:
DATA ANALYSIS - CATEGORIES,
THEMES AND RELATED SUB-THEMES**

CATEGORIES	THEMES	SUB-THEMES	Code
PERSONAL	<i>Understanding of impact of background on current experience</i>	* Influence decisions/actions	PBI
	<i>INTRINSIC</i>	* Self concept	PISC
		* Self-efficacy	PISE
		* Praxis	PIP
		*Coping strategies	PIC
		* attitude	PIA
	<i>Perceptions of privilege</i>	* being at institution	PPI
	<i>PERSONAL CHANGE</i>	*awareness of	PCA
		* bias	PCB
		* Expectations of	PCEX
		*empowerment	PCE
	<i>FINANCIAL</i>	* impact on academic	PFA
		* impact on social	PFS
		* aid	PFA
SOCIAL/ CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS	<i>SOCIAL INTERGRATION</i>	* social rejection	SIR
		* marginalisation	SIM
		* isolation/alienation	SIA
		* participation	SIP
		* racism	SIRA
		*-/traumatic experience	SIT
		* inadequate social life	SISO
	<i>SUPPORT</i>	*peer (own ethnic)	SSP
		*peer (other ethnic)	SSPA
		*social networks	SSN
		* institutional	SSI
	<i>PSYCHO-SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT</i>	* Social status perceptions	SPS
		* Political/social awareness	SPOL
* Praxis		SPP	
* stressors			
*Inadequate social life		SPS	
*Change to self-concept		SPC	
*Change in self-efficacy	SPSE		

CATEGORIES	THEMES	SUB-THEMES	
ACADEMIC	<i>SCHOOL BACKGROUND</i>	* adequate prep for university	ASAP
		* inadequate academic	ASIP
		* other skills	ASS
	<i>FACULTY ATTITUDES AND SUPPORT</i>	* negative experience	AFN
		* positive experiences	AFP
		*supportive	AFS
		* race-based perceptions	AFRP
		* school background perceptions	AFBP
	<i>ACADEMIC SUPPORT</i>	* peer support (own)	AAPS
		*peer support (other)	AAP
		* knowledge of institutional support	AAIS
		* use of organizational academic support	AAUS
		*language	APL
	<i>PERSONAL DETERMINANTS</i>	* change in academic self-esteem	APSE
		* Praxis in coping strategies	APP
		* positive academic self-efficacy	APEF
		* negative academic self-efficacy	APN
		* Post-grad aspirations	AP

**APPENDIX B:
AN EXAMPLE OF DECODING
PROCESS**

Extract : Iyanla ^{who} → Individual Interview Transcription.

R: || A coconut, a coloured ^{that} want to be white. That was really hard for me and I was like angry and stuff and it didn't help that my two black friends they were away for the weekend so I was basically and the other tannie, we were the only two coloureds there. But like for instance when I came back they asked how was it and I said I enjoyed it. So that was one of my main barriers, I was afraid to take a change. xxx xxx

I: Okay.

R: Like I have two, like three, like three really white people I can go to, like this [one girl even translates my notes in English for me. She is Afrikaans so without her I don't know what I'll do and stuff.]

I: So would you say that is also another issue with, with your academics, the language thing.

R: [The language thing definitely affects my academics because I have to put in more time because I have to first translate]

I: Are your lectures not suppose to making English notes available to you?

R: They don't. I have to do it myself.

I: You have any way where you can challenge this?

R: Mm. Because we have this language policy xxx xxx like it is Afrikaans and it is Afrikaans.

I: Oh okay. You don't have a choice xxx xxx.

R: Exactly yea.

I: Okay. And what personal of your personal characteristics, you've mentioned one now xxx open minded

R: (Overlap) That was, that was probably [one of the first things that I've learnt here was to be open minded]

Pressure from coloureds → not to get involved

Peer Pressure SSP

Fear of ride taking / esp with interaction

SIP/SIA

Problem.

PCA

Some white students who help with Academics

P/S

Racial context of help

Challenge

Language → affects academics

Lang /

put in more time

Notes not available in English

don't feel free to challenge because of language policy

APL

personal conversation

"Open minded"

PIP Personal factors Result.

AP/AB Racial Context

APL Implications of language check to be held

Voice of Agency Link to theory

APL

Possible quote

[first translate]

]

APPENDIX C: ORGANIZING THE DATA

SUBJECT	THEME	EXAMPLE	THEME	EXAMPLE	EXAMPLE
Oprah	Peers → Diverse community → ability to facilitate → not always working * African friends → * Diff. English + Agendas → interaction * Pressure from friends back home → "hunk" bigger than us → only people home / here	P. 7 P. 13 P. 20	Racism → makes you uncomfortable → not allowed same responsiveness → feel like tellers → can't be trusted → when challenge → denied, this creates comparison → No appreciation of self and efforts → contribution not valued → sometimes support still in the eyes of someone but not as help person would wish	P. 7 P. 12 quote P. 17 quote P. 20 P. 21	P. 12 P. 27 P. 34 [P. 34/35 → Lecturer 1 quote]
Alice	Perception of lack of support from administration → difficulty dealing with this → competitive → all experience → pressure to succeed * White students → more fun → less pressure academically → have time for extra-curricular activities	P. 18, P. 20 P. 20 P. 24/25	Black → students treated differently to Caucasians → live on campus → more support → i.e. extra work to them more readily → more contact, when talking with them because of fear of being "unwelcomed" / "fear politics and backlash" → Black students more assertive than Caucasians because of sense of "quintessential" → Difference in way Blackie cultures are treated and experience compare → have to appreciate → Over-representation of Black students → those who are not on race → those who are → People like to be on race → those who are not → the exception rather than the rule → subjected to blatant racist stereotyping → More covert racism → people not will be able to see it → Attitude & Culture	P. 27 P. 34 [P. 34/35 → Lecturer 1 quote]	P. 27 P. 34 [P. 34/35 → Lecturer 1 quote]
Sher	Different races different types of interaction English White → more tolerant of difference African → limited experience or interaction with cultures except to not on equal social footing → experience → acceptance → play a big role in acceptance	P. 4 P. 4/5	People of color being referred to as Quotas dehumanise and dehumanize → makes them feel angry / humiliated → marginalised → Young people attitudes and approach to others influenced by limited exposure and parent attitudes and experiences	P. 4 P. 4/5	P. 21 P. 33 / P. 39
Iyanla	They'd based her support help direct to SSW - for support → Most of Friends Xhosa & White English → Perception difference between English and Xhosa → Mrs. M. / English teacher more open but cautious → against stereotyping → If we don't want to be stereotyped then should not make generalisations on others → Take people as they come	P. 6 P. 11 P. 20 quote P. 26	→ Court → this is important able to tell court about it but it's their in checking → Need for assertiveness to address and name ourselves	P. 6 P. 11 P. 20 quote P. 26	P. 16 - 17 P. 25
Therese	Sometimes → culture → assertive & aggressive → Teenager own ethnic group → challenge thinking → need to be pro-active	P. 6		P. 6	P. 30 P. 37

CATEGORY: SOCIAL CONTEXTUAL → THEME: INTERCULTURAL

Link
 → make she.

by
 → page
 → quote