A LIVING JOURNEY TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING BLACK WOMEN ACADEMICS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the following thesis entitled “A living Journey towards understanding black women academics’ perception of social transformation in South African higher education”, submitted for the degree Philosophiae Doctor at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not been previously submitted at another university or faculty for degree purposes. All references made in the study have been acknowledged.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to **my study participants**! Together we have done it! I also dedicate the study to **my daughters** who still love me regardless of my stealing their time to complete this study. I love you gals.

Abstract

Transformation of higher education, both internationally and within South African higher education (SAHE) is an on-going process. Higher education institutions (HEIs) always need to change the way in which they conduct their daily business, both academically and socially. Some of the issues that constantly warrant attention from these institutions are policy development, curriculum development, issues pertaining to community engagement and issues pertaining to creating a welcoming institutional climate for all constituencies. Within the South African context, as more and more diverse staff and students enter the SAHE system, the system needs to change to accommodate the new direction. This is especially the case within the historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions, which face a huge responsibility to change their academic and social landscape to accommodate the new education system.

This study explored how black women academics (BWAs), as part of the masses entering the historically white Afrikaans-medium higher education institutions, perceived the on-going social transformation attempts within the institutions. Using the University of the Free State (UFS) as a case study, the focus was on how this particular constituency viewed social transformation from race and gender points of view. An action research (AR) approach was used, which engaged BWAs, together with a complementary group of white women academics (WWAs) in individual face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. The main questions that formed the heart of the discussions were:

- **What is our concern regarding social transformation at the UFS?** And
- **How can we improve our work environment?**

Findings from the study indicate that BWAs have a negative view of social transformation at the UFS. Issues that contributed to their negative perception included, inter alia, problems pertaining to the dual language policy, scarcity of capacity building initiatives, power dynamics and interpersonal problems, all of which seemed to hamper successful social transformation at the UFS. Interesting though

was this group's awareness that the responsibility to improve the UFS did not only lie with the university management but that, as part of the institution, they too were responsible to act as agents of change in creating a space where everybody could feel a sense of belonging.

List of Acronyms

AR:	Action research
BWAs:	Black women academics
CRT:	Critical race theory
FGDs	Focus group discussions
HODs:	Heads of Departments
SAHEI:	South African Higher Education Institutions
UFS:	University of the Free State
WWAs:	White women academics

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Chapter 1: Orientation

1.1 Introduction

Within the context of social transformation in South Africa, this thesis has a personal history aimed to reflect on social transformation at a South African Higher Education Institution. Not only do I share my own thoughts and development, but I also configure the changing university environment as perceived and experienced by black women academics (BWAs). This thesis takes the critical race theory as its 'starting point', which sets out from the experiences of people of colour in analysing social environments. In view of this theory, Cole (2009) argues that the voices of people of colour in historically racially unstable contexts need to be heard and it is only through analysing the lived experiences of people of colour that knowledge of how they perceive their environment could be gained.

I should clarify that this chapter is presented mostly in present tense as it states what the complete study is all about. In addition, using the present tense indicates my position as a researcher who positions herself in anticipation of the unfolding of the study. In this way I use this chapter to reflect on my present position of a concerned black woman academic; a present that to me cannot yet be regarded as a past, as the agency of the women in transformation continues and cannot actually be regarded as having been accomplished. I only use the past tense in the actual events that took place during the course of the study. However, my thoughts in this chapter are framed in the present tense to keep them alive and to remind myself of the continuing challenges black women academics face, and to keep in mind that solutions can only be attained if the experiences of these women are not ignored as issues of the past.

In taking this point of view I am striving to not only allow myself to grow and gain insight into my own disposition, but to also encourage my black women colleagues to find their voice. The perspectives of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) and Gilligan (1982), whose issues of voice and mind are central themes in acquiring

knowledge by moving from silence to a position of constructing new knowing and action, influence this point of view. In this way, I believe that involving BWAs in a study of this kind will not only contribute to policy development and institutional practice, but it will help the women to deconstruct their work environment.

1.2 My personal experience and the experiences of BWAs (motivation for the study)

My experiences as a woman and a black academic at the University of the Free State (UFS) led to my decision to conduct this study and involve BWAs as study participants. I am aware that BWAs may differ significantly in their experiences and that their experiences may be different from mine. I wish to share my own experiences that encouraged me to undertake this study and alerted me to the complex nature of social transformation within HEIs. These experiences and others are revisited each time during the course of the study, especially in the results chapter, to capture the journey which I and the study participants took to find ways to contribute to our personal and institutional changes.

I joined the UFS in 2007 as a junior lecturer and a masters' student through the Grow Our Own Timber Programme (GOOT). This programme aimed to address issues of past imbalances and inequity that characterised the SAHEIs before 1994 (Bunting 2006; DoE, 1997; Reddy, 2004). On my first day at work, the Head of Department (HOD) clearly indicated that he had a problem with my appointment, since I could not speak Afrikaans, which was (and still is) a medium of instruction parallel to English at the University. I had to sit for weeks without being allocated a space or given work to do. The confusion of my role at the department culminated in a loss of confidence on my part.

Later that year, the HOD asked me to register for a course that would enable me to present some modules within the department. This was a practical BEd (Honours) course, which demanded that students and the lecturer get involved in a community project. During one visit to an orphanage, the black students viewed some incidents as racist. Apparently, one of the students lodged a complaint with the dean regarding the day's events. I was not involved in the lodging of the complaint, but as it turned out, both the lecturers involved and the HOD held me responsible as having

allegedly accused these lecturers of racism. I was devastated by the accusations and wondered why I was regarded to be guilty. Was it because I was black and a woman and the HOD already had a problem with my appointment? This created a very traumatic situation for me and I was even scared to walk in the corridors, because I was afraid of what people were saying about me. There was tension within the department and I experienced total exclusion from the members of the department to such a degree that everybody would speak in Afrikaans at the departmental meetings, even though they were aware that I did not understand it. I had to sit through a two to three hour meeting without following anything. The use of Afrikaans extended to the social events of the department.

After two years, when my contract with the GOOT programme expired and I was supposed to be absorbed permanently into the department, the orphanage incident was used as a reason why I could not get a permanent position in the department, together with the claim that I was 'too sensitive'. The meaning of 'too sensitive' is still not clear to me.

One other incident involved an argument over students' marks with a white senior lecturer in a position of leadership at the same department. I shared the same module with this lecturer, he taught the Afrikaans group and I taught the English group. My group performed better in a test than his group. Our discussion over the factors that might have led to this discrepancy ended in what I perceived as a stereotypical thought towards black students (people of colour). He clearly indicated that he believed that his white students were more intelligent than my group, because they had been educated in better schools. At this point, I wondered how he defined 'better schools'. For some time this incident changed my perception about my own students and I doubted the intelligence of my students and even questioned my way of teaching. This gave me reason to believe that I was maybe not good enough.

Apart from my experiences that have been reported above, I developed an interest in getting to understand how other black women academics, both within and outside my own faculty, perceive and experience their work environment and the social transformation attempts resulted from these incidences. The whole study shows how I embarked on a meaning-making and an awareness-creation journey with the BWAs

that I selected as study participants. I believed that as our institution strives to transform, different constituencies have their own views, and through sharing these views, the institutions policy makers would be sensitised to the feelings of the people that need to adhere to the issues stipulated in the policies and pland. My focus was not only on the institution, but mainly on how I and other BWAs analyse and challenge our thoughts and our behaviour as we also try to make sense of and improve our work environment. This whole study shows how the study participants, through focus group discussions and individual interviews, strived to make their contributions at the personal, faculty, and institutional level.

It is worth mentioning that, at the initial stages of the study I conducted a preliminary investigation as a way of establishing how the selected BWAs perceived social transformation at the institution. The findings reflected that they had concerns around the issue of social transformation within the institution. During the interviews with these women, a number of issues of concern emerged regarding social transformation at the UFS. Some of these were lack of debates on sensitive issues of race and discrimination within the institution and the failure of the university to recruit and retain black female academics, issues of access, identity formation problems and problems of institutional culture in terms of language and creating a sense of belonging. These issues are further discussed in this study and brought to the surface through the voices of the people who experienced them (cf chapter 4).

These women's telling of their lived experiences and I form a basis on which we can find a way to challenge our own thoughts, understand our work environment and make other people aware of our feelings. My involvement in this study, as both a researcher and a participant, may be viewed by those who hold a positivist view (Chavez, 2008; Ellis, 2004) as hampering the flow of the study in terms of objectivity, biasness and accuracy. I am also aware of the criticism that underlies using the "insider perspective" in research where data analysis tensions may arise due to the researcher's involvement as a participant in her own research and a person sharing directly in the experiences of the study participants (Chavez, 2008; Rabbitt, 2003).

Although I understand the argument, in this case I believe that my involvement as a participant in my own study puts me at an advantage. Being an insider gives me a unique insight into the cultural dynamics of the institution and the experiences of

BWAs. In this way, I was able to form a better rapport during the study and create a "collective space" (Rodriguez, 2010:492) and lessen the hierarchical relationship between my study participants and I (McNiff &Whitehead, 2006:42). This made it easier for them to share their experiences with me regarding the way they perceived social transformation at the institution. In the case of the position I assume in this study as both researcher and participant, and the influence it might have had on the women's responses, I used reflexivity as an approach to lay open the impact that my own biases could have had in the study. To curb some of the negative consequences that my own experiences could have, I related my experiences to a neutral interviewer who recorded my account of my own experiences. I used these to check how my own self-reflections on the experiences of BWAs influenced the direction of my study. I also insert a record of my experiences as an addendum at the end of the study to allow my readers to check how much my own bias interferes with the study. I do this for the purpose of transparency in my study.

1.3 A brief conceptualisation of transformation

I would like at this stage to conceptualise transformation as it is used in this thesis. Studies in the area of higher education (HE) that investigate transformation mainly focus on academic transformation. Academic transformation entails change in the way HEIs conduct their three core activities: research, teaching-learning and community service (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008;, DoE, 1997; Duderstadt 2007; Lebeau, 2008; Silver 2007). Transformation in these three areas becomes mandatory for HE because, as "capillaries of power"' (Esakov, 2009:71), HEIs are faced with the task of bringing change to the wider community. They can only achieve this through radically improving the way they conduct their daily business. Although academic transformation is the focus of transformation attempts of most HEIs, I, however, believe social transformation is equally important. Social transformation involves HEIs' introspection of how well they handle social issues within their campuses. According to Waghid (2002) these social issues that need attention in HEIs include issues of student and staff access, employment equity and representation of women, as well as, I would add, a sense of belonging for all. This means that social transformation involves HEIs looking within themselves to ascertain areas that need to be addressed for the smooth social functioning of the institutions. I agree with Lebeau (2008) that it is important for institutions to change socially in this way so that

there could be internal stability to allow productivity from all the constituencies. It is in line with this conceptualisation that I involved BWAs as study participants, as my study addresses social transformation with particular emphasis on how HEIs transform in the areas of gender and race.

The reason for my interest in gender and race in this thesis, apart from my personal motivation, is that in the international higher education institutions (HEIs) and in South African higher education institutions (SAHEIs), social transformation attempts have focused on addressing imbalances that targeted race and gender (Blackmore, 2010; Cloete & Moja, 2005; Dixson & Rousseau 2006; DoE, 1997). These two social constructs (Stromquist & Fischman, 2009) have always been issues of great debates among scholars and feminists who felt that there were imbalances that needed to be addressed around women and people of colour (Bell, 2007; Blackmore, 2010). The problems around race and gender extend to HEIs as the social ills from societies spill over to these institutions. Thus, I feel it is appropriate to target these groups, especially during this time when HEIs are socially transforming to redress past imbalances. I therefore feel it appropriate to embark on a journey with BWAs as we travel through the changing landscape of SAHEIs. The black women's sharing of their experiences sheds light on how they perceived the on-going transformation attempts.

1.4 The South African Higher education context

The South African context before 1994 was such that the education sector was divided into racial moulds and was also carved in a way that women in general found it difficult to fit into the academic world, as the working conditions were masculine and did not take the multiple roles that women had to play into consideration. In terms of racial issues, there were separate universities and technicons for whites and for black people (Lebeau, 2008). Race groups' crossing over to institutions was considered a crime. This may have been due to the fact that white universities and technicons were more privileged in terms of infrastructure and the quality of education. According to Engelbrecht (2008), the education offered at the black universities was engineered to be just enough for their graduates to teach the 'watered-down' curriculum that was offered in the black schools. This situation put black people (people of colour) at a disadvantage. According to Fanon (1967:11) a

situation like this "dehumanises" people of colour and disallows them "a necessary condition for all human beings: '*having*', as a condition of being".

After South Africa gained democracy, there was need to move from the old dispensation to accommodate a new political and educational landscape of the country. SAHEIs needed to transform to redress the past inequalities and inequities. However, this has proved to be such a complex process (DoE, 2008). The complex nature of social transformation in SAHEIs is emphasised by the report of the Ministerial Committee on Social Transformation and Cohesion in Higher Education (DoE, 2008). This report indicates, among other issues, that SAHEIs show very little progress in terms of social transformation. The report raised issues of a lack of internal dialogue within universities with regard to social transformation, recruitment and retention of black academics and other issues that are similar to the accounts given by the BWAs. The report further indicates that policies that are in place for racial transformation are not implemented (for example, UFS Transformation Plan 2007-2010) and gender transformation has not even been documented in most transformation policies and innovation plans of SAHEIs. In addition to this report, Badat (2010) has also noticed that SAHEIs, through their own internal thinking, structures, cultures and practices and their external conditioning by the wider society, have failed to show adequate progress in social transformation. For Badat (2010) the problem of social transformation in SAHEIs lies heavily on redressing past inequities of race and gender, where institutions still fail to face the challenge of creating environments of respect towards diversity and difference.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Within the broader transformative paradigm, this thesis uses the critical race theory (CRT) as a 'starting point' to understand the perceptions of BWAs. According to the CRT, social environments can be constructed and deconstructed through the narratives of people (Cole, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano &Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). The CRT advocates that lived and told experiences of people of colour help to make their voices heard and help them to make meaning of their own environments (Bell, 2007). This view of CRT regarding its advocacy of voice on the part of the people of colour influenced me to draw from CRT in my endeavour to assist in the emancipation of BWAs in this study. Literature shows that BWAs in

SAHEIs have faced challenges that arose from marginalisation and oppression because of their status of being black and women experienced (Shackleton, Riordan &Simonis, 2006).

Against the background of the history of SAHEIs and on the premise of the institutions' attempts to address the mentioned inequalities (cf 1.4); it is necessary to effect changes, taking the needs and feelings of the previously disadvantaged into consideration. CRT therefore seems to be an appropriate theory that not only considers the voices of all marginalised people, but focuses more on the people of colour. The study shows how this critical approach to understanding the experiences and perceptions of BWAs aided in challenging both the BWAs disposition and the institutional structures. Henning (2004) and Jansen (2009) agree and state that a critical theory such as the CRT offers a lens through which researchers can empower and give a voice to the marginalised others. It is only when their feelings are made known, as is the premise of CRT, that change can be positively implemented. There is criticism that CRT overlooks other forms of social oppression and focuses more on people of colour and the demolition of white supremacy (Cole, 2009; Miles, 1989). Although this is the case, I concur with Delgado (1995) when he states that it is not enough to pay attention to all social groups but that the voice of the marginalised and oppressed groups should be 'inflated'. According to Cole (2009:7), the inflation of the voices of the people of colour elevates CRT above other race theories that only bring to the fore "multi-vocality" and the voice of "the suffering others", without specifically highlighting the voice of this most marginalised, oppressed group (people of colour). I therefore find CRT most appropriate for my thesis, which seeks to analyse the voice of BWAs as people of colour and women in South Africa. The study shows however that, I include the voice of white women academics in this study. It needs to be clarified that they are involved as a reflective system that black women academics can use to interrogate and reflect on their own disposition.

I am aware of the 'limiting effect' of using CRT as the only theory that underpins my study. Although a transformative paradigm like this is necessary to bring to the fore the challenges that people of colour face, my study is not only dealing with the issue of colour, but is also delving into the issues of gender. While it is true that current

developments in CRT consider other marginalised groups, such as women and their experiences (Price, 2010:152), this is not at the heart of CRT (Cole, 2009). Another limitation that may have arose if I used CRT as the only theory informing my study could have been that I might have been tempted to analyse my data in a deductive way to allow the themes that emerged to fit into this theory (a theory that does not account sufficiently for women's issues). The argument of some people could be that a feminist theory would be appropriate in this case. However true this could be, in the study I have opted for a more open interpretative perspective which could help to sufficiently address the gender issues without forcing the experiences of the BWAs into some theory. This helped me in the analysis of data to draw themes as they emerged from the data instead of just fitting issues into the already existing analytical framework driven by concepts from a theory.

So, in order to address limitations arising from the sole use of CRT, I used BWAs' psychosocial explanation of their perceptions and experiences as women within the UFS. To do this, I borrowed from Pratt and Wilkinson's (2003) psychosocial model. Pratt and Wilkinson used this model as a way of understanding the experiences of people living with dementia. They therefore proposed that this model could be used to understand the psychological and social issues that contribute to the experience of people in a given social context. I find this a useful framework for understanding people's experiences and use it to understand the personal experiences of BWAs in relation to their work environment. On emphasising the importance of employing psychosocial explanations, Yuil and Crinson (2008) point out that these explanations are idealistic in a situation where experiences need to be explored without any structural reference to some set theory. This correlates with Clarke and Hoggett's (2009) contention that psychosocial interpretations become very important in interpreting unique experiences, which could only be understood if the context is taken into consideration. They emphasise that personal experiences are very difficult to theorise and that it is better if they are understood within the social and psychological context from which they emanate.

1.6 Concern and research questions

This thesis takes 'the approach' of action research. One of the key questions that needs to be considered by researchers embarking on this kind of research is, *'why*

am I concerned? (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:43). Being a black woman academic at the UFS and finding myself in a growing diverse constituency on campus, I have become increasingly aware of the hampering effect of the lack of common ground and shared understanding in terms of social transformation (cf 1.2). My lived experiences (as briefly stated in Section 1.2) are indicative of the complexity of this process at the UFS. As also mentioned earlier, the results from the preliminary investigation also indicated that BWAs also had concerns regarding transformation at the UFS.

Other issues that further motivated a study of this nature are the racial incidents that took place at the UFS. These include the Reitz Four (Pillay, 2009) incident, the Villa Bravado incident and other unpublished incidents. Although these were not directly staff issues, did not take place among staff and did not involve BWAs, I believe that they are indicative of the underlying problem of racial tensions within the UFS, of which academics are part. One other issue is the suspension and resignation of the Vice-Rector (International Affairs) of the University. This may not form part of the racial differences at the institution, but the uproar that it raised (from NEHAWU and the Black Academic Forum), shows that constituencies of this university are sensitive to any incident that involves black people. This may be reflective of black people's perception that the University is not sensitive to their feelings.

It is due to the above-mentioned issues that I conducted this study. I would like to emphasise that not all the issues mentioned affect BWAs in particular, but they are indicative of an underlying racial tension within the institution that is striving to transform socially. In addition, as I have stated, I intend using my own experiences as a black woman academic as a point of departure in gaining insight into how other women perceive and experience social transformation at the UFS.

To address the above real-life problem, this study has to answer the following main question: **How can the experiences and the perceptions of the everyday practices of gender and racial dealings by BWAs within a transforming institution be understood and how can that contribute to institutional and personal growth?**

The following specific sub-questions are also addressed in order to get answers that provide an understanding of the situation at the UFS in particular:

- What is the face of social transformation in South African higher education institutions and at the UFS in particular?
- How is race and gender transformation at the UFS experienced and why is it perceived as such?
- How can the insight gained from the research be integrated to assist women in finding their voice in contributing to social transformation at the UFS at both personal and institutional level?
- How can I grow during the process and how does the understanding I gain contribute to improving dialogue aimed at creating environments of respect for diversity and difference?

1.7 My purpose and objectives

My purpose with this study is to gain insight into the way BWAs experience and construct transformation within the UFS, in order to contribute to social transformation at the university at both a personal and an institutional level. In order to do so, I have set the following objectives:

- To explore the face of social transformation in the South African higher education arena and specifically the UFS.
- To use the personal narratives of the participants to highlight how BWAs experience and construct race and gender transformation at the University of the Free State and to ascertain what underlies these perceptions and experiences.
- To put the insight from the narratives up for debate by having open discussions with black and white women academics in order to stimulate dialogue with the aim of strengthening the voice of the women academics in contributing to social transformation.
- To reflect on my personal insight that emerged from this study and how we, as women academics, can contribute to social transformation at the University of

the Free State by improving dialogue as a way of creating environments of respect for diversity and difference.

1.8 Research strategy

This study employs an action research (AR) design. This design, as advocated by McNiff and Whitehead (2006) as well as McBride and Schostak (1995) entail studying a social situation with a view to improving the situation. The use of this design aligns with the framework for this study, as AR is emancipatory or transformative in nature. The researcher in this case reflects on own practice and environment and asks the question, 'how do I improve my own environment?' McNiff (2002) argues that though AR is a form of personal reflection and self-evaluation, it creates a context for critical conversations in which participants in the study can learn as well. In this thesis, I use AR as a way to understand the UFS' cultural dynamics with regard to social transformation and as a design that guides me in terms of assisting the BWAs to take action in finding their voice and agency within the university. The World Bank Report (2012: 150) says the following about agency;

> '*(agency* is) *individuals (or group's) ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes... (which culminates) it is an ability to influence policy (development) and have a voice*.'

It is from this definition of agency that it could be concluded that agency can not be divorced from voice, which denotes a disposition of assuming power and changing one's environment. I believed that it was through such voice and agency that BWAs could truly gain a solid identity as women, black and academics and maintain the balance needed to affirm their space within SAHEIs.

Within the broad AR approach, I used the narratives of the participants on their lived experiences of social transformation within the UFS. This approach encompasses the study of experience as story (Clandinin, 2006). The narratives enabled me to get deeply into the lived and told experiences of the BWAs' work environment. This concurs with Barrette and Stauffer's (2009) belief that narratives involve a storied presentation, representation and meaning making process. Thus, the stories from

BWAs were analysed with the intention of drawing meaning and understanding from their experiences.

The narratives that I gathered were based on the living methodologies as suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (2006: 46). These authors present two ways in which narratives could be conducted: the *telling narratives* and the *living narratives*. The former involves working from the told stories of the participants while the latter, which I employed, involves an enquiry where the researcher lives alongside the participants and becomes a co-participant in own research. Barrette and Stauffer (2009:11) echo this when they state that this kind of inquiry leads to "collaborative stories, where the researcher is no longer the scribe of others' experience, but a story-teller and story-liver alongside research participants."

Although the researcher shares experiences with the participants, he or she should not allow these experiences to shadow the experiences of the others or homogenise his or her experience with those of the participants. It is therefore important to take into consideration the following elements when dealing with participants' narratives:

i) **Temporality –** as suggested by Smith and Sparkes (2009), events and perceptions evolve sequentially over time and space. As a result, the researcher has to pay attention to the fact that people rely on time to tell stories. Time itself holds together places, people and events and as time passes, change takes place. Thus, it becomes interesting to uncover how the experiences of BWAs have been shaped by the political structure of SA and SAHEIs and how in these changing times, the frame of the landscape of SA and SAHEIs influences this group's feelings.

ii) **Sociality –** Clandinin, Pushor and Orr (2007) are of the opinion that each person's context and experiences are shaped by the existential conditions, the environment and the surrounding factors. These contextual experiences work together to form feelings, hopes, reactions and dispositions. In the case of this study, I understand that sociality in this study involves being aware of the institutional and personal factors that might have shaped the perceptions of the BWAs with regard to transformation at the UFS. I also view my relationship with these women as forming part of the sociality with this group and that I cannot

disentangle myself from the inquiry. As such, data is collected from both the BWAs and me as the integral part of the inquiry.

iii) **Place –** the importance of taking into consideration the place where the inquiry is conducted and the identity of people is linked to the place (Clandinin & Huber, 2008). This means that the way BWAs define transformation and their experiences therein links up with them as academics within the transforming institution, which is a historically white Afrikaans-medium university. This in itself can influence this group's way of thinking and how they perceive their environment.

1.8.1 Participants and tools

I gathered the narratives, conducted interviews, as well as held focus group discussions with eight BWAs at the UFS with varying work experience within the UFS. BWAs narrated their personal experiences; telling their lived and told experiences of their workplace (Clandinin &Huber, 2008), relating their personal selves to the culture of the UFS. For the purpose of this study the UFS was selected as the case to be investigated, because this institution, like most historically white Afrikaans-medium universities in South Africa, is still grappling with the issues of social transformation as the racially diverse constituencies increase.

During the first phase of the study, focus group discussions were conducted with the eight BWAs, followed by individual face-to-face interviews with participants who felt that they could not reveal some of their experiences within the group. These face-to-face interviews were used as a way of eliciting information that participants may have felt intimidated to raise in the dialogues/discussions that were held. All discussions and interviews were tape-recorded. After analysing the data, I let the women read the analyses (member checks) to ensure that the recorded interviews expressed the views and feelings of BWAs correctly. I also used the services of critical friends (McNiff, 2002). These people reviewed my analyses and helped me see my data through a different lens to prevent my bias from directing my analysis to my favoured interpretation.

During the second phase, four white women academics were interviewed individually and they became part of the mixed group discussion conducted with the BWAs as

well. These four colleagues were a complementary group that formed a validation system to help BWAs shape their reflections.

A document analysis was used to address the first subsidiary research on **the face of transformation within the SAHEIs**. I analysed different institutions' policy documents and innovation plans to align and place the UFS within the framework of other historically white Afrikaans universities in SA. This helped to place my study in a broader South African context.

1.8.2 Data collection

Data collection in this study followed a cyclic pattern (McBride & Schostak, 1995) as is the case with AR studies. In the case of this thesis, data were collected in four phases. The first phase was in the form of a focus group discussion with the BWAs. This group related their personal narratives in terms of the social transformation at the UFS. In this case, if any participant felt that she could not share her narrative in a group, an individual session was scheduled. These individual sessions involved face-to-face semi-structured interviews, where issues raised during the focus group discussions that needed more clarification were discussed. The reason for this was that probing in terms of getting deep into sensitive information could not be done at the focus group discussions as participants did not feel free to discuss them there.

The second phase entailed a group discussion involving a mixed group of BWAs and a complementary group of four white women. The white colleagues were involved to help BWAs in their reflection on the constructed perceptions of race and gender transformation at the UFS. My belief was that if this was not done, BWAs could isolate their experiences and reflect on their situation without considering that they shared a space with other people for whom the institution also needed to transform. This discussion was followed by another focus group discussion with BWAs. In this session, knowledge of how the other group of white women felt was used to assist with further reflection on and deconstruction of BWAs' own perceptions. It was during this phase that BWAs also planned the next phase, where the insight gained could be disseminated across the institution. All academics from different faculties, including faculty management representatives, were invited to participate. The following diagram illustrates how the action research process took place in the study:

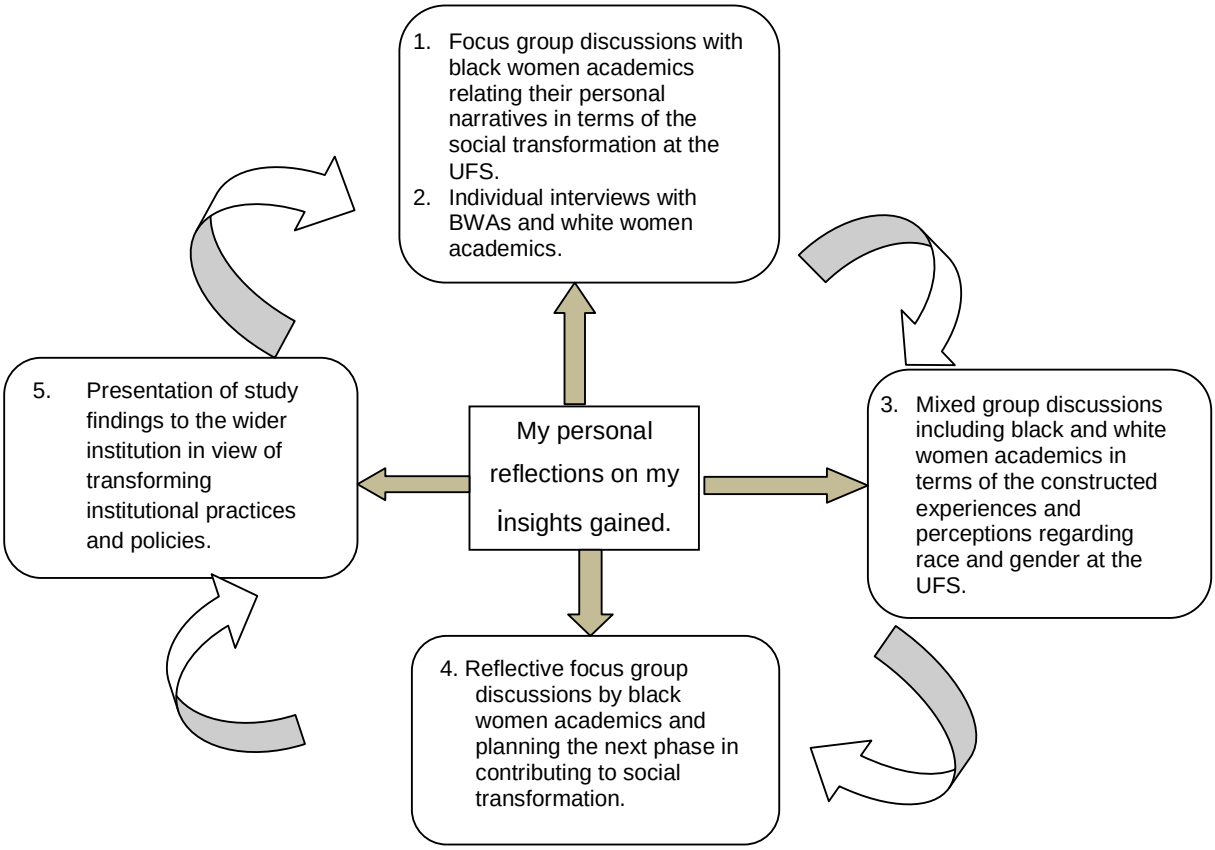


Figure 1.1: My action research phases

1.8.3 Data analysis

Data in this study was analysed using latent content analysis with a critical interpretation. Latent content analysis involves analysing written and spoken texts to find common threads of information that help a researcher to make meaning out of the data sets (Fulcher, 2005; Given, 2008; Stead & Bakker, 2010). The main aim of doing a content analysis was to identify common issues arising from participants' responses to make meaning of the patterns that form relationships within the participants' responses (Given, 2008). These could then be grouped into themes so that an overall picture of how participants construct their experiences could be formed. I closely followed this in my analysis of the data in which I used CRT and psychosocial perspectives as typologies to review my data.

Although content analysis does not specifically explore power relations, Stead and Bakker (2010)point out that in (public) institutions, patterns within the responses could indicate how power plays itself out in interpersonal relationships. This could be

seen in the way people express themselves in relation to their experiences within a social context. Some people may argue that a more appropriate method of analysis to use in this case is discourse analysis. It will, however, be noted that the study is not looking at the discourses per se, but aims to look at how the perceived salient elements of an institutional culture could be viewed by the participants as including and favouring some people while excluding others such as in the case of people of colour and women within academia. The excluding elements of an institutional climate most often marginalise people's experiences regarding employment, level of appointment and other worrying issues in the development of institutional policies and in the general way of conduct that characterises an institution. It is in this regard that I use content analysis instead of discourse analysis to highlight the experiences and perceptions of BWAs as discussed in the focus group discussions and the interviews. This is envisaged to contribute towards further plans regarding social transformation at the institution. Fulcher (2005) mentions that the researcher analysing data in this form looks at how people construct their own version of an event and how they construct their own identity. As such, BWAs' construction of their reality in terms of experiences is going to be identified and the hope is that as they do so, they will also be analysing who they are and what role they can play in their socially transforming institution.

1.9 Ethical consideration

Race and gender transformation is a sensitive issue and therefore personal risk and institutional good have to be balanced. During Phase 1 of the data collection cycle, participants were requested by e-mail to participate in the study. Their participation was voluntary and as Nolen and Putten (2007) clearly state, informed consent was obtained from them. They were assured that the data could not be used in any way to implicate or identify them and that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable at any stage.

To ensure confidentiality of the information collected from the participants, I did not use names during the interviews and discussions and the data that was captured on the audio recorder was used only for the study and by the researcher. Because such

data was transcribed, the real audios were deleted after transcriptions were completed.

The involvement of the participants with the extended group of white women during Phase 2 was also voluntary. It was foreseen that, as the participants started developing their own voice, they would get to understand that academia is a world where difficult dialogues are held and sensitive issues are discussed and as a result, they would be more willing to engage in dialogues in this typical critical academic manner. The issues shared in the mixed group discussion represented the voice of the women academics from both the focus group discussions and individual interviews and not of any individual participant.

Any sensitive information that may harm the integrity of the UFS was used very carefully to avoid any harm to the institution as the study is intended to improve understanding and positively inform institutional practice. This was achieved by reminding one another in our discussions that our aim was not to bring the UFS into risrepute, but to find a way in which we could contribute positively to the improvement of the institution. In this way, the participants tackeled issues that they felt made the institution's transformation process to go slower.

1.10 Value of the study

This study is intended to be valuable to the participants, the UFS and the broader SA higher education sector grappling with issues of transformation. The participants are stimulated to find their voice within their institution as well as deconstruct their work environment. The seminar is hoped to help both the participants and the attendants in trying to bridge the gap in understanding transformation at the UFS. The dissemination of the findings of the thesis and publications should hopefully create an awareness of the needs of BWAs as a constituency and as such, contribute to the body of knowledge in this regard, from which other South African institutions may learn to enhance social transformation at their institutions.

This study was envisaged to also have a methodological contribution in that it would contribute to the studies in action research as an approach used to improve practice and contribute to the emancipation of people within a social environment.

1.11 Lay-out of thesis

This study is reported from Chapter 2 to 5 in the form of an action research cycle:

Chapter 2: The face of social transformation in the South African higher education arena and the University of the Free State: my meaning-making process. The methodology adopted in the study is explained in this chapter. The chapter includes a discussion of the theoretical and the methodological approaches in this study.

Chapter 3: Experiences and perceptions of race and gender transformation: an application to the University of the Free State. This chapter looks at the existing literature on social transformation in SAHE and traces some of the experience of BWAs in both the international and local HEIs.

Chapter 4: Race and gender transformation: extending the meaning-making process. This chapter basically reports on the findings of the study. It shows how themes emerged from the data collected for the study.

Chapter 5: Self-reflection and recommendations for institutional practices. The chapter wraps up the study by looking closely at how the study has contributed to social transformation at the UFS and how I have grown as an action researcher during the course of the study. It further shows how the theory building emerged ththough an engagement in the AR process in the study.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter presented the proposed study. It presented the intended area of study, the research objectives and the methodology thar is used in the entire thesis. In this chapter, the theoretical framework used as a basis for my approach to the issues pertaining to social transformation and the perception of the black women academics at the UFS is also outlined. In the next chapter, I present the methodology used to explore the perceptions and experiences of BWAs within the University of the Free State.

Chapter 2: Research methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research methodology of this study. The methodological aspects discussed are the research design and approach, data collection methods that were used for the study and the procedures followed for data analysis. All these aspects are tabled in an attempt to indicate how the central aim of the study was met and how the specific research questions were investigated. As indicated in Chapter 1, the aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of black women academics (BWAs) towards social transformation at the University of the Free State (UFS).To enable me to explore this issue, the methodology tabled in this chapter aligns with the following research questions that were proposed in Chapter 1:

- What is the face of social transformation in South African higher education institutions and the UFS in particular?
- How is race and gender transformation at the UFS experienced and why is it perceived as such?
- How are the insights gained from the research integrated to assist women in finding their voices in contributing to social transformation at the UFS at both a personal and an institutional level?
- How do I grow during the process and how does my understanding contribute to improving dialogue with the aim of creating environments of respect for diversity and difference?

2.2 Research design

All studies need a plan or blueprint of how a researcher intends to conduct a study. Some researchers (Henning & Van Rensburg, 2004) argue that a design should not necessarily be a fixed plan, which a researcher has to follow, but should be a flexible and open plan that could be adapted and changed as the research unfolds. Henning and Van Rensburg (ibid) suggest that qualitative research should be exploratory, fluid and flexible and should be driven by the data collected and the context of the

research. In justifying this Comaroff and Comaroff, (1992) argue that more unstructured designs do not restrict a researcher, but provide ample opportunities for the researcher to explore. McNiff and Whitehead (2010:11) are of the opinion that a research design should proceed in a developmental transformative nature that enables flexibility when new issues emerge.

Although I agree with the notion of a flexible design, I concur with what Henning and Van Rensburg (2004) further state, that studies that have a clear design are more focused and yield a more in-depth response to the research question. They add that qualitative researchers should produce the design for their own use to facilitate the coherent and rigorous development of the study. In this way, a research design could be regarded as a roadmap to navigate the road towards the researcher's destination. In addition to what Henning and Van Rensburg state, Cresswell and Clark (2008) explain a research design as a procedure that neatly states the model for conducting a specific study and helps guide the method that the researcher decides to take. These include the approach, the methods of data collection and analysis (McNiff & Whithead, 2010).In this study, although there was some flexibility in the way data had been collected and analysed, an action research (AR) route was used as a design to guide my thinking and reflections throughout the study. The following diagram is a framework of how I organised my study, showing my approach and the theoretical basis of my study as well as the methodological design used in the study.

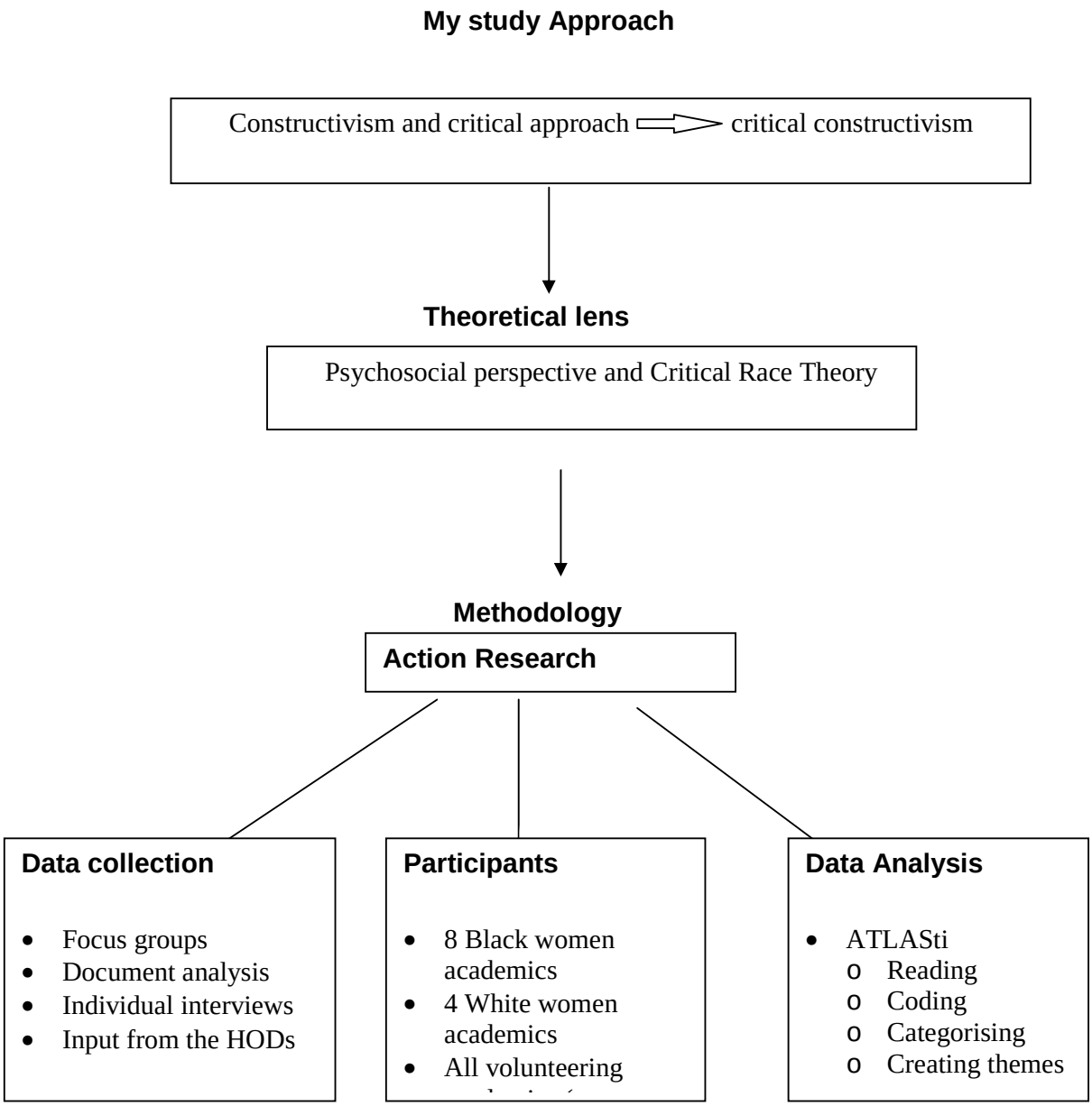


Figure 2.1: Study design

2.2.1 Research approach

Based on the literature study on transformation in SAHEIs, this study departs from the philosophical assumption that social transformation within South African higher education (SAHE) in general poses great challenges for institutions of higher learning in South Africa.As SAHEIs strive to transform socially, constituencies have different perceptions towards these attempts. Some constituencies may feel that the changes effected are not sufficient for adequate progress towards social transformation. As a result, the changes may be viewed as further perpetuating the

discomforts that some constituencies feel within their institutions, thereby instigating tensions within HEIs. This study therefore sought to understand how black women academics at the University of the Free State experienced and constructed social transformation attempts by their institution. For this reason, I felt that a constructivist approach to understanding the feelings and experiences of this particular constituency was appropriate for this study. According to constructivism, study participants should be viewed as being able to make meaning of their own environment through their experiences and interaction with their social environment (Elliott, 2005; Given, 2008:116).Given (2008) states that in constructivism both the researcher and participants get insights and understanding of the phenomenon under study through the inquiry process itself. This means that as the study progresses, new insights are derived, which helps both the researcher and participants to arrive at new knowledge and thereby reconstruct their reality. By adopting this approach in my study, I was therefore able to interpret how the participants constructed their environment by interacting with them personally, as they narrated their experiences (Elliot, 2005:5).In this way, I was in a position to also understand the factors that influenced the way in which they perceived their reality. The use of this approach aligns smoothly with the theoretical base of this study, which is the psychosocial interpretation.

As already indicated in Chapter 1, psychosocial interpretations involve people's interpretation and definition of their social context. Concurring with this thought, Elliott (2005:124) is of the opinion that reality is relational and inherent in the interactions people have with others within the social context. She further notes that reality is fluid and determined by the context. Aligning myself with this notion in my adoption of constructivism, I seek to understand the daily practices within the UFS through which BWAs constructed and reconstructed their work environment, in terms of how they perceived social transformation. I did this by focusing on their narratives, which were primary to their construction of reality. Specifically within the narratives, I looked at the psychological and social factors that played a role in determining the way in which BWAs perceived and defined their daily interactions (Pratt & Wilkinson, 2003).These factors helped me to understand the issues that created the perceptions within this community. The adoption of a constructivist approach, which

considers these factors, was thus relevant in finding out how BWAs construct and reconstruct their UFS environment as the institution transforms.

It is, however, my stance that constructivism alone could not fully offer a comprehensive analysis of the reality faced by BWAs at the UFS. Its main limitation, as noticed by Morris (1999), lies mostly in its focus on reality as purely existing and being created in the minds of people that live it. In this way, it negates the idea of some independent realities that exist outside the constructions of individuals, which may have a great influence on how people perceive their situations. As much as I agree with the construction of realities through the lived experiences of people, I also believe that in some instances, there are existing realities (which I strived to discover as I analysed the narratives), which do not depend solely on how people interpret them. These too may have a tremendous bearing on people's experiences. I would like to argue that certain realities remain real, despite people's constructions and need to be considered when trying to understand how individuals construct their realities. Although construction of realities by people is not wrong and actually helps in understanding reality as lived by individuals, it should be understood that the constructions depend on individuals' perceptions, which at times may shadow the essence of some existing factors that may actually contribute to the experiences of people within a certain social context. As a result, I borrowed aspects from the critical approach to complement the constructivist approach that I employ in this study.

Although I may be seen to have adopted contradictory stances, mixing constructivism with a critical approach, I believe in what Morris (1999) states, namely that constructivism could be used with a number of paradigms. In fact, Price and Reus-Smit (1998:260) observe that constructivism is part of a broad family of critical international theories, such as feminism and others. Although it differs from other paradigms mainly in its ontology, its epistemic stance seems to draw from aspects of a number of paradigms, including post-positivism and critical inquiry. In trying to find out how BWAs constructed meaning from their lived experiences (constructivism), I therefore believe that cognisance had to be taken of the social, political and historical issues and the role these played on shaping these women's perceptions (critical) (Stears, 2009:400).

Apart from the fact that constructivism could be used with a number of other approaches, I concur with Barkin (2010) and Lincoln and Guba (2000) when they urge that paradigms or approaches should not be taken to stand in opposition to each other. Barkin (ibid) in particular, states that researchers should find a ground for thinking of ways in which these paradigms relate to each other and try to adopt a non-exclusionary pattern towards paradigmatic thinking. In addition to this, Donmoyer (1999) suggests that approaches (paradigms) should be seen as complementary rather than competitive and that the 'paradigm wars' should end, as they inhibit researchers to look at different aspects, which could be easily ignored if a single approach is used. As an endorsement to this, Stears (2009:400) and Bentley, and Fleury and Garrison (2007:4), coined a critical constructivist approach to understanding how people make meaning of their environment. The critical constructivism approach could be seen in the adoption of AR as a methodology for my study. In concordance with the constructivist thought, AR assumes that (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:35):

i) Knowledge/reality is uncertain and unambiguous. A question may generate multiple answers.
ii) Knowledge/reality is created not discovered. Hence ARs produce their own theories.
iii) Answers are incommensurable and cannot be fully resolved.

McNiff and Whitehead (2010:47) further show the overlap between critical approaches and constructivism when they indicate that AR is emancipatory and challenges dominant thoughts (which is a belief in critical approaches) and that within AR, the emphasis is on the importance of people's own interpretations and negotiation of events (a belief predominant in constructivism).It could therefore be seen that employing the two approaches was not contradictory, but was done with the purpose of addressing the issue at hand holistically.

Within the critical approach, the focus was on understanding the experiences of the marginalised groups such as black women academics through understanding the dominant power dynamics involved in issues of race and gender. I employed a critical race theory approach. Although some people could see a critical approach as

contradictory to the constructivist approach, which emphasises the understanding of phenomena with the aim of deconstruction and reconstruction of environments. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, I believe that aspects of the critical approach could be helpful in understanding the historical factors and power ideologies in the way in which the black women academics constructed their work environment. Critical theories in general, as defined by Jansen (2009) and Henning and Van Rensburg (2004), offer a lens through which researchers can understand dominance in social structures with the aim of empowering and giving a voice to the marginalised others. Jansen (2009) argues that critical approaches do not have a place in the post-conflict societies like South Africa. I argue against this view as my experiences and the preliminary investigation for this study indicated to some degree that at the time of the study, racial and gender conflicts were still inherent in SAHEIs, even though the country is in its post-apartheid era. As a result, I found it still pertinent to look at the experiences of the historically marginalised in institutions of higher learning that might claim to have moved beyond the colour line. Although Jansen (2009) further claims that critical approaches overlook the other previously advantaged groups and the pain they have to live with as well as their plight in living with the guilt, Hooks (1989) and Cole (2009) clearly state that societies can only genuinely change if the previously disadvantaged cannot be driven to silence through multi-vocality.

Lecompte and Schensul (2010) and Given (2008) point out the importance of critical approaches, as they provide a chance for the researcher to be a participant in his/her own research in trying to empower the participants to engage in self-expression as they shape their environment. It is my belief that the adoption of a critical approach in my study allowed me to be both a participant and researcher with a view to carrying out an emancipatory investigation. This angle also aligned well with action research (AR) as the design of my study. AR in the same way encourages the researcher to forge collaboration with the participants in raising voice and making meaning of the environment in which they work (McNiff &Whitehead, 2006).The critical approach also enabled me as the researcher to understand how the system of power (Given, 2008) within the UFS institutional structures functioned to perpetuate the dominant culture that might have been interpreted as hostile by the participants. Understanding these power dynamics that might have impeded social

transformation within the UFS allowed participants to take calculated and planned action in contributing towards the improvement of the institution's environment or social transformation.

Within the critical approach, I specifically used the Critical Race Theory (CRT) mainly to understand the black women academics' perceptions within their institution. These perceptions were important in revealing how this constituency carved their identity and negotiated their place within their institutional space as agents that could contribute positively to the changes that were effected within their institution, in negotiating their space and identity within changing societies. Du Bois (1989), who developed some propositions around race relations in the USA in the 19th century (which technically make him the father of CRT), noticed that black people looked at themselves and the roles they played within their American society through what he termed a 'veil'. According to Du Bois (ibid), this veil refers to the perceptions and stereotypes that society uses to screen the less powerful. These are later internalised by the victims and shape their perceptions about themselves as individuals, which can either contribute positively or negatively towards the improvement of their communities. The perceptions and stereotypes discussed here develop along colour lines. When addressing the issue of colour in creating stereotypical ideologies in societies, Du Bois (1989) noticed that race groups keep on gauging each other according to their whiteness or blackness, which further plays a part in the construction of their identities within communities. By expanding these propositions to the SA context, it could be argued that the veil and colour line could be factors that contributed to the way in which black women academics at the UFS perceived their work environment as they interpreted it through the perceptions that their university community might be holding about them.

CRT, as further advanced by Hooks (1989) and Gillborn, (2008), is based on some tenets that form the most important components of the theory. In alignment with these tenets of the CRT, I investigated the UFS social structures, trying to understand the determinants of the development of BWAs' perceptions towards social transformation in this institution. These tenets, which are discussed briefly, are that

- whiteness (as a culture in institutions) plays a role in privileging one group over the other;
- marginalised groups (especially black people) are silenced in societies;
- the needs of the marginalised can only be known through the narration of their lived experience and stories (giving voice to the marginalized); and
- race and gender intersect in creating unequal societies (Cole, 2009).

Whiteness or white supremacy (Cole, 2009) in this study takes on the meaning that is attached to it by CRT theorists. These theorists regard whiteness as a situation whereby there is a differentiated distribution of opportunities, rights and duties and in which whites are privileged by virtue of their being white (Cole, 2009; Gillborn, 2008; Hooks, 1989).Further clarifying this situation, Gillborn (2008) asserts that white supremacy should not only be taken to mean racism, in which case only the overt racist practices are looked at, but should go deeper into an analysis of the covert practices that marginalise black people while privileging white people. Cole (2008), sees white supremacy as being unjust to the white people because it homogenises all whites as being in positions of power and privilege and overlooking the more non-colour coded racism. Positioning myself within this tenet, I endeavoured to find out from BWAs whether whiteness played a role in the way they perceived the changes that were taking place within their institution (**tenet 1**)

The other three tenets intersect in that in literature, as seen in Chapter 2, black people and women were considered as being vastly marginalised in SAHEIs. Thus, this study aims to uncover issues that made the women still feel marginalised despite transformation attempts. This was done by letting them narrate their stories (**tenet 3**) and break the silence (**tenet 2**) around the discussions of the sensitive issues of race and gender. This study also aims to discover how these stories reveal the inter-sectionality of race and gender in the experiences of the women (**tenet 4**) (Falcon, 2008).

From the above discussion, it is clear that, however much constructivism and critical approaches may have clashing issues as has been discussed in the previous paragraphs, they can be used in conjunction with each other by using aspects that do not clash. If this is done, healthy social environments and a holistic understanding

of phenomena under study can be achieved. In this study, this was achieved by giving the participants a chance to construct their environment as they related their experiences. At the same time, the participants were assisted to challenge the dominant systems that made it difficult for their institutions to achieve social transformation.

2.2.1.1 Action research

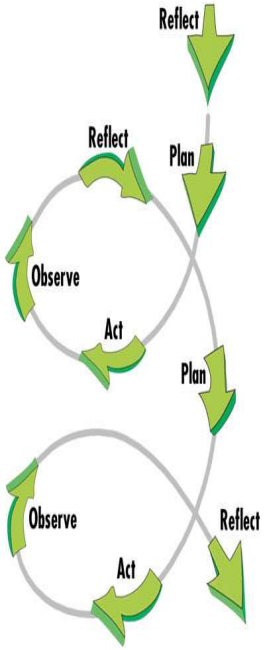
This study employed Action Research (AR) as an over-arching design that guided the investigation to be carried out. AR is generally defined as a process of systematic inquiry, which allows individuals to look at their own professional practice (Koshy, 2005:4) with a view to improving it (McNiff, 2006). AR is distinct from other qualitative studies in that researchers conduct research on themselves and do not aim to solely change external social structures (Kemmis &Wilkinson, 1998, McNiff &Whitehead, 2010). Rather, they aim to find the best ways in which they can disentangle themselves from the disabling effects of constraining social structures and changing them where possible. According to McNiff (2006) people embarking on this kind of research aim to improve and not only change the situation. Action researchers can improve their own understanding of social issues or a social situation (which is the focus of this current study), which is rooted in their own value base. My own value base driving my quest for understanding how BWAs perceive social transformation at the UFS, was that a workplace should be a place where everybody has a voice towards the productivity of the constituents and a place where everybody feels a sense of belonging. I believe that without these two aspects, functionality and productivity could be hampered seriously. Assisting BWAs in gaining a voice and agency could give them a sense of citizenship within the UFS and could lead them to being productive and advance the UFS to be a university of excellence.

There are two forms of AR which share a number of similar arguments pertaining to conducting AR. These are practical action research and participatory action research (PAR) (Cresswell &Clark, 2008:599; Springer, 2010:464).While practical action research explores more localised practitioners' problems, such as classroom situations in which teachers become researchers, PAR explores wider social issues that constrain individuals' lives with an emphasis on equal collaboration and life-

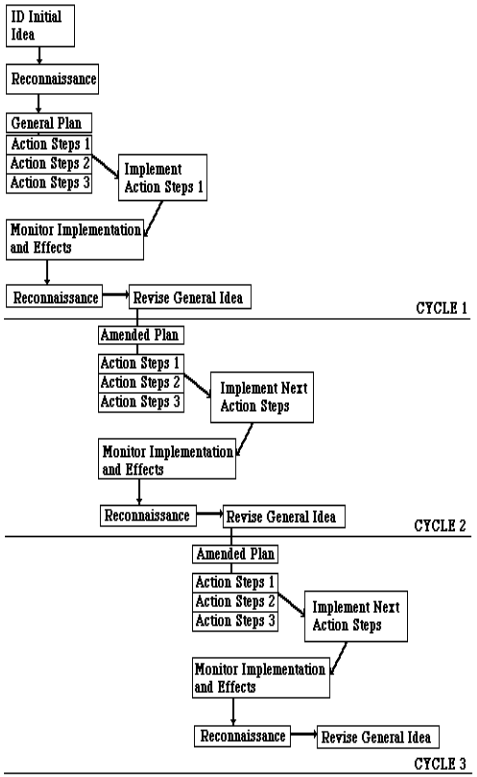
enhancing changes. The end-result of PAR is an emancipated researcher and co-researchers (Cohen, Manion &Morrison, 2010:348; Cresswell, 2008: Koshy, 2005:464; McNiff &Whitehead, 2006 & 2010).However different the focus of these two approaches may be, both engage in a similar process, which involves the problem identification, reflection and action stages. It should be noted that there are differing models of AR, which have been used by action researchers, but all have a common goal of taking action regarding the social challenge with a view to improving the situation. In this case I can cite a variety of models. Elliot's model suggests that AR starts with identifying the initial idea and ends with reconnaissance with the cycle being repeated over and over again. O'Leary's model entails the 'observe, reflect, plan and act' stages, McNiff and Whitehead's model observe, reflect, act, evaluate, modify and move in a new direction. Kemmis' and Wilkinson's (cf. 3.2) model consists of the plan, act and observe and reflect stages. It should, however, be noted that it is not an issue of which model an action researcher employs, but how the researcher adapts these models to suit his/her own research (Koshy, 2005). As could be seen in the progression of my design's discussion, I have developed my own cycle, which is adapted from aspects in all these models.

As indicated in the diagrams below, the models of AR that I drew from in constructing my approach are from different action researchers. It will be noted that although the models may differ in some respect, all three have common aspects. O'Leary's model and Kemmis and Wilkinson's model are similar, except that Kemmis and Wilkinson clearly indicate that the AR process involves working on a revised plan. Although Elliot's model seems more detailed, it still emphasises that AR entails planning, action, observing and reflecting. It is these aspects that I also found important for my study and planned my own AR around these elements (cf. fig 2.3).

O'Leary's AR model



Ellliot's AR model



Kemmis and Wilkinson's model

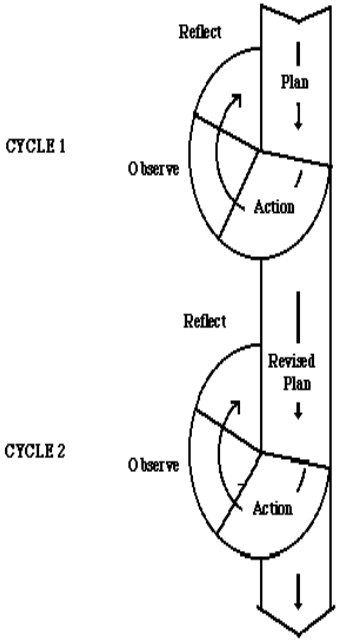


Figure 2.2: AR Models

In this study I employed an emancipatory PAR and engaged BWAs to examine their understanding and the way in which they interpreted or carved their identity within their social context, which was the University of the Free State. I did this with the aim of contributing to the emancipation of this particular constituency in finding their voice within the UFS. Generally, participants in an emancipatory AR interrogate how their knowledge shapes their sense of identity and agency (Cohen, Manion &Morrison, 2010).The participants also reflect on how such knowledge frames or constrains their actions. After reflecting on this, participants devise ways in which they can recover from the irrational, unproductive and unjust social structures. The current study had taken this stance. The issue of social transformation was explored with the aim of understanding the challenges that shaped the BWAs' perceptions and which inhibited their productive functioning so that these could be reconstructed and deconstructed to build a liveable environment for all participants. This means that the participants in this study reflected on their perceptions with the aim of challenging them and identifying how these could have acted as barriers to prevent them from being productive members of their institution.

Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) view AR as a reflexive process in which people investigate reality with a view of changing it. Cresswell (2008) adds that reflection is done with the aim to "particularly change own practices through self-critical action and reflection". These two action researchers propose that the process of AR should take a spiral pattern in which researchers plan, take action and reflect. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) argue that the first step is to identify a problem. It is only after identifying a problem that, action researchers can plan their action. Figure 3.2 indicates how action research should generally be viewed and practiced by those who engage in it (as adopted from Kemmis &Wilkinson, 1998).Koshy (2005:5), however, cautions that action researchers should not view this spiral model as a rigid structure. The reason for this argument is that the stages within the structure overlap. The reflection stage, for example occurs at almost every stage of the spiral. AR is also a fluid process that is responsive to the situation the researcher finds in the field. It is for this specific reason that I have indicated earlier that the AR cycle that I use in this study has been adapted according to the needs of my study. The diagram below, however, sets a general guideline for action researchers:

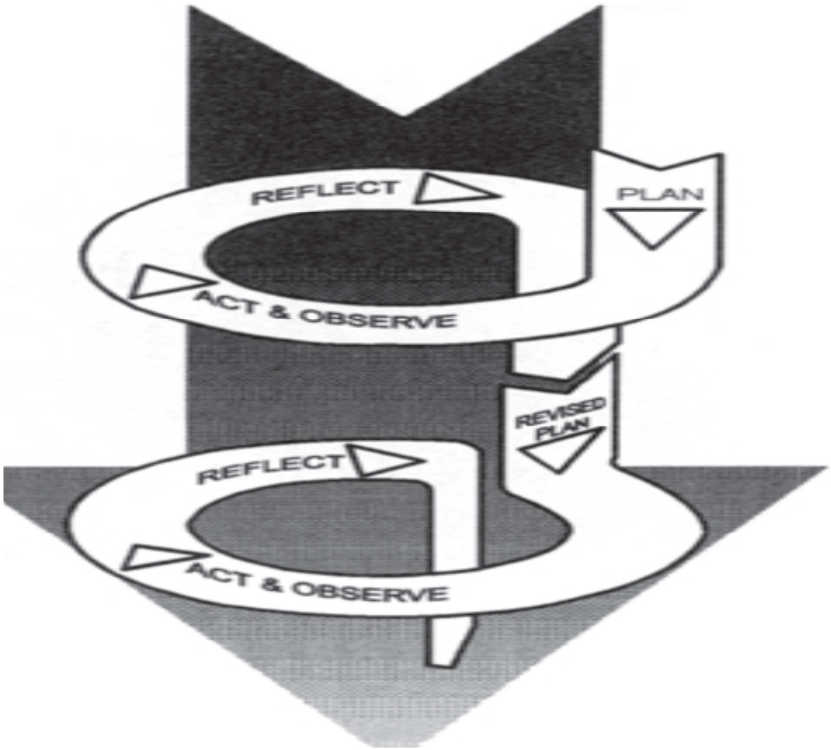


Figure 2.3: AR model adopted from Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998)

According to the above diagram, after identifying a problem (McNiff &Whitehead, 2006), action researchers plan an action. The plan of action that the researcher and participants devise centres on their problem. After taking action, they observe the progress and the consequences of the change. They then reflect on their action and the consequences it brought. It is only after careful reflection that they can re-plan the next phase in trying to solve their problem. In my employment of AR in this study, I adhered as far and as closely as I could to this recommended way in which the process has to be carried out.

Within the above spiral of actions and reflections, action researchers are always sensitive to the forces that shape people's perceptions within their social environments. These influential forces seem to stem from people's psychosocial perspectives (Kemmis &Wilkinson, 1998).The forces intertwined in nature, work together to create a web of factors that may be responsible for the way people experience their environment. By changing their practice around these forces, action researchers (and participants in this study) strive to change their social spaces for the better. The four forces mentioned by Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) are:

- **acts: these** may be symbolic acts or social acts that may be shaped by
- **social structure**: this refers to the cultural issues and political realms, which in turn may be shaped by
- **social media**: this entail discourses and power, shaped by
- **knowledge**: which involves people's understandings and values.

The four aspects mentioned above assisted with an effective engagement of AR in my study. BWAs in this study engaged in discussions in which they reflected on how their own actions and the external social structures might have perpetuated the way in which they perceived and experienced social transformation within the UFS. If BWAs could understand how their historical political knowledge about their institution could have contributed to how they acted towards others or connected with their institution, they could take action towards redefining their perception in this post-apartheid era (Jansen, 2009). On the other hand, if the BWAs could, in the process of AR, reflect on themselves as the marginalised and oppressed group, and take time to reflect and understand the experiences of other constituencies at their institutions (white colleagues), they might get to understand the actions of others, which might in turn change their perceptions of others. These were some of the outcomes that adopting AR in this study envisaged to achieve.

The above was the reason why I developed the model that I used in collecting my data. This was done through employing an adapted AR cycle as shown below:

AR model for this study

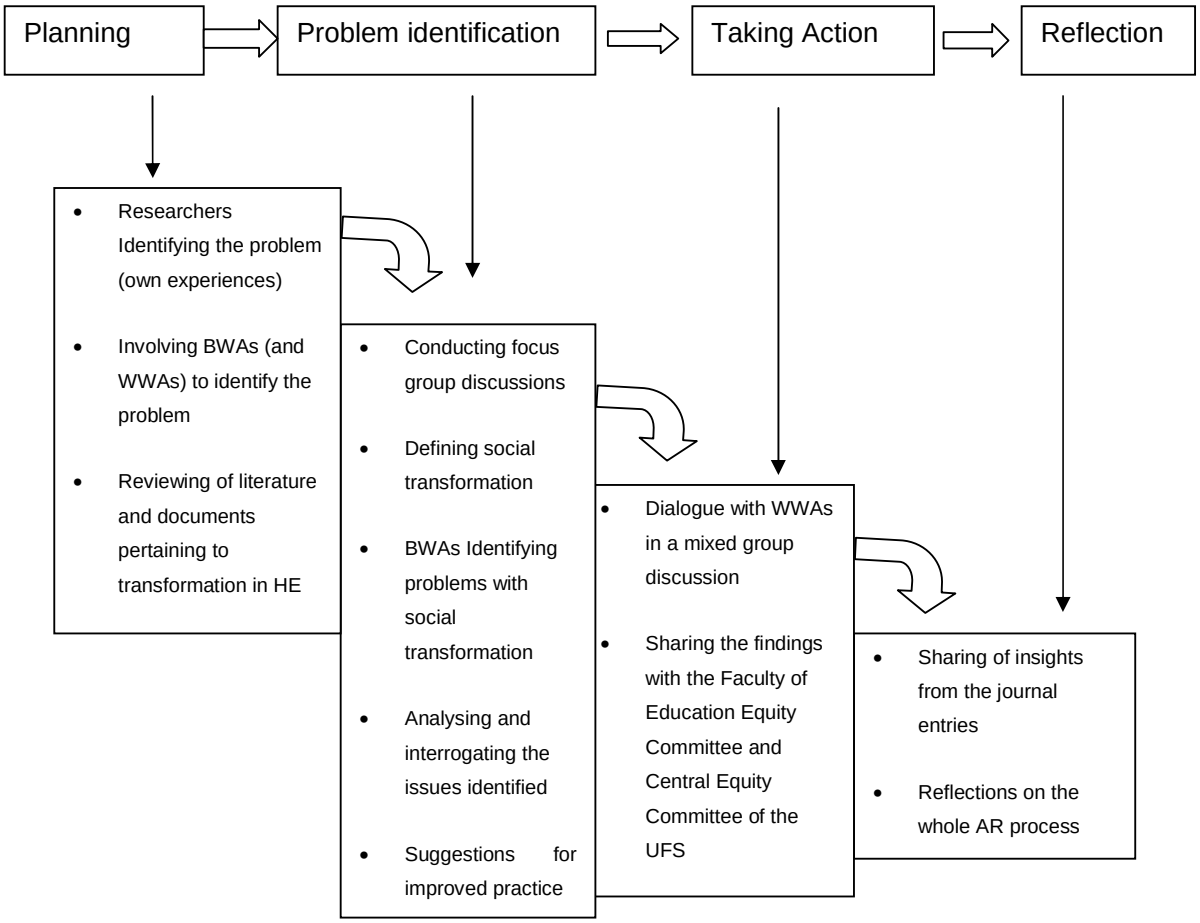


Figure 2.4: AR approach for the study

With the use of the above-mentioned model, this study was closely aligned with the six central features of PAR as outlined by most action researchers (Cresswell, 2008; Kemmis &Wilkinson, 1998; McNiff and Whitehead, 2006). These features are that**:**

1. *PAR is a social process in which the researcher deliberately explores the relationship between the individual and other people*: In this case, I involved the white women colleagues to provide their perceptions as well so that BWAs could reflect on their own perception by understanding how the other group within the UFS felt. This might help BWAs not to isolate their experiences, but to think about their experiences in conjunction with other people within a

similar context. I believed that this would have a positive impact on how BWAs later viewed their workspace.

2. *PAR is participatory*: With this in mind, in this study, BWAs examined their understanding of social transformation as shaped by their own values and how these values affected their dealing with others and with the wider institution. In this case, I did not only look at transformation from my own angle, but involved other black women and constituencies (through the seminar) in my study.
3. *PAR is practical and collaborative*: To conduct this study, I involved other BWAs who acted as co-researchers in that they were actively involved in the action-planning phase and the action itself as well as reflections. The action that we (BWAs) got involved in was to deconstruct our perceptions regarding the way in which we viewed our institution's transformation process. To do this we drew from our practical day-to-day experiences within the UFS.
4. *PAR is emancipatory*: BWAs helped themselves through critical self-reflection to challenge their thinking, which might have played a role in how they viewed themselves in relation to their work environment as women in academia. As the women academics engaged in the self-reflection process, they could change the way in which they perceived social transformation at the UFS and with regard to issues that they could not change, BWAs looked for ways in which they could fit themselves productively within an environment which they regarded as hostile. In this way, the emancipatory exercise that BWAs got involved in was not an ambitious quest to change the UFS overnight, but as is the premise of AR, researchers are the central focal point of the improvement before they could aim at influencing the others within the social space. So, in line with the study's objective, the BWAs engaged in an exercise in which they delved into the issues that contributed to their perceptions and challenged some of them as a way of emancipating themselves.
5. *PAR aims for freedom from constraints that are rooted in language, procedures and relationships of power*: BWAs freed themselves from the constraint of silence, which might be inhibiting them to voice their own feelings and needs and act as agents of change within their space. As they engaged in the discussions, they interrogated the way in which they perceived the UFS and through challenging questions, began to unfold the reasons that led to

such perceptions. In this way they freed themselves from the slavery of bottling their feelings which could have an impact on their daily dealings with their institution.

6. *PAR is reflexive*: As has already been explained in the preceding paragraphs, the reflexivity in this study was shown through the spirals of reflection and action throughout the whole action research process.

Cresswell (2008) suggests that, as action researchers look through the above features, they have to engage in a 'look, think, act, reflect' process. This four-phase process involves data collection, interpretation and implementation of practical solutions. It is not different from the earlier discussed 'problem identification to reflection' process that Kemmis and Wilkinson (2008) propose, but it goes deeper into the theory building within AR. The first phase of 'looking' entails collecting data through interviews, observations and documents. This phase was employed in this study through the engagement of focus group discussions, individual interviews and an open seminar. The second phase, which was also employed, was the 'think' process where participants engaged in the interpretation of the identified issues pertaining to social transformation within the UFS, in order to decide which ones required action to be taken. The 'act' phase involved devising a plan with clear objectives, tasks and evaluation. Finally, reflection evaluates the success of the action and where necessary, new plans are made. This shows that these four processes form the centre of the action research process and it is pertinent that action researchers become aware of this. The diagram below shows the interwovenness of this process as I engaged in it. An in-depth discussion of how this was done is discussed under the data collection section.

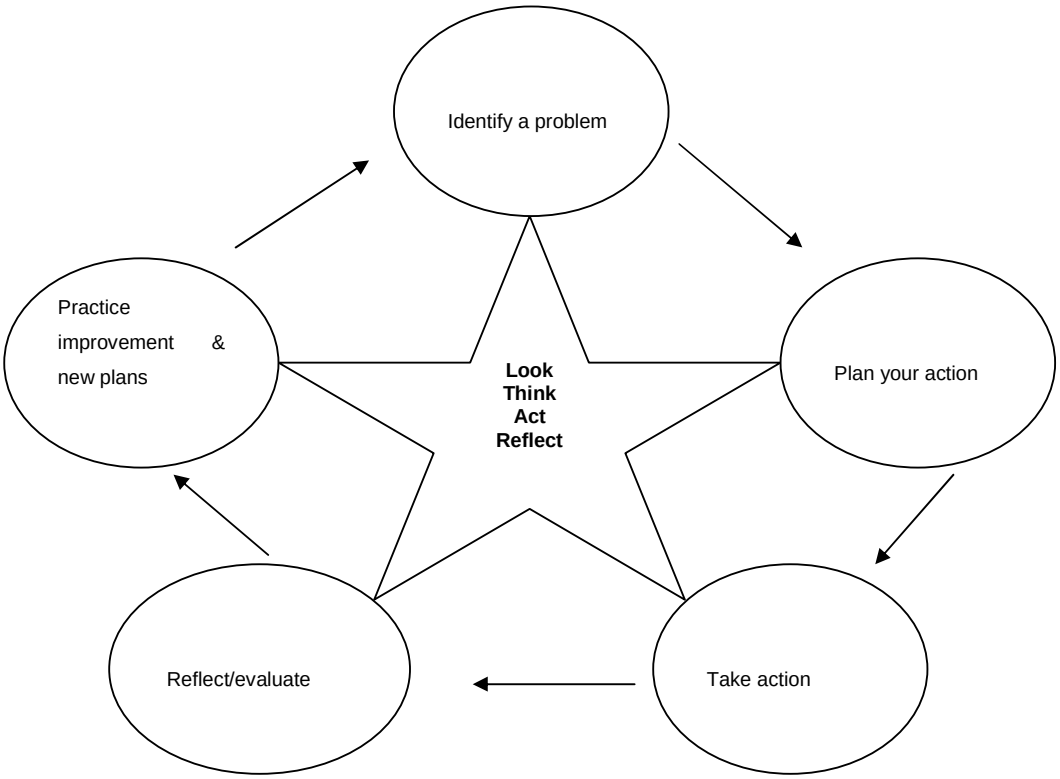


Figure 2.5: Theory building in action research

2.2.1.2 Study participants

The participants for this study were drawn from the University of the Free State (UFS).Eight black women academics (BWAs) were involved in this study as main study participants. I refer to the women as 'main' participants, because they were part of the action research (AR) cycle from the beginning of the planning session to reflections and they also voluntarily took part in the open seminar held at the end of the study. It should be noted that these women were not regarded as representative of the UFS constituencies and the findings in this study should not be taken as representing the experiences and perceptions of all women academics within the UFS. The black women academics were selected because the study dealt with issues of social transformation and it was my understanding that successful social transformation should take into consideration the needs and feelings of groups that were previously marginalised in SAHEIs.

Through the literature study about the structure of higher education in South Africa pre- and post-1994, black people and women seemed to fit the description of the

previously marginalised in South African institutions. Transformation policies devised by the government in South Africa for the education sector (DoE Education White Paper 3, 1997; Higher Education Transformation, 2004) had primarily been developed with the previously marginalised groups in mind. That was why the two mentioned papers emphasised that transformation attempts should focus on redressing past inequalities and inequities in education. I selected black women to find out how they felt and experienced the on-going transformation attempts by the UFS and to assist them in voicing their perceptions and taking action to contribute towards social transformation at the UFS.

Apart from the BWAs, a complementary group of white women academics was selected for this study. This group should not be regarded as a control group, because the study does not constitute a quasi-experimental study. The white women were not involved to validate the experiences and perceptions of BWAs. The reason why this group was involved was to help BWAs to reflect on their perceptions with the knowledge of how the other group within the university felt. The involvement of this group was part of the action in this study, which assisted the BWAs in realising themselves as part of the institution, which consisted of diverse groups of people. Understanding this could assist them in conflating their dispositions against others with whom they shared a space. This stance was in line with one of the main characteristics of AR, which is that within the AR practice participants get involved in deeply understanding themselves in relation to others. This assisted BWAs not to isolate their experiences as unique to them, but knowing how others felt within the context of social transformation, they were assisted to reflect better on their own situation in the light of what they would have learned from the other group. This might have also challenged BWAs to interrogate their own thoughts and behaviours towards other constituencies and the university at large.

2.2.1.3 Data collection

To collect data I used a combination of methods. These included document analysis, focus group discussions and individual semi-structured interviews. Document analysis was used to find an answer to the research question on the status/face of social transformation in the broader SAHEIs. Focus group discussions and interviews were used to elicit in-depth information from BWAs as the primary source

of data as well as the white women academics as the complementary group in this study to address the other two research questions.

a) Document analysis

For the first question of this study - **What is the face of social transformation in SAHEIs and the UFS in particular?** - Data was collected using document analysis. The documents that were analysed included South African higher education's policy documents and transformation plans from the Council of Higher Education (CHET) and those from the Department of Education in general. South African literature that provided insight on what was happening in different SAHEIs (especially white Afrikaans-medium universities) and any documents that showed the attempts that SAHEIs were making with regard to social transformation were also used (e.g. DoE, 2008).An analytic memo was compiled (**cf. Appendix 2**) in which data was placed under the three broad areas of transformation that are discussed in Chapter 3 (institutional culture, access, retention and recruitment).

Main issues arising under each of these categories were listed and quotations on the recommendations to the institutions regarding the areas of challenge for SAHEIs were extracted. On the part of the higher institutions' documents, a number of documents, mainly from the UFS and then the University of Cape Town and University of Pretoria were analysed. The main objective in analysing these documents was to see how HEIs have responded to the Department of Education's recommendations and how far they were with the implementation of their innovation plans (implementation strategies).I did this so that I could compare the progress that the UFS in particular had made (**Report on this is in Chapter 4, problem identification phase**).

I believe that getting an overview of what was happening in general at other previously white SAHEIs helped me to assess how different the UFS could have been in its handling of social transformation and also determined what was unique about the UFS. What I was mainly interested in, was how the social transformation plans of each institution took the inclusion of the previously marginalised groups of black women academics into consideration. The information from these documents was used against the narratives of BWAs of how they experienced social transformation within the UFS in particular. This information also assisted me in

planning for the focus group discussions that were conducted with BWAs and WWAs as information gathered from the documents was used to probe for in-depth information pertaining to social transformation at the UFS.

b) Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Focus group discussions (FGDs) in this study were used as the principle source of data, because from the initial stage of planning through to reflection and action, BWAs and a complementary group of WWAs were involved in the discussions. The advantage of using FGDs was that they served to stimulate the participants' memories, probe for alternative interpretations and more depth of information that could only come from the interaction of the participants (Tewksbury, 2009). The focus group discussions in my study followed a multiple viewpoint (Greef, 2002) of the participants on a debatable issue of social transformation within the UFS. These discussions assisted participants in understanding one another and the diverse perceptions they had. Greef (ibid) notices that focus groups also create an understanding of people and the circumstances on which they build their perceptions. This understanding is important in a study of this kind, which endeavours to bridge the gap of misunderstanding between diverse people and contribute to social cohesion and transformation. My expectation before I could carry out the discussions was that during the focus groups, participants would open up and provide their experiences openly when they noticed that others around them have had similar experiences. I felt that the participants would feel empowered to also voice their perceptions and experiences. Although this did not fully happen at the first FGD and some participants had to be interviewed individually, a lot of information on more general issues, which did not touch on the very sensitive experiences of the members, emerged from the discussions. The first FGD also helped very much in exposing the emotions that people had when the sensitive issues of race and gender were being raised. This gave the women a platform to take out the bitterness and share their feelings with other people who helped very much in challenging some of the perceptions.

All questions for all focus group discussions were open. The discussions focused mainly on the lived and told experiences of the participants, which centred on their narratives and stories. In this case, there was an interview guide containing a few

questions for directing the discussions. The questions were availed to the participants before the discussions so that participants could come well prepared to give in-depth information. The distribution of the questions prior to the discussions taking place did not hamper the probing that I intended to do in follow-up sessions about issues I felt needed clarification and depth.

As a way of ensuring that all participants in the focus group discussions attended the sessions, I sent an e-mail to the participants at least two weeks prior to the discussion to inform them of the date and place for the meeting. I also asked them to confirm their attendance and followed this up a week before the meeting. Encouraged by Greef (2002), I made follow-up phone calls to all participants on the day of the meeting.

Discussions took place in a private boardroom of the faculty, which is separate from the office spaces. I chose this venue so that my participants could feel a sense of security where they could speak freely without fear of being heard by colleagues in other offices. This is encouraged by most qualitative researchers, who believe that the space in which participants are interviewed should be a relaxing one in which people feel free to voice their opinion (Henning, 2004; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This proved to have been a wise decision, because as emotions soared, people's voices became louder and the privacy of the room served to the group's advantage. The first meeting with BWAs, in which we had to identify concerns around the issue of transformation, progressed smoothly. I termed this Phase 1 of the **problem identification stage** in my data collection stage and below I elaborate on all the phases of my AR cycle, from problem identification to the reflection stage. The model I used to conduct the phases is captured in the diagram shown below.

Phase 1: Problem identification and Planning

1. My experiences which raise concern
    - Plannedand carried out a preliminary investigation
    - Planned the first focus group
2. Focus group discussion with BWAs
    - Exploring perceptions by interpreting individual meanings of social transformation
    - Narrating individual experiences within the UFS
    - Identifying trends that arise from the experiences and interpretations
    - Recording of discussed issues for reflections
3. Individual interviews with WWAs
    - Exploring perceptions by interpreting individual meanings of social transformation
    - Narrating experiences within the UFS
    - Identifying trends that arise from the experiences and interpretations

Reflections

- Second focus group discussion with BWAs
- Tabling of main issues raised by WWAs
- Reflecting on previous discussions
- Recording of new insights arising from this

Phase 2: Action Steps

Action Step 1

- Mixed group discussion of issues raised in previous discussions
- Discussion of the interpretation of different and similar experiences
- Carving a common ground

Action step 2

- BWAs meet again
- Reflect on the insights gained in the mixed group discussion
- Discussion of lessons learnt from the previous discussion
- Reconstruction and deconstruction of previous perceptions
- Planning for the dissemination of the insights gained

Action step 3

- E-mail to HODs to share the findings of the study
- Request for input from HODs

Action step 4

- Presentation of the findings at the faculty Equity Committee
- Presentation of the findings at the Central Equity Committee
- Presentation at the Critical Discourse forum

Figure 2.6: My Action Research Model

(i) Phase 1 (problem identification and planning stage)

The problem identification phase comprised of my own experiences and the experiences of BWAs and WWAs, gathered in focus groups and individual interviews, as well as document analysis. In this section, I am reporting on the responses to the questions, what is my (our) concern and how do we know whether our concern is a problem that warrants action?

My problem identification phase started with my concern about social transformation within the UFS, which was based on my personal experiences (cf. Chapter 1).My observation of the issues that needed attention within the UFS for the institution to progress smoothly in handling social transformation and my desire to contribute towards transformation at my institution led me to consider deeply how the other constituencies perceived their environment. My own experiences had left me crippled in many areas of my work as a lecturer and negatively affecting my functioning within my workspace. I became aware of how lacking voice and agency in the changes effected in my institution affected my perception of the overall university culture as disabling and hostile. I felt that I needed to take action towards engaging others who might be sharing similar experiences. It is due to this that I involved people who shared similar characteristics as I; the characteristics of being a black woman in this study. This was my way of finding out how others perceive the UFS and attempts being made in attaining social transformation.

My quest to find out how the black women academics (BWAs) also perceived the UFS led me to carry out a preliminary investigation. For this, I conducted individual interviews with eight BWAs and posed this broad question to them: **'Thinking of transformation, what does it mean to you and what issues do you associate with this concept at the UFS?'** This question elicited much information from the women academics and I noticed that they also felt that they lacked voice and agency within their transforming institution. They raised their concerns around issues such as access, retention, stereotypes, lack of mentoring and negative subtle racial treatment that they received from their colleagues in their faculties. The data also indicated that the way they perceived the institutional culture negatively affected these women's functioning within the university. This gave me an indication that **my concern** was genuine. I decided to embark on AR to lead both the women and

myself towards an emancipatory process of making meaning of our work environment by engaging in discussions in which we could share our experiences and take action by first challenging our thoughts and sharing our feelings with the wider university.

The actual study started with a focus group discussion (FGD) with a different group of BWAs. The reason why I used different participants than my preliminary investigation was to get a fresh perspective from other BWAs as well. In the discussion, I asked the BWAs to provide their own interpretation of transformation and against the different interpretations, each one of them reflected on how the institution itself was transforming and how this transformation fulfilled the BWAs' expectation of how their institution should be progressing. From our different interpretations, we identified the main issues that we considered most important for social transformation in our institution. To identify these points in order of importance, I employed the nominal group method. The way in which I embarked on the nominal group approach is explained below.

- ***1st focus group discussion (28th May 2012)***

To begin the discussion, I clarified the purpose of the study, which was to identify the BWAs' perception of social transformation within the university. In order to ensure that everybody had a way in which they interpreted social transformation and for me to understand how BWAs defined social transformation, I asked each member to give her own understanding of the phenomenon, especially as it applied to their work environment. The following question was a broad question posed to them:

What is your understanding of social transformation within the UFS?

I had brought a flipchart to the discussion room and I jotted down the definitions as they came from the group. Through the nominal group method, I asked BWAs to identify similar main issues from the definitions. We also wrote these issues down as a group. These were the issues emanating from our broad definitions of social transformation. I then asked them to look at the list and reflect on which one was the most important to them. I asked them to do this individually in writing. Each one of them wrote the issue that was most important to her with regard to social transformation on a piece of paper. After they had finished, we compared what they

had and ordered our items in the order of importance according to the majority and then began to discuss them in that order. The next questions therefore followed on the first one:

> ***Reflecting on the items that we have listed, what are your experiences and perceptions regarding social transformation at the University of the Free State?***

At this stage, each participant narrated her own experiences and shared with the group how these experiences contributed to how she perceived social transformation at the UFS. Although the BWAs at this first FGD did not seem comfortable to share their more personal lived experiences of social transformation at the UFS, I gathered very rich data by getting to understand that among the BWAs themselves, interpretations of what transformation meant to them differed. The discussion was a very open in-depth discussion in which participants started interrogating and challenging each other's perceptions. Since the discussions seemed to evolve around these women's perceptions of themselves as blacks and women, I found it necessary to ask this question:

> ***How do you associate your experiences with gender and race transformation at your institution?***

This question too elicited many issues that the women felt infringed on the race and gender issues.

At this stage participants were encouraged to keep diaries in which they would keep record of the discussions and the main issues that they would learn in each phase as the study progressed (Cresswell, 2008; McNiff &Whitehead, 2010).These diaries and the records were to be used in the last phase, where participants were expected to show how they had grown throughout the study and what lessons they had learnt as they deconstructed their environment and perceptions.

As I was also a participant researcher, I too kept my own diary (cf. Appendix 5).In the diary, I wrote a clear record of the discussions so that I could also report on how the discussions helped me grow and deconstruct my thoughts and perceptions regarding

transformation at the UFS. The intention of taking notes, as encouraged by Greef (2002:317), was also for the purposes of member checks before I could analyse the data. The notes that I took during the discussions included the seating arrangement and the order in which the participants were speaking so that I could code the participants easily. On-verbal behaviours were also important to note, because they gave a lot of information, especially in terms of unspoken feelings and perceptions. Tape recording was also used for this purpose and participants' permission was sought before they were audio taped.

It was also during this phase where roles were clarified. My role as a facilitator in the discussions was tabled, but I assured the participants that this role did not mean that I knew the answers to the questions or that I was an expert in the discussion, but just a co-researcher. I therefore clarified that I would not be expecting specific responses to the questions that would arise in the discussion. This helped them to ease up as they realised that they could share their stories without judgment from anybody. Their role as co-workers in my study was emphasised and that they would feel free to air their feelings should they feel uncomfortable at any stage of the discussions.

Participants were expected to give their specific experiences of their gender and race dealings and experiences within their transforming institution. These were not only confined to the negative experiences, but also the **positive experiences** that they had had. This was done because the aim of the study was to build on the positive aspects in contributing towards social transformation at the university. To ensure that the positive aspects were also highlighted, after all the concerns around social transformation had been discussed, participants were asked to reflect on the positive experiences and to also write them down on the paper that had been provided. The question here was:

> ***What are your positive experiences of transformation with regard to your institution's attempts towards social transformation?***

I asked this question to enable the participants to reflect on their negative experiences with the positive moves that the institution was making to ensure that the institution accommodated everybody and that all the constituencies felt a sense

of belonging in their institution. I did not ask the participants to discuss these positive aspects in the group, but I asked them to take the task as an exercise that would help us to consider the efforts the university is making and base our reflections on this.

Although I needed the participants to give narratives of both their negative and positive experiences during the focus group discussions, I did not steer the discussions towards what I wanted to hear. I practiced the following interpersonal skills that helped me gather information that reflected the perceptions of this group. McNiff and Whitehead (2010) recommend the following skills as important for action researchers:

i) Listening: this involves using direct questions that aim at stating the 'you' rather than the 'I' and avoiding the use of 'no' as the person is narrating their stories. During the discussion, I had to listen more and talk less. I let the women academics debate the issues on their own without interfering and I would only participate when I felt I needed clarification. This made the study not only about my own experiences and myself, but also about the experiences of the other people who were co-participants in my living journey.

ii) Managing: this means managing myself not the participant (**attend all meetings, be punctual, be aware of people's sensitiveness).**I applied this by being in the discussion room before any participant so that I could welcome everybody. During the discussion, I became very alert regarding discomfort, as participants were also asking each other questions. I would intervene if I felt one of them felt irritated by a question and assured her that she did not need to respond if she felt uncomfortable with the question.

iii) Collaborating: trying to understand my relationship with the participants and trying to understand their opinion, which helped me to also reflect on my own disposition as a BWA in relation to the other people. I had to continuously remind myself that the study was not only about me trying to improve my own environment, but about 'us' deconstructing our thoughts and environment.

(i) Interviews (Further problem identification)

Semi-structured interviews were used as the secondary source of data collection for this study. They were secondary to focus group discussions, because they were only used to follow up on issues that needed clarification, but seemed too sensitive for the participants to clarify at the group discussions. To ensure that the follow-up allowed for comfortable discussions, I conducted these one-on-one interviews in each participant's own office space, unless the participant stated that she would wish to do so at a different venue, which was the case with one participant. The interview schedule I used for the interviews was different for each participant and was drawn up after the first focus group discussion. The different schedules addressed specific points I followed up on for each participant.

- **Individual interviews with white women academics**

I had planned to involve our white women academic colleagues in a similar focus group discussion that I had with the BWAs. It became difficult to find the time that would be convenient for all four WWAs who had volunteered to become part of my study, due to lectures clashing with the times that we could use for the discussion. I therefore conducted one-on-one interviews with them. I asked each one of them the same question I had asked the BWAs:

> ***Reflecting on gender and race transformation at your institution, what are your experiences and perceptions regarding social transformation at the University of the Free State?***

I asked this question so that I could gather similar information from these women as I had from the BWAs. The responses from this group and the responses I received from BWAs also helped me to develop questions for the next phase of the mixed group discussion of BWAs and WWAs.

(ii) Phase 2: Action Steps (What can we do to improve our own practice?)

There were a number of steps that were taken as action steps towards improving our environment and challenging our thoughts. These steps entailed a mixed group discussion where the women academics (BWAs and WWAs) discussed ways in which they could improve their work environment by suggesting changes at the institutional level, the faculty level and the personal level; the reflections by BWAs, which assisted them in challenging their own perceptions; a request for input from the faculties' heads of departments (HODs), which served as a mechanism for raising awareness and the voices of the women academics; and the seminar in which findings from the study were shared. These action steps are discussed below.

- **Action step 1 (mixed group discussion)**

The mixed group discussion was conducted with six BWAs and three WWAs who were involved in the first focus group discussion and individual interviews. Although I had my first FGD with eight BWAs, I could not find a time that would suit all of them for this phase. The other two BWAs had other academic commitments that prevented them from joining us in the mixed group discussion and one WWA was also at a conference on the day of the discussion. I should point out that it was very difficult to organise this phase, because of the time factor. Eventually I made an arrangement with some of the BWAs, who had also indicated that they had other commitments on that day, to sit through the discussion for half the time or just an hour, while some of them arrived some minutes after we had started. This impacted very much on the discussion, which I had anticipated would include everybody's input. We had planned to discuss ways in which we could address our concerns raised at the previous discussions. To make up for the part of the discussions that some of the women had missed, I organised a telephonic discussion with each one of them so that I could also get their input.

When we started, I indicated that the discussion was a follow-up on the concerns raised at the first FGD and the interviews. I had listed the areas of concern on the hand-out and gave each a hand-out like below:

Previous discussion through FGD and individual interviews was the ***problem identification phase - 'what is our concern?***

Problems that were identified:

- ***Language*** *barriers*
- ***White male domination***
- ***Lack of voice*** *for women in senior positions*
- ***Stereotypes*** *and tensions in horizontal interpersonal relationships*
- *Stringent Promotion criteria*
- *Need for substantial* ***Capacity Building: mentoring and supervision***
- *Quality* ***Access***
- ***Retention***

Today we will bring the discussion to, 'What can we do to address our concerns?/ how can we improve our work situation?'

At:

- *An institutional level*
- *Faculty level*
- *Personal level*

Although I handed them the above list, we did not discuss the problems listed in the order that was presented. I noticed that all the problems intersected with each other in such a way that during the discussion of one point, we would find ourselves already discussing another point on the list. The discussion on 'white male domination' was, for example discussed in conjunction with 'promotions' and 'women in senior positions'.

Although I had anticipated some discomfort during this phase due to the mix of the BBWs and the WWAs, the opposite turned out to be true. The discussion proceeded smoothly with each participant willing to contribute and no one dominating the discussion. I believe that the calm environment was created by the fact that I did not make this a phase where participants had to raise their concerns, but it was a phase where everybody had to ask herself, '**how do I become an agent of change?** 'As could be seen in the discussion guide that I distributed, everybody had to think how

they could contribute to social transformation at the three levels – institutional, faculty and personal. For the institutional level, the participants had to make suggestions for improved institutional practice (cf. Section 2 Chapter 4). As far as the faculty and personal level were concerned, the focus was on the self and how each of us could transform to bring about positive changes within our faculties.

I did not ask the questions, but expected answers from the participants and everybody felt at ease to talk. They just looked through the discussion guide that I had drawn up and continued with the interactive discussions that brought out very rich data. I should point out that my supervisor was present during the discussion to take part in the reflective exercise of how we could move our institution forward. Her presence did not influence the discussion in any way, as most of the participants did not even know her as my study leader. She joined as a participant observer and took part in the action in which the participants were getting to understand one another, not as divided others, but united colleagues whose objective was to see the UFS as a transformed institution for everybody. She also helped to take the notes and observed the non-verbal communication during the discussion.

My role was mainly to keep time as we had agreed at the beginning of the discussion that we would use ten minutes for each point. Time keeping became a challenge for me as issues were intertwined. We did, however, manage to cover all our listed points in the one hour and thirty minutes that we had scheduled. The limitation was that we did not have time left for reflection on how we had grown in the process of our action research. I sent each participant a follow-up mail to get their reflection on how the discussions had helped them grow within their social space.

- **Action Step 2: Reflection**

Although it was stated in Chapter 1 that BWAs would reconvene for the reflections after the mixed group discussion, this did not happen. The workload and other commitments prevented participants from meeting. I decided to request them to send their reflections by e-mail. These reflections were on the evaluation of the whole AR process that we had gone through as well as an indication of how they had benefitted as individuals from the discussions they had had with colleagues. This stage served as a response to the question of how we had grown throughout the AR

period as participants and how our growth could assist us in changing our own practice. The questions that I posed by e-mail were:

- **After our discussion with our white colleagues, how have our perceptions changed or been influenced by our colleagues' perceptions and how do we now construct transformation with the insights gained from the mixed group discussion**?
- **How have we grown and how have the discussions helped us deconstruct our environment?**

❖ Action Step 3: Input from HODs

After the collection and analysis of data from individual interviews, focus group discussion with BWAs and the mixed group discussion, I mailed the findings to the heads of departments (HODs) to request their input towards the areas of concern as raised by the women academics. This step was taken as an endeavour to raise the voices of the women academics in the group, which could act on the points raised within their departments. This was an attempt to take action with the aim of improving practice. The 'request for input' was sent by e-mail to all HODs in the faculties of Education, Humanities, Economic and Management Sciences. I compiled the list of all HODs from the UFS website. I purposefully selected these three faculties, because research in their faculties is geared towards the social sciences and I believed that the HODs would understand the findings of my study and the way in which I collected data in my quest to try to understand human behaviour. I did not send my request to the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences because of the different nature of their research, which I thought would impede understanding of the angle that I took in my study.

❖ Action Step 4: The Faculty and Central Equity Committees

As another step towards taking action with the aim of improving practice and contributing to social transformation at the UFS, I shared the findings of this study with the Faculty of Education and the Central Equity Committee. For the Faculty's committee, I wrote a letter to the Chairperson of the Committee requesting time to speak at the meeting. Getting time to speak was not a problem but I had to send him a copy of the issues I wanted to present so that this could be attached to the agenda. I prepared a one-page presentation of the main findings of my study and e-mailed this to him. Although the Committee's first meeting was postponed, a copy of my findings was already with the Chairperson of the Committee. He promised to share this with the other members and they would discuss another possibility of a slot in which I would share the findings in person.

For the Central Equity Committee, I approached the Chairperson of the Committee and indicated my interest in sharing the findings of the study. I had to explain what my study was about and how I thought the findings would benefit the UFS in its endeavour to transform. She was keen to understand how the BWAs perceived the institution and suggested that I presented this to the whole committee. I should point out again that this was not a simple task since the Committee consisted of the professors who were knowledgeable about the transformation issues and I was only an aspiring PhD student. I took this as a challenge and as a way in which I could get an opportunity to present the voice of the others to the people who had power to act on the needs and to also contribute to any change that might stem from the presentation.

2.2.1.4 Data analysis

For data collected from the individual interviews and focus group discussions, I did a content analysis using ATLASti as an instrument that made it easy for me to form categories and themes. ATLASti is a commercial qualitative data analysis program that researchers use to segment, code, categorise and develop themes for their data sets. In my analysis I used an 'abductive' approach (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen &Karlsson 2002; Lombrozo, 2012).An abductive analysis involves an understanding of the theory that underpins one's study, as well as a clear understanding of the literature around the focus of the study, so that it would be easy for the researcher to base the analysis on the broader themes that are already known. Lombrozo (2012) indicates that abduction relies on the existence or quality of an explanation to guide inference, an idea that has since been pursued both theoretically and empirically. This explanation may give one the idea that abduction is combining deduction and abduction together. This may be true. The strength of induction, however, lies in the fact that the researcher should have an ability to be creative in the use of the themes drawn up and form associations with the reality of the data she or he has to work with (Danermark, *et al*. 2002).Danermark, *et al*. (2002) argue that it is from this creative reasoning and association that new ideas, that are unique to the study, could be formulated.

I found abduction the most suitable way to look at my data, because as I indicated in the earlier chapters, I would use CRT and psychosocial perspectives as my lens through which I would engage with the data. However, I did not intend to use the data just to confirm certain assumptions that arose from the two theories, but to find new guidance and direction that could lead to understanding the world of others. It is, for example the tenet of CRT that the voices of the oppressed are important in exposing the unfairness of the oppressive structures. In my analysis, I did not only look at the voices to understand how BWAs perceived the UFS, but I looked deeper into the reasons for their perception as well as the most critical question of how we, as black women academics, could challenge our own thoughts without ending up in submitting ourselves to thoughts of oppression. In this case, I looked at the research questions for segments in my data sets that were relevant to my study focus and answered my research questions, and therefore provided required responses to the questions. On the other hand, after analysing data in this way, I reviewed the

literature through the lens of the theoretical framework of my study and borrowed themes that fitted into the data sets. This aligns with Bailey and Jackson's (2003:??) contention that aspects of both inductive and deductive data analysis could be combined to look at the data in a more abductive way.

For both the individual interviews and focus group discussions, data was iteratively analysed. After every focus group discussion and interview, the tape-recorded data was transcribed and segmented and field notes were compiled into a comprehensible unit. These data sets were then, with the help of ATLASti, used to develop codes and categories. The specific steps I followed in analysing my data are:

a) Step 1

The first step of data analysis involved document analysis. As I have already indicated in Section 3.2.2.2, documents from different HEIs and the government were analysed in which themes were borrowed from the literature and data fitted into those themes. What was important in this step, is that I did not only fit the information I collected into the pre-existing themes. I compared and contrasted information from both the government and HEIs for each point and asked questions on the discrepancies I had noticed so that I could take this forward to the seminar to use for recommendations for institutional improvement.

b) Step 2

Step 2 involved an analysis of data collected through the individual interviews and focus group discussions (both black and white women academics).As has already been indicated, data in this case was analysed iteratively. After every data collection, I sent the audio data to a postgraduate student that helped me to transcribe data from the audio recorder. I checked the accuracy of the transcribed data by reading rigorously through the transcribed data and listening to the audio recorder. I then kept these as my data sets to use when I analyse data on ATLASti. As I read through and listened to the data sets, I compiled categories and sub-categories drawn mainly from the data. Through the help of ATLASti, I constructed an analytical memo for the recurring themes. I later compared these categories to the ones I had in the document analysis and noted the similarities.

c) Step 3

In Step 3, I compared and contrasted the themes that emerged from the empirical data to those from the document analysis. This was aimed at finding out to what extent the women academics recognised the efforts taken by their institution to transform and how they actually perceived such efforts. The actual narratives of the women academics (both white and black) were used as a basis on which critical areas of improvement for the institution, as perceived by BWAs, would have to be done, if social transformation should be achieved.

d) Step 4

This step involved analysing data mainly from the seminar. The debates of the participants and how these differed from the views raised by BWAs were the primary focus. This data helped me/us (BWAs) in our final reflections. It is at this stage where my analysis from the personal angle involved mainly what I had learnt and how the whole process of AR had helped me to grow and challenge my own thoughts towards my work environment.

This analysis was done within the alignment of the CRTs' four tenets (cf. 3.2.1) and the model below was used as my unit of analysis. The model was compiled using the two frameworks that were a basis of the study; the CRT and psychosocial perspectives. Using the two as a lens through which I looked at the data gave me the opportunity to also notice the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches and to appreciate how combining them helped me to look at the perceptions of the BWAs holistically. Using both was, therefore, important as they both complemented each other. Specifically important was using psychosocial perspectives to complement CRT because through these perspectives, both psychological and social (environmental) reasons that accounted for their perceptions of the BWAs perceptions were analysed and reasons were provided for their feelings. The model below has many overlaps and commonalities in the issues identified but the discussion of the issues in Chapter 4 clarifies how the issues raised by BWAs intertwine to form a web of factors responsible for the perceptions of this group regarding social transformation at their institution.

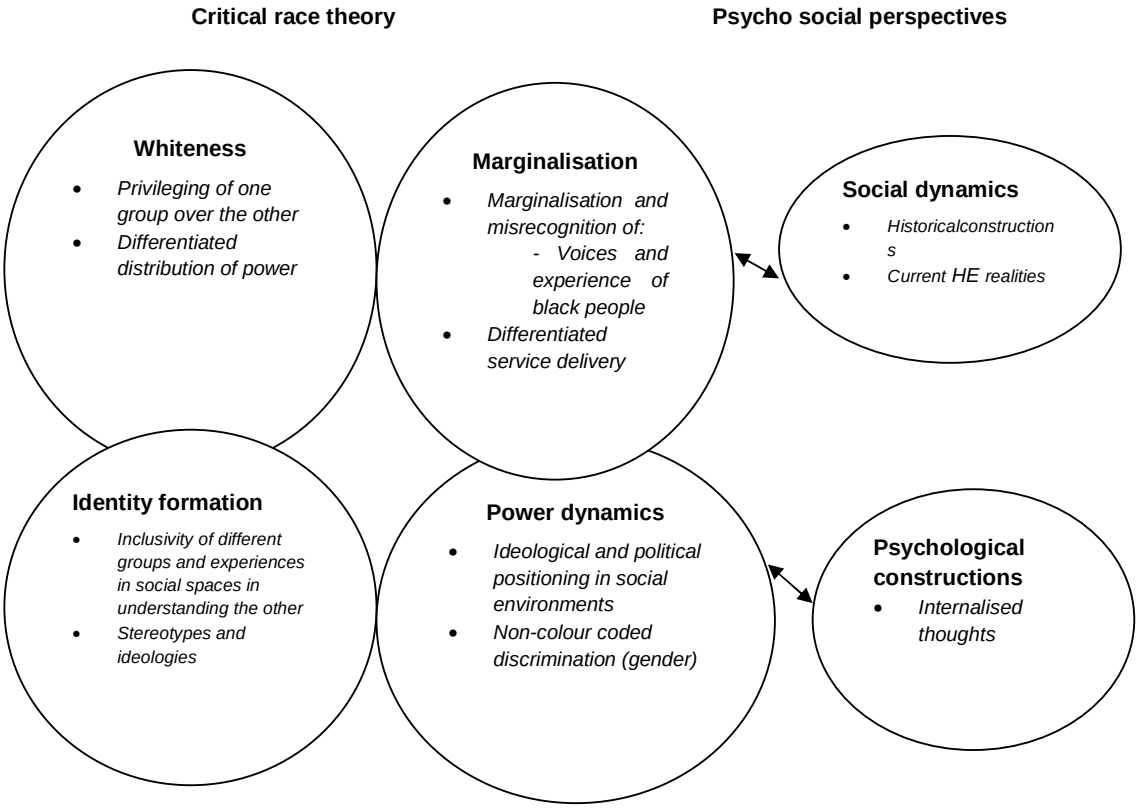


Figure 2.7: Units of analysis

I am quite aware that other scholarly units of analysis exists that I could have used in my study, but I decided to develop this one because the model links well with the whole study in terms of the theoretical base as proposed in Chapter 1. On the one hand, some people could argue for example that Bourdieu's Habitus (Goldthorpe, 2007) could fit well as a tool for analysis in my study because of the elements present in the model that seem to explain issues that the BWAs raised in this study well. The elements in Bourdieu's Habitus are cultural capital, social fields and power dynamics to name a few and are also quite strong elements that surface in my study. However, the elements of CRT have served the same purpose that Bourdieu's model could have served. On the other hand, using the CRT tenets as my units of analysis covered the interpretation of narratives quite well in that issues of voice (telling of lived experiences) which are central to the CRT approach are given an in-depth recognition, especially the voices of 'people of colour' (BWAs in my study) (Bell, 2007).

One other model that I could have adopted in analysing the narratives from the women academics could have been Clandinin's narrative analysis (cf. 1.4).This

model looks at the role that place, temporality and sociality play in forming perceptions. It could have been a good model to use in accounting for the reasons behind the perceptions of BWAs. For example, if BWAs reported negative perceptions regarding social transformation at the UFS, one could look at the role of the historical realities of the UFS in shaping these perceptions (temporality) and pay attention to how the social environment of the UFS could be further perpetuating the negative feelings. I however found that the psychosocial perspectives covered these aspects well in that the psychological factors as well as the social factors accounted for in the psychosocial perspectives provide a clear framework for the reasons regarding the perceptions of BWAs. Therefore, in using my constructed model as shown above, the sub-categories that I developed from the focus group discussions and individual interviews' data fitted well into the tenets. It should be re-emphasised though that the analysis was not just a 'fitting in' process but I endeavoured to find meaning in the data to explain fully the perceptions of this constituency.

2.3 Validity/Trustworthiness

Validity is defined by Springer (2010:152) and Johnson and Christensen (2012:245) as the degree to which evidence and theory supports the interpretation of data. It refers to the correctness or truthfulness of the interpretation of data. Although, in qualitative studies such as my study, validity is taken not to apply, the concept of trustworthiness, which is similar to validity, is employed. Trustworthiness, like validity, refers to the extent to which the results of the study are plausible, credible, trustworthy and defensible (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:264). In other words, the researcher has to ensure that the interpretation provided for the study is genuine and supported by evidence from the data sets. According to Johnson and Christensen (2012:264) a threat to trustworthiness in qualitative studies is bias.

To curb the researcher's bias in my study and to ensure that I was aware of how much my own personal view could affect how I interpreted the data, I used reflexivity. This refers to engaging in personal reflection about my predispositions and becoming more aware of how much of myself and my experiences surface within my interpretation of the data. I understand that, as I was a participant in my study and

also shared similar experiences with BWAs, these could interfere with how I understood the perceptions of my study participants and could influence me to find what I wanted to find in the responses provided by the participants. I believed that I could counteract this influence if I could strive to look for information from the participants that could also negate my own expectation about how BWAs viewed social transformation within their institution. This stemmed from my understanding that, no matter how similar our experiences as BWAs might be, there might have been individual differences in how we perceived social transformation at the UFS.

Furthermore, as much as the data was subjected mainly to my own interpretation using the CRT and psychosocial perspectives, I ensured that I reported accurately on the information provided by BWAs. I did this by providing excerpts of the transcribed data to support any claim that I made regarding my analysis of data. I also did member-checks (Johnson &Christensen, 2012:266), by presenting my report to the participants to verify that my report reflected their own perceptions and experiences. I did this before publishing the results of my study. Using critical readers also helped validate my claims. I gave some of my data to my critical friends and asked them to look at the themes that I had drawn from the data and criticize them. The themes that I drew from the data were also compared to the literature findings regarding the discussed issue and how it manifested in a similar situation.

I believe that using the three methods of data collection (focus group discussions, individual interviews and document analysis was a form of triangulation that enabled me to gather in-depth information and assess the discrepancies within what participants said in focus groups as opposed to the information they provided during a one-on-one discussion. In addition, engaging the participants in more than one focus group discussion is considered a form of data triangulation that I used to ensure that I collected credible results.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the broad approach that I employed for this study. I have clearly indicated that I adopted a critical constructivist approach to studying BWAs' perceptions of transformation at the UFS. The reason for this, as I have stated, was to understand how the women academics constructed their reality, being influenced by their own psychological and social context. The critical approach then helped me to assist the women in finding voice and agency to challenge their own perceptions about their work environment as well as challenging the power dynamics within their institution. It has been indicated that the theoretical perspectives adopted in this study fitted well with this approach and the reason for this believe have been provided. Using PAR as the design for this study created the platform where BWAs convened to deliberate on their perception and together try to deconstruct and reconstruct their work environment. The diagram below summarises the whole methodology for this study and indicates that the critical constructivist approach encompasses both my theoretical approach and my study design, which is at the heart of my study.

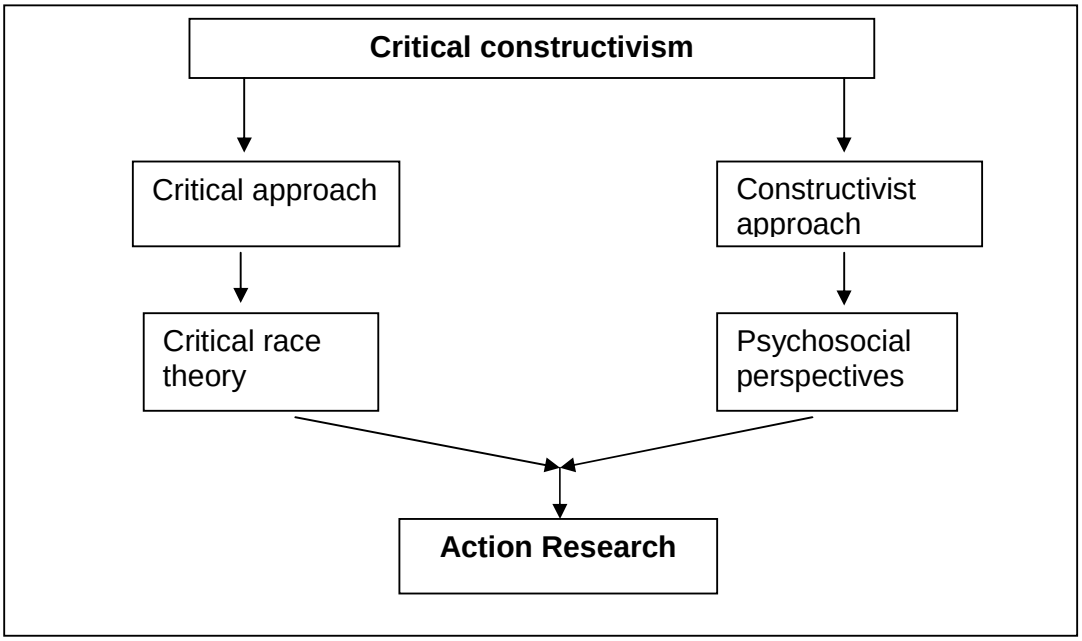


Figure 2.8: Summary of the methodology for the study

The next chapter draws on the literature to provide an overview of different views of scholars interested in the area of transformation in higher education both internationally and within the SAHE area. The literature is reviewed to lay a basis on which issues arising from the empirical study could be analysed. Understanding the experiences of other women academics across higher education, as reported in literature, helped to integrate the information gathered through the empirical study and that of other women academics around the globe. This addresses the first research question, which explores the state of social transformation in the broader HEIs but focuses more specifically on the SAHE area around which the study is demarcated.

Chapter 3: The face of social transformation in the South African higher education arena and the UFS: my meaning making process

3.1 Introduction

This thesis grounds itself in the perceptions of black women academics towards social transformation within the historically white Afrikaans-medium universities in South Africa and specifically at the University of the Free State (UFS).

In addressing the first research question: 'What is the face of social transformation in SAHEIs and at the UFS in particular', the focus on the UFS, as an institution, is primarily due to the fact that the current study takes an approach of action research (AR) aimed at taking action against a localised problem; in this case social transformation as experienced by people within a higher education institution. I as a researcher embedded in the research have been driven by my experiences within the same institution (cf. Chapter 1, Section 1.1) and my interest in assisting in the deconstruction of my own thoughts and that of the participants' thoughts and beliefs.

The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to clarify the theoretical concepts and target group involved in this study, as well as the underpinning theory and the relationship between various concepts used in the study in relation to social transformation.

Against the background of the preliminary investigation in the previous chapter (cf. Section 1.3), the challenges that black women academics (BWAs) perceived as hampering the positive progress of social transformation at the UFS, and the various facets of this study were unpacked in this chapter. Also briefly highlighted in the previous chapter is what social transformation entails as conceptualised in the South African literature on transformation (Badat, 2010; DoE, 1997 & 2008). A more detailed conceptualisation of this phenomenon is dealt with in this chapter, relating the South African context to the international higher education context with the aim of

highlighting the similarities and differences constituting the uniqueness of **South African higher education** (SAHE).

The involvement of **black women academics** in this study is also accounted for in this chapter by providing the history of women within the wider global higher education and the broader South African higher education context, narrowing it down to the UFS. The history of black women in global academe, wider African academe and SAHE is also discussed.

The **race and gender** comparison and contrast of the global and local context that I discuss in this chapter is aimed at establishing how wide-spread the challenge of social transformation is globally, so that similar and different trends in the challenges HEIs both in South Africa and globally face with regard to **social transformation** could be brought to the fore. In this way, I believe that the uniqueness of the South African higher education context will be seen. It should be noted that throughout the discussion in this chapter, the theoretical basis of the whole study, namely the **Critical Race Theory** (CRT) and **Psychosocial perspectives** (cf. Section 1.2),is kept in mind so that the arguments within the chapter can be placed within the appropriate theoretical basis that informs the study.

A more in-depth discussion of the theoretical approach to the study was discussed in the previous chapter. Below, I am presenting a conceptual framework which shows the outline of this chapter and the ordering of the concepts as they are discussed in the chapter.

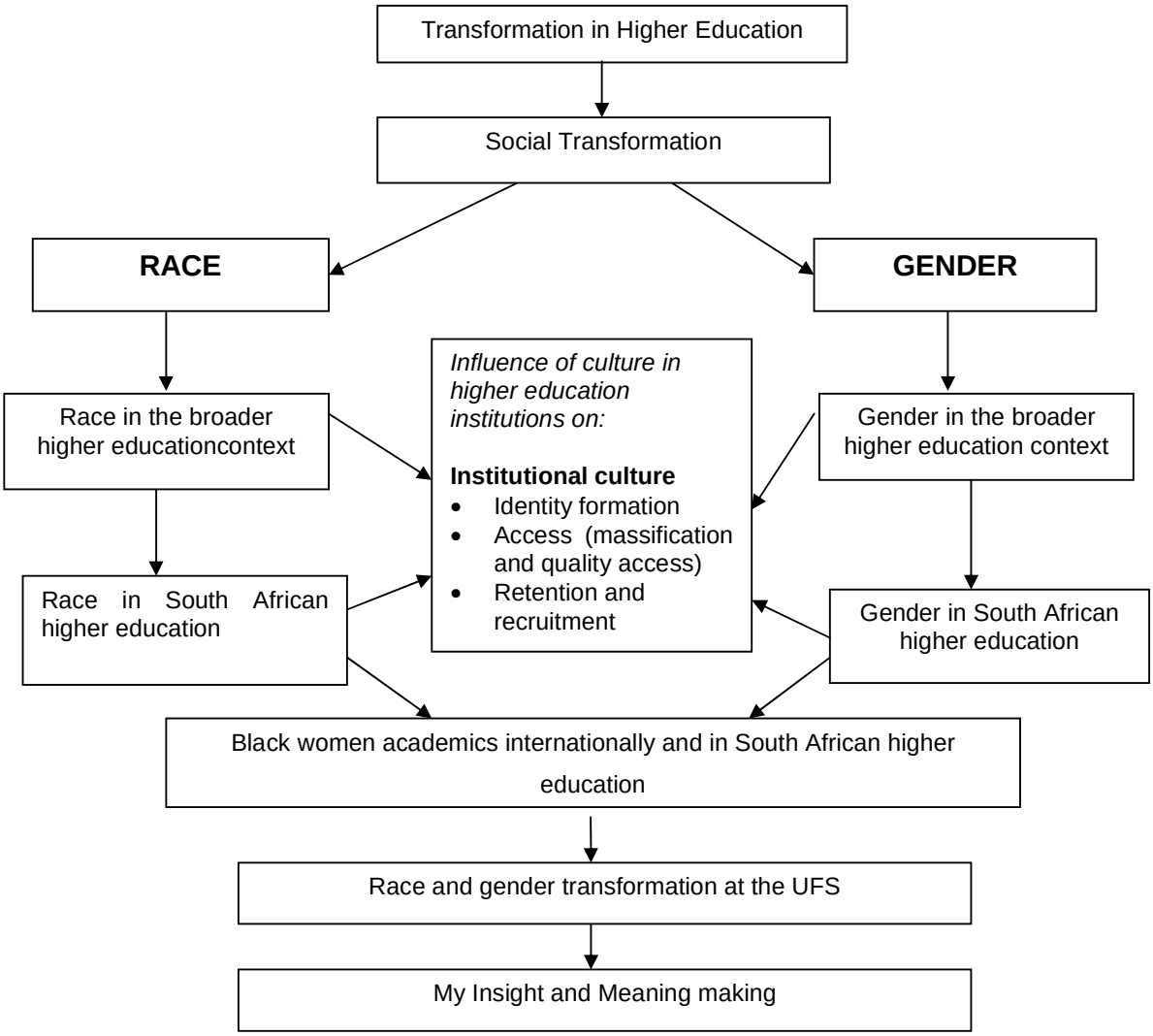


Figure 3.1: Framework of discussions for Chapter 3

3.2 Social transformation in higher education

Transformation of higher education is a topic of great debate both in SAHE and international higher education (HESA, 2011; Horsthemke, 2009; Mather, 2007). Harper and Furtado (2007:8) define transformation as "*the type of change that affects the institutional culture; that, which is pervasive and deep, is intentional and occurs over time."* On the one hand, deep change as envisaged in the above quote reflects a shift in values, not only espoused values, but also enacted values and those that underlie daily operations within institutions. On the other hand, pervasive change involves a situation whereby this change is felt by everybody within the

institution and is reflected in the daily work of the faculties as well as the administration.

Badat (2008) conceptualises transformation as change that entails processes of improvement, reform, reconstruction and development. In such a change there is dissolution of existing social relations, policies and practices, which means that successful transformation should show the intentionality of the institution to construct a culturally affirming environment for all and experiences that facilitate harmonious relationships within constituencies. As Badat (2008) further states, transformation connotes the intention of institutions to recreate and consolidate new social relations and practices. Haper and Hurtado (2007) further argue that true transformation should be distinguishable from any other change within institutions. For them, normal change only involves minor adjustments (sometimes they could be deep) that continually happen in academia and may only be limited to one programme area or unit, while transformation aspires to change the whole campus climate and often takes into consideration the minorities and powerless, who might feel silenced when changes are effected on their campuses. It is in this situation that Badat (2008) distinguishes among three forms of change that can happen in higher education:

i) Change as **improvement**: this type of change involves or is associated with changing the existing policies or practices in a limited or minor way. Institutions engage in improvement of the existing structures to achieve specific goals, but do not bring any substantive changes to the established policies and practices.
ii) Change as **reform:** institutions engaging in the reformation of their structures make more substantial changes in their current policies and practices. This may involve a recast of the structures, but they remain circumscribed within the existing dominant social relations within the institution. Thus, although the changes made may be far-reaching, they do not displace the prevailing structures, but reproduce them in new ways and forms.
iii) **Transformational** change: involves institutional change that occurs at all levels of the institutions. As Badat (2008) notices, this change is conditioned by the inherited and changing terrain of higher education. In South Africa, for

example, the way SAHEIs are managing their spaces is still affected by the past racist and patriarchal social order. The current higher education landscape in South Africa, however, places demands on SAHEIs to run their daily business differently.

Silver (2007), and Brennan and Naidoo (2008) highlight some of the important reasons that make it mandatory for global HEIs to transform. They mention that HEIs in general need to transform so that they can address issues, such as internationalisation and globalisation, which are important if institutions have to be viable in meeting the demands of the developments in communities that they serve (DoE Education White Paper 3, 1997). They emphasise that transformation of global HEIs in these areas is important in the production of graduates that can contribute to new global economic and social developments (Duderstadt, 2007).In addition, the new demands on the provision of community service and engagement urge institutions to align with the needs of the communities. As a result, HEIs have to carve their community service programmes to meet these demands and have to consistently change the way in which they conduct their daily business.

Apart from the urge for HEIs to transform to meet global demands in research, community service and curriculum, most HEIs seem to be compelled to transform by the mandates passed by governments (Eckel, 2001; Shackleton, Riordan & Simonis, 2006).This seems to especially be the case within higher education in South Africa. For a long time, HE issues in South Africa were driven mostly by the apartheid regime. Bunting (2006) indicates that before 1994, the apartheid government ensured that SAHEIs served as ‘creatures of the state’ to disseminate and generate knowledge for the purpose defined by a socio-political agenda. At that time, institutions served as strong pillars for political affiliations (Cloete, 2006).However, the democratic government in 1994 mandated SAHE to take a turn to accommodate the new social and political frameworks of the country. Policies have been formulated and SAHEIs have to operationalise these transformation policies set out (DoE Education White Paper 3, 1997).As much as the policies stress the importance of HEIs to transform academically, they also emphasise the need for social transformation.

As has been briefly indicated in Chapter 1, social transformation entails change that takes place within the social environment of HEIs (Eckel, 2001).According to Eckel, social transformation has to be infused into the daily lives of the institutions' constituencies for the smooth functioning and running of the institutions. As a way of ensuring this, institutions should seriously consider the way in which they handle social issues, such as staff and student access, recruitment and retention of staff along the lines of race and gender and institutional culture and practices. Thaver and Thaver (2010) indicate that if institutions engage in transformative actions, they will be negating the previous social order in the established structures, bringing relief to the deeply embedded social relation within HE (DoE, 2008).Although Daniel (2009) argues for social transformation that does not only focus on particular constituencies, but that all faculties within academia face stressors that go beyond racial and gender issues, Eckel (2001) points out that social transformation should be pervasive and should focus on race and gender disparities, because the two phenomena seem to hamper transformation attempts by HEIs. This means that transformation should be connected mostly to the ideas of social justice, which, among other issues, entail equity in terms of race and gender. This idea is congruent with the demands outlined in the South African Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997), which clearly indicate that transformation in SAHE should redress past inequalities and serve the new social order as well as respond to new realities. Shackleton, Riordan and Simonis (2006) argue that one key component of social transformation in SAHEIs should be increasing the number of black female staff members participating in academia, because SAHEIs still face the inequitable distribution of access and other opportunities for staff with regard to race and gender. The social issues that have been mentioned in this paragraph are discussed with specific relevance to SAHEIs.

3.3 Race as a social construct

The concept of race as a biological, social and a cultural construct has dominated discourses of race among social scientists (Bell, 2007; Castagno, 2006; Foote, 2004; Park, 2011).Shulman and Glasgow (2010) state that as a biological concept race could be used to refer to racial essences that correlate outward morphological traits, such as skin colour, body structure and other physical features. Some social

scientists (Park, 2011) have, however, noticed that, as a biological construct, race maps poorly onto any actual patterns of human genetic variation. It is the contention of these social scientists that race is more a social than a biological construct and it is from this understanding of race that I also discuss issues pertaining to black women academics and their perception of social transformation within an institution that comprises diverse race groups. These women are drawn from the black people groups, using the official categorisation of races used in South Africa, which groups blacks under three different categories of African, Indian and Coloured.

As a social and cultural construct, social scientists define race as a phenomenon that refers to and clusters different people according to their physical appearance, especially skin colour. This could be seen as confusing, especially when the meaning of race as a biological concept seems to focus on the similar aspects of physical appearance. To clarify this point, Shulman and Glasgow (ibid) concede that physical features cluster people into biological race groups. With social construction, people are, however, clustered as unequal and in this way some groups are elevated over the others. It could therefore be noted that race as a social construct is an oppressive tool that brings out inequalities among communities. Faucher and Machery (2005) concur that the concept of race is acquired from one's social environment and is imposed by political structures that favour some groups over the others. This political influence on the construction of race leads to it being a form of oppression which advantages some groups over others. Walker (2005) has noticed that race contributes very much to how people treat one another within their social contexts. He contends that the stereotypes that are levelled against groups of people, due to their racial identity, lead to some of these groups either being marginalised or privileged by the social and political structures (Shulman & Glasgow 2010).

An example of South Africa during the apartheid government shows that the classification of people into different race groups of Coloureds, Africans, Indians and whites were used to subordinate other groups and allocate certain privileges to the white nationals in this country. It is in this instance that the inequalities within the broader South African political context spilled over to SAHEIs. These institutions, as has been explained in Chapter 1, were organised in racial moulds and contributed

very much to perpetuating the stereotypes of one group by the other. I find it imperative to look into how the new political structure of SAHEIs, with institutions striving to create a new culture of diversity, is perceived by the previously marginalised groups of blacks, Indians and Coloureds. The area that I intend to look at is mainly an institutional culture and how it informs the other areas of social transformation, namely access and recruitment as well as retention. I am doing this with an intention of exploring the intentions of the SAHEIs to transform and the actual experiences of the people that are part of the changes.

3.3.1 Race and the workplace

Against the construction of race as discussed above, this part looks at how such constructions influence the entrance and success of different race groups within the workplace. Historically, workplaces or organisations have been predominantly made up of white males. According to Hendricks (2003:308), this is because white males have been seen as more superior and as a result having more expertise than other race groups. The argument that Hirsh and Lyons (2010) raise is that this picture has changed because more people of colour are entering the labour market. However, it seems that there are still challenges in the wider labour market that people of colour have to surmount. These include, among others, discrepancies in salaries between the white male colleagues and black co-workers, inability of the black workers to move up the employment ranks and a number of other disparities.

Hirsh and Lyons (2010) believe that the disparities could be due to race discrimination; in as much as the employees often claim that, for example, upward mobility is based on performance, effort and experience. The argument here is that, although this may be true, it seems that across jobs, mostly people of colour are seen as low performing, or having insufficient skills for promotions. This challenge does not seem to be a problem within particular regions only, but it is an international problem (Hellerstein & Neumark, 2008). It is reported that in the United States of America, black people are kept at lower ranks due to their perceived lack of skills and also due to their lower proficiency in English. This interconnectedness between skills and race seem to be a global issue. Commenting on a similar issue, Harries (2007) indicates that this perceived lack of skills on the part of people of colour in

Britain forces them to work three times harder than their white colleagues to prove themselves.

3.3.2 Race in the broader higher education context

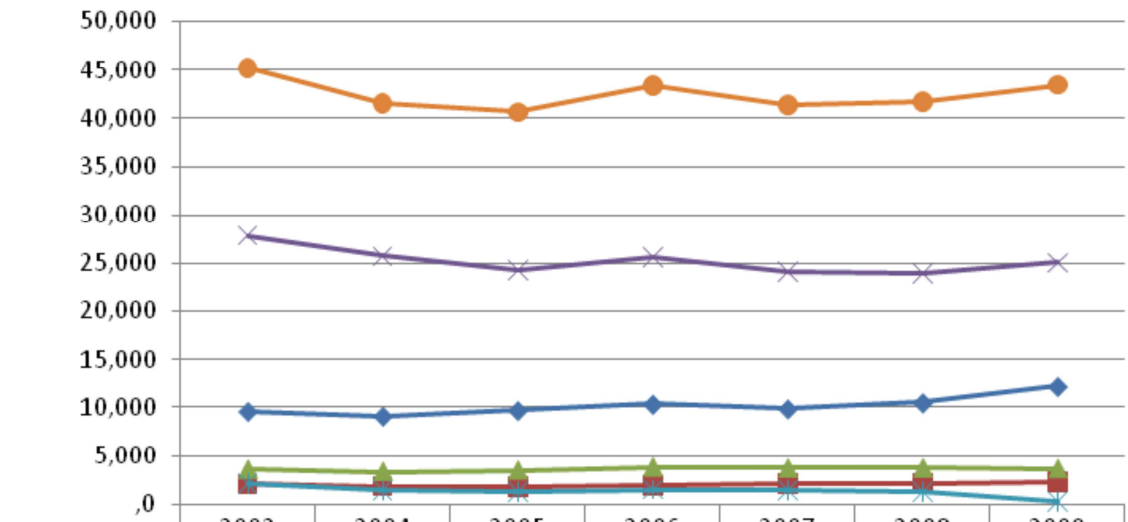
The situation, when it comes to race issues and discrimination, does not seem to be different in higher education. A study conducted in higher education in the United Kingdom reported that underrepresentation of people of colour is a problem that cuts across all institutions of higher learning (Leathwood, Maylor & Moreau, 2009).Overall, black and minority academic staff in United Kingdom higher education only accounted for 8.6% of professional staff. Out of this number, this report indicates that the percentage is even lower at the professorial level.

When discussing some of the feelings of the black academics in the United Kingdom, the same report indicates that this group reports feeling that their leadership ability is questioned when they are occupying senior positions, and that assumptions are often made that they are in junior positions even when they occupy senior positions (ibid).This shows that the stereotypes that are socially held against black people as being weak, impacts heavily on the way that people view them, even when they have broken the barrier of illiteracy into HEIs.

In the United States of America, studies conducted indicate that African American academics often have experiences of invisibility, isolation, marginalisation and racial discrimination in American higher education. This is due to assumptions that are made regarding their abilities and skills. According to Lloyd-Jones (2009), at times, even the research conducted by people of colour in the United States of America is not given the same epistemic value as that conducted by the white colleagues. Also, compared to their white colleagues, black academics often complain about being given heavy teaching loads which affect their research. They often do not get proper mentoring and support for their carrier development and find it difficult to get promotions (Leathwood, *et.al.,* 2009).

3.3.3 Race in the South African higher education context

Studies conducted in South Africa on black academics indicate that this group faces a similar plight of marginalisation in terms of access, recruitment and retention. A close look at the national demographics of higher education in South Africa indicates that there is a problem of equal access within the SAHEIs. Figure 2.1 below shows the demographics of higher education by race:



	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
African	9,615	9,127	9,711	10,352	9,875	10,494	12,169
Coloured	2,049	1,861	1,831	1,960	2,136	2,176	2,263
Indian	3,583	3,352	3,485	3,818	3,705	3,730	3,656
White	27,863	25,745	24,348	25,656	24,199	24,009	25,067
Unknown	2,107	1,435	1,280	1,537	1,468	1,329	,291
Total	45,217	41,521	40,655	43,323	41,383	41,738	43,446

Figure 3.2: All SAHE academic staff statistics in terms of race (including tutors and temporary staff)

The pattern, as reflected in Figure 2.1, shows that SAHE academic staff are still predominantly white. The figures, as taken from the HEMIS report of 2011 (DHET

2011), suggest that the majority of constituencies come from the white community. The overall number of 25,067 white academics that were present within the SAHEIs in 2009 is indicative of the problem facing this sector in terms of access. This is in comparison to the other race groups, with black academics at 12,169; Indian academics at 3,656 and Coloured academics at 2,263. According to HESA (2011), this is a worrying situation that suggests that the current situation should be dealt with if successful transformation has to be achieved; otherwise SAHEIs are running the risk of reproducing the inequalities of the apartheid era. The same concern has been raised by Mabokela (2011), who has noticed that this critical situation of access manifests itself in the under-representation of some racial groups within academia.

The statistics shown here, which reflect the trends in terms of access for academic staff in SAHEIs, seem to reflect a similar problem of underrepresentation of academics in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. When looking at the statistics over the years, some people could argue that the numbers in terms of the white academics and the other race groups seem to have changed over a six year period, with a drop in the access of white academics into the institutions and a rise of other race groups. Although this may be the case, when one looks at the total number of academics by 2009, for example, the white academics still dominate the academia. The argument I am making in this case is that, although there is an improvement in the intake of other groups into academia, there is still very much that needs to be done to ensure that the higher education department's goal to reach equality and equity is realised (DoE, 1997).

Of major concern within SAHE, is the fact that, even after entering or gaining access and at times even occupying senior positions, black people still face disparate treatment within SAHEIs. Griesel (1999) noticed that even when black people have physically gained access into the higher education space, the problem of successful participation still remains. He indicated that SAHEIs should start considering access that has a goal for redress and equity, where all constituencies could be successful participants within academia. This similar concern was highlighted by the CHE (2004) where an issue of redress that considers success within higher education for black people was emphasised.

3.4 Gender as a social construct

Like race, gender could be both a biological and a social construct. Throughout history, women have been socially constructed as carers, nurturers, and mothers. (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009).This is in contrast to how men are constructed. They often feature as strong, providers and mentally capable. Because of these differences in the way that these two concepts are constructed, women have most often been side-lined when it comes to the labour market. Ortiz and Roscigno (2009:337) state that, viewed as mothers, women have been considered by prospective employers as less dependable, less promotable, and deserving of lower starting salaries.

According to Mor-Barak (2011), women previously formed a minority group in the workforce. Men were constructed as a group most suited to be part of the workforce due to some perceived qualities that they were believed to have, which women were considered not to have. These qualities included professional commitment of men in the workplace and vision in terms of setting strategic directions (Ibarra &Obodaru, 2009).Although the current years are, however, seeing an increase in women entering the corporate world, this does not mean that the perceived incapacity of women to handle work issues has vanished.

One other way in which the concept woman is being constructed is linked to sexual issues. Women are seen as sex toys that are meant to satisfy their male partners. According to Ortiz and Roscigno (2009:337) this construction makes employers push women to do ‘women’s work’ such as mentoring and guidance. Sometimes, women find themselves exposed to sexual harassment by their male supervisors and other co-workers. The next paragraphs discuss the challenges women face within the workplace and specifically within HEIs across the globe.

3.4.1 Women and the workplace

As has been indicated in the previous section, access of women into the labour market is still a challenge due to the stereotypes that people hold about women. However, the number of women in the paid workforce has increased in the last few decades (Small, Harris, Wilson& Atljevic, 2011; Mor-Barak, 2011). They are, however, still experiencing exclusion in a lot of workplaces. These exclusions may

be overt or covert, ranging from organisations' policies that are male-oriented (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011), to stereotypes that stem from group dynamics within organisations. In fact, according to Watts (2009), women in all workplaces face the challenge of having to fit into their work environments due to the multiplicity of roles that they have to perform.

The challenges that most women in the workforce have to face include juggling career responsibilities with family responsibilities. It has been indicated that women are constructed or socialized to play the nurturing roles in the homes. These include being wives, mothers and active community members. With all these responsibilities, it becomes difficult for women to effectively and efficiently execute the occupational roles that the taxing work environments put on them (League of Black Women, 2011; Small, *et al*., 2011). Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) notice that the multiplicity of work and personal roles that women have make it difficult for them to maintain a balance in terms of equally allocating time to the conflicting roles. This is made worse by the fact that the organisational demands often take the male-oriented route in defining the work expectation for their staff. Organisations seem not to consider the social role that the women play beside their career role and continue to expect every staff member to perform with absolute commitment.

It is due to the above-mentioned issue of dual roles that women play and the stereotypes levelled against women, that women in most countries get to be marginalised in 'gender-atypical employment areas' (Watts, 2009:38), such as engineering, mining and construction. It is believed that these areas need long working hours that women cannot manage to work and the muscular power that only men possess. As a result, employers in these areas become reluctant to employ women workers. According to Watts (2009) it is not only these areas that are reluctant to take on women as employees, but also some professional institutions that still hold the social stereotype of women as belonging to the home. It may be argued that the marginalisation of women in this case could be due to the ideologies which try to maintain male dominance.

The power struggle in terms of male dominance is mostly seen in the higher level positions which most organisations keep for men. Small, *et al*,. (2011) have noticed that women remain underrepresented in higher level positions because of feminised

stereotypes that doubt women's efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace. In fact, Ibarra and Obodaru (2009) point out that women are still a minority in top ranks, because of their perceived lack of vision in terms of setting strategic direction, inspiring other co-workers, and sensing opportunities, which are qualities that most men are perceived to have. This perception could be argued to be trying to justify the stereotypes that maintain women within the workplace as subordinate to men and deserving to remain at lower positions. A closer look at academia as a professional institution and on which my study focuses in the next section, tries to establish if women in this sector are also facing the same challenges. The section discusses issues pertaining to all women, but maintains a specific focus on black women academics as the target group in this study.

3.4.2 Women in the broader higher education context

All women in academia, regardless of race or class, face challenges in higher education (Barnes, 2007; Mabokela, 2011; Odejide, 2007; Tsikata, 2007).The challenges are around the issues of inequalities and exclusion (Morley, 2005).The inequalities and exclusion normally present themselves in these women battling to break the glass ceiling. The reasons for women academics failing to break such barriers involve pressures of balancing their social responsibilities and academic roles as well as the stereotypes that are levelled against them, which are internalised by these women and hampers their development. With regard to the internalisation of stereotypes, Mabokela (2011) indicates that it cripples these women to such an extent that they stop trying to prove themselves as equal members of the faculties. She points out that women get discouraged to even apply for the senior posts as they already feel that they cannot qualify. When defining internalised thoughts, Alleyn (2007:271) refers to them as an 'internal enemy' that hampers functioning. The women in this case enact the stereotypes as such that their thought processes are totally ruled by this 'internal enemy' and they do not see themselves as different people from how they are labelled.

In terms of positions within academia, women in higher education are mostly confined to low positions of junior lecturer and lecturer (Morley, 2005).Morley argues that the problem does not lie with access, because women are absorbed into

academia in large numbers. She argues that the different forms of knowledge or practice that women bring into the institutions are not given epistemic recognition. Furthermore, even though the potential space for access to power might be widened for the women academics, this power is not redistributed. What this means is that although women enter academia in masses, they still struggle to find voice and position within institutions which could help them to advance their careers. Ones and Palmer (2011) refer to women in academia as 'tokens' who are confined to pre-determined positions. These authors point out that failure to break the glass ceiling arises because women academics have the challenge to balance their dual role identity of maintaining their social relations and advancing their careers.

The social roles that women still battle with include care giving and maintenance of their families. These hamper women's progress in academia, because they make the women's roles in academia taxing when they have to perform these two conflicting roles. Writing on this point, Barrett and Barrett (2011) indicate that women in academia in the United Kingdom fail to get promotions and progress in higher education, because of the social roles that they have to perform outside their academic roles. These authors argue that institutions are not considerate of this fact and continue to assign massive workloads to these women and also expect them to work unsocial hours that restrict them from fulfilling their home roles. As a result, a number of women academics opt for hourly paid contract jobs within academia or they opt for part-time employment. This type of employment disadvantages women in the United Kingdom in that the women get excluded from the processes of recognition and reward which full-time employees get. According to Barrett and Barrett (ibid), these institutional practices perpetuate the masculine values that marginalise women.

The balancing of workload and family duties is a major challenge for women in academia. Kuther (n.d.) and Pillay (2009) state that women in academia are expected to put up with the load of research, teaching and community service while they still have to play their roles of keeping up their families, domestic work and other social responsibilities as women. With institutions placing research at the top of promotion criteria, the women academics are disadvantaged, because they do not usually have time to conduct research due to the social roles that they have to

perform. At times, even if women do not feel pressured because of the dual roles, they internalise the stereotype against them as primarily family caregivers and then employees as their secondary role. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) indicate that at times the women themselves reject the responsibilities that come with higher positions, because they feel that they cannot cope. These women end up believing that career ambition is 'unfeminine', that is, it is greedy, pushy, individualistic and competitive and is unbecoming of a woman to want to move up the ladder in academia. In other words, women end up becoming their own enemies and block their own opportunities (Alleyn, 2007).

Although women seem to be in a dilemma pertaining to handling and managing the dual roles they have to perform, some authors believe that institutions have to put transformational plans into place to help women academics. Geber (2011:64) proposes a model through which women can be mentored to achieve their best in higher education. She argues that supporting women by providing career development programmes and offering psychosocial support could lead to confidence and higher productivity by these academics. The model that she proposes outlines some support programmes that institutions could consider in improving the environment for the women. In the table below, I have listed some of the aspects that she considers important in this regard:

Table 3.1: Proposed change agent model

Career development for women	**Meeting the psychosocial needs for women**
Sponsor for training	
Provide challenging assignment in mentoring	Provide acceptance and confirmation
Provide exposure to the wider academic world	Develop trust in the women's potential to succeed
Coach the women in teaching and learning and research	Encourage the women and guide them
Also provide political information (for debates)	Engage the women in constructive confrontation whenever needed

Geber's (ibid) model above shows that there is a possibility that through proper support programmes, women academics can do as well as their male counterparts. If women get this kind of support, they will get confident and the internalised stereotypes regarding their non-performance due to their dual roles could be changed to positive thinking. The aspects under psychosocial support (e.g. acceptance and confirmation, trust, encouragement) could be argued to create a welcoming environment which could lead to a sense of belonging for the women. If women feel that they are legitimate citizens within their academic space, they may not be intimidated to strive to break the glass ceiling and occupy leadership positions.

3.4.3 Women in African and South African higher education institutions

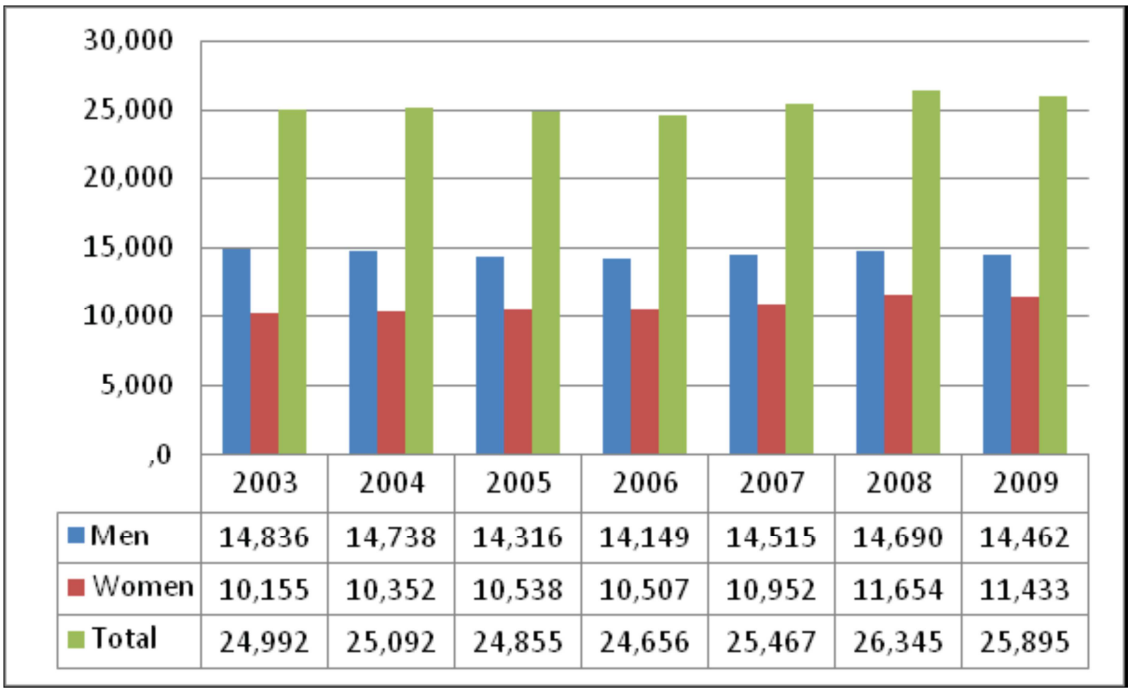
Generally women in African higher institutions face challenges in terms of upward mobility within the male-dominated spaces (Barnes, 2007; Mabokela, 2011; Tsikata, 2007).The challenges lie mostly with the representation of women in senior positions and in some African countries, with access as a major problem. Barnes (2007), for example, states that across Africa there are few women in the professoriate level and that the African professoriate remains overwhelmingly male. She stresses that as much as it is difficult for these women to enter academia, it is even more difficult to maintain their positions once they are within the academia. The problem of maintenance for her lies with the production and reproduction of ways of knowing which privilege maleness while they marginalise women. This point is also echoed by Ramphele (2008) who notices that higher education, especially in South Africa, still hold on to the ideology of men as more suited for academia than females; this creates a male dominated culture, especially in senior positions. An example of this may be the kind of research that is accepted as being of an academic standard. Institutions in Africa seem to classify research according to issues that are researched and often classify studies on gender as dealing with minor issues (Barnes, 2007). In an opening speech at a conference held in Cape Town, South Africa, Dr Ramphele (2008) raised a concern regarding the struggles that women in African HEIs and specifically in South Africa face. She indicated that institutional cultures are awash with gender-based constructions which contribute to keeping women out of leadership positions. Thus, she encouraged and urged women to amplify their voices against such stereotypes.

In a study conducted by Tsikata (2007) on Ghanaian HEIs, the problem of access and representation surfaces as the main issue. Tsikata mentions that women are less represented within the whole university of Ghana and worse, in some departments, they are not represented at all. According to her, the Ghanaian universities are still stuck in the 1970s, where women were believed to belong in the home. The statistics from the study show that at the University of Ghana, in the case of the total academic staff, only **20.3%** of women are part of the permanent staff

while their male counterparts constitute **79%** of the permanent staff. Of these percentages, **4.4%** of staff in senior positions is women, while men occupy **17%** of the positions. Tsikata (ibid) argues that in this institution, the university pays lip service to gender equity, while it is continuing with gender blindness.

The same plight is seen in Nigeria. In this country women have unequal access to higher education when compared to men. Odejide (2007) asserts that the Nigerian universities function as sites for the production and reproduction of contemporary gender identities and gender inequalities. Women in higher education in this country seem to be treated as subordinate to men. The findings of Odejide's (ibid) study show that when women gain access to academia, they are concentrated in junior positions. The range is such that only **14%** of the women academics are at the professoriate level, **30%** in senior lectureship and **41%** in assistant lecturer positions.

South African higher education is no exception to the problem of access of women into higher education. Although South Africa is burdened with racial issues, inaccessibility of women into higher education cuts across races. The percentage of women entering higher education in this country is far less than that of men. According to Riordan and Potgieter (2011), women in SAHEIs are under-represented and mainly so at the senior positions. The following table shows the comparison between men and women in SAHEIs:



	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Men	14,836	14,738	14,316	14,149	14,515	14,690	14,462
Women	10,155	10,352	10,538	10,507	10,952	11,654	11,433
Total	24,992	25,092	24,855	24,656	25,467	26,345	25,895

Figure 3.3: Staff numbers from junior lecturer to professor, HESA, 2011

The above table shows the number of male and female academics across higher education institutions in South Africa. The statistics show the gender demographics from 2003 to 2009. It is clear that the number of women entering academia has been increasing from 2004 to 2008 and has slightly dropped in 2009. The same is true of male academics. Their numbers in academia dropped in 2009. The conclusion here could be that there was an overall decline in the number of academics in higher education in 2009. This decline may be due to some academics retiring or the intensive civil service recruitment after the election of the new government early in 2009 (Arya & Bassi, 2011), which may have led some academics leaving academia for competitive remuneration packages in government departments.

Important though is the difference of the number of female academics to that of their male counterparts throughout the years. The statistics show that there have always been more men than women academics in SAHEIs with approximately 3000 more men than women each year. The above table shows that, in terms of academic gender differentiation in all institutions across South Africa, SAHEIs have always been predominantly male.

It is in the light of the discussion in this section that I believe that women academics in South Africa need to be capacitated not only to gain access to the institutions but also to successfully participate and move up the academic ladder. Geber's model, as discussed earlier (cf. Section 2.4.2), could be used to empower women who are already in academia.

Apart from Geber's model, which could be used by institutions in capacitating women academics to be able to function effectively within academia, one would think of capacity building from the angle of equipping South African academics to complete their PhDs. In SAHE, some of the women academics take positions within the institutions without having completed their PhDs and get into the academic system as junior lecturers. It could be argued in this case that a feeling of inadequacy may creep in and lead to low self-esteem and as a result low productivity for these academics. It could be on the basis of this that a number of academics have looked into the process of supervision, which could be vital in ensuring that academics get capacitated to obtain their PhD degrees. The relationship between the supervisor and PhD student in this case can therefore not be overlooked. This is one issue that most SAHEIs seem to lead postgraduate students to believe that institutions are not paying attention to their progress when the supervision process fails or does not meet the students' expectations.

In some instances the supervision process could dwindle due to misunderstandings in the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. In the case of the BWAs, this could be the reason why they may feel that their institutions are not transforming, since the majority of the supervisors are white professors and doctorate holders. Because of the history of racial moulds within the historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions, there are still issues on the throughput of graduates in these institutions, especially at postgraduate level.

Addressing this issue, Lee (2008) proposes the framework below which could assist the supervision process in higher education. Institutions could adopt the model in strengthening their supervision process, which in this case could involve studying BWAs to progress.

Table 3.2: Model for improved supervision process (proposed by Lee, 2008)

	Functional	**Enculturation**	**Critical thinking**	**Emancipation**	**Relationship Development**
Supervisor's Activity	Rational progression through tasks	Gatekeeping	Evaluation Challenge	Mentoring, supporting constructivism	Supervising by experience, developing a relationship
Supervisor's knowledge and skills	Directing, project management	Diagnosis of deficiencies, coaching	Argument, analysis	Facilitation, Reflection	Emotional intelligence
Possible student reaction	Obedience Organised	Role modelling	Constant inquiry, fight or flight	Personal growth, reframing	Emotional intelligence

The above model takes into consideration that supervision is a two way process that involves both the supervisor and the supervisee. It lists the qualities that are needed for both parties and could help in the process, especially in transforming institutions which are striving to build capacity for the students (and in this case the black women academics).It shows that if the supervisor becomes supportive, the student's attitude towards the studies and the supervisor could change positively. For example, if a supervisor becomes a mentor and supporter through reflective exercises and facilitation of the student, such a student gain personal growth and hence develops academically. The argument that I am making here is that supervision is one way in which the SAHEIs and the UFS in particular could show its commitment in capacitating the BWAs so that they are able to function effectively and gain recognition in their institutions. Such capacity building endeavours by institutions could help a great deal in how the constituencies perceive their institutions' transformation progress.

I would like to now turn my focus to black women academics. The issues that are discussed in the next section include the access of black women academics compared to their white colleagues and the recruitment and retention of these women in academia. This is looked at in the light of a broader institutional culture/climate, which I believe encompasses all practices within institutions. If these practices are not improved to give everybody a sense of belonging, they could create a hostile environment which could hinder some constituencies to fit in their institutions. The discussion will first focus on the black women academics across the globe and narrow its focus to the black women academics in Africa and specifically in SAHEIs.

3.5 Black women in the higher education context

Black women in global higher education seem to be facing a number of challenges in terms of the overall university culture that includes, among others, recruitment and retention, access and experiences pertaining to their dealings with their colleagues. Although Daniel (2009) contends that all women within academia face stressors and challenges impressed on them by the work demands, she is mindful of the fact that black women academics have added stressors, which result from cultural stressors of working in predominantly white universities. Lloyd-Jones (2009: 608) clearly noticed that the experiences of these women position them in a unique space. She reports this about BWAs:

> *'While black women's experiences of womanhood may overlap with those of both White women and other women of color, they will also differ from them in important ways; and their experience of Blackness may overlap with those of African American men, but will significantly differ from them as well.'*

The quote above indicates that black women academics' experiences are unique in two ways. Firstly, as women within academia, their experiences as women may be similar to those of white women colleagues. Some of the structural challenges may, however, make BWAs' experiences differ significantly from those of white women. The difference in the experiences between these women is discussed below. Equally significant is that, although these women are black and share some characteristics and experiences with other black people, their experiences are different from those of their black male counterparts due to the structural dynamics of HEIs across the globe.

In another study conducted by Harries (2007: 59), a participant had this to say when she commented on the way she perceived academia and how different the experiences of black women academics are from other academics:

> *'Since the beginning of my career I have been in the precarious position of defining and defending my professional identity because of* ***my race and gender.'***

3.5.1 Black women academics in the USA higher education

There are stressors in higher education that influence BWAs to perceive the institutional culture as hostile and unwelcoming. Daniel (2009) mentions that some of the challenges black women academics have to face include having to withstand students or colleagues who challenge their expertise and the negative stereotypes regarding their intelligence and skills. Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar and Griffin (2009), for example, reported that at their University, which is in the United States of America, BWAs experience overt or covert racism that includes being stereotyped and pigeon-holed. Participants in Lloyd-Jones' (2009) study conducted in the United States of America,reported their frustrations with regard to having to work extra hard to prove their credibility and respect from both their colleagues and students. Arguing on this issue, Morrison (2010) states that black women academics always face questions of 'fitting' in from both students and colleagues. The issue of whether they fit into academia relates to questions of how well they do in research and teaching as well as in matters of collegiality. Morrison (2010) states that this happens mainly in courses that are considered to be 'big' and therefore cannot be presented by black women. These women are stereotyped to only fit in with the 'softer courses'. BWAs' challenges with regard to their expertise extend to marginalisation in terms of their research being discredited, because it is believed not to be of a good standard.

Similarly in the United States of America, Daniel (2009) reports that participants in her study reported feelings of inferiority, as they experienced authority issues in which they felt their expertise was often challenged and that they were being stereotyped. These experiences led these BWAs to feel that they lacked cultural capital to cope within their institution, which had different cultural practices, practices that invalidated their presence in their university space. A similar plight seems to be facing women in British universities. In their article '*Out of place: black women in British universities*', Wright, Thompson and Channer (2007) write that women who participated in their study, which covered eight universities, also experienced a hostile institutional culture and continuing stereotyping. The participants reported feeling like space invaders in their institutions, as they constantly faced the burden of doubt from colleagues and students and their work being constantly 'hyper-

scrutinised'. On this point, Morrison (2010) indicates that black women who find themselves in this situation could experience a lot of feelings, from discomfort to hostility towards other groups.

3.5.2 Black women academics in British higher education

Although there have been very few studies on black academics in the United Kingdom (Maguire & Hoskins, 2011), a study that examined the experiences of black women in British universities reports that, with regard to access for black women into faculties, the universities have opened doors in terms of widening participation, but on the other hand the same universities are kicking these women out because of institutional racism (Wright, Thompson & Channer, 2007).The researchers in this study feel that it is time that black women in academia world-wide voice their experiences with a view to bettering their environments. They believe this should be the case as previous research on black female experiences has been constructed through the 'male gaze' (Wright, *et al.,* 2007: 146). This means that the experiences have been narrated mostly by male researchers. Thus the voices of black women are missing from the discourses of race and gender. In addition to this, Maguire and Hoskins (2011) point out that in the United Kingdom, the experiences of women in higher education have been under-researched, but these women face many personal and professional struggles within academia.

With regard to climbing up the academic ladder, women in Britain seem to be working very hard and are willing to break the glass ceiling. Mirza (2009), however, notices that no matter how much these women may be motivated to move up, there are still entrenched stereotypes of underachievement levelled against black women academics in this country. These stereotypes seem to have their origin in the early years of migration, when a number of migrants that came to Britain were perceived to be underachievers due to their limitations in using 'proper English'. Although these women work hard to be promoted, it seems as if they are still pigeon-holed.

3.5.3 Black women academics in South Africa

As has been indicated above, the oppression and marginalisation of black and women academics in higher education is not a problem unique to the South African context, but is also found internationally. The work of Lloyd-Jones (2009), for example, has indicated that black women academics in the United States of America,suffer a pervasive racial and ethnic bias, which contributes to unwelcoming and unsupportive work environments for the faculty of colour in American HEIs. On the same note, reports from Australia also show that women academics in Australia face the same plight (Wilson, Marks, Noone & Hamilton-Mackenzie, 2010). My intention therefore is not to claim that this situation is unique to black women in South African higher education. I do, however, wish to emphasise that BWAs in SAHEIs suffer a two-fold oppression: they suffer the effects of the continuing oppressive apartheid system as black people and suffer an added oppression as women within academia. These women, like all other black people, could not gain access to the historically white universities during the apartheid era. This situation has not changed much in recent years. The following statistics compiled in 2006 (UFS Employment Equity Three-year Rolling Plan, 2007) shows how BWAs still battle with access issues in SAHEIs: The statistics are used because they reflect a comparison between institutions, which gives a clear picture of the differentiation between male academics and female academics across institutions.

Table 3.3: Employment equity comparisons between universities (2006)

Universities	Black Male	Black Female	White Male	White Female	Foreign	Total
Central University of Technology	538	443	543	526	45	2,095
University of Pretoria	719	520	1,244	1,798	157	4,438
University of Stellenbosch	641	553	1,006	1,364	110	3,674
University of Johannesburg	1,701	1370	2,014	2,290	221	7,596
University of the Free State	626	569	965	1,298	158	3,616

The table above indicates that, compared to other academics, BWAs still struggle to gain access into academia. The table shows that, with the exception of the foreign academics, the number of black female academics is still far below that of other

academics. The exception that could be noticed from the table is that of the Central University of Technology, which does not show a wide gap in the number of academics. This may be due to the fact that, unlike the other universities cited in the table above, it is still a predominantly black university of technology.

The few black women academics that finally gain access to the historically white HEIs have to surmount yet another hurdle. This is the hurdle that women academics in general, regardless of race, have to face, which is that of women in positions of power within the SAHEIs (Coetzee, 2001). Hassim (1991) believes that black women were not only dually oppressed, but faced triple-fold oppression and qualified to be called the most oppressed as black, women and workers. Hassim (ibid), however, adds that the unfortunate state is that these women themselves seem to have yielded to this oppression that retards their development. He contends that the oppression that has been suffered by black women has resulted in an inferiority complex that needs a 'bulldozer' to move it. In such an instance, one can understand why these women often give up hope that things will work out if they challenge the status quo. The struggle for these women seems to be with themselves to break awayfrom the entrenched stereotypes of their perceived incapability and inadequacies as academics. Pertaining to black women academics, the question once again is whether the past oppression and marginalisation are continuing in the transforming of SAHEIs. What is the status of gender and race transformation in the South African institutions? This study aims to provide a response to this question.

From the beginning of this chapter, focus has been on race and gender as concepts that need to be clarified. These concepts were linked to how they influence the way in which people from different race and gender groups are treated both in the wider labour market and specifically within academia which is the focus of my study. What became clear from the discussion was that institutions as well as the wider job market have socially constructed black people and women as subordinate to other groups. As a result, the organisational and institutional cultures are made unwelcoming to these groups due to the stereotypes held about them.

In the next section, I turn my focus to the elements that often become a barrier to full participation of black people and women in institutions. These need to be transformed if institutions, particularly in SAHE, have to boast about social

transformation as a success within their spaces. I place my discussion within an umbrella term of institutional culture and discuss some elements in the culture of the institutions, which could, if not transformed, lead to some people feeling excluded in academia and influence them to perceive the attempts by their institutions to socially transform in a negative light. So, I firstly define what an institutional culture entails, then focus on elements such as identity formation, access, recruitment and retention to indicate how these are influenced by the overall culture of an institution.

3.6 Institutional culture

Although it is an issue of global discussion, institutional culture is a difficult phenomenon to define (Higgins, 2007; Jansen, 2004). Higgins (ibid) states that the reason for difficulties in defining this concept lies in the fact that in literature there are diverse explanations and definitions of this concept and all these cannot be connected to get to a singular definition. Higgins (ibid) suggests that maybe breaking up the concept into two terms, 'institution' and 'culture' might help in bringing some understanding of the concept. He further continues to propose the definition of culture as the product of shared meanings among group members in a given environment, which in this case will be an institution, and an institution as a cultural or social entity. Silver (2003) also defines culture in his attempt to define an institutional culture. Like Higgins (2007), he defines culture as shared values and beliefs within groups and he believes that understanding this will shed light on what institutional culture comprises. This may be a fair way to get to the definition of 'institutional culture', but I find it vague, because culture itself is a broad term. Trying to understand culture may lead to confusion as it also does not have a singular definition (Reiman & Oedewald, 2002; Schein, 1992; Tierney, 2008).I have therefore decided to define and explain 'institutional culture' as one concept which needs to be understood as a unit.

Many scholars have defined institutional culture as a unit without attempting to break down the compound word into two separate words. According to Jansen (2004:1), institutional culture may be defined as a 'frontier' in the quest for social integration and *(a quest for*) non-racial communities in former white universities. The use of

'**former** white universities' and 'non-racial communities' by Jansen here seem to suggest that institutional culture is a concept predominantly used in racially diverse institutions. This poses a problem as the definition seems to focus on institutional culture with regard to diversity in terms of race, thereby excluding other forms of diversity like gender and class. The definition further gives this concept a very narrow localised South African focus, in which race in institutions of higher learning seems to form the heart of debates around transformation issues. Furthermore, this definition would be problematic as it may be taken to cluster races into homogenous entities of black and white. I would therefore wish to adopt a general definition as suggested by Fourie (1999), Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) as well as Schein (1992).These scholars define an institutional culture as a prevailing ethos; one that is characterised by a deep-seated set of values, norms and behaviours and one that is shaped and understood by people within an institution. In this case, Schein (1992) shares the same view of institutional culture and has developed a model that examines an institutional culture as a phenomenon with three levels:

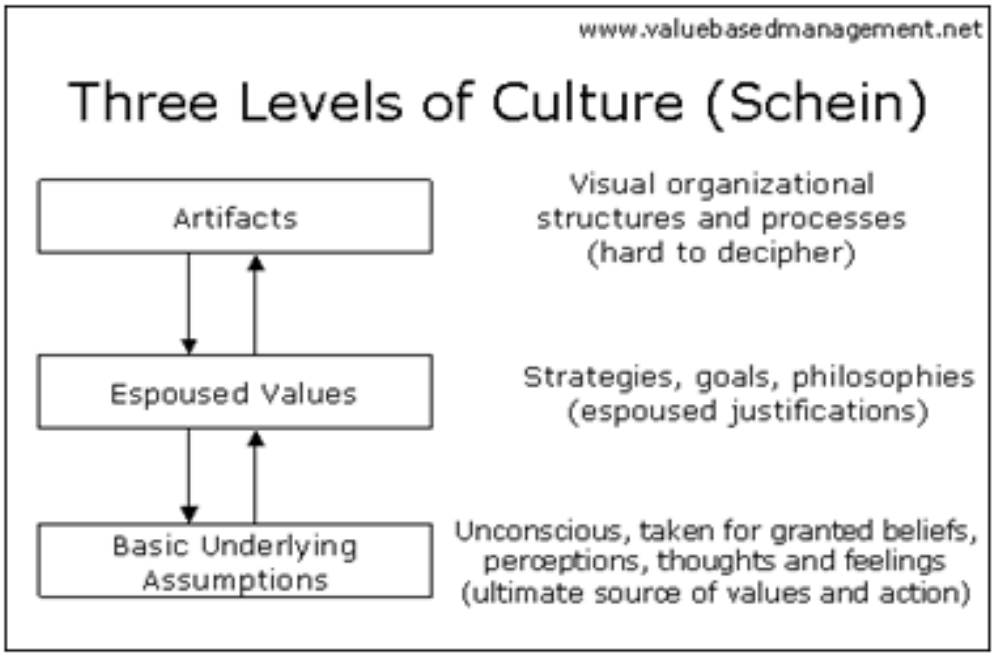


Figure 3.4: Schein's (1992) model of organisational culture.

According to the above proposed institutional culture diagram by Schein (ibid), an institutional culture comprises three levels, which are closely interrelated and inform

each other. The understanding here is that an institutional culture could be understood by examining the artifacts within an institution first. The artefacts include the structures and processes (and at times the way of dressing and tidiness within the institution) that govern an institution which, according to Schein, are very difficult to understand (Reiman & Oedewald, 2002).The interpretation of this first level of culture, according to Reiman and Oedewald (ibid), requires effective and diverse research methods and an understanding of the internal dynamics of the culture.

The second level of espoused values looks at an institutional culture from the point of the goals and philosophies within the institution. They include the objectives, declared norms and operating philosophy of the institution. This may mean that each institution sets goals and employs strategies that ensure that the culture within an institution is welcoming to all constituencies. An example of this in the case of social transformation and the University of the Free State may be the way in which the institution conceptualises social transformation and the steps that the institution takes towards achieving its goal of being a fully transformed institution, racially and in terms of gender and how these attempts are further experienced and interpreted by the constituencies.

The third level of basic underlying assumptions is the most important level, as it touches on the experiences and perceptions as well as understanding of the people who form part of the institution's community. According to Reiman and Oedewald (2002: 6) underlying assumptions refer to problems related to *internal integration* and to maintaining an operating capacity that is concerned with creating a common language and concepts, defining group limits, the level of authority relationships and interaction, as well as methods of reward and punishment. If there is an understanding in these, members of the organisation can function together in an organised and predictable working community. This layer seems most important, because it influences people's values and behaviours within institutions. Hence the harmonious and productive work relationships emerge if constituencies at this level have a similar understanding of the culture. It is with this in mind that I, as a researcher, feel that the feelings and needs of BWAs need to be brought to the fore as a contribution towards making the UFS a university for the diverse constituencies within it.

Concurring with the above-mentioned levels that Schein proposes, Reiman and Oedewald (2002: 6) continue to define an institutional culture as an organisation's values, an organisation's generally accepted system of meaning, or an organisation's operating philosophy. They adapt Schein's definition of institutional culture and state that an institutional culture is

> *A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of* ***external adaptation*** *and* ***internal integration****, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as a correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (p6)*

Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) further clarify the concept of institutional culture as a way of life of an institution known by those who work within the institutions' environment through their lived experiences. This is also what Niemann (2010:1002) perceives in that an institutional culture reflects what is inherent to the people within an institution "in what they value, how they define their environment and how they construct that environment in terms of what it could become". Emphasising that institutional culture only becomes known by the institution's constituencies, Silver (2003: 159) says this about an institutional culture:

> *…a shared set of meanings, beliefs, understanding and ideas, in which there is a reasonably clear difference between those on the inside and those on the outside of the community. Part of the sharing, and sense of community, resides in the taken-for-granted aspects of the culture…*

3.6.1 Perceptions around institutional culture

Although it is true that institutional culture is a shared phenomenon, different constituencies may, however, experience the culture of the institution differently (Mabokela, 2011; HESA, 2011; Ramphele, 2008). As Silver (2003) points out, some constituencies may describe the culture as hostile, a culture that isolates or a culture

of conflict, depending on their individual experiences (HESA, 2011). These individual experiences and perceptions stem from exposure to the subcultures that are brought about by different constituencies. In fact, Silver (2003: 167) continues to argue that there is nothing called an institutional culture, but within an institution, there is a system of subcultures that leads to what he terms "a culture of tolerance of diversity". This may be the reason why Silver (ibid), although he shares the same view of culture, highlights the fact that institutional culture may be taken for granted by the communities that are supposed to share it. In the case of HEIs, these communities may be the diverse staff and students who are supposed to share a similar culture that binds them together in their institution.

Within the SAHE context, institutional culture is a buzzword in discussions involving transformation (HESA, 2011; Higgins, 2007). It seems to be regarded as key to successful transformation of SAHE. The importance of a positive institutional culture within the SAHEIs is seen in the phrases embedded in the mission and vision statements of these institutions. Tierney (2008) points out that through their mission and vision statements, institutions try to clarify the overarching ideology upon which the institution functions, which is connoted here as institutional culture. In this case, cited below are the mission/vision statements of some of the historically white Afrikaans universities as taken from their public web pages. These are meant to highlight the importance that institutions put on defining identities through clearly showing what they stand for by incorporating aspects of their culture:

> *(Our mission): is to be an excellent, equitable and innovative university, promoting an* ***academic culture****… and development of the total student as part of its academic culture* http://www.ufs.ac.za/content.aspx?id=12[1] (UFS)
>
> *Our mission is to provide a world-class and innovative service and learning… and advance a positive* ***organisational culture*** *of learning and innovation amongst staff.*

[1] The University of the Free State Mission statement

> *http://greaterstellenbosch2010.wordpress.com/2009/09/01/stellenbosch-university-%E2%80%93-student-excellence-in-matieland/*[2] (University of Stellenbosch).
>
> *(Our mission is) to become a balanced teaching-learning and research university and to implement its expertise in an innovative way. This the institution will achieve as it lives its values, strives for sound management and pursues transformation, while being locally engaged, nationally relevant and internationally recognized*
>
> *http://www.nwu.ac.za/webfm_send/732*[3] (North West University, Potchefstroom)

An institutional culture within most SAHEIs' policies is discussed within the context of racial identities in a post-apartheid society (HEMIS, 2011; Higgins, 2007; Jansen, 2004). As was earlier noticed from Jansen's (2004) definition of an institutional culture, this concept within higher education in South Africa is conceptualised to refer to the whiteness (HESA, 2011) of the SAHE academic culture. In this regard, HEMIS (2011) suggests that within historically white institutions, the culture may be perceived as alienating by black academics, because of the whiteness of this culture in terms of the institutional environment. This focuses the argument pertaining to institutional culture on racial issues within institutions and specifically on the experiences of black staff against the backdrop of power relations. The power relations come into play in this discussion because of the past political dynamics of the HEIs. White people may still be regarded as the most powerful and privileged by the other race groups as was the case in the past. Arguably, these past power relations may still have an effect on how the other race groups perceive the changes that are effected within their campuses.

On the one hand, in a culture of whiteness, black people perceive the culture as alienating and disempowering, therefore harbouring a sense of not belonging within their institutions. This leads them to feel like 'outsiders from within' (Lloyd-Jones,

[2] University of Stellenbosch Mission Statement
[3] North West Universty Mission Statement

2009: 614). When arguing on an alienating institutional culture, especially within the historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions, HESA (2011: 11) reports thus:

> *The specific histories of these institutions, lingering racist and sexist conduct, privileges associated with social class, English as the language of tuition and administration, the overwhelming predominance of white and male academics and administrators, the concomitant under-representation of black and women academics and role-models, and insufficient respect for and appreciation of diversity and difference could all combine to reproduce institutional cultures that are experienced by black, women… as discomforting, alienating, exclusionary and disempowering.*

3.6.2 Institutional culture and its influence on identity formation

The culture of whiteness as discussed above may be enjoyed by people who feel favoured by the culture. This may be in cases where the culture is biased towards some groups who can relate to the way things are done. In this way, these people find it easy to fit within such a culture. The reason for the differing perceptions of groups towards an institutional culture may stem from the historical realities of institutions. As Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) point out, institutional culture could be shaped by the historical cultural issues that impact on the social dealings within institutions. Thus, an institutional culture that is felt to hold on to the white ideologies could be felt by the black constituencies as disempowering. Black academics may feel that such a culture robs them of their identity. The identity of the black people is threatened when they try to acclimatise to the new culture. Identity involves the way in which members of this group understand themselves, interpret experiences, present themselves, wish to be perceived, and are recognized by the broader academic community. They try to fit into the new culture so that they can feel accepted and part of their institutions. This kind of situation is explained in a study conducted in the United States of America with black women academics at one university (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). The researchers found that the black women in their study became so set to fit into the university culture that they were alienated from their self in the process and could no longer connect to who they were and where

they were going. The results of that study further highlight the negative effects of a disabling institutional culture by showing this about the participants:

> *They have so deeply internalized the expectations, attitudes, and judgments of those around them that they are unable to evaluate their own self-worth beyond their next grant, publication, or award. In other words, they played the game to win so intensely that they sacrificed their core self in the process and internalized their institution's values as their own criteria for determining self-worth. (p615)*

Harries (2007) further explains the disabling effects of a hostile institutional culture by stipulating that black people often feel the urge to acclimatise. As they do so they find themselves forced to sign a cultural contract with their institutions and as a result lose their own identity. He argues that black people find themselves having to choose between one of the typologies which he terms:

(1) Ready-to-sign contract (assimilation): here, people who are not part of the dominant culture find themselves having to try hard to be accepted and therefore they abandon their own culture and completely get assimilated in the predominant culture within their institution. Morrison (2010:90) calls this process 'straightening'. Black women in this situation find themselves changing their racial identity to adopt an identity that they perceive as being superior. Because they do not do this wholeheartedly, they often feel oppressed as they start to lose their own identity.

(2) Quasi-completed contract (adaptation): in some cases, black people do not completely get assimilated into the predominant culture, but they adapt to this culture. According to Morrison (2010), black academics who do this try to be closer to get associated with the whiteness as part of the institutional culture. This situation also becomes confusing, because aspects of their own culture get lost as they try to understand their new culture and find a way of functioning within this adopted culture.

(3) Co-created contract (mutual valuation): this situation arises as black academics try to come to terms with diversity within their institution. They tend to believe that as much as there could be a uniform institutional culture, sub-cultures within an institution should co-habit. In this situation, black people become disappointed when they realise that there is one group of cultures that seem to be more accepted and celebrated than the other cultures and which influences the overall institutional culture.

The effect of institutional culture on how people shape their personal and professional identities is not considered to be new (Badat, 2008; Moore, 2008). Moore (ibid) argues that identity is not fixed as it entails a constant negotiation taking place within the contradictions of situational and historical constraints. She maintains that it is normal for people not to have a stable identity, but shape their identities within their changing environments. She is, however, aware of the fact that some cultures can have a negative impact on the desired identities that people desire. Hostile cultures, for example may taint the person's beliefs and values so much so that the desired professional and personal identity becomes difficult to develop.

The definition of an institutional culture in the above section has indicated how difficult it is to arrive at a single definition of this concept. It could, however, be deduced that an institutional culture is influenced by the sub-cultures within the institution, although one culture may be more influential than the others. It is in a situation where others feel that their culture is being marginalised that they begin to define an institutional culture as hostile and alienating.

It has also become clear from the discussion on institutional culture that within institutions, people perceive the culture differently. This, as has been indicated, may stem from people's past experiences of race inequalities in institutions or may purely be driven by psychological issues of how people view themselves in their social context. The elements of the psychosocial perspectives on the way people construct their environment have been highlighted, namely the psychological factor of inferiority and a lack of sense of belonging in an environment. The social factors that have been highlighted here include the way the espoused values within institutions are manifested to create a sense of equality among institutions' constituencies.

3.6.3 Institutional culture and its influence on access

Access to higher education, both internationally and within SAHEIs, is an important issue and has drawn much attention from researchers (Altbacht, Reisberg, Rumbley, 2009). Rockquemore and Lazsloffy (2008), for example, report that an examination of the statistics in American higher education on faculty diversity reveals a dismal state of affairs that has changed little since the passage of civil rights legislation; a state that needs attention if American HEIs have to pride themselves in achieving transformation. The same is true of the Indian higher education system. A report from this country shows that there are disparities in access in terms of students and staff. The comparison that has been reported by Thorat (2006) in the study focuses mainly on the areas of gender, religion and geographical area, where disparities in access to higher education are noticed. This is the reason why Thorat (2006:3) states that Indian higher education expects that there should be improvement in the level of higher education in terms of aggregate access, access to disadvantage groups and the quality of higher education.

On the same level, studies in SAHE show that SAHEIs are facing the same challenge in terms of access. Van de Waal (2002), David (2007) and Herman (2011) indicate that the higher education sector in South Africa lacks diversity in terms of access of staff along the lines of race, gender and class. The same trend could be seen in other African countries, such as Uganda, Tanzania and Ghana, where, although race is not a major issue, access seems to pose a problem in terms of gender and class (Mlama, 1999; Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2009).

In South Africa specifically, access, as documented in South African policies and literature on transformation, is conceptualised to refer to issues of diversification, massification and differentiation of the SAHEIs along the lines of gender, race and class (DoE, Green Paper 1996; Herman, 2011; Potgieter, 2002). As clearly stipulated in the post-apartheid policy statement issued by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE), one of the fundamental goals of higher education transformation in SAHE is, for example, to address the legacy of apartheid by broadening access into HEIs to under-represented groups, in particular black and female constituencies (Herman, 2011). SAHEIs are mandated by the Council of

Higher Education to broaden access by raising the level of participation and by increasing the proportion of black constituencies within universities. The NCHE required SAHEIs to increase the number of skilled professionals and 'knowledge workers' and emphasised that the great bulk of the constituency needed should come from the black community.

Although past research stresses the importance of access in terms of massification, that is, the demographics of academics that gain access to SAHEIs (Herman, 2011), Griesel (1999) points out that within the SAHE's socio-political change, access should not only address massification or differentiation, but should also address the goal of redress and equity. This goal is strongly emphasised in the Education White Paper 3 (1997: 9) which states that:

> *There (should be) an equitable distribution of access and opportunity for students and staff along lines of race, gender, class and geography. There are gross discrepancies in the participation rates of students from different population groups, indefensible imbalances in the ratios of black and female staff compared to whites and males, and equally untenable disparities between historically black and historically white institutions in terms of facilities and capacities*

Looking at this mandate from the Department of Education, Griesel (ibid) argues that the type of access that looks at redressing the past imbalances of equity and equality entails dimensions of quality and capacity building, which should serve as national imperatives for SAHEIs and should be the strong elements of the culture of the institutions. On the same note, Thorat (2006) emphasises that the issue of access should not only address demographics of the previously disadvantaged groups or head counts of the previously marginalised, but should more importantly address equality and quality as well as systemic disparities in terms of race and gender. The systemic disparities that may be involved here could be inequitable distribution of services and workload for all academics, capacity building in terms of mentoring programmes as well as similar recognition when it comes to promotion and research. I mention these issues here, because they were among the issues that BWAs

mentioned as relating to transformation in higher education. It is on the same note that David (2007) argues that HEIs should strive for access that is inclusive rather than focusing on diversification and differentiation, which only seem to maintain social inequalities within the higher education system for those that are already inside the institutions.

Inclusivity in the above-mentioned case involves equal delivery of services for all constituencies. Cross (2004) refers to access by headcount as **affirmative remedies** and notes that these remedies fail mostly because of their inability to promote equity and social justice effectively. He argues that massification endeavours stigmatise the disadvantaged and adds the insult of misrecognition to the injury of deprivation. The argument here may be that if the previously marginalised groups could be merely looked at through the numbers that gain access to HEIs, then institutions would fail to see beyond the headcount into the real issue of creating an equitable space for everybody to feel a sense of belonging. Because massification remedies tend to generally promote group differentiation, they do not effectively address injustice and inequality within institutions. Wright, Thompson and Channer (2007) concur with this when they state that the masses of the previously marginalised groups entering HEIs should not cloud the issue of access in terms of positions which these masses occupy. This means that access should not only be viewed from the stance of the number of academics entering the HEIs, but also in terms of the institutionalised patterns which aim at addressing the legacies of the apartheid SAHE. The question that needs attention in this case, therefore, is how far SAHEIs have opened access to diverse constituencies, not only in terms of diversification or differentiation, but also in terms of equality and quality which come with capacity building. In this regard, Griesel (1999:8) urges institutions to make an introspection of the

> *mechanisms that have been developed within particular contexts, their degree of success, and the particular visions and assumptions that underpin initiatives that in varying degree are intended to address the challenges of access*

Griesel (ibid) further provides questions which institutions should address when they look at the process of access within the institutions. He believes that the following three questions are vital if quality access has to be achieved:

- What does access entail? (e.g. what strategies, procedures or processes? Who is targeted? Who remains excluded?).
- What indices are used to evaluate or measure success?
- What remain constraints on access, in terms of policy and implementation?

The problem of access programmes that focus on massification is not only a South African reality, but an international reality as well. A study conducted on the transformation trends in global higher education (Albacht, *et al.,* 2009) show that there are deficiencies in the global access programmes that fail to confront the social inequalities that are deeply rooted in the structures of many institutions. Studies conducted in the United States of America, for example, indicate that marginalised groups, such as black people and women, have made great strides with regard to their entrance in HE, but they have not yet reached equity and parity with particularly white male colleagues. As a result, women especially find themselves in a situation where they lack voice and agency in these male-dominated institutions (Heugh, 2011). Lloyd-Jones (2009) also reports that in the United States of America, constituencies, especially the academics of colour, suffer bias that contributes to unwelcoming and unsupportive work environments within the American HEIs.

3.6.4 Institutional culture and its influence on Recruitment and Retention

According to Tettey (2005), the excellence of higher education is a function of the people whom institutions are able to enlist and retain in their faculties. Unfortunately, global higher education is reported to experience problems pertaining to retention and recruitment of staff (Tettey, 2005). Metcalf, Rolfe, Stevens and Weale (2005), for example, found that there are a number of factors that impact negatively on recruitment and retention of staff in higher education. These include salaries, which most staff members feel are not ‘liveable’ and serious disparities with regard to

salary allocation; low levels of job satisfaction, which involve less opportunities to use own initiative, discrimination, long work hours of junior staff in relation to senior staff and social relationships among colleagues. Tettey (2005) also cites unfairness in terms of staff salaries, unequal opportunities and delivery of services, as well as biased promotions as the causes of recruitment and retention problems. To summarise, the problem seems to lie within institutional structures and processes, which are insensitive and unresponsive to the needs of their constituencies. According to Tettey (2005) other issues that give rise to low retention of academics are related to the lack of inclusivity in decision making. Staff feel that they are not included when important decisions that affect them are being taken, because the decision-making process in most HEIs seems to be centralised at the management levels (Tettey, 2005) and with the lack of proper communication channels between the management that seem to take the top-down approach to decision making, staff at the lower ranks may feel that their input as part of their institutions is not sorted. I believe that this feeling of being ignored may lead to lack of a sense of being valuable members of the institutions and if things go this way, academic staff may seek employment in other sectors where they will feel accepted and valued.

A close look at global HEIs reflects a generalised problem in terms of recruitment and retention. In the United States of America, for example, studies that look at anecdotal information over the years have indicated that women do not obtain tenure and promotion at the same rate as men in similar fields with similar academic credentials (Mabokela, 2011). This is an issue of concern for the academics in the United States of America and some of the constituencies revert to seeking jobs in private sectors where their expertise is recognised.

The plight that the United States of America women academics face seems to be similar to that of the women academics in the United Kingdom. HEIs in the United Kingdom fail to retain women academics especially in the area which has to compete with the private sector, because these women look for better offers outside academia. The reason for this is that, within academia, it becomes very difficult for the women to get promotions and permanent appointments. SAHE is not an exception in this case. The HEMIS report (2011) indicates that in this country a great number of academics are lost to the private sector, because of the competitive

remuneration. Private sectors seem to be paying their employees higher than SAHEIs and academics leave their posts in academia to occupy the real paying posts in the private sector.

A focus on SAHEIs indicates that although there may be a number of factors that lead to this problem, recruitment and retention challenges seem to have their roots in the apartheid South African higher education system (DHET, 2011), especially with regard to black constituencies. The impingements of the racially moulded (Bunting, 2006) higher education system have had an adverse impact on the current SAHE to recruit and retain the black academics. This fact was noticed by Mabokela and Wei (2007:169), who state that even after SAHEIs were merged as a way of redressing past inequities, challenges still remained for SAHEIs to recruit staff from diverse workforces. Although it could not be claimed that the difficulty of SAHEIs to recruit and retain staff is only a race or gender issue, but also affects those groups of people who are regarded as advantaged, research shows that institutions have more difficulty with the recruitment and retention of black women (Mabokela, 2011). Unlike their white colleagues, whose situation is confined to the institutional hierarchies that keep them at the junior positions, the situation of black women does not end within the four walls of their institutions, but extends to the wider society through societal racial inequalities (Schulze, 2005). As a result, black women often find it difficult to stay in academia, because they are stereotyped in a number of ways, both within their institutions and within their communities, which make it difficult for them to cope in HE.

The discussion here indicates that the problem of recruitment and retention with regard to black women lies in the culture and structures of the HEIs. This is summed up by Rockquemore and Lazsloffy (2008:38) in this way:

> *(**the problem of retention depends on**) who receives the benefit of the doubt, whose opinion is valued, who gets mentored, and who is invited into collaborative opportunities… these are subtly shaped by often un-conscious racialised assumptions about who is an insider and who is an outsider, who does and does not belong in the academic club, and whose presence is welcomed and whose is tolerated.*

The above statement clearly shows that the main problems facing SAHEIs are the institutional patterns that form the overall culture of the institutions in terms how the institutions handle diversity and how much they aim at keeping their campuses racially diverse and diverse in terms of gender. BWAs in this case often feel unwelcome and outsiders in their own institutional spaces due to racial disparities and stereotypes that are brought against them. In this way, BWAs may find it difficult to cope in this kind of environment and often decide to leave their institutions to find a better environment where they will be accepted despite their race and gender. The questions here again remain: what do SAHEIs do to ensure that they recruit and retain BWAs? Are the attempts that SAHEIs are making in this regard perceived positively by this constituency and if not, how can the HEIs and this constituency work together to ensure that there is a common understanding of the attempts in terms of recruitment and retention?

Regarding the question of what HEIs in South Africa are doing to ensure success in recruitment and retention, the higher education committee led by Badat (2008), looked into the institutions' commitment towards the development of the next generation of academics in SAHEIs (HEMIS, 2011). The observation of this group was that the problem of recruitment and retention lies mainly with the setting of targets by the institutions. Although the group confirms that institutions do set targets that aim at the recruitment of staff from the previously marginalised groups, they point out that these are frustrated by poor monitoring and evaluation of the progress. The group asserts that the failure of SAHEIs to evaluate their targets closely might abort the transformation success by these institutions.

The above discussion of access, recruitment and retentions has shown how these processes are interwoven into the issue of institutional culture. They seem to form the heart of the culture of SAHEIs. All other issues of the group relations, identity formation and the development of perceptions seem to get their roots from how constituencies in institutions feel once they have gained access into the institutions and experienced the culture. The experiences that the constituencies have of the culture seem also to determine whether they stay or leave academia.

Since the UFS is used as a case study for the current study, focus is now turned to this institution. Although an in-depth document analysis on the progress made by

SAHE towards social transformation is reported in Chapter 4, a brief look at what the UFS is doing is captured here to provide an overview of this institution as the area in which this current study takes place. This is done to place the institution within the wider context with the issues that have been discussed in the sections above.

3.7 The University of the Free State

The University of the Free State was founded in 1904 with six students and was offering a BA degree course that was presented in English (Strydom & Holtzhausen, 2001). In 1948 the medium of instruction in this institution, however, changed to Afrikaans (Wilkinson, 2010) so that the needs and wishes of the Afrikaans-speaking community, that was predominant in the Free State, could be satisfied. The University's main aim became one of making provision for the white Afrikaans-speaking students in the area.

In the 1980s, due to the pressures that were put on the university by the black forums, the university expanded and established a separate campus that would deal with the needs of the black students and community. The establishment of a separate institution for blacks was in line with the then apartheid system, which casted the education sector into racial moulds (Bunting, 2006; Engelbrecht, 2008). This campus was named Vista University. The medium of instruction in this institution was mainly English and the staff was a mixture of both white and black academics.

After 1994, at the dawn of democracy, the newly appointed government overhauled the education system. In 1995, the Minister of Education, Professor Bengu, appointed the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) to investigate and make recommendations for the restructuring of the higher education sector. The main mandate of this commission was to look into the challenge of redress that was central to the aims of the new dispensation. The redress was mainly on the inequitable distribution of access and opportunities for students and staff along the lines of race, gender, class and geographical areas. In line with this mandate, and through the mergers (Mabokela, 2006), the University of the Free State was finally merged with the Vista University. Staff and students from Vista moved to the main campus as part of the integrated institution. According to Strydom and Holtzhausen

(2001), this was enough to force the UFS to transform its campus into a multicultural institution that would accommodate diversity. It is in line with this that the current study is looking into the strategies that the UFS put into place to ensure successful transformation. Equally important, however, is how the constituents (BWAs in this case) perceive the efforts by the institution.

3.7.1 Social transformation at the UFS

The University of the Free State, like all other SAHEIs which are in a transformation phase, is still grappling with social transformation. In its transformation plan (UFS Transformation Plan, 2007-2010) race transformation is given recognition as one issue that needs attention. Although gender transformation has not been documented in this plan, the University aligns its plan with the requirements of the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997). Among the transformation aspects that are specified in this document, gender and race transformation are given recognition. This means that SAHEIs should work towards the eradication of any form of marginalisation and inequity. Even though the transformation plan of the institution does not include issues of gender, the UFS has pointed out in its 2001 strategic plan that it is striving towards a non-racial and non-sexist campus in which diversity is celebrated. In its 2005 Employment Equity policy and its 2007 Institutional Charter, the university once again commits itself to creating a non-racial, non-sexist and multicultural institution that appreciates and recognises diversity in a balanced way.

Among the attempts that have been undertaken, the University of the Free State has established an International Institute of Transformation, Social Cohesion and Race Relations. The main goal of the Institute is to focus on scholarship, discussions and community engagement that explore and aim at finding complex and challenging work of social transformation in the broader SA and the UFS in particular. The establishment of this institute came about after the racial tensions that have plagued the UFS in the past few years. Among these tensions was the notorious ‘Reitz four’ (cf. Section 1.3) scandal, which involved white students and black workers. The incident raised uproar from the black constituency of the University, as well as rekindling political flames within the institution. The Institute serves to bring transformation and racial cohesion to all spheres of the institution.

The University has also introduced a programme in which they fast-track post-doctoral academics for professorship. This programme, although it is not specifically for black and women academics, helps all young and aspiring academics, whom black women academics are part of. Other processes dealt with in depth in Chapter 4 (document analysis) include empowerment programmes, funding and mentoring programmes. The University has also put action plans in place to ensure that the timelines for the programmes are adhered to.

The UFS social transformation regarding the students is highly visible. The institution has established a number of programmes in their endeavour to create harmony among its diverse masses of students. One of these is the residence integration programme that deals with placement of students in residences. The UFS strives to attain a 50% white/50% black combination of students in residences, which previously had been divided into black and white residences. In addition to this is a programme on leadership development in which first year students visit international universities to learn about integration and diversity management through interaction with diverse academic communities. Other programmes that are initiated by the Institute of Race Relations aim to open student dialogue on sensitive issues of diversity within the UFS.

The next chapter contains an in-depth analysis of the documents from previously selected white Afrikaans universities. The focus is on how the UFS runs its specific transformation programmes and then comparing these programmes with those from other universities, with the aim of finding out how these HEIs are progressing in terms of social transformation.

3.8 Literature review: my meaning-making process

In the previous chapter (Chapter 2), I looked at the general approach to this study and defined AR as the design adopted by the study. This design enabled me to explore the perceptions of the BWAs through a transformative approach in which the process engaged could lead to the emancipation of the women academics that participated in the study. Investigating the issues pertaining to transformation in this chapter allowed me to understand the background in studies of transformation in higher education so that I could align myself to the current debates in my analysis of

data and as a result contribute to the knowledge in this field. In addition, the information from the literature also enabled me to draw some themes that could fit in the interpretation of the data that came from the discussions with the women academics.

Reviewing the concepts emerging from this literature study, I identified a clear alignment with the broad typologies that I drew from the theoretical framework of the study. The analytic framework that I developed in Chapter 2 (cf. Section 2.2.1.4) from the CRT and the psychosocial perspectives include similar concepts discovered during reviewing the literature. These issues include white male domination, problems with access, recruitment and retention of the BWAs as well as problems with general aspects of the institutional culture responsible for creating an institutional climate that ensures a sense of belonging for all constituencies. All these could feature within the broad tenets of the CRT a well as align with the concepts mentioned under each one of them. The units of analysis that I presented in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.2) looked like this:

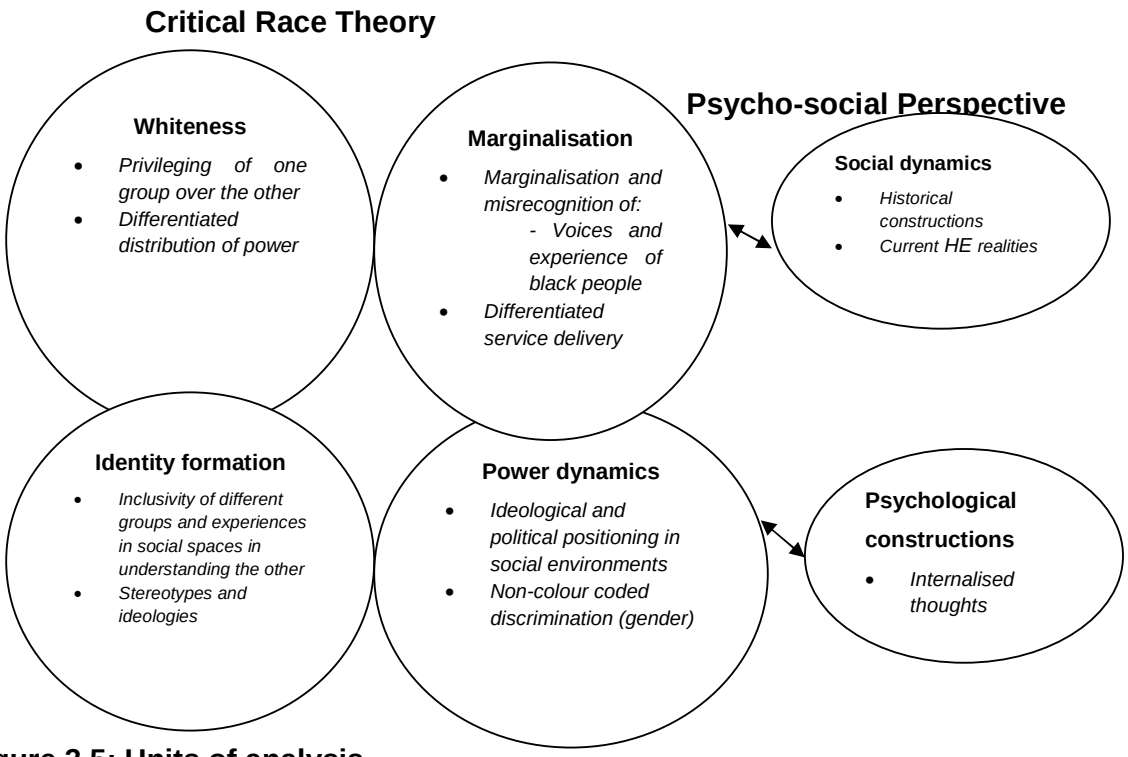


Figure 3.5: Units of analysis

Reviewing the literature, particularly the broader aspect of institutional culture, I noticed that the concepts in this framework are what constitute problems with social

transformation in the higher education context and more so in the SAHE. However, the literature mentions specific issues in the broad categories that formed my units of analysis. These issues could be presented and fitted into the broader units of analysis proposed in the previous chapter to show the alignment between the framework for the study and the literature reviewed. It also further extended the meaning-making process that I aimed to do in trying to understand the experiences and perceptions of black women academics, wearing the lens of the CRT and the psychosocial perspectives. Reporting the results of the study in the next chapter follows this extended meaning-making framework shown in the figure below:

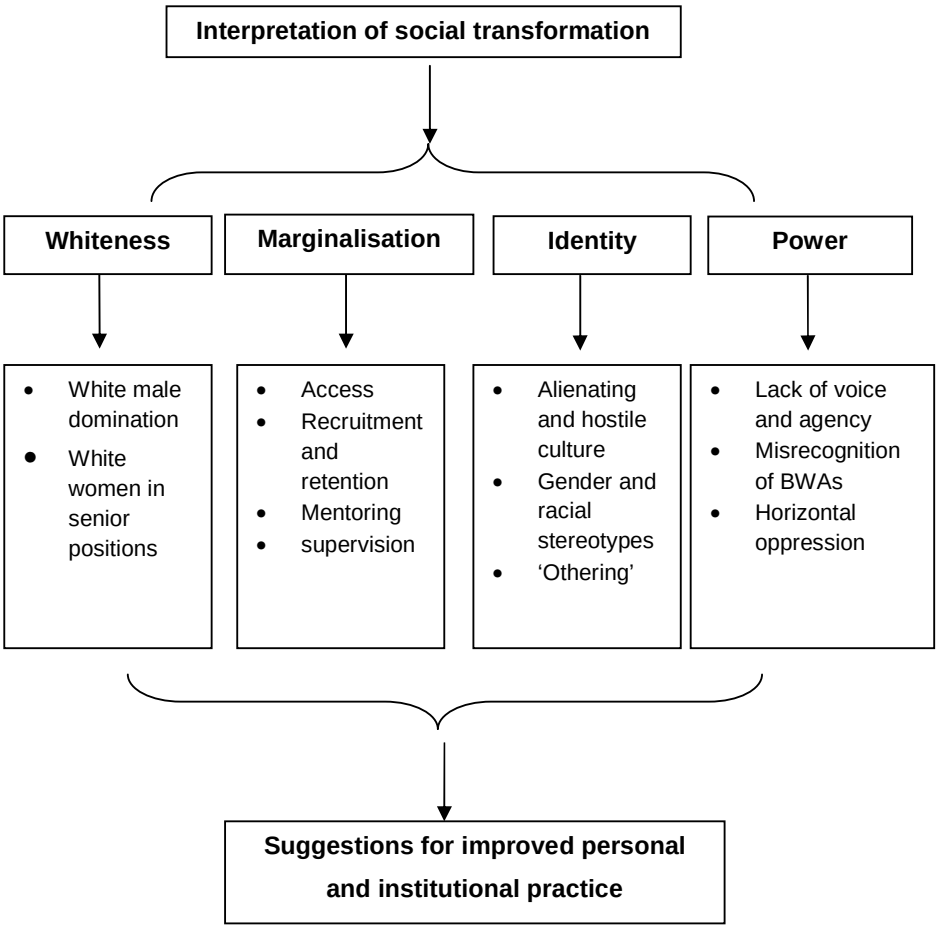


Figure 3.6: Themes from the literature (Extending the analytic framework)

In the review of the literature, for example, an issue of **whiteness**, where **white males** still dominate SAHE, has been highlighted as impeding social transformation

attempts by institutions. This view aligns with that of critical race theorists when they point to the **privileging** of one group over others in a social environment. This point, as also depicted in Figure 2.6 in the previous chapter under whiteness and highlights the discrepancies that arise when institutions allow **access** to a large number of white academics while black academics are restricted by the structures of whiteness to gain access to the institutional spaces. The literature revealed that white academics still **dominate** academia. It may be argued by some people that this does not show lack of transformation, but may be because academics who occupied posts before 1994 are still within the institutions' spaces. This could be true, but the question could remain as to what efforts institutions and the higher education sector are doing to create more posts for the intake of a new workforce. This is the critical question asked by the race theorists regarding **inequitable** spaces. The theorists argue that, if social spaces need to be shared equally, then all need to have equal chances of participation and social structures should be constructed in a way that ensures that this happens. It is this very same issue that I addressed in my discussions with the BWAs to understand their perceptions in this regard.

The statistics presented in Section 2.2 and 2.3 show that there was an increase in the number of black people and women entering academia since 2003 (cf. Figures 2.1 and 2.3). The statistics could be an indication that HEIs in South Africa were doing their utmost to respond to the demands of equity and redress that the government had put to them. Although this cannot be written off when the attempts of the institutions are considered, the literature has argued that it should not be about the masses of black women who are allowed access into academia, but about the **inclusionary practices** that form part of the welcoming institutions within higher education (cf. Section 2.4.3). What was highlighted in this chapter was that there were still **exclusionary practices** that denied black people and women academics successful participation in SAHE. These exclusions often caused black women academics in the wider HEIs to perceive the institutional climate as hostile, including a lack of **mentoring** programmes aimed at **building capacity** for these women, promotion criteria that are male-oriented and pigeon holing that they get mainly from white colleagues and students. In making meaning out of these, I also became interested in seeing if these issues would emerge from the black women academics

at the UFS in relation to the progress that their institution is making towards social transformation

It was also interesting to find that a hostile **institutional culture** has a negative impact on how BWAs carve their **identities** in their transforming institutions. When experiencing an alienating culture, BWAs seem to battle with defining their roles and who they are within the institutional space. As depicted above, when black people sense that the members of their social environment are alienating them, perhaps due to some **stereotyping**, they feel muted and their **voices and agency** get barred. The stereotypes that they experience from their institutions' management and colleagues, those that challenge their worthiness and capabilities, make them feel unwanted in academia. As has been noticed, this makes them feel like they have to work double as hard as their white colleagues, which further instils in them a feeling of being outsiders in their own institutions. Because of the way that they are viewed, as people who do not have academic skills, they feel like they always have to negotiate their **identity** between being academics and black people who also bring a wealth of knowledge to their institutions.

The concept of **capacity building** was also highlighted in the literature review as lacking for BWAs. Literature indicated that these women are still considered as nurturers who cannot handle the academic pressures. It was indicated that they are often relegated to the **gender atypical** fields of humanities and education and are also burdened with tasks involving guidance of students. In this way, institutions do not feel that it is necessary for BWAs to be **capacitated** to take up senior positions and to work in male-oriented academic fields. Consequently, the issue of proper **mentoring** as well as **supervision** for BWAs doing their PhDs is in most institutions not considered an important component of the women's training. I became intrigued by this point and wanted to find out if the women academics in my study also faced difficulties with capacity building. The most important issue was to get the women to talk these issues through with the aim of emancipating themselves and improving their own work environment.

On this point of capacity building, I became interested in the proposed strategies that could be used in equipping women with skills to succeed in academia. The two models of Geber and Lee (Tables 3.2 and 3.3) could be incorporated in the views of

the institutions' constituencies in improving the skills of the BWAs. This was most interesting for the purposes of this study because the strategies link directly with the aim of action research used as a design for this study, which mostly entails understanding the problematic phenomenon with the aim of improving the situation. The finding was later conflated with the views of the black women academics in the suggestions that they made towards improved personal and institutional improvement with regard to practice. In the next chapter, the question, '**how can we improve our practice**?' is discussed, drawing from the suggestions made by the women academics who participated in the study.

The literature has indicated that it is not only with regard to capacity building that improvement could be sought by the institutions. They also provided suggestions for improving, for example, access. Scholars, especially those within the SAHE, have suggested that quality assurance for the BWAs should accompany access. This meant that institutions should not only take pride in the number of BWAs who gain physical access to the institutions' spaces, but should ensure that these women become successful academics. It would be interesting to see if the participants in my study would also come up with some strategies on how institutions could achieve the aim of quality assurance in their attempts to transform and how they as academics could play a role in this regard.

There are many other issues that have been raised in this chapter, which are of concern when it comes to social transformation in HEIS both in South Africa and internationally. Issues of recruitment and retention, lack of voice in decision making for the women academics and difficulty to break the glass ceiling for the women are among some of the worrying aspects that act as barriers towards the inclusion of BWAs. These also feature in the framework proposed in the previous chapter as issues given attention in the analysis and reporting of the empirical data.

One other issue that was noteworthy from the literature, apart from the barriers towards social transformation, was the **interpretation of social transformation** provided by scholars in the area of transformation in higher education. It was apparent from the interpretations that social transformation is a very challenging process in SAHEIs and in the broader HEIs. The major challenge that was discussed as impacting negatively on institutions' attempts was the creation of an institutional

culture that could embrace every member of the institution. Scholars quoted in the chapter highlighted that the phenomenon of the institutional culture itself is confusing, because of different interpretations and explanations attached to the concept. Employing a stereotypical view of what institutional culture entails, could therefore lead to a lack of common understanding in people that live the culture.

Another issue that could make the interpretation of an institutional culture within the broad aspect of social transformation challenging is the fact that different constituencies within one institution view it from different angles. It has been stated clearly by many researchers that constituencies within the broader HEIs view culture either from a racial or from the gender perspective. Others have even pointed to the issues of class and geographical barriers that could also be problematic issues within the institutional culture. Therefore, viewed from all these dimensions, the question of what has to take priority in the transformation of institutions could be a real challenge. In this way, it could be understood that perceptions of constituencies need not take a simplistic view of the complexity of social transformation for institutions that have to implement the process.

The brief insights that have been shared in the above paragraphs have shown how the literature reviewed in this chapter links with the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this study as discussed in Chapter 2. As such, the data analytical framework proposed in the previous chapter was extended to include the themes that would be borrowed from the literature in the interpretation of the data as reported in the next chapter.

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review in this chapter was done to establish the progress of international HEIs and SAHEIs with regard to social transformation. The milestones that all HEIs are achieving regarding transformation have been captured. It has, however, been an observation that there are still challenges that the institutions have to face, especially when reports from the research done in the area of gender and race still reflect the problems that women and black people face within academia in a number of areas. Although an overview of the progress made by the

UFS in terms of social transformation has been presented, it should be borne in mind that the focus of the study is to discover the perception of BWAs in this institution against the backdrop of these developments within their institution. The next chapter gives an outline of the women who formed part of this study's participants and the methods used to collect the required information to assist in getting answers to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Experiences and perceptions of race and gender transformation: an application at the University of the Free State

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an account of the findings from the data generated through focus group discussions, which I conducted with BWAs, the individual interviews with both BWAs and WWAs and the open seminar. I present the findings in three sections that link with three cycles of AR. These sections are the problem identification stage, which formed the first phase of my data collection, the action and reflection section, which reports on the second and third phases of my data collection and the third section, which reports on the dissemination of the findings at the open seminar. The findings that I have compiled in this chapter are responses of the BWAs and the WWAs to the two research questions:

- How is race and gender transformation at the UFS experienced and why is it perceived as such?
- How can the insights gained from the research be integrated to assist women in finding their voices in contributing to social transformation at the UFS at both the personal and institutional level?

The first phase described in the next section is the **problem identification** phase. In this section, I provide responses to the question, **'what is our concern?**' Issues pertaining to the concerns of the women academics regarding social transformation are reported. An account of the findings from the **action steps and reflections follows the problem identification phase (Section 4.3).** The main question in the action steps phase was: **what can we do to address our concerns?** As has been mentioned in Section 2.2 (data collection), this included mixed group discussions, where both BWAs and WWAs discussed their previous concerns with a view of finding ways in which they could handle the problems, followed by a focus group discussion in which BWAs discussed their reflections on the points raised in the

previous two discussion group meetings. Data from these two discussions is presented in an integrated way. This is done with the intention of showing how the action taken inmixing the BWAs and WWAs in a race and gender discourse assisted the BWAs to deconstruct their perceptions. Finally, I present the input that I received from the HODs after providing the information on the needs of the women academics in their departments, and I then report on the seminar, which was held as a step towards raising the discussions of the women academics to the wider university community. The reporting of the results in this chapter will follow this order:

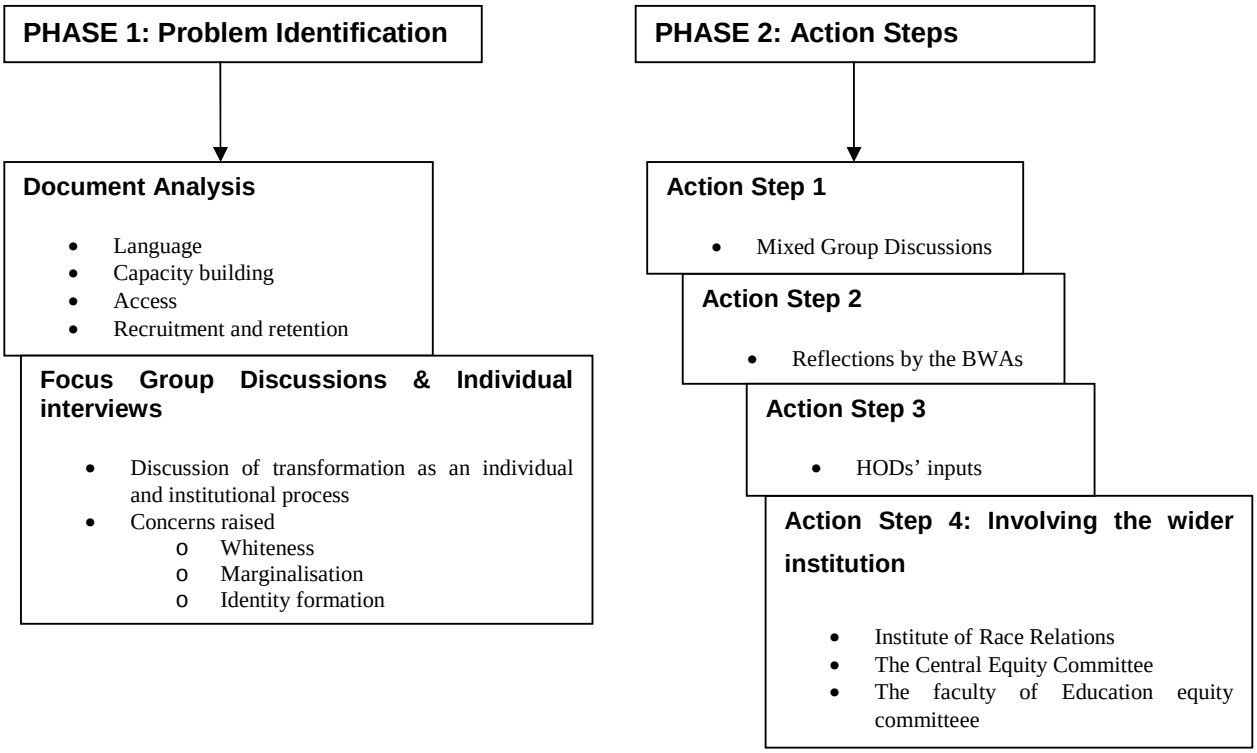


Figure 4.1: The results of the study

4.2 Phase 1: Problem identification

As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2 (cf. Sections 1.3 and 2.2) problem identification for my study started with my own concern as a researcher. My concern was that race and gender transformation seemed to be a problematic process at the UFS. Apart from the racial tensions that were rampant in the wider institution (cf. Section 1.3), I perceived my personal race and gender experiences within my faculty as indicative of a problem with social transformation (cf. Section 1.4). My productivity was greatly

hampered by what I perceived as a non-accommodative and hostile culture within my faculty and department. I always felt excluded by the use of Afrikaans in the meetings and in other formal settings and always felt isolated by the members of my department, who would at times not include me in the meetings. I also felt marginalised when most of the time my colleagues would discuss important departmental issues informally in their offices without involving me. Whether there were other factors that contributed to this, my feeling was that I was treated that way because of my race and gender. As I felt that I could not work productively in this kind of environment, which I felt was disabling, my question was, **how can I improve my work situation**?

I decided to take action that would help me to improve my situation and assist me to become a productive member of my department. The action that I took was to embark on an emancipatory exercise in which I could challenge the situation and my disabling thoughts regarding the situation. I decided to conduct a PAR study (cf. Section 1.5) and include other people who might be having similar experiences. It should be understood that I embarked on an AR study from the premise of my own value and that I bring this value into my presentation of the findings in this chapter. My value is that exclusion of people within a work environment has the potential of being a barrier to productivity and that people who feel excluded by institutional structures, should voice their concerns and find ways in which they could act on their problematic situation.

To begin my AR journey, I read diverse literature on transformation, both from the international and local context to establish how HEIs globally handle issues of social transformation. I reported the results of this in Chapter 2 and in this chapter I am reporting on SAHE in terms of what government expects from the institutions as a move towards social transformation. In addition to this, I report on the analysis of documents from the three historically white SAHEIs to ascertain what attempts these institutions were making in response to the government and to the mandates and recommendations made, at the time of this study.

4.2.1 Analysis of documents

The documents that I analysed were from the UFS, the University of Cape Town (UCT), and the University of Pretoria (UP). The main focus was on the UFS as a case study and I used the other two institutions to check if the UFS was keeping pace with the other institutions that were still grappling with social transformation issues. I report the findings from the analysis of these documents under problem identification, because I identified some of the challenges and problems that SAHEIs had to face from these documents.

In the reporting of the findings from the documents, I use the themes that I drew from the literature and which I found from the documents themselves as the most challenging aspects in SAHEIs. I used information from these documents to highlight the challenges that institutions in SA face regarding social transformation, and to present the recommendations made by the government. From this, I indicate how the three selected SAHEIs deal with the challenges to transform socially. It should be noted that all the discussed issues are classified as having an impact on the institutional culture of the institutions and therefore there is a need for SAHEIs to revisit the way they are running their institutions.

Institutional culture, as presented in this section, comprises different aspects that contribute to the feeling of a sense of belonging for all. These include language as it is used within the institution, capacity building for staff members so that they can function optimally within their work environment, promotions for staff as recognition of their hard work and other issues that will be discussed here. As has been mentioned earlier (cf. Section 4.1), I first reviewed the government recommendations and mandates for SAHEIs and then analysed the way in which the institutions themselves responded to such demands through their documented policies and transformation plans. The UFS is a point of focus, but I include the UCT and the UP to understand if the UFS is responding to the government demands in a similar way. Below is a discussion of the issues that I found in the documents.

4.2.1.1 Language

The government, through the Higher Education Act (CHE, 1997), stipulates that there are two languages considered to be languages of scholarship in higher education. These languages are Afrikaans and English. According to the Language Policy Framework for Higher Education (DHET, 2002), the higher education sector acknowledges the position of the two mentioned languages as playing a big role in research and teaching and learning in HEIs. In response to this, all three universities studied aligned their policies to this demand (UFS language Policy, 2003; UCT Language Policy, 2003; UP Language Policy, 2010). The UFS and UP in particular recognise English and Afrikaans as parallel media of instruction and the UP undertakes to use these languages as valuable instruments of science. The UCT, on the other hand, as an English-medium university, uses only English as a medium of instruction and language of communication. Although these institutions adhere to the policy, they encourage the development of other indigenous languages so that they could also form part of the languages of scholarship. It seems that the indigenous language recognised in each institution depends on the language of the majority within the community that is served by the university. The UFS, for example, encourages the development of Sesotho and is a member of PANSALB, which aims at improving this language. The UP, on the other hand, encourages the development of Sepedi and currently accepts it as a language of communication.

4.2.1.2 Capacity building

Capacity building, as conceptualised in the documents that I analysed, refers to HEIs' readiness to develop their constituencies so that they can function optimally within the institutions. In this case, the National Strategic Plan (RSA, 2001), Education White Paper 3 (DOE, 1997) and the Report on the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation (DHET, 2010) encourage HEIs to provide their constituencies with fair opportunities and increased capacity so that these constituencies can realise their potential. The government suggests establishing development programmes aimed at improving the capacity of the constituencies. These documents emphasise that such programmes should be geared more toward assisting 'young African academics' and in particular, women. The documents also

suggest that capacity building may take the form of mentorship programmes and other career development opportunities.

An analysis of the documents from the three institutions shows that to some extent HEIs are paying attention to this. Through its strategic document (UFS, 2001), the UFS commits itself to empowering its staff through effective mentoring programmes. These include mentoring programmes, induction and in-service training (UFS Employment Equity, 2005). The UCT likewise offers a number of capacity-building initiatives. Although these are not specific to black women academics, all academics enjoy the support that develops them as researchers and academics (Researcher Development Programmes). Through its Education Induction Programme, the UP enhances the newly appointed academics' teaching skills. The university has exchange programmes that also add to the development of staff (**information collected from web page of the UP**).

4.2.1.3 A general sense of belonging

The Council of Education (2004) outlined the five principles that HEIs have to commit to. These are: non-racialism, non-sexism, democracy, redress and a unitary system. These ensure that there are no inequalities and that all staff members enjoy a sense of belonging within their institutions within HE. HEIs in this case have to ensure that they address any form of discrimination, whether direct or subtle, that are perpetuated on their campuses (DoE, 2008). The DoE (2008) encourages institutions to remove all barriers to academic development by building a culture of respect for all. If staff in HE feel respected, they can feel a sense of belonging.

The UFS has responded to this mandate by initiating workshops in which issues pertaining to sensitivity, stereotypes, prejudice and cultural dialogues are discussed (UFS, Strategic Plan, 2001). It is the UFS' undertaking to create a climate of respect, sensitivity and a sense of belonging (UFS, Employment Equity Policy, 2005). As a way of ensuring that the constituencies feel a sense of belonging, the university commits to creating an institutional climate where diversity is appreciated and celebrated and where sexist behaviours are not tolerated. This is the same for the UCT and the UP. These two institutions also aim to create a non-racist and non-

sexist institutional climate (UCT: Strategic Plan, 2010-2014; UP: Policy on Unfair Discrimination on the Basis of Race, n.d). UP also specifically addresses the gender issues through its Code of Conduct on Handling of Sexual Harassment. In this document, the UP states that sexual harassment is a form of discrimination that is prohibited within the institution. Included here is sexual favouritism, where a person in authority rewards those who respond to his or her sexual advances.

4.2.1.4 Access

Access is another aspect of social transformation that this study looked at. It involved an exploration of how institutions dealt with the intake of people from the previously marginalised groups of black and women academics. In this case, as was clarified in Chapter 2 (cf. Section 2.2), access involves not only massification, but quality and equality. Massification was defined as the demographics of black women entering academia (Ramphele, 2008). It is important for this study to look at the face of transformation in this regard and once again look at the government's demands and how HEIs respond to such demands.

a) Access through massification

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996) requires of SAHEIs to increase participation of staff by ensuring that people who had been previously marginalised were given access to enter academia. The NCHE policy (1996) emphasises that particular focus should be given to black women. On the same note, the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997) and National Strategic Plan (RSA, 2001) emphasises the need for HEIs to focus attention on staffing that reflects the social composition of the broader society. This kind of redress had to happen at all levels of academia. It could be stated that, in terms of academic staff, demographics had to change from the level of junior lecturer to that of professor. The Council of Higher Education (CHET) urged HEIs to redress past inequalities by increasing the participation of black and female academics. The National Strategic Plan (RSA, 2001) indicated that there was a decline in the appointment of black and female academics in the more senior positions and that HEIs had to pay attention to this.

In response to the above, the UFS committed itself to address issues of access in terms of staff, so that they could create a diverse workforce (UFS, Strategic Document, 2001). It is stated in the Strategic Document that the UFS would sensitise faculties through awareness programmes that there was a need for this kind of redress. Also in 2007, through its Institutional Charter, the UFS aligned its access with the demands of the government by indicating that it would bring balance in the composition of staff and that it would do this by opening its doors to all races. The UFS would do this through access programmes and an the introduction of parallel medium instruction. The UCT and the UP also made such a commitment to pay attention to their staff demographics by opening doors to "members from the designated groups" (UCT: Employment Equity Plan 2010-2015; UP: Strategic Plan-2025).

b) Access through quality and equality

The government did not only mandate HEIs to deal with access through changing their demographics. The emphasis was also on quality and equality. On this point, the Education White Paper 3 (1997:14) states that HEIs should "promote equity of fair chances for success to the previously marginalised". The CHE (2004) also emphasises this by stating that there should be "redress that considers success within higher education".

Although the three institutions do not clearly incorporate this in their commitment to access, the mentorship that has been discussed in the previous issue of institutional culture may be seen as a way in which institutions ensure that they provide access with quality. The perceptions of the BWAs in this regard show how this group experienced quality access within the UFS.

4.2.1.5 Recruitment and retention

Although this issue could be similar to access, I have dealt with it separately, because it mostly involves the attempts by HEIs to ensure that they get a pool of academics from designated groups. The National Strategic Plan (RSA, 2001) clearly indicates that, increasing and retaining the pool of qualified black and women staff is

a goal of the ministry of education". The suggestion the government made was for HEIs to increase financial support for postgraduate students, so that these could form a pool from which the institutions could obtain their staff. The DoE (2008) also encourages institutions to establish staff development programmes that can build capacity for the BWAs to stay in academia. The one challenge that has been noticed is that there is difficulty in appointing black women in permanent positions, which makes the retention of this group a problem. In such a case, the advice is that institutions should give temporary contract posts to retired staff so that they can put aside permanent positions for the black women academics.

The UFS emphasised the need for the institution to retain staff from the designated groups in its Employment Equity plan (2005). It committed to diversifying selection committees so that these could employ staff in line with the retention policy. The UCT and the UP also committed themselves to set equity targets that will ensure that they recruit and retain staff from designated groups (UCT: Employment Equity Plan, 2010-2015; UP: Strategic Plan 2010-2025).

After an extensive review of the literature and thorough analyses of the relevant SAHE documents, I realised that the HEIs themselves were aware that there were challenges in the process of transformation. The analyses of documents indicated that these institutions were working hard to ensure that the process became successful. In this case I thought that a voice from the people that were part of the changes was necessary as a contribution towards the success of this process.

4.2.2 Results of the focus group discussions and individual interviews

As was indicated in the previous chapter (cf. Section 3.2), a model was used to analyse data from the focus group discussions and individual interviews. This model (drawn from the literature and theoretical framework) helped to distinguish between different elements of an institutional culture, which BWAs felt were of concern to them. Similarly, as has already been discussed, the themes were drawn from the tenets of the CRT and psychosocial perspectives. The paragraphs below elaborate

on these themes and through excerpts from the BWAs' narratives, highlight the deep issues that contribute to the way this constituency feels regarding social transformation at the UFS. The different issues discussed in this section (4.2.2) – **what is our concern** – provide insight into the experiences of BWAs at the UFS, and how this group makes sense of such experiences. The first part in this section presents the group's definition or interpretation of social transformation. This definition is important because it is based on the interpretation that the BWAs perceive the UFS transformation either negatively or positively. The interpretation forms the platform for the expectations of this group regarding the way in which they would have expected their institution to transform socially. I should re-emphasise that I take my value into this presentation and interpretation of data and that as an action researcher my focus is on first improving my own practice as the focal point of the study.

As discussed earlier (Section 2.2), my journey towards raising my voice with the aim of improving my own practice and also involving others to assist them in gaining a voice, started with approaching other BWAs (cf. Section 1.2). The BWAs showed their concern regarding gender and race transformation at the UFS. They agreed to be part of my study, in which we could share our lived experiences of the daily practices of social transformation at the UFS and find ways to work through any challenges that we were encountering as part of this transforming institution. This culminated in preparing for our first meeting through a focus group discussion. I was responsible for organising the focus group discussion (FGD), because I had initiated the discussion and needed to compile the information for my PhD study. However, I worked closely with the BWAs in finding a suitable and convenient time. Our first FGD was mainly a problem identification stage and a planning phase in which we deliberated on the meaning of social transformation as we conceptualised it and planned for the next FGDs.

I should point out that in the first FGD I did not contribute much of my own experiences and interpretation of issues, but let the participants discuss their own. The reason was to avoid directing the interpretations and experiences towards my own understanding as a researcher. Although I had clarified my role as a researcher and participant (cf. Section 2.2) to the members of the FG, I could notice that they

still regarded me as a researcher and thereby knew what we had to discuss. After explaining the study and asking them to discuss what social transformation meant to each of them, there was a long silence. Nobody wanted to open the discussion and they looked at me to give them my own interpretation. This was a challenge as I was also new to the AR process. At that stage I realised the importance of including another person who was an expert in the field. I considered the possibility of including such a person for the next FGD. At that first FGD, it was only after my suggestion to write down our interpretation on individual papers that one of them suggested that our discussion should be open. She started the discussion and others felt at ease to follow.

The open discussion on the definition and interpretation of social transformation yielded much data. The participants added to each other's definitions and even prompted contributions among themselves. The phrases that they used, such as '*yes that too, but don't you think it could also include*....' (R4) were effective in drawing out more interpretations of the phenomenon.

In the first FGD with BWAs, I noticed that most of the participants geared their interpretation of transformation towards addressing the topic of my study. I, for example, noted responses like, '*I would say the UFS is transforming if they could address issues of equity*' (R3) and '*what is this university doing to develop the black female academic? Are there any gender offices within management? Transformation for me is about the institution responding to these critical questions*' (R5). Although I would have preferred at that stage that they give their own understanding without issues of what the UFS was not doing, I let their discussions continue, because that was how they viewed transformation. They understood it as inexorably interwoven with the institution and they could not divorce their interpretations from the institution. My initial plan was that we would get general meanings and based on that, discuss what the UFS was or was not doing to address the issues that we, as participants, felt were important. My plan at that stage had to change to accommodate the new direction which the participants wanted to take.

As I analysed the data later, I noticed that despite the discussion being geared more towards the UFS, the participants all defined social transformation as a change process. They defined this process as a process that had to be implemented in all

areas of the institution. Some felt that '*the minute you talk about transforming something, it means you are changing something completely, overhauling it' (R1)* and that if transforming is an '*active word' (R5)* it meant that a new way of doing things was being implemented. I interpreted this to mean that BWAs had a view of transformation, which entailed a total overhaul of the UFS structures and a movement towards a totally new direction for the UFS in all its spheres.

Although the BWAs felt that transformation within institutions meant changing the institutional structures, they admitted that social transformation was a very complex process, which could not take place within a short period and at times was a very difficult phenomenon to define. According to them transformation was '*a huge word with a lot of impact*' (R1) for the people who had to implement it and for the institution that experienced the change. When they discussed the complexity of this process for the institution, BWAs indicated that a lot of factors needed to be taken into consideration when changes were being implemented. Taking the UFS as an example, one participant said,

> *R4: 'When it comes to the University of the Free State, a person should also understand how the institution was fifty years ago and how it is today so that one can see if transformation is taking place.'*

This could mean that different considerations needed to be made before the participants could assess the success of a social transformation process within their institution. In fact, BWAs themselves were of the opinion that the background of the UFS played a critical role in the way in which the institution was transforming and this background was making the process very complex (cf. Section 2.5 for the history of the UFS). During the discussion one participant, who did not want to disclose her personal experiences, likened transformation to a gemstone.

> *R1: 'Transformation is like taking a gemstone, which, when you look at it has things you can see with your eyes, but if you project the light, you see things that you cannot see with naked eyes.'*

This statement could mean that within institutions there were transformation issues that could easily be pointed out and thought of as very easy to change by people, who thought transformation was an easy process when looking at it from the surface.

If one could, however, go deep into the dynamics of transformation, that is, what it entailed and the effort that was needed to implement it, then the difficulty of the process and the complexity therein could become exposed. Although I thought that was what the participant meant, I had to ask to avoid uninformed conclusions. I asked her what she meant by her statement and what the hidden things within the UFS transformation could be. This was her response, '*you only get to understand those if you have crossed a lot of people's paths in this institution*.' I could immediately see her tenseness at that point and felt that the issue she was referring to could be very sensitive. I had to assure her that she did not have to talk about her experiences if she felt she could not share them in the group discussion. That was my chance to remind all the participants that our discussions, as they signed up when we started, were confidential. I also indicated that I was going to set up individual interviews and anything that they would want to discuss only in such interviews would be kept for that. This alleviated their fears as one of them stated that she was afraid to talk, because she thought I would ask her if she had any specific experience that she wanted to share. At that stage I was, however, alerted once more to the sensitive nature of my study, which could evoke painful memories and became aware of my responsibility as a researcher to be sensitive to the participants' feelings and experiences.

There were, however, participants who generally defined the concept according to what it could mean, not only at the UFS, but also in the broader higher institution context. These participants stated that to them transformation was a process. This process was an '*institutional process and a self-awareness process'* (R6). This is what one participant said in this regard:

> R6 (BWA): *'It is a change that has to happen, but there should be self-awareness first, individual awareness. Transformation is an individual thing and an institutional thing. There can't be institutional transformation if there isn't individual transformation*.'

As I analysed this quote and responses from other participants, I noticed that the participants were aware that there were two levels at which social transformation had to be manifested within an institution –a personal level and an institutional level. This reminded me of Schein's model (1992; cf. Section 2.3) of institutional culture, which

depicts that changes within institutions need to occur on three levels: at the level of the organisational structures and processes, the institutional values and the individual people's values and actions. I followed up with a question that sought to understand what the participants defined as an institutional level of transformation and a personal level of transformation. Below is an account of how these two levels were discussed and defined in our FGD.

4.2.2.1 Transformation as an institutional process

Most participants held the belief that an institution, through its management, had a responsibility to ensure that successful transformation took place. This was what they defined as institution driven transformation. They highlighted the importance of management to oversee the change process so that management could notice when the process was not being driven properly. According to the BWAs, when transformation takes place in any institution, '*there are certain procedures to be put in place, certain systems, and policy changes, whatever'* (R2). Only management could therefore engage in policy development, monitor and evaluate the process. The BWAs felt, '(they) *cannot do much to see to it that change is implemented at this level'* (R8). The definition of BWAs in this case seemed to align with what Badat (2008) called a 'reformation' transformation (cf. Section 2.2), which focuses on the changes in the policies and practices. The only possible problem about this change maybe that the changes do not often deal effectively with the existing dominant social relations within institutions (Badat, 2008). These social relations were some of the issues of concern for the BWAs towards the process of social transformation at the UFS.

As they turned their focus more to the UFS, the BWAs felt that the institution could only transform socially if it would address the past inequalities. They pointed out that even though transformation was a '*broad concept with many legs' (R7),* at the UFS it could mean *'the institution's ability to reflect on the restitution, which means moving away from the past and working on addressing all issues that have led to imbalances' (R4)*. Such imbalances, which BWAs linked to social transformation, included the gender and race imbalances in terms of access and retention. The women academics felt that the UFS had to ensure that there was '*proper*

representation, which reflects the society within which the institution exists' (R1). According to the women, although the UFS was a diverse institution, they suggested that particular attention had to be paid to the intake of black women academics. Although this could not mean that the institution had to shut out people from other race groups, the BWAs were referring mainly to a balanced representation of all race groups within the institution, which was at that time still a challenge for the UFS (cf. Figure 2.4).

The BWAs' feeling that the institution had to drive this kind of transformation was in line with the government's mandate for SAHEIs, namely to increase the intake of black women academics (CHET, 2001). The UFS itself also undertook to address the imbalances by ensuring that the UFS became a de-racialised institution (Employment Equity, 2005; Strategic Plan 2012-2016). Although this was an undertaking from the University, the UFS' staff demographics showed that white male academics still dominated the academia (Strategic Plan 2012–2016). It could have been due to these statistics that the BWAs felt that the UFS management had to attend to transformation in the area of access.

The participants' feeling was that social transformation could only be achieved if the UFS management reflected on these questions, which the BWAs felt were important:

> *R5: 'What do they do about developing the black female academics at this institution? Are there any gender offices within the management? Where are black females in the management of the University?'*

The role of management in the process of social transformation was not emphasised by only the BWAs. During the individual interviews the white women colleagues also referred to management as '*key figures*' (WWA 3) in ensuring that the UFS achieved social transformation. While they differed with the BWAs in that the UFS' transformation had to be geared towards black women, they had a similar feeling that management had to take a lead in making the UFS a diverse institution, which reflected a fair representation of all race groups. The WWAs were, however, more concerned about gender issues. They felt that management was '*paying more attention to race than gender*' (WWA 1) in the UFS' endeavour to be '*politically right*' (WWA 3). I observed a feeling of anger in this particular participant's perception

about the political aspect of transformation, namely that the management was failing to adopt a balanced approach to transformation, but because of the broader South Africqn issues of past apartheid, the institution seemed to be overcompensating to satisfy the new higher education demand of racial redress. She was hesitant to engage with me on this issue, because she thought I would regard her as jealous of the black people.

> *WWA 3: 'You shouldn't think that I am jealous. I am absolutely not, but do you think what the management is doing is right? I don't see our people having a future here. The focus is on black people. They seem to have forgotten that we (white women academics) were also marginalised. I think transformation focus has to shift'.*

In fact some of our white women colleagues pointed out that everybody who was not a white male had been marginalised, so it should not only be a black women academics' issue:

> *WWA 2: 'The status quo was that a black man, black woman and a white female assumed a second class position to the so-called superior role of the white male. So it is not only black women that are marginalised in this regard.'*

Although two of the WWAs felt that gender inequities were not being addressed, the argument from others was that one had to look at the history of the UFS. For one WWA, who had been with the institution for twenty-three years, there was 'a *lot of gender transformation,*' because when she first joined the UFS, there were few women at the university, mainly those in senior positions. She, however, pointed out that at the time of my study one could *'see women and their voices have increased and they are acknowledged*' (WWA 3). Nonetheless, even this WWA pointed out that there was still '*much that needed to be done*' by the management in this regard.

4.2.2.2 Transformation as a self-awareness process

Despite the general feeling of the women academics that transformation was an institutional process to be driven by its management, personal accountability of

individuals towards the success of this process at the UFS was also introduced by some of the BWAs in the focus group discussions (FGDs) and by the WWAs in the individual interviews. In the FGDs, this was an issue of great debate. The BWAs did not understand what self-awareness entailed in this case. Explaining the process of self-awareness, the BWAs who supported the idea, defined it as a process of '*knowing yourself and where you come from and understanding other people around you and where they come from'* (R7). The point of debate lay in the second part of the definition, which seemed to place a responsibility on the participants to make and effort to understand the 'other'.

When the notion of the 'other' was mentioned, participants wanted to know why the 'other' should matter. The problem in this case seemed to stem from the perceptions of the BWAs towards their white colleagues. All participants understood the importance of understanding the self, but they argued that it was not possible to know the other people within the UFS. Their understanding of the other people here was that it referred to the white colleagues and therefore the BWAs felt it was almost impossible to get to know the 'other', because that 'other' was not interested in knowing them. At this stage I again understood the complexity of social transformation, where, within the UFS, people still clustered each other into race groups who could never work as a unit. The challenge for me as a researcher was whether I had to propose at that stage that we individually interrogated our beliefs towards the other or whether I should leave the reflection part for the next discussion. As I indicated earlier, we had planned that we would try that day to get a sense of how we each interpreted social transformation and focused on the concerns that we had, based on our perceptions of a socially transformed institution. My other dilemma was that the discussion was scheduled for only one hour and thirty minutes, during which time we could not reflect on all the issues of concern that we had raised. I decided to write down my questions on how we felt we had to view the other and left it for the next FGD. It bothered me that I had to take that decision when the BWAs were still willing to debate on the issue of 'otherness' and noticed that these were some of the inner decision-making conflicts that I would have to handle well in the next sessions.

At this stage I should acknowledge the assistance of one of my colleagues, who provided me with material to read on interviewing skills. Reading on these skills mainly helped me in learning to manage time. One thing that I learnt was that one participant should not be allowed to speak for a long time while others were waiting for their turn. In a sensitive way, the facilitator of the focus group discussion had to find a way of dealing with participants who had much to contribute without giving others a chance to speak. I realised that this was my weakness during the first FGD. The suggestions on areas of concern would have been briefly touched on if I had facilitated the time for discussions well. I should point out that, although this sounded helpful in my case, I struggled with how I would put it into practice at the next discussion without making the participants reluctant to contribute.

Getting back to the discussion of the day though, the BWAs had to deliberate on how they understood transformation as a self-awareness process and how this could contribute to social transformation at the UFS. The discussion still centred around knowing oneself in the sense of '*appreciating that we are black and we are women without attaching any negative connotation to the concepts*' (R5). The BWAs believed that this could possibly help them to focus on their strengths and the knowledge capital that they brought to the UFS and also accept others as complementary in areas where they had weaknesses.

> *R7: 'This will help us to accept that we have strengths that the other people might not have, and that we have weaknesses and allow others to help us with these. By so doing we will also learn to accept the role of others in our academic lives, and as a result see that we need each other. Isn't it how we will celebrate diversity and avoid racial and gender tensions within the university?'*

While this sounded very positive and encouraging for the BWAs, the question that arose from others in the group was how we would incorporate the others in the process of transforming the self. This concern was raised because racial inter-group tensions still existed in different areas of the institution at the time of the study. The BWAs felt that the mixed group discussion that had to follow in the following month would be the first step to get to understand our WWA colleagues. We all, however, agreed that each one of us would reflect on ways in which to go through a process of

self-awareness. Although we did not make this compulsory, we suggested that we would share our reflections in this regard at the next FGD.

I would like to share an excerpt of my journal entry for that day, which I wrote immediately after our meeting as a reflection on the issue of self-awareness and reflection. I share this piece to highlight the inner conflict that I had after the discussion, which helped me to go through the self-emancipatory process of challenging my way of doing things within my department.

Journal entry 28th July

> *Our discussion on self-awareness has been so valuable to me. Looking at my situation now within my department, I think I have not taken the first step to try and solve my problem and to try and understand why my colleagues are behaving in this way. I have always doubted myself as a deserving member of my faculty. I have actually contributed to how my colleagues view me, because I always feel that my colleagues are superior and I have nothing to offer. I am not aware of my self-worth and this may be reflecting on other people... Mmmm, was I hasty to judge the situation as a race issue? I think the problem here is that I haven't tried to understand why my colleagues are treating me the way they do? No, I am not a problem here! And I know I can be productive if I let myself accept that I have something to offer. Therefore, what am I going to do? I will discuss my concerns with my HOD first...oh NO!*

As I engaged in the reflection exercise that day, I noticed how difficult it was to go through the reflection process and how difficult it was for me to challenge the way I had been doing things in practice. I understood the difficulty of change and self-emancipation. The exercise of writing a diary, however, proved to have been an emancipatory exercise for the majority of the BWAs when we shared the reflections at the following FGD. Unfortunately, I will not be able to share their diaries, because they requested that I should not include them in this report. Most of them, however, explained that this was an eye-opening exercise, which made them see that they might have been contributing to some extent to their perception of the UFS being non-transforming.

Although the WWAs, on the other hand, did not use the term self-awareness process, they also felt that individuals could contribute to social transformation by '*getting out of their little corners*' (WWA1) and try to understand the other colleagues' background. One WWA confessed that she always felt guilty that she did not make an effort to talk to her colleagues and she admitted that she might have stepped on many people's toes, because she did not understand who they were and what they believed. The WWAs accepted that getting to understand who a person was and understanding their way of life would be a step towards creating harmony within departments and the possibility of collaboration among staff. The other WWA recalled that one BWA from her department resigned from the UFS. She indicated that other white women colleagues suggested that the BWA was lazy and could not handle the academic work. This WWA stated that she always felt that the BWA was not lazy, but overwhelmed by the new culture of the UFS, which at that time was very white. What the WWA was emphasising in this case was that if colleagues had made the effort to get to know their colleague, they would have understood her frustrations and maybe would have helped her deal with her situation.

What was striking in this instance was how uninformed perceptions about other people could lead to a misunderstanding about different groups. The BWAs felt it was difficult to approach their colleagues, while the WWAs in this study showed their willingness to get to know their black women colleagues better. Some women academics felt that this misunderstanding could successfully be dealt with if there could be critical discourses, which could address the area of 'the 'other' within their workspace.

It was on the basis of the above interpretations of social transformation by women academics that we had in-depth discussions on areas of concern at our first focus group discussion and individual interviews.

4.2.3 What was our concern?

In this section I report on how the women academics perceived social transformation at the UFS and as is the premise of the psychosocial perspectives, indicated the reasons why they perceived social transformation in that way. In my analysis of the data reported in this section, I adopted a theory driven approach to identify the themes for my data deductively (cf. Section 3.2). However, I did not only go through

the data to identify pieces that fitted into my themes, but as indicated in the previous chapter, I used an abductive analysis (cf. Section 3.2.2.3; Danermark, *et al*., 2002) to interpret my data. I have, for example, used the psychosocial approach to report on the differences between the perceptions of the women academics, as influenced by their years of experience within the UFS and how their interactions with the individual colleagues and the wider institution affected the way in which they perceived social transformation at the institution. In this way I took cognisance of the influences of time, space and sociality in forming the women's perceptions (cf. Section 1.5.2). The CRT also played a role where I report on the experiences of BWAs against those of WWAs so that the voices of the BWAs, as the focus of this study, could be highlighted against the 'multi-vocality' of the marginalised others (cf. Sections 1.3 and 2.3; Cole, 2009). I have not used this approach to pit black and white with the aim of presenting one group as more advantaged or disadvantaged than the other. I have used the approach to highlight differing and similar issues, which the women academics raised with the purpose of clarifying the areas of focus that needed attention in the mixed group discussion. What I also had to bear in mind was that, in an emancipatory study like this one, the difference in the voices might assist in the reflections in which groups involved could consider the 'other's' point of view when thinking about change in their work environment.

In our first FGD, the BWAs raised their concern on a number of issues that they felt hampered social transformation at the UFS. These issues, as discussed in the paragraphs to follow, are language problems, power relations, capacity building problems, non-recognition of the BWAs, gender and racial stereotypes and issues pertaining to access and retention of BWAs. As I am using an abductive inference in this study to report on the data, I would like to link this section tithe tenets of CRT discussed in the previous chapter (cf. Section 3.2.5). These tenets are whiteness, marginalisation, identity formation and power dynamics. I use these tenets as my units of analysis so that the framework that was proposed could feature throughout the study. These tenets were used accompanied by the psychosocial perspectives of the BWAs and WWAs (cf. Section 3.2). Figure 4.1 depicts once again the framework of the units of analysis that I used in the study (cf. Figures 2.7 and 3.6). It should be noted that the issues of concern that BWAs raised have each been placed under relevant themes of the tenets while the psychosocial perspectives are linked to these

themes to account for the reasons why BWAs held these particular perceptions. It will be noticed that there are commonalities and overlaps in the domains/issues placed under the tenets and another researcher could have arranged these categories differently. To prevent repetition of the categories which could feature under more than one tenet/theme and for the purpose of this study, the issues/domains were dealt with as represented in the diagram and any overlaps are explained in the paragraphs that follow.

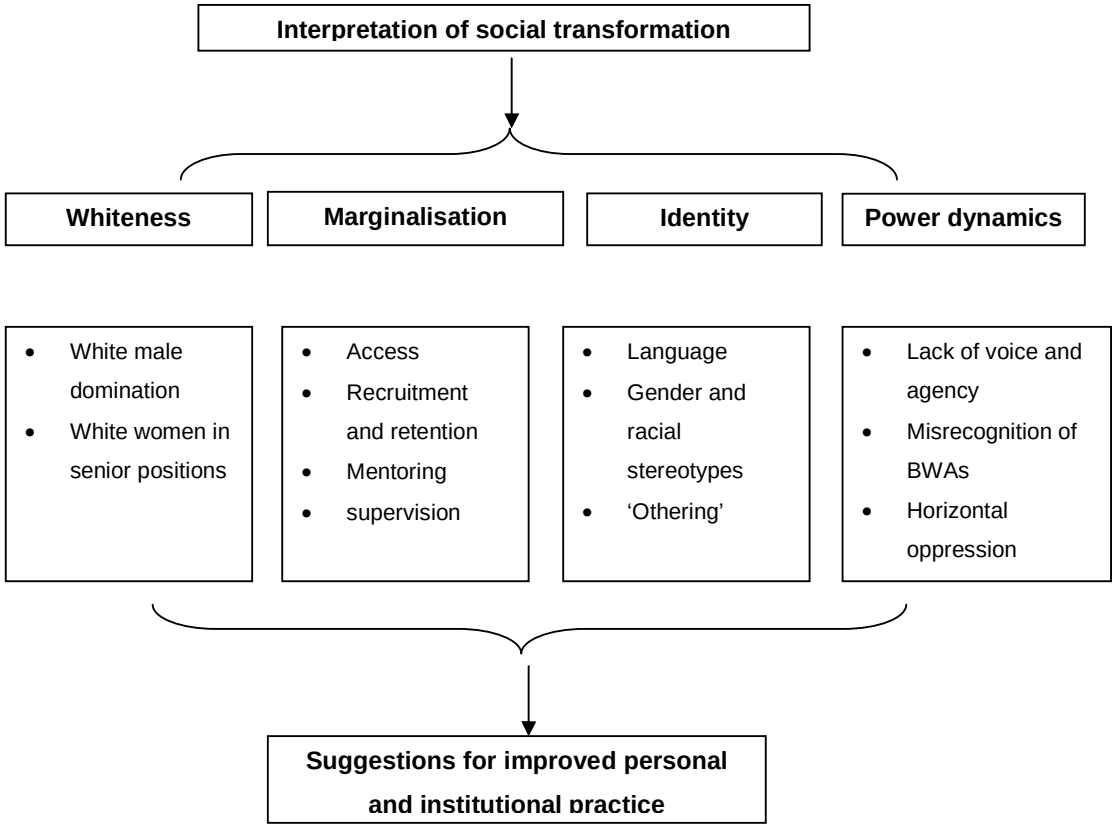


Figure 4.2: Themes used to report on the findings

4.2.3.1 Whiteness

Whiteness in HEIs has been discussed in Chapter 2 as a culture in which white people are privileged while black people are disadvantaged (cf. Section 2.1.1.2.1). In fact, CRT generally views whiteness or white supremacy as a system in which there is a differential distribution of opportunities and wealth based on the socially

constructed racial groupings (Cole, 2009). Viewing whiteness as a socio-historical and political construct, Cole (2009) (cf. Section 3.2.1), explains it as a situation whereby there is a differentiated distribution of opportunities, rights and duties. This socio-historical reality within SAHE could be looked at from the differentiated provision of services that used to characterise SAHE during the apartheid era (Section 2.1.1.1) and attention has to be paid to interrogating the progress that SAHE has made to deal with those inequalities in their endeavour to transform socially. When one looks at this interpretation of whiteness, it could be noticed that all the issues in Figure 4.1 could feature under whiteness, although they have been distributed across the four themes/tenets as stated for the purpose of the study. Noted here though, is that this concept (whiteness) points to institutional practices which keep the system of privileging and marginalisation alive (issues also discussed under other themes within my model). For the purpose of this reporting though, focus here is paid to how the UFS' practices may be contributing to the culture of whiteness through the dominance of the white male academics within the faculties as well as the dominance of this group in senior positions. This point is discussed further in terms of how the culture of whiteness disadvantages other groups within the UFS when it comes to promotions. Also discussed under whiteness is the role that white women academics who occupy senior positions play in further keeping the system where BWAs feel subordinated through horizontal oppression alive (this point is elaborated under power dynamics). The social dynamics of the past realities of SAHE in this regard are recognised, although BWAs feel that if their institution is really striving to transform socially, it should pay attention to addressing these past issues.

a) White male domination

The number of white males dominating the UFS was mainly recognised by the BWAs as visible at the senior positions and the top management of the UFS. The BWAs mentioned that the deans and heads of departments were all male and, with the exception of the Faculty of Education (where the dean was Indian), were still white. The problem of white males dominating senior positions in academia has been discussed in Chapter 2 as an international problem (cf. Sections 2.1.1.2 and 2.3; Mabokela, 2011). Literature indicated that the situation of male dominance

generally prevents women being promoted to senior positions. The review of the literature showed that women are still stereotyped as lacking in terms of leading departments and while the white woman seems to be getting over this stereotype, the black woman is still regarded as inadequate in this regard (Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

At the FGD and individual interviews the BWAs pointed out that the UFS did not seem to be transforming in this area. They mentioned that the top management of the institution, apart from one black woman, who was appointed after a black male vice-rector resigned in 2011, the university council/management remained white and male. One woman asked a question, '*what we see is a big number of white males in those positions (senior positions), where is the black woman?*' (R3).

The women believed that the large number of white males in senior positions hampered transformation as they felt that these males geared the UFS to transform in a direction that favoured white males over females. This point correlates with the findings in the literature, which indicated that although the issue of whiteness is not an issue in some African HEIs, male dominance is a problem, in which case women in general are stereotyped to be lacking the qualities of good academics. It has been indicated though that in other countries like the United States of America and the United Kingdom white male domination is as much a problem as it was in SAHE at the time of the study (cf. Section 2.2.2). When discussing this problem, the BWAs in this study cited an example of the promotion criteria that did not take the social responsibilities of females into consideration, but set the same standard (in terms of research) for both men and women. According to the women academics (BWAs and WWAs), white males were at an advantage because they already had previous research outputs and, as was the case with all male academics, they did not have as many social responsibilities as the women academics reported to have. As has already been discussed in the previous chapters (cf. Section 3.2), the social responsibilities of women in international higher education seemed to make it difficult for women to spend the required amount of time and energy to execute academic responsibilities. As a result, many of them suffered in cases where promotions emphasised mainly research as the major requirement.

As the BWAs also noticed, the promotion criteria are favourable to male academics, who could invest a lot of time conducting research and writing articles. This is not a

new situation in higher education as has been highlighted in the chapter on the literature review. Women in most countries seem to believe that the institutional practices, which include promotions, seem to invalidate their presence within their institutions and portray men (especially white males) as having more expertise. The frustration of the women academics in my study regarding the point of promotions was echoed in a statement by one BWA, who said:

> *R6: 'The promotion criteria itself promotes dominance. The expectation on publications is just too high. That is why I decided to put the idea of promotion on hold until my kids are old enough to look after themselves… I believe the criteria is not that bad, but only for those women who don't have a responsibility of young kids who are still at school.'*

Actually the women themselves felt that being promoted was like '*a dream*' (R3) to them and that they would never qualify for promotions into senior positions. Some even mentioned that they '*would never apply for such promotions because (we) can't succeed*' (R1). When the BWAs mentioned that they could not even bother to apply for promotions in our first focus group discussion, I thought that such a defeated mind-set needed to be challenged. It was at this stage in our focus group discussion that I felt I needed to share my positive experience about being promoted to a lecturer position (from junior lecturer), at the time of the study. Although this was not a senior position, I had always perceived the criteria to this level as unattainable for me, I applied nonetheless and was promoted. This made me optimistic, realising that I had always engaged a defeated mind-set even before I tried.

I had thought that the BWAs would take my experience as motivation that we had to adopt a changed mind-set towards climbing the academic ladder. The majority, however, felt that the position I had applied for was easy to get since it was still a junior position. One woman who had her doctoral degree related her experience (in an individual interview) of how she had applied for a senior lecturer position after having checked the criteria and believing that she qualified. The application was not successful and she indicated that she had been despondent since then. Although few participants in the FGD agreed that we had to keep trying, some women again felt that it was like fighting a losing battle.

The frustration regarding promotions, which was biased towards white males, was not only raised by BWAs, but the white women also felt disadvantaged by the promotion criteria. They felt that it was useless to work hard hoping for a promotion, because the criterion was unattainable and favoured mostly men:

> *WWA 1: 'I don't work for promotion now because if I were to do, I would become discouraged. The criteria are very steep and I don't think as a woman I can achieve what is required.'*

When this woman indicated that she felt discouraged, I remembered my conversation with one WWA, although not part of my group of study participants, had also not been successful after applying for a promotion. This happened despite the fact that she felt she had published widely to be considered for promotion as research was at the time a crucial consideration in the research criteria of the UFS. The anxiety that this colleague showed towards the criteria indicated that she might never try again. She also indicated that she felt the '*old white professors*' still held a perception that women could not make it in academia. She also felt that the white male professors acted like 'gate keepers' and did not want to allow people into the inner circle. It was striking how the phrase 'old white professors' was not only used by BWAs, but by the WWAs too. This could mean that both groups felt strongly that the old white professors, who dominated both research and academia, had to retire so that there could be room for young women academics. The issue of the white male professors who had to retire but were still holding permanent employment was also mentioned as a cause for concern in the report of the ministerial committee (DoE, 2008), which also recommended that these could be given temporary posts so that they could vacate posts for young academics. The phrase 'old professors', which was used to connote a state of oppression felt by both groups, indicated that gender disparities were binding us strongly and was indicative of the intersection that exists between race and gender marginalisation in academia even though we might have been divided by race and experiencing the UFS differently from a race perspective.

One issue that has to be borne in mind, despite the feeling that was raised by the women, is, however, that at the time of this study, the UFS was striving to be a university that would be recognised internationally through excellence in research. It

seemed that placing the emphasis on research output as an important aspect in promotion was aimed at encouraging all academics, regardless of gender or race, to conduct research. The women's feelings that the institution's promotion criteria frustrated them seemed only to take into account their status as academics that had to fulfil other social roles. The important issue here would be whether the UFS could afford to adapt the promotion criteria so that they would be feasible to everybody. Could the institution do this without compromising the standard it had set? The question that could be asked at this point would be, **what implication would the review of the promotion criteria have on the growth of the university as an institution that was striving for excellence?** Possible suggestions and feelings with regard to this question are discussed in the section on mixed group discussions, which highlight the women's suggestion of how they would like the UFS to handle the issue of promotion.

Although the concern of the women (both BWAs and WWAs) that white male academics dominated academia was uniform, the women noticed that there was a bit of a breakthrough for a few women, who were in powerful positions as professors, programme directors and coordinators. There was, however, a strong feeling from the participants that these women did not have much impact in changing the institutional practices. Participants believed that male colleagues often silenced the women's voices and prevented them being an active part of the decision-making processes. This issue, which was raised in the FGD and individual interviews, is discussed below.

b) Women in senior positions

Participants in this study showed concern towards the underrepresentation of women in senior positions. The senior positions that the women referred to were at the level of senior lecturer to top management. According to the women, BWAs were concentrated more in the lecturer and junior lecturer positions. This finding is not new in this study; it echoes the plight of the BWAs across higher education globally (cf. Section 2.3.1). The findings from the literature indicate that the women in the American and British higher education, as well as those in the wider SAHE faced challenges in breaking the glass ceiling to senior positions as well. In this study, the

women academics indicated that getting a promotion from the position of lecturer and junior lecturer was a struggle for them. They felt that this was because of the promotion criteria and the stereotypes still held about them as people who could not function productively in senior positions. They also indicated that, although some women, especially white women academics, were promoted, this was done just for window dressing and for transformation reports. The issue of promotion criteria, although it is touched on in the section on power relation, seemed to particularly concern the BWAs. The main concern in this case was that the criteria evoked anxiety in these women:

> *R6 (BWA in focus group): 'this criteria is meant to create anxiety in us. They will tell you that in order for you to be promoted, you need to have published so many articles and attended so many conferences, something one can never do with the workload that we have.'*

> *R3 (BWA in focus group): 'right now we feel so demoralised that we feel you know what, not even one article… I am just going to fold my arms.'*

The anxiety highlighted above indicates that transformation in the area of promotion was an issue that needed attention from the university. This constituency felt that they were not going to be productive in the area of teaching and learning, because of the pressure that the institution was putting on them to publish. One BWA quoted the well-known phrase within this institution, '*it's a publish or perish situation because if we don't publish then we don't benefit and get recognition in academia*' (R4). The women academics' main concern was that they were expected to publish without having been trained in this aspect. Although this is now an issue of capacity building, which taps on how much the UFS develops the skills of the BWAs, the BWAs who were novice researchers, indicated that there had to be provision made to build competence for them to write articles before the UFS' expectations could be realised:

> *R3 (BWA in focus group): 'if you say you are expecting me to write articles for me to get promoted, you should ensure that I am now capable and competent to handle article writing.'*

> *R1 (BWA in focus group): 'they cannot just say jump because if you don't know how to jump, you will break your leg.'*

One woman academic expressed the anxiety of having to publish for promotion by creating an analogy of a street child:

> *R4 (BWA in focus group): 'you see, it's like taking a street child straight from the street and put him in a boarding school and say look at the other children. What about you? You are not like them. I mean, he doesn't know anything about table manners, can't read, can't write. No rehabilitation, doesn't know how to use a toilet or shower and then you start blaming him. Look, but these guys are your age.'*

The above view of the BWAs regarding promotions is shared by other women academics in other countries (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Thompson & Channer, 2007). However, these other academics problems centre more around the fact that they have the ability to write and do research, but they always feel like their work is hyper-scrutinised and regarded as not having the same credibility as their white colleagues' research. So, the point that could be drawn from this is that BWAs face challenges being promoted to senior positions, whether they have the capacity to (research) or lacks the skill, like the participants in my study.

The women academics in this study stated that even though the rector of the UFS had a vision of the institution that would function on par with the international higher education as far as research was concerned, he did not have instigated enough skills development programmes to assist the constituency to live up to that dream. Their argument was that, until there were such programmes in place, the promotion criteria should not be as steep and unattainable as they perceive them to be.

One other point of concern regarding promotions, also mentioned briefly, was that women promoted to senior positions seemed to be 'window dressing' (R1 in focus group), because they did not make much difference in ensuring that women academics' voices were heard:

> *R8 (BWA in individual interview): 'what really is the difference that they make because they sit with other HODs who are males so they often get outvoted'*

> *R4 (BWA in individual interview): 'yah, but like I said, how strongly do these women come out? What role do they play when they get promoted?'*

In this case, we notice the issue of voice and agency. The view expressed in the above excerpts seems to challenge the existence of the woman academics' voice in the institutional discourses that involve race and gender disparities. As Wright, *et. al.* (2007: 146) ask regarding women in positions of power: "do these women let their needs be constructed through the male gaze by giving the white males power to decide what women academics need? "The women pointed out that it had to be difficult for the woman academic within the UFS to raise her voice when she was promoted, because the male voice (due to number differentiation) muted the female voice. Their feeling was that it would be more difficult for a black woman academic who would be promoted to a senior position, because she would be '*one black person amongst the white people who would be trying to push her own idea*' (R3 in focus group). The women suggested that if the criteria for promotion did not change they did not see the UFS transforming in this regard, in which the black woman would be given enough recognition and a voice to partake in important decisions.

4.2.3.2 Marginalisation

Marginalisation, like whiteness, refers to a situation where some groups of people feel alienated, isolated and deprived of equal opportunities compared to other groups (cf. Section 2.1). As was noticed through the review of the literature, institutional social relations, policies and practices could marginalise other groups within academia intentionally or unintentionally (Badat, 2008). This marginalisation in higher education and as reported in this section, could be felt due to problems around the issues of access, recruitment and retention as well as capacity building. If there are disparities in the distribution of services in these processes, constituencies could begin to feel marginalised as indicated by the BWAs in this study. As a result BWAs felt that there was very slow progress in social transformation because they felt that once again the culture of the UFS providing services in terms of access, retention and capacity building was biased towards the white academics.

a) Access

Access is one aspect in which the BWAs felt marginalised. As stated in Chapter 2 (cf. Section 2.3), access entails increased participation of the previously marginalised within the university. The access reported in this section is not only about numbers, but also about quality. As BWAs pointed out, access within the UFS should not only be a 'numbers game', but should be accompanied by the recognition that has been reported on in Section 4.2.2.3.4. According to the Education White Paper 3 (1997) the type of access needed in SAHEIs is that which is accompanied by fair chances for success for all constituencies, and it is this kind of access that the BWAs mentioned as their other area of concern.

According to the BWAs, access did not only have to entail the demographics of the constituency that entered the UFS or as one participant put it '*should not be a numbers' game*', but had to also include how those that were already within the institution were groomed to climb the academic ladder and access senior posts. This aligned with the thoughts of Cross (2004; cf. Section 2.1.3) who spoke against affirmative remedies that failed to promote equity and social justice when it came to access of the previously marginalised in academia. The argument put forth in Section 2.1.3 was that this kind of access could fail to look beyond head counts into the real issues of equitable spaces that could enhance a sense of belonging for

everybody. As the women academics pointed out, the UFS had improved very much in terms of having filled most of the junior positions with the historically marginalised constituency (BWAs included).The BWAs' observation was, however, that those were in the junior positions they occupied. The UFS, in its institutional charter (UFS, 2007), committed itself to bringing a balance in the composition of staff and to opening its doors to all races through access programmes. Although the women academics in this study were aware of this commitment, they pointed out that the nature of these programmes was not clarified in the charter. Their concern was whether the stated programmes included quality assurance for the new entrants, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This quality assurance had been advocated in the White Paper 3 (1997) as it was noticed that SAHEIs were still struggling with imbalances and disparities among the racial groups, especially within the historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions. According to one of the women, '*the UFS is busy working on the equity targets and when we are here they are happy, because they have something to put on their report for the government' (R4).* This view emphasises the women's need for equity, which surpassed the demographics of headcounts.

Discussing the issue of access beyond numbers at our discussion group meeting meant that we needed to clarify for ourselves what programmes we would have wanted to see implemented, which could lead to quality access. The BWAs mentioned that quality access began with the quality of the constituency that was recruited to enter academia. According to these women, programmes to recruit quality staff needed to begin sooner with the prospective academics. They cited an example of the Grow Our Own Timber (GOOT) programme that was no longer functioning at the UFS at the time of this study. Their belief was that this was a good programme that ensured that the UFS recruited their own future academics and therefore could be responsible for the quality of the future academics produced by the programme. The DoE (2008) also mentioned the importance of the GOOT programme as instrumental in grooming a potential pool from which to recruit academic staff. The GOOT programme was cited by the BWAs, because it targeted and developed capacity of mainly black women.

Another suggestion was for the UFS to recruit academics from an international context. The BWAs mentioned that this move would assist the UFS to '*get out of the mind-set of being local*' (R2) and addressing only the apartheid era concerns. They suggested that bringing competent international flavour into the UFS would enhance scholarship. The UFS was already running a programme of recruiting professors from an international higher education context. The UFS had to be applauded for this programme, as it was the first of its kind in SAHE. The BWAs were of the opinion that the overseas countries were not the only ones that have the best academics. They suggested an African mix in which the UFS had to also consider professors from African universities:

> *R4: 'Why can't we have somebody from UCT or even somebody from Nigeria? If they are good academics, they can also help us in decentralising our thinking from the UFS and South African issues while at the same time they may understand more our African context and what we need to advance.'*

b) Retention

The problem of retention was discussed in the FGD as an inseparable issue from access and recruitment. For example, BWAs felt that we could not discuss recruitment without looking at the rate at which those recruited were retained within the UFS. Their observation was that a number of colleagues, especially black academics in general, left the service of the UFS in numbers. Their perception was that the UFS did not make much effort to keep black academics within the institution. The question that they asked during the focus group discussion was why it was mainly the black academics that left the UFS. Part of the answer to this question could be found in the HEMIS report (DHET, 2011) which indicates that retention challenges have their roots in the apartheid SAHE. So, it seems that the past inequities still have an effect in how historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions strive to retain black and women academics. Some of the women academics suggested that the culture of the UFS was alienating and made the black constituency feel a lack of a sense of belonging:

> *R7: 'The treatment you get here, you don't feel comfortable. You don't feel relating to these people. You don't feel part of your own department. You feel that from the time you join the university there are people who own your department space, you see that some spaces are just a 'don't touch area'.'*

The feeling of isolation and alienation was mentioned as resulting in the black constituency not feeling welcome at the UFS and hence leaving the institution. This finding compares well with the literature (cf. Section 2.1.1.4) in which retention of people of colour is reported as a problem for HEIs globally. The reasons for this correlates with the findings in this study in that black women academics battle with being recognised as having potential to make it in academia. As a result, they suffer exclusion in most of the important areas, which include decision making and inequalities. Most of the participants in this study had examples of black academics who had left, because they were not happy at the UFS. Again this feeling of the BWAs in this study seemed to be an internationally uniform issue when it came to black women academics in that most of the members of this constituency felt in one way or the other that their institutions did not want to keep them because of the stereotypical belief that they were not strong enough for academia. As a result, their opinions were not valued in decision making, they were not even invited into the collaborative spaces where critical issues were discussed and they were not even mentored to occupy senior and important positions (cf. Section 2.1.1.4).

According to one woman in our focus group discussion, '*the UFS (does) not recognise us, and the institution makes it a point that we leave because we are not good enough. If not, how did they let go of Prof X who was such a powerful young black woman academic? Maybe it was because she was a threat to the white seniors in her faculty.*' This view just shows how despondent the BWAs were to the fact that the UFS at the time seemed not to value their presence because there were no visible efforts made to ensure that BWAs were retained.

What the BWAs mentioned as saddening them was the fact that they felt that the UFS' management were not worried about the good black academics that left the service of the UFS. They mentioned that some of their friends who had left to get

better employment outside did not even get an exit interview to ascertain their reasons for terminating their employment.

The BWAs mentioned too that the remuneration competition from the private sectors could be another reason why the black constituency left the UFS. This was also reported in the Report on the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation (DHET, 2010). The report pointed out the inability of HEIs in South Africa to compete with some public and private sectors in terms of salaries. The report stated this as the main reason why academic staff left the institutions. One BWA in the FGD cited her faculty as an example of this crisis. She mentioned that black chartered accountants could not stay within academia, because they were paid triple the remuneration they receive from the UFS. This could be the case, but the BWAs insisted that if the UFS culture was welcoming towards the black constituency, it would be probable that some staff would still serve the institution with its lower salary. Responding to a question asked by one of them, namely whether they thought the UFS could afford to compete with the public sector, the majority mentioned that this was impossible. They, however, suggested that the institution could at least benchmark itself against other SAHEIs, which had better remuneration. Another debate broke out when the issue of other academic institutions paying better salaries was mentioned.

Although we did not exactly understand why there were differences in the remuneration across institutions, some BWAs assumed that publications, which generated funds for universities, could be the reason why the universities mentioned could afford higher salaries. With this enlightenment, the BWAs felt that they could also contribute to the salary increment by committing to publish. Some felt that they could not really commit to publishing, because of the teaching workloads that they carried. With this difference in opinion, the challenge was what we as individuals felt we could do to improve the environment for ourselves. The main question was: 'since it was almost impossible for the UFS to compete with the public and private sector in terms of remuneration, **how could we contribute to making the institution an attractive place where constituencies could experience a sense of belonging?**'

c) Capacity building

Capacity building ranked second in the list of concerns compiled during the nominal group discussion we had during our first focus group discussion. The BWAs were greatly concerned about the lack of capacity building programmes that targeted mainly the BWAs within their institution. They felt that they needed these programmes in the areas of teaching and learning as well as research so that they could function optimally within the UFS. These programmes were discussed as important in ensuring that the BWAs were brought on par with their colleagues who were considered enjoying more attention in faculties. The BWAs referred to mentoring and supervision as some of the ways that could assist them developing skills needed to cope in academia. According to the BWAs, mentoring arrangement within their faculties marginalised them because their observation was that their white colleagues were often taken under the wings of their white colleagues to ensure that they excelled in academia while they (BWAs) did not enjoy such attention. The issue of mentoring and supervision are elaborated on below.

(i) Mentoring

With regard to mentoring, the BWAs were of the opinion that, at the time of this study, this group did not have sufficient skills to survive adequately in academia; from the required skills for teaching and learning to skills required to prove oneself as a researcher deserving promotion into a senior academic post. They felt strongly that the institution had to organise training sessions or should have had a formal mentoring programme that would have clear guidelines in terms of the mentoring of people who had been previously marginalised. This point seemed to echo Geber's (2011; cf. Section 3.2.1) contention that women academics needed support through career development programmes and psychosocial support that could give them the confidence and skills to take on the academic world. This does not suggest stereotyping women academics as a group who require immense support from institutions. As was also indicated in the literature review (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011), the multiple roles that this group performed put them at a disadvantage against men and they needed to be equipped with skills that would give them the assurance that they could also cope within academia. The BWAs in this study felt that the UFS had to do something to '*develop the black woman academic*' (R3) to get to a senior position. Their feeling was that '*the female role within the UFS (was)*

not lifted enough' (R4). The upliftment of the role of the woman academic within the UFS seemed to suggest that the women felt that they did not get enough recognition as capable academics. Their suggestion was that this might have been due to their lack of skills in some areas and if this situation had to change, the UFS had to develop some intervention.

The discussion in one focus group was geared towards what mentoring meant for the women and what they would consider as mentoring. This is what one of them suggested:

> *R5: 'Realistic development or mentoring is what I consider important for transformation, because you know at times you'll say people like to use the word mentor people into this or that, but sometimes the mentoring processes are not really specific and focused towards what you want to achieve. It's just a general mentoring programme, but you know the processes within the mentoring programmes are not actually going to give us the results that we need.'*

What is striking from this excerpt is that the BWAs were aware that the UFS had the mentoring programmes that the BWAs needed so much. Actually, the UFS itself had declared that it would build capacity for the previously marginalised (Employment Equity, 2005). The institution had already established a programme called the Vice Chancellor's Prestige Scholars Programme as a way of intensively preparing post-doctoral staff members for the next generation of professors (Strategic Plan 2012 – 2016). Although the initiative was meant not only for the BWAs, some of the participants were part of the programme and they mentioned their appreciation for this.

The BWAs were, however, of the opinion that the selection criteria for this programme were very stringent, since the programme allowed only 25 candidates. Some of the women suggested a more elaborate programme where young academics would be assigned individual mentors within faculties and departments. Once again, the point that was raised by Geber (2011) draws a parallel between effective mentoring programmes and the success of the women academics within their institutions. Such success, she emphasised, would only come if the women academics would feel

accepted and encouraged through mentors that would confirm their roles and issue the trust for their positive potential in academia (cf. Section 2.2.1). In the focus group discussions and individual interviews, women academics felt that if individual mentors would be allocated to the new entrants with a clear goal of where such a process aimed to take them, the mentoring would be focused on the actual needs of the people that needed to be mentored, because the mentor and mentee would design a programme to be followed. This suggestion seemed to be welcomed by the majority who participated in the focus group discussion. Some, however, were concerned about this. They felt that one-on-one mentoring may perpetuate the power relations.

> *R7: 'I never had a mentor till today; I think not having a specific person assigned presented an advantage, because it meant that I could go to anybody and get different views. I didn't owe anybody my loyalties. If you have a mentor depending on how mature they are, sometimes your mentor can be a limitation, because you may have a person that does not want you to consult other people before informing her or him…'*

It was, however, the feeling of some members that BWAs were responsible for their own growth within academia. They felt that finding one's way in academia was a personal process, which involved going out to look for assistance from the more experienced staff members. One woman stated that '*You take the role of knocking on everybody's door not expecting to be attended to, because you look different, your gender, your race, but you have to have a mind-set that I'm an academic and I'm going to function like one and everybody else is an academic like myself*' (R1).

The women were inclined to agree with this as they felt that the mentoring could never be what they wanted at the UFS. They agreed that it was time for black women to '*emancipate ourselves and not depend on anybody for our success here (at the UFS)'* (R7). I became excited to see the discussion becoming that positive. I thought that was the kind of emancipation that we as BWAs needed so that we could be productive within our environment. This was one of the most important milestones of the discussions in this study in which the BWAs were ready to challenge how they had been thinking and refocusing their attention towards the improvement of their own practice without a defeated mind-set that they were not carved out to succeed in academia.

The women noticed that academia was difficult to manage for everybody, regardless of colour or gender. They felt that the senior members of the faculties would not know what the junior members needed if the latter did not knock on their doors to seek help. Although the participants agreed that knocking on the doors of the seniors could help, some were of the opinion that this would not be easy, taking into consideration the socio-historical reality of the UFS as a historically white institution where black academics could not feel at ease discussing their weaknesses with the white colleagues. Nonetheless, they suggested that maybe it was time for black academics and women academics to change their mind-set from that of victims or underprivileged to that of being equal to everybody and talk to their colleagues from that premise of equality. One woman suggested that, if the senior members of the faculties did not volunteer to mentor the young academics, the latter should '*impose*' (R8) themselves upon someone, finding mentors either within the institution or outside the institution if they could not find mentors within their own faculties. I noticed that at this stage the women were challenging their racialised and genderised thoughts, because they believed that these kinds of thoughts left one with a defeated mind-set. They challenged each other in the group discussion to collaborate with all colleagues and to make an effort to succeed in academia. This changed the perception of most of the participants, who viewed mentoring as a process that had to be initiated by the management. Actually, in the end, the majority of the participants in that FGD understood that black women academics needed to find mentors themselves and they could get people that would be willing to help them grow in academia.

> *R1: 'You are independent, do your own research. How far you develop is also dependent on your own effort, collaborations and all that. Much of it is also dependent on you as much as maybe the HOD and the dean still need to do their part, but a lot of it is also dependent on you.'*

Although this did not release the institution from its responsibility to have mentoring programmes, which BWAs felt should be engineered to respond to individual needs, BWAs in my study eventually decided to be responsible for their own growth. The discussion proved to be a real emancipatory exercise.

Our WWA colleagues had similar experiences with mentoring. They also stated that mentoring never existed for them, that they had to find their own way in academia.

This was different from how the BWAs had thought of the situation. The BWAs had claimed that their white female colleagues often arrived in the departments and were immediately '*taken under the wing*' (R6) by their white senior colleagues and given proper mentoring. The BWAs even mentioned that the senior colleagues collaborated with the new entrants in publications as a way of ensuring that the latter climbed the ladder quickly. Although the WWAs that I interviewed did not disagree with this, they stated that for them it had been different, because they had to grow on their own. They also echoed the importance of self-growth in academia because the academic world was '*such a busy world*' (WW4) and having to wait for senior people to initiate mentoring could mean putting back one's development.

(ii) Supervision

The BWAs also perceived capacity building from the angle of supervision; mainly supervision of PhD students, as all of the participants were staff members of whom some were pursuing their PhDs. Acquiring a PhD for most of the participants would mean that opportunities would be opened for them to get promoted to the next level and would also give them recognition from their colleagues at a personal level; it would mean gaining respect from their colleagues. As has been seen in the review of the literature, globally most black women academics in higher education are reported to have a feeling of inferiority, which leads to suspicions that they are stereotyped and by their colleagues and staff (cf. Section 2.3.1). It could have been this same feeling in the participants in my study that they were stereotyped because they did not have doctoral degrees; a degree which could have earned them respect. I conclude that this might have been the way they felt because some of them reported that they were doing their PhDs so that they '*could be recognised like their white colleagues*' (R3). What could also be noticed from this statement is the internalised feeling of inferiority which the participants that were still doing their PhDs had because they felt that they could not compete with their fellow white colleagues or could not function at the same level.

The same feeling as the one expressed above had been reported in literature as rife in BWAs around the globe who also at times had to battle with feelings of inadequacy when compared to their white counterparts (cf. Section 2.2.1). It was for

this reason that BWAs in this study felt that they needed effective supervision to finish their studies so that they could also feel a sense of citizenship (Morrison, 2010) which they felt was earned when an academic had a doctoral degree. In fact, at that time at the UFS, the rector was emphasising the need for staff to obtain their doctoral degrees because he always indicated that he was not willing to let his students be instructed by staff who were not experts in their fields. At our first focus group discussion the BWAs pointed to this expectation of the Rector as putting a lot of pressure on them to finish their studies. They believed, therefore, that effective supervision by the senior academic staff who had to show a willingness to assist them would ensure that their and the Rectors 'aspirations were fulfilled. The model in Chapter 2 (cf. section 2.2.1) discusses the qualities that could be useful for supervisors in this regard. The model emphasises the need for supervisors to mentor their students and to help them develop the critical skills needed for their students to succeed in academia. In congruence with the model, the BWAs were also aware of the role they as students needed to play in the supervision process, which is working hand in hand with their supervisors to complete their work on time.

Supervision, as mentioned above, was one of the most sensitive areas the BWAs raised. All participants studying toward their PhD voiced their concern regarding the treatment they receive from their supervisors. They did not want to disclose their specific experiences, but generalised with phrases like, 'some supervisors' and 'most of these supervisors'. I could sense that they were deeply hurt by some of the experiences they had had with their own supervisors. Some felt that the process of supervision was not working for them and they blamed it on the fact that they are black. They explained that, unlike their white young colleagues who finished their studies within the minimum time required, they took a long time to complete their studies, because the supervisors neglected them. Some had to go through the lonely PhD journey unsupported:

> *R6: 'supervision never existed for me. You see that proposal I was presenting the other time, I did it all by myself without the help of the study leader. But my white colleague who came after me was taken under the supervisor's wing and now he has registered his title and I am sure he will obtain a qualification soon.'*

Whether the point of the white colleagues getting support while BWAs were not getting support, was true or not could not be verified. Nonetheless, with the suspicion that this was the case, the BWAs felt that they were being marginalised on the basis of their race. This kind of marginalisation was contradictory to the key national goal of capacity building recommended as a way in which black and women academics could gain expertise to function fully in academia. So, congruent to Lee's advocacy of framework for supervision (2008), Badat (2010) also echoes the need for a developmental programme in which supervisors could get training on their supervision work and perhaps be alerted to the need for a successful throughput of the BWAs who are doing their doctoral degrees.

In my follow-up interviews with some of the BWAs who were mostly bothered by this issue of supervision, I found out that they had specific experiences which they felt were directed at them because of their race. This is an example of a conversation I had with one of them:

> Interviewer: 'You said you are also doing your PhD?'
>
> Respondent: 'Yes.'
>
> Interviewer: 'In our FGD you seemed very concerned about the supervision that you are getting. Could you please elaborate on it?'
>
> Respondent: (sighing) 'It is just not working at all. I was allocated a supervisor four years back when I started with my study. I think everything was going fine until she dropped me this e-mail one day to tell me that she will not look at my work again until I got an ethical clearance number.'
>
> Interviewer: 'Why is it that for four years you had been studying without ethical clearance?'
>
> Respondent: 'Because my study is multidisciplinary. I have a clearance number from my department, but they wanted me to have another number from the other side. How possible is it that she could expect this of me without even having sat me down to explain this to me? I tried to get through that whole process without her helping me and I failed. I can't deal with these

> politics… that couldn't have happened to any of my colleagues here because these people look out for each other.'

During this interview and the ones similar to this, where most of the BWAs complained about the time that they had taken working on their PhDs, which were still in progress, I decided that I would have to present the supervision issue at the mixed group discussion. Some of the BWAs who were going to be part of the mixed group already had their PhDs and three of the WWAs were at senior levels and were supervisors. The question that I thought was important was: **'what should the UFS through the faculties' management do to ensure that the supervisors carried out their responsibilities effectively to ensure throughput within the expected period? (this was discussed later with some of the HODs).**

4.2.3.3 Identity Formation

As discussed in Chapter 2 (cf. Section 2.1.1.2.2), BWAs in HEIs, both internationally and in SAHE felt like they had to keep negotiating their identity as black women and as members of their academic institutions. Harris (2007) notices that the culture of the institutions sometimes makes it difficult for black women academics to define themselves as black women and maintaining their culture without compromising themselves within the culture of whiteness that seem to dominate higher education. As has been further noticed, the aspects of the institutional culture generally leave the BWAs vulnerable and they sacrifice their core selves in trying to acclimatise to the institutional culture to be accepted within their institutions. In this section, I report on how the language of scholarship and communication within the UFS, as perceived by the BWAs, and discusses how the BWAs position themselves in the formation of personal and professional relationships with their white colleagues.

a) Language

As I indicated in Chapter two (cf. section 2.2.2), in our first FGD we used a nominal group approach to identify main issues of concern towards social transformation at the UFS. Language was the main area of concern, which needed attention at the UFS. The BWAs indicated that the use of two languages, English and Afrikaans, posed a challenge for them in a number of areas. These areas include teaching and

learning situations, where the BWAs have to interact with students, faculty and at departmental meetings and institutional formal and informal gatherings. As stated previously (cf. Section 1.2), it should be noted that the policy of the UFS recognises these two languages as languages of scholarship and formal communication. The policy is also supported by the Higher Education Language Policy Framework (DoE, 2001), which also allows institutions to use either languages or one of them as language of scholarship. Nonetheless, the BWAs felt marginalised by the use of these languages, which allowed their colleagues at times to switch codes between Afrikaans and English in the meetings. They felt that Afrikaans in particular was used to exclude them and made them non-citizens within the university space, since the majority of them did not understand this language. However, the BWAs felt the situation could never change because *'the university policy (was) supporting it'* (R2).

The women academics in the mixed group discussion felt that discussing language issues could be regarded as going against the institution and as a result some of them were a bit of sceptical in engaging in a language issue. Some of them, especially those who had read widely on the language debate in higher education after democracy, felt that we would be trying to fight a losing battle taking on the language challenge. The language debate in SAHE had been going on for some time (Alexander, 2003; MoE, 2002; Webb, 2010). This debate discussed Afrikaans in a post-apartheid SAHE. Some scholars advocated for the retention of Afrikaans as a language of scholarship while others felt that it was in the past when it was considered to be the language of the oppressor. This kind of debate, which had seen the proponents of language fighting for retaining Afrikaans, mainly because the language represented a cultural heritage for the Afrikaners, had made any discussion focusing on the language used in SAHE very contentious. In our mixed group discussion were white Afrikaans-speaking colleagues and BWAs who did not understand the language and who perceived the use of Afrikaans as exclusionary.

Talking about language was evidently going to evoke emotions and disagreements. During the discussion I remembered that for some people in that room Afrikaans was associated with discrimination, oppression and marginalisation (MoE, 2002), while for some, it had created opportunities and privileges and they probably felt that they

had to defend its survival. I understood that the discussion had to be approached with all the sensitivity it required.

It should be borne in mind that despite the on-going debates on the position of Afrikaans, the National Language Policy Framework (2001) continues to support the adoption of a dual language policy by the institutions that wished to do so. And at the time, as seen in the previous chapters (cf. Section 2.4), the UFS was one of the institutions which had opted to adopt a parallel English-Afrikaans medium of instruction. It was due to this highlighted situation that the women academics felt that they did not have any capacity themselves to influence the UFS in any way to review its language policy.

However, although it seemed that BWAs felt that there was nothing that they could do to influence policy change in terms of language, the black women academics pointed out that the language issue evoked feelings of anger and despondency in them. As they discussed this in the FGD the anger and pain was evident. One BWA felt that in meetings '*the most painful moment (was) when they (colleagues) laughed because one of them had just cracked a joke' (R7).* The pain with this kind of situation was described as unbearable by the BWAs. They explained that a person who did not understand Afrikaans would not know why people were laughing and as BWAs explained, a person would just '*grin, not even knowing if they were laughing at you*' (R1). Two BWAs expressed the pain that they felt in meetings and social gatherings in which Afrikaans would be language used mainly:

> *R1: 'There was this time when I was invited to a function and I was not told that it was going to be conducted in Afrikaans. When I arrived there, everybody was speaking in Afrikaans and I felt so stupid. Afterwards they all shook my hand and said thanks for coming. Can you believe it!*
>
> *R5 (BWA in focus group): 'I sometimes find myself playing on my phone as the meetings are in progress. Even if I could listen, what would I gain… sometimes I become very angry and feel like just standing up and leave the room.'*

A close analysis of the second statement from R5 reflected not only the pain that accompanied the use of Afrikaans in meetings for non-speakers, but also the

incapacitating effect of the language. If non-Afrikaans speaking constituencies could do as this BWA was doing in meetings whereby she would just '*play on her phone*', then most would be left out of important decisions that would be taken and they would not be contributing much to the development of their faculties. This kind of exclusion led to the woman quoted above feeling that she could not contribute in meetings, so her leaving the meeting would not have any impact on the decisions taken by the colleagues.

When addressing the issue of pain that they felt in social gatherings and meetings, BWAs pointed out that the feeling of anger and pain was further instigated by the attitude of their colleagues who would show no remorse for excluding them in such situations. Most of these women referred to instances where the Afrikaans-speaking academics would claim that they felt comfortable using their language and that at times 'it comes naturally' to switch to own language when they could not 'figure out' an English word. This example reminded me of the two end-of-the-year functions at my faculty during which the person conducting the ceremony continued using Afrikaans without realising that some of the colleagues did not understand the language. Some of the speakers in both instances would also stand up and started speaking in Afrikaans. I would feel so excluded that I sometimes felt like leaving. This made me feel like an intruder in an environment in which I considered myself a citizen. These are examples why some of the participants felt they were not full members of their institutions but rather as they put it, 'an appendage' or 'guests' at their institution. As was also discussed previously, this kind of exclusion leads to feelings that BWAs are outsiders within their homeland. This taps deep into the kind of identities that these women would form in which they have to keep negotiating their place and role in trying to fight for recognition at the UFS. It was on the basis of these feeling that the BWAs felt that the UFS was slow in the process of transformation.

One unforgettable moment for me was when the master of the ceremony in one end-of-year faculty function came to me at the end of the function and said, '**I'm sorry that I used Afrikaans but you see, in functions like this, one feels at ease expressing oneself in one's language**.' The question I asked myself was why the faculty had to also invite non-Afrikaans speakers if the most comfortable language

that would be used throughout would be Afrikaans. I found myself faced with the question of who I was and what place did I have in that function and what role was I playing there? Was I a full member or just an unwanted guest who nobody could make provision for to ensure that I felt accepted? I could identify with the BWAs who also felt like 'space invaders' at the UFS but the challenge here was moving beyond this challenge of belonging and finding ways to deal with the situation without the resenting the language, which was the feeling that most of the people in the group discussion had. Although we did not get deeper into the suggestions for improvement at the time, some of the participants felt that it could make a difference if the equity committees could raise this point in the faculties.

Although BWAs did not claim that English was better than Afrikaans, they suggested that it would be better if the UFS could adopt it as a language of communication in formal settings to avoid the confusion that the inclusion of Afrikaans brought to the institution. This suggestion by the BWAs in this study was not a far-fetched idea. At the time of the study, two historically Afrikaans-medium institutions – The University of the Western Cape and the University of Port Elizabeth – had in practice moved towards an English-medium approach (MoE, 2002). According to the women academics, '*everybody within the academic staff understands English*' (R6), so English could be a better way to '*bring people together by adopting a common language as a unifying language*' (R3). This suggestion by the BWAs was not meant to suggest that Afrikaans had to be denied a place within the university. They, however, suggested that it would be better if it could be used in informal gatherings as was the case with other languages that existed within the UFS. The issue that had been raised in Gerwel's report (MoE, 2002) had to be borne in mind by these academics though, namely that Afrikaans as a scientific and academic language had to be recognised as a national asset and as such, threatening its academic status could be failure to nurture socio-diversity.

The BWAs argued, however, that the continued status of Afrikaans through the dual language policy or parallel-medium policy of the UFS was divisive and presented challenges in class presentations and faculties' meetings. They likened the parallel medium of instruction within the UFS to '*running two universities on one campus*' (R3). Their argument in this case was that the situation divided colleagues and

students. At the UFS, the situation was such that white colleagues who could use Afrikaans fluently would present classes to the Afrikaans-speaking students and then there were classes for English-speaking groups on the other hand that ran parallel to the Afrikaans classes. According to the women, this denied the students a chance to be together and learn and understand each other's culture. As a result, BWAs felt that racial tensions would persist within the institution, because students were not allowed unity. The situation was defined to be the same for the staff. BWAs felt that staff were divided along colour lines in which they could not work collaboratively in planning and presenting classes. This was believed to prepare a fertile soil for stereotypes among staff.

As BWAs discussed the issue of the language barrier in our discussion, I reflected on my experience on allocating marks with my white colleague (cf. Section 1.1) in which we seemed to have clustered our students into black and white and influenced by our apartheid past, developed our intelligence stereotypes along the colour line. As the discussion on the divisiveness of language continued, I kept reflecting on the situation concerning which group of students (in my case with the professor) was more intelligent and asked myself if it could have been different if my colleague and I were presenting classes in the same language. My reflection on this issue was that language made us live worlds apart from our colleagues. He would prepare for the Afrikaans group, while I would prepare for my English group. There was not a time in which we could sit and deliberate on our approach to the students. I recalled an instance in which my colleague wanted to show a video to his students. He could not share the video with me, because it was in Afrikaans. As I reflected on this particular incidence when I was analysing the data, I realised why my students at one point felt that they were being under-privileged. With the permission of one of my students, I would like to share this complaint that he presented to me:

> *'Ms Ramohai, I would like to bring to your attention that I am not happy with the X class. I have found out that this module is unfair and you don't have integrity. Why is it that the other group is doing so well and that they get some material that we do not get? I would like to tell you that I failed the module last year and I can see that I am going to fail it again and no matter what I do I will always fail, because you don't treat us the same*

*and you don't have integrity.' (**NB: This is just a summary of the student's exact words**)*

I recall how difficult it was to convince my student that they could not get to see the video, because it was in the other language and that I would have had it translated if it had been written material. My challenge when I reflected on this incident and the whole language issue, was, however, finding ways in which I could do things differently with my students in future, despite the language barrier and despite being worlds apart from my colleagues. In terms of language, I could find ways in which we could work together.

In the FGD, the BWAs indicated that the language issue could not easily be resolved within the UFS, because they felt it was used more for political reasons than scholarship. They believed that it was a political instrument that was meant to exclude others, since the UFS had previously been a white Afrikaans-medium institution and the language was also believed to be used to perpetuate authoritarian structures.

This complexity of the language issue within the UFS was also emphasised by the WWAs in the interviews. Similar to the concerns of the BWAs, the white colleagues also felt that, '*in the corridors, in the meetings and in the tearooms people (were) being excluded by language*' (WWA1). One of these women academics pointed out that the reason for such exclusion was sometimes not deliberate. With the corridor and kitchen talks, WWAs indicated that it was easier to communicate in their own languages and felt it was natural not to consider 'the other' in such discussions. The aim in this instance would not be to exclude, but to engage in natural conversation. One of them explained that people seemed to be complacent in such situations. She raised the importance of *'speaking up'* (R1) if a person felt excluded by the use of language.

With regard to the use of Afrikaans in meetings, WWAs stated that they would normally revert to the language in which they were comfortable with, because of their lack of linguistic capital in English. They explained that they sometimes '*ran out of words and (didn't) feel comfortable using English*' (R2) so, it was the natural thing for them to switch to their language. They also noticed that the privilege that the UFS

policy gave them in terms of using the two languages led to a situation where they did not become aware of the disabling impact of the use of Afrikaans for non-speakers. Furthermore, they explained that their lack of capital in the English language was a result of most of them having attended Afrikaans-medium schools in their Primary and High School years. They were not fully exposed to English and they at times also felt '*excluded by English and even became scared to contribute in the meetings for fear of getting the language wrong*' (R2). Two of them pointed out that they even felt uncomfortable using English in their class presentations and using interpretation services that the UFS offered seemed to assist them in this regard.

The argument of the WWAs above indicates that there might not have been any malice in the use of Afrikaans by our white colleagues. It indicates that excluding other people through language could have been an unconscious process on the side of the WWAs. This finding is similar to the situation of other colleagues in other countries, who, although their misunderstandings regarding the treatment they received from their colleagues and institutions did not arise due to language issues, would also feel isolated by some of the practices within their institutions (cf. Section 2.3.1). These practices, which would in some cases be unintentional, often made the BWAs feel like space invaders in their own institutions and as noticed from the literature, made the women feel like 'outsiders from within' (Lloyd-Jones, 2009: 614). As far as the BWAs were concerned, such unintended exclusion, however, influenced their perception of the UFS as lacking social transformation. Their argument was that, although they were suggesting the sole use of English, it was also a second language for them. What they suggested was that, since English was understood by everybody and was not a first language for the majority of the academic staff, the UFS could consider using it as it would not be in favour of any race group. The argument raised by BWAs here is counter to what some scholars believe is the case with English as a language of instruction and communication. This counter opinion is mainly on the hegemony of English as a prestigious language although it too is historically a language of the coloniser (Silva, 1997). The opinion also rests more on developing the indigenous languages so that they also can serve a role in institutions. The argument here is that the full development of these languages could help to nurture the socio-diversity that

can help in building sustainable togetherness of the nation (MoE, 2002). Despite the difference in the suggestions from the BWAs and the opinion of some scholars, what was striking was that the WWAs also believed that the language problem could be addressed if the UFS would adopt one language, which could be English:

WWA 2: Although I believe that the UFS should not overlook the language heritage of this institution when trying to solve the language challenges, I believe that the use of English as a language in teaching and learning could help reduce the tensions among staff and students.

On the point that the UFS needed to consider the problematic nature of the dual language policy, one WWA colleague indicated that the UFS was already making strides towards resolving the language issue. As she had been at the UFS for twenty-three years, she felt that the UFS was changing, because when she first joined the university, it was purely an Afrikaans-medium institution and it had moved from that to a parallel medium of instruction and communication and even established interpretation services in both languages. What should be noticed in this case is how the years of experience within the UFS contributed to the difference in participants' perceptions of social transformation. For the participants with only a few years of experience, the UFS was not transforming as expected in the area of language, but from the perception of those who had been with the UFS for '*ten years*' (R1) and '*twenty-three years*' (WWA 3) there was improvement. Once more it can be noted that the process of transformation is a very complex one since people in the same social context do not always share the same expectations and wishes. Consequently, it becomes difficult for institutions to implement a process that satisfies everybody.

(i) Language as an exclusion tool

In class presentations

BWAs described the use of language at the UFS within the frames of exclusion. As stated earlier, they felt that they were excluded by their colleagues who used Afrikaans in meetings and that even students were also excluded in class presentations. On the issue of students, some BWAs mentioned that this group was the most marginalised by the language issue, because the students could not speak up for fear of victimisation. The BWAs cited examples in which students would approach them with their complaints and asked if they could '*speak on their behalf*' about incidences of Afrikaans-speaking colleagues who would '*use Afrikaans despite the fact that our black students (did) not understand Afrikaans*' (R8). An incident where an Afrikaans-speaking lecturer told a student that the UFS was an Afrikaans-medium university and that the student '*should go and read if you don't understand because I will not present this in two languages*' (R7) was cited as one of the painful realities that the non-Afrikaans speaking students had to go through. What should be noted at this point is that although the UFS was using a parallel-medium policy in which there were separate classes for Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking students (cf. Section 4.2), some faculties at the time of this study had adapted the policy to present classes in one language at postgraduate level and using interpreting services. According to the BWAs, some students were complaining that they did not follow the translations. At times, some Afrikaans speaking students enrolled into the English courses and the BWAs reported that it was in such instances that some lecturers would switch to Afrikaans when explaining some concepts in class. This led the BWAs to conclude that the institution (UFS) did not monitor the use of the language policy to identify the discrepancies between policy and practice. This view had been raised by Dooley and Vallejo (2009) who indicated that the problem with language in historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions lay in the dialogue between policy and practice in which the ideological notion of inclusivity hailed by the institutions contradicted with the narratives of the consumers of the policies. It is this thought that evokes the question of how much these consumers of the policies are the agents in policy development and practice. It could

be through involving these consumers that the UFS' endeavours to transform socially could be noticed.

On the point of exclusion of students in classes, the BWAs stated that some of the students suffered in silence, because they were afraid to speak up and had to go through such classes being marginalised without complaining, because the UFS policy allowed presentations in Afrikaans. At this stage of our discussion, I mentioned the recommendation of the Language Policy Framework of higher education (DoE, 2002) which stipulates that the use of Afrikaans and English should not serve as barriers to quality access and success in SAHE. I then posed a question to the BWAs for suggestions on how the UFS could ensure that this government recommendation was implemented among students. The women academics indicated that there were challenges in reporting instances of exclusion and they suggested that the suggestions be postponed until the next session in order for them to think of ideas that they could share (**details of their suggestions are in the next section**).

The students' problem with language was not mentioned as a case for black students only (English groups). During the discussion it became clear that the Afrikaans-speaking students were also affected by the problem. Five of the BWAs indicated that there were cases in which clashes on the students' timetables led to some Afrikaans students attending their lectures, which would be presented in English. The expectation of the students would be that they would still get the opportunity to express themselves in Afrikaans. This seemed to put a strain on the women academics, who do not understand the language. This is how one woman expressed the feeling:

> *R7: 'I wish the medium of instruction could change to English. Some of these students, especially Afrikaans students, come to our classes. Their complaints! They told me one time that they did not want translation services and that they were going to ask questions in Afrikaans! I was so frustrated. Although I stayed firm, I felt pity on them somehow.'*

In staff meetings

As indicated earlier, most of the participants mentioned feeling excluded at staff meetings and formal social gatherings. To deal with this problem, some participants suggested attending basic Afrikaans classes that were presented at the UFS for non-native speakers of the language. These classes were presented after-hours, six times in a semester to equip students and staff with basic Afrikaans for communication purposes. This was received by the majority as a positive move towards improving their own practice towards communicating effectively with colleagues. One participant who had attended the classes indicated though that those classes only prepared a person for the most basic interactions of greetings and pleasantry talks. She indicated that she still did not understand the language enough to join in more formal conversations even after completing the classes:

> *R2 (individual interview):'I attended the Afrikaans course, but I still don't understand the language. That course doesn't prepare us for more formal discussions. How many times do we go there? About six to eight times if I still remember.'*

There was a feeling that the UFS needed to consider the possibility of these classes being extended to a year course. The problem, however, was how the constituencies would juggle their workloads and publication pressures and still find time to attend these classes. The academic work itself brought its own pressures in which the BWAs were already complaining about the immense workloads that they had to deal with, which left them with little time to attend to other things such as the mentioned Afrikaans course. The majority of us felt, however, that although there was still more to be done by the UFS, the endeavour towards inclusion in terms of language was visible. The remaining question on this issue was the viability of the two languages in formal situations. What could be a more inclusive way in which the UFS could tackle the language issue? Could the UFS possibly adopt a one language approach and what would the practical implications of this be? We deliberated on these questions, which further alerted us that it was not a simple process to just drop a language of scholarship as this could have adverse consequences for the institution.

One challenge that we discussed in our FGD was that, although adopting a one language policy could possibly lead to inclusion for some students and staff, the same process would lead to the exclusion of students who had done their schooling in Afrikaans. So the use of English as an inclusion mechanism could still create challenges for the Afrikaans constituency. This was emphasised in Gerwel's report (MoE, 2002) in which the committee looking at the position of Afrikaans in SAHE recommended that the language be retained as there were still students that were predominantly Afrikaans and also needed to be catered for to maintain equity. In our focus group discussion, we reflected on the definition that the BWAs had given of social transformation earlier and applied it in this case. We had defined social transformation as a process in which institutions had to show '*proper representation, which (reflected) the society within which the institution (existed)' (R1*; cf. Section 4.2.1). The Free State, especially Bloemfontein, where the UFS is situated, consists of mostly Sotho and Afrikaans communities.

If the UFS has to cater for this community, a more scholastically developed language apart from English was Afrikaans. If the UFS could not provide for the learners who were schooled in Afrikaans and were within its supply area, where would the learners go? We realised the implication of language change for the whole education system in South Africa. Abolition of Afrikaans in institutions would mean a change of both the Language Policy Framework at all levels, which would make it mandatory for all learners in SA to be taught in English at all schools. The reality of the situation made us rethink our perception that the UFS could 'just' do away with a language of scholarship and also alerted us to the complex nature of the transformation process in this case. The realisation came with much more despondency, since language occupied the top position when we organised our concerns in the nominal group discussion.

It was apparent that it would be a difficult process to suggest systemic change in this regard. It should be noted though that action researchers aim at improving an own environment (McNiff, 2002) and not solely changing social structures (Kemmis &Wilkinson, 1998; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Our challenge was then to think of ways in which we could improve our environment for ourselves and our students and to make recommendations for improved institutional practice. Some of the BWAs

acknowledged the use of translation services, which could be used as a short term approach to the problem. The UFS had already adopted this, so the discussion was on how effective the services could be made.

Once more, for the BWAs who had long years of experience at the UFS, translation services were a positive move towards inclusion of people from different language backgrounds. One of these women academics who had been at the UFS for thirteen years, indicated:

> *R1: 'Compared to the time when I arrived here, where I could not follow anything in the meetings, I feel that translation services make a slight difference. At least I can now understand and feel a sense of inclusion a bit. I cannot say the service is 100% effective, but for someone who had to go through Afrikaans meetings for eight years, any small improvement is better than nothing…'*

It was, however, the feeling of the majority that the translation services were not effective due to the quality of translators that the UFS had. They suggested that it would be better if the institution could get the services of translators with expertise in the different academic fields, so that they would not struggle with the appropriate vocabulary, especially in departmental and faculty meetings.

Since the language issue was not only raised by BWAs, but was also raised by WWAs, we suggested that it would be better to discuss the problem further with our white colleagues in the mixed group discussion. The BWAs, however, showed concern towards Afrikaans which they suggested seemed to be used to maintain authoritarian structures. Below is an account of what the discussion on this point entailed.

(ii) Language as a tool to perpetuate authoritarian structures

Although I have stated in the preceding paragraphs that BWAs became aware of the complexities that would accompany language change in SAHE, they still believed that Afrikaans within the UFS was used to maintain authoritarian structures. The authoritarian structures black women academics believed were being maintained

were dominant structures, where white people within the UFS remained in control of the university space. It can be noticed that the discussion here links to the power dynamics within the UFS and even though, according to the developed units of analysis in my model power dynamics is taken as a different theme, it has been stated that the sub-categories under each theme overlap. I am discussing authoritarian structures here because people in communities where these kinds of power dynamics play themselves out struggle to form identities, depending on the privileges that those in power create for different groups. It is these kinds of privileges that make individuals want to identify with some groups and not others. These structures in my study were mentioned from the point of view of who was at the top management structure of the institution. The women had the perception that the top management structure, which was predominantly white (cf. Section 4.4.2.1.1) was the way it was, because the individuals in the management positions could all speak Afrikaans. One woman had this to say about this point:

> *R2 (BWA individual interview): 'the issue of language is quite political. It is not just language as language but it is used to cover the real issues within this institution like at the management, if you look at the admin, you will find that in terms of race, you don't see a lot of black people there because they cannot speak the language. The people there have a role to play, which is preserving the culture of the university and that of the Afrikaners; not that there is a difference between the two.'*

Although we could not verify the truth of this allegation, the BWAs felt strongly that posts at the management level had an inherent requirement of Afrikaans, although at times it might not be stipulated in the advertisement of the post. The focus for these women were not to question the employment processes of the UFS, but the BWAs felt that if Afrikaans continued to have a place in who was employed and in what position, the UFS could lose out on potentially good academics who could be able to contribute towards the achievement of the UFS mission. According to the BWAs, if Afrikaans as a requirement for employment could be dealt with, the UFS could attract international scholars into the senior management who could lead the institution towards excellence. The BWAs pointed out that it could be that, *'the UFS want to maintain this tradition because there is fear that if you do away with this*

language, because to them it is more than just a language, coz they attach it to their tradition, values, history and all that, so there is fear of loss of tradition, loss of intake of other students, loss of sponsors…' (R6).

The view above again took the discussion back to the history of the institution as an Afrikaans-medium institution. The participants agreed that people attach values to spaces which they feel belong to them. In the same way, the Afrikaans community had fought for the institution from the English and they possibly regarded it as the Afrikaans community's property (cf. Section 2.4). It could be that the management '*feared what the change (of language) might bring if they just yield to English. Black people may think that the white colleagues are resistant, but change is frightening for most of us…*' (R3). This discussion of the political nature of Afrikaans at the UFS made some of the participants feel hopeless that the UFS would transform in this regard. Some of the participants even thought that we were '*cracking our brains on something that we could not do anything about*' (R7) and suggested that we had to learn to live with the reality that the non-Afrikaans speaking constituency would always be excluded at the UFS on the basis of language. This statement nearly led to everybody giving up on trying to contribute by suggesting improvements in the language area.

I should point out that at this stage I also became emotional, because the use of Afrikaans was also a painful experience for me. The suggestion that we had to just accept it and do nothing to change the situation upset me and for a moment I could not control my emotions. I shouted that there had to be something that we could do to improve the situation for ourselves. Most participants felt that I wanted to '*fight a losing battle*' (R2). The tension growing in the room led to some moments of quietness. During the silence, I was battling with the thought of whether at that stage I was a researcher, a participant or a political activist. These three roles were very confusing for me at that moment. At the beginning I had planned not to interfere in the direction the discussion was taking by using my own experiences, but these experiences were burning inside me and I wanted to share them with the group. I had to think of how this would impact on the direction that the discussion would take. The comments I had had from my critical friends before I started with the discussions, which indicated that it was going to be difficult to research my 'own back

yard' without being subjective, became a reality for me. In common with the view of Ellis (2004) that there are challenges in being both a researcher and participant in own research in terms of the hampering effect on the flow of the study, I also felt the tension caused by these two roles emerging, and for a moment I felt like leaving all other concerns that were raised and ask the participants to focus on the issue of language. I realised that this would be driving the direction of the discussions, which I had not intended to do as it would put me at a powerful position of simply a researcher with all the power. To avoid pushing the discussion to the language issue, I suggested that we continue to the second point on our list and individually in our own spaces after the group discussion, reflect on how we could bring improvements to our language challenge. We decided that we would share our suggestions in the next meeting.

The discussion of language as an area of concern for social transformation in this section has highlighted the difficulty of taking a superficial view of transformation in this area. The practical implications of the language change process make it difficult for the institution to take an immediate decision towards addressing the challenge. This study alone cannot get deep into this issue and offer recommendations for institutional practice. I, however, believe that the voices of the BWAs in this regard will alert the institution's management that there is a group of people within the institution who feel excluded in this regard and that the institution will find mechanisms to improve the situation. A statement like the one below should alert the management to the painful experience that some of the UFS' constituencies have with regard to the language issue; not only the pain, but also the disabling effect in which some end up unproductive, because of a lack of a sense of belonging.

> *R7: 'I totally switch off in their meetings. This makes it easier for me to cope with the situation because if I become attentive, I end up getting very upset over something that I cannot do anything about.'*

b) Forming Relationships

Social transformation was also looked at from the angle of possible relationships that BWAs formed with members of their faculties who were not black women**.** The black

women academics felt that positive relationships had the potential of contributing to social transformation at the UFS. They indicated that the interpersonal relationships could lead to *'healthy working relationships'* (R3) within departments and faculties. If the working relationships could be healthy, they argued that this could positively influence productivity in all academic areas. In the FGD, the women indicated that although it would be ideal to have good working and personal relationships with their colleagues, such relationships were at that time not stable. Some of the reasons that were discussed included perceived rejection from the other group and discomfort on the part of the BWAs. During our discussions, concerns like these were raised:

> *R2: 'I think it is because of my race that I feel I am not accepted by my colleagues. We work together when we have to but that is where it ends... sometimes you feel a subtle tension when you are with colleagues like they are telling you that you are not part of them. So I never feel like even getting into their offices to say hello (Laughs).We don't share anything in common other than Prof X's work'*

As we were discussing this issue, I could identify with what the women were pointing out. I had been with the faculty for four years when I conducted this study. Despite the four years I still felt very intimidated in the presence of my white colleagues. Some of them gathered in the tearoom for an informal chat during lunch most of the time. I normally just waited for them to leave the room before I could also get my cup of tea. Although they had never treated me badly, there was always that subtle feeling that I was not accepted in their company. Once I stood in that room for a few minutes and they continued speaking in Afrikaans, like a non-Afrikaans speaking person was not in the room with them. I felt so ignored and decided that I would never get involved in their informal gatherings anymore.

The subtle message that a person did not belong in the company of the white colleagues was discussed in our FGD as a contributing factor to unstable informal relationships. The main question that kept coming back was the issue of who we were at the UFS; whether we were constituencies with full rights to citizenship or just an 'appendage' or guests who could not claim the space. I could see that most of the participants had feelings of non-belonging which led them to regard their white colleagues as having more rights to the university space than them. These kinds of

feelings hurt the participants who believed that the feelings they harboured might have led to unstable relationships they were forming with their colleagues. What was unfortunate in this case was that this rejection in informal settings influenced the working relationships of the BWAs. Some women pointed out that they did not even know their colleagues' office spaces, because they never visited them, but only met them in the boardroom or in cases where they were co-teaching the same course. On the one hand the BWAs blamed the situation on feelings of rejection, but on the other hand they admitted that the independent nature of academia could be playing a role when it came to work relationships. They were aware that academics needed to focus on own research and teaching. This spirit of, '*you are independent, you do your own research*' (R1) seemed to isolate academics and blocked chances for collaborative opportunities that would build the UFS and contribute to its vision concerning research.

As much as work and personal relationships at that stage were ailing, the BWAs admitted that the UFS and particularly their departments were trying to improve the situation. One BWA shared the experience of her faculty's strategic planning exercises, which required all academic staff members to sleep over at some hotel. She indicated that the faculty had a sharing rule where the academics had to stay in shared rooms. She saw this as a start towards building positive relationships with colleagues, because the sharing could make colleagues get to know one another. She pointed out that such endeavours, however, also had to be strengthened, because people had the freedom to choose who they wanted to share with, which still contributed to clustering according to who felt comfortable with whom.

BWAs liked this initiative and felt that perhaps it could work in other faculties too. The question that had to be discussed, however, was how such initiatives could be strengthened. Although the general feeling was that it depended mainly on the free will of individual academics, in the mentioned department the academics at that time did not show such willingness. One suggestion was that faculty management had to pair the academics. The majority did not agree that this could work, because no person should be forced to transform. So some people suggested that faculty management could conduct awareness workshops, which could highlight the importance of relationships.

The importance of the above-mentioned workshops was also highlighted by the WWAs, who also had a similar feeling that relationships could be built if academics got to know and understand each other. One WWA suggested using forums, like critical discourses, where everybody could have the chance of opening up to understand how other people within the UFS felt with regard to sensitive issues of race and gender. In my interview with one WWA, the presence of such a platform, where women met to talk about gender issues, was brought to my attention. This was an initiative from the gender department and it was reported to have positive results on the part of the women who participated. The colleague stated that the women in this group were encouraged to understand themselves as academics and as women who had something to offer to the university. In this group, the colleague reported that the women discussed their role within the institution, the challenges they met as women within the UFS and how they could handle such challenges so that they could feel that they were fitting in the academic environment. In the mixed group discussion we discussed how the two mentioned initiatives by the faculties could be strengthened and extended to the other faculties.

4.2.3.4 Power dynamics

Unequal power-relations came up in the FGD as another area of concern for the BWAs. The discussion on this issue reflected the BWAs concern that the UFS' structures allowed for gender and race inequalities. In this instance BWAs raised their concern regarding the demographics of the white male academics, which seemed to have been dominating other groups. Although this point has been discussed under whiteness, it is re-emphasised here because the BWAs felt that white male domination was the biggest issue that caused the tensions within the UFS as it led to other constituencies feeling powerless and subordinate.

According to the women academics, the white males were over-represented in faculties and departments as well as in senior management positions of heads of departments and deans. One faculty, which the women viewed as vividly showing such inequalities, was the Faculty of Health Sciences. The BWA from the faculty indicated that she always felt inadequate as '*a person that comes from the nursing background and getting into the male dominated medical profession*' (R1). Behind

this statement is mainly the BWA's discomfort of being within a faculty in which she felt overpowered. According to this woman, the white males that formed the majority in that faculty, did not allow anybody's voice in decision making due to their belief that *'they are right every time, because they have more knowledge than anybody else in the faculty*' (R1).

The Faculty of Health Sciences was not the only faculty that seemed to raise concern in terms of white male domination. BWAs from other faculties too voiced their concern about the large number of white male colleagues in their departments and senior positions. The concern was that the dominant numbers of this group reflected and confirmed a stereotype that other groups (females and black people) were not good enough for academia. The women believed that SAHEIs as 'capillaries of power' (cf. Section 1.3) responsible for bringing changes to the communities should not perpetuate such stereotypes within their structures and practices. They commented that the UFS *'(had) kept the old white professors*' (R6) and as a result of this, most young black academics did '*not get permanent post'* (R3).

The issue of permanent positions was the most critical issue raised in the discussion. BWAs complained that white colleagues in general '*often get permanent posts while (we) are not given such because we are normally taken on equity posts*' (R3). This concern shifted the focus of the discussion to the two ways in which academics were employed within the UFS. At the time of the study, there was what was referred to as 'equity employments'. With this kind of employment, there were special funds allocated for this purpose and the group that benefited from this arrangement was mostly young black women academics. The other groups went through the normal employment processes. Although this arrangement was used positively to increase the numbers of BWAs within the UFS, the beneficiaries themselves felt that it was counterproductive to the issue of redress. They cited examples of black colleagues who were never permanently employed and had to renew their contracts each year '*as long as the equity funds were available'* (R1). In fact, one of the participants was in a situation where she was kept on contract for a long time. She explained that she had been on contract for six years and her faculty did not show any intention of employing her on a permanent basis.

> *R4: 'I have been waiting for a permanent post for six years… I wanted to leave this institution, but I think I will be doing exactly what they want me to do, so I am not going to. I will go to CCMA…'*

The woman looked very anxious about her situation and felt that it was a case of one of the biases of the UFS towards accommodating the white constituency at the expense of the BWAs. This finding is in line with the literature findings that black women academics in the American and in British higher education were also not appointed on permanent post. According to Rockquemore and Lazsloffy (2008), this was shaped by the institutions' racialised assumptions about who was an insider and who was an outsider and whose presence was welcomed and whose was just tolerated. This echoes the point discussed in the preceding paragraphs on retention in which the women were questioning the UFS' intention to keep them as people that had the potential to contribute positively to the advancement of the UFS. As BWAs further noticed, retention of this constituency through permanent appointments would mean that the UFS was serious about transforming the demographics of the institution.

The women also mentioned that their white colleagues in their departments, who were appointed after them, were already occupying permanent positions. According to the BWAs this situation placed their white colleagues in a powerful position of '*space owners*' (R2), while they on the other hand were just accommodated because the government mandated HEIs to do so. One woman even felt that it would be better if the government would leave institutions to decide on how to drive their transformation agendas without interference. She pointed out the pain of being reminded that she was an equity appointment by some of her colleagues.

As I was listening to the discussion, I recalled that the government had put forth a recommendation to create equity appointments (Equity Employment Act, 2006 amendment). Before the discussion, I had always felt that it was a positive initiative. Listening to the plight of some of the women caused by the same initiative, I, however, became confused and almost felt that equity employment was counterproductive to the redress endeavours. I raised this point that equity employment was not just a UFS issue, but one of the wider national work environment and that it was a government initiative to create equity in organisations.

The women had always been aware of this and they were not necessarily against it, but they felt that the way it had been implemented in their institution may have been lacking in some regard. It was difficult for these women to totally base their negative perception of transformation on equity employment because on the one hand, we noticed the positive impact that equity employments had had within the institution. The number of the BWAs had increased due to this initiative. However, on the other hand, it seemed that people who had gained access to the UFS through this initiative were stereotyped as not having expertise and therefore could not get permanent employment. This was another area that we found difficult to try and find solutions to. While equity employment was mainly a management issue, it was very painful for the women who had experienced its negative effect and therefore these women could not discuss the issue unemotionally.

Another suggestion by members of the group was that BWAs should work hard to prove themselves as worthy of being within the institution and securing permanent employment. According to them, '*if you perform regardless of your gender or race, you get recognized as a colleague*' (R2). This means that these BWAs felt that being regarded as just an equity figure could be dealt with by proving oneself as an academic. This included, as some mentioned, '*putting deliverables on the table*' (R1). These deliverables were mentioned as publishing as much as other colleagues and '*investing time in the teaching and learning*' (R2), because if BWAs could do this then '*everybody would respect us*.' (R2).

This raised huge disagreement within the group. Some participants felt that if we adopted that spirit of 'proving ourselves', we would find ourselves working extra hard just to prove that we were worthy of the appointments. The argument was that some colleagues did not have to go through a process of proving themselves, while BWAs had to prove their expertise. A previous chapter (cf. Section 2.3.2), has reported that even if the women could be motivated to prove themselves as worthy of being in academia, some countries found that there were always entrenched stereotypes of underachievement that would still be levelled against the women academics. This means that although proving oneself may work in some instances, it is not always guaranteed that it could wipe out the stereotypes once they are held about a group. In the discussion at the end, we had to discuss a way forward to improving our

environment in this regard, since working extra hard to prove oneself was considered by the majority as submitting to the stereotype of lack of expertise on our side. In this FGD we could not find any solutions to this issue and planned to discuss it at the next meeting.

a) Lack of voice and agency

The women, both BWAs and WWAs felt that the male voice still had more weight in academia compared to that of women. They stated that, mostly in cases where women held positions of power, their voices were mute and they were presumably not considered much in decision making. Some of the participants in this study were in such positions of power and I specifically became interested in understanding their perceptions in this regard. The general feeling of these women was that they did not have the voice that they would have liked to have, because of male dominance. Although they agreed that they were given a chance to contribute in meetings, the challenge was for such contributions to be taken seriously. As they mentioned, '*In faculty meetings, you notice that your voice is silenced'* (WWA 3). One woman noticed that there was a difference in being '*allowed chance to talk'* and *'being listened to*' (WWA 2). She mentioned that being given a platform to make contributions often did not guarantee that her contribution would be considered when decisions were being made. According to these women, '*you are allowed to speak as a woman, but you wouldn't necessarily be heard, so you would have your say and in either overt or latent ways you would be ignored' (*WWA 2). They felt that men were still privileged at the UFS because their voices were heard and that changes in that area were being delayed. To these women, even being in positions that could be regarded as powerful, did not remove the stereotypes which they felt were responsible for the situation. These stereotypes were summed up by one of these women, who said:

> *WWA 1: 'There are stereotypes on the emotionality of women that is why they are not recognised. This traditional stereotype: a woman is often seen still as emotional and irrational and not to be taken seriously, while the man is always regarded as logical, rational and decision maker.'*

Because of such stereotypes some women even felt that using their male colleagues as allies to strengthen their voices would be a better strategy. They issued statements such as, '*I believe my voice would be heard if I was a man*' (WWA 2) and *'Sometimes I feel I need a male ally who would back me up and make my voice be heard. In senior positions we need the support of men because they are heard*' (WWA 3). Looking at such statements I wondered if the situation was so bad that women felt they would willingly give their power to men to back them. As one white woman academic, however, stated, '*this is a strategy, and if it helps to put our ideas forth, we can use it, because actually what will be implemented will not be the voice of the man that raises an idea but my voice through a man*' (WWA 4). I believed that this strategy could work on a short term basis, and challenged the women on what strategy could be adopted on a long term basis in which women would not speak through men, but raise their voices to bring about changes. The women stated that the situation too needed a lot of sensitisation workshops that the university could implement to make constituencies aware of the role of women in leadership positions. Critical discourses where women would be given a platform to speak about concerns like this one were also suggested by the women academics, who felt these would also serve to let their male counterparts understand how they felt.

Although the WWAs voices were the strongest on the issue of lack of voice for women in senior positions, perhaps because they were the ones who were in such positions, the BWAs also felt that women in senior positions did not have a noticeable impact in terms of bringing changes about for other women within the UFS. They indicated that, as women in junior positions, they were looking up to those in power to make a difference. An example of the promotion criteria was cited again to indicate that if women had a voice, they would have debated the criteria. The participants felt that it was the role of those at the top to fight for women and to ensure that stereotyping of women were dealt with. Some believed that the presence of those women in some powerful positions was just a '*number game' (*R2), so that people outside the UFS could think that the institution was transforming. The BWAs saw that '*there is visibility of the women in some powerful positions but are they there in the decision making processes*?' (R4)

Some felt that maybe these women's voices were, however, 'muted' by the threatening environment that was dominated by males and some of these women in power could be feeling inhibited to voice their opinions. In the FGD, the women talked about the possibility of a threatening atmosphere for the women who were appointed in senior positions. They thought that perhaps these women were forced by circumstances to adhere to the status quo.

> *R5: 'I think it is an issue of if women have struggled to get to the senior position; they stand to lose a lot if they strongly stand up for what they believe in. They may feel that they have an agenda to stand up for, but to what degree will that impact on them if they take a stand?'*

Women's lack of voice became a worrying issue, because the women academics themselves seemed to have given up hope that their situation would ever change. It was one of the most challenging issues on my part. As the feeling seemed to be unanimous, I wondered if it was worth taking it to the mixed group discussion for further elaboration. Would it be any use and what would come up which was new? Would the participants be willing to engage in another discussion on this issue? These were some of the questions that I battled with as I analysed the women academics' responses.

I did not want to just let this issue go, because it was also affecting the women academics' perception of social transformation at the UFS. I also felt that the women needed to take action regarding the issue and also challenge some of their thoughts towards giving men power to be their spokespersons. How was I going to raise it without making the participants think that I was too pushy and how would I get them to participate in the discussion on the same issue? I decided to bring it up nonetheless and hoped to get new perspectives.

The power relations were not only discussed with regard to male dominance, but also to the oppression that the women in the FGD mentioned they felt in the hands of their white women colleagues who were in positions of power. I am discussing this under the theme of horizontal oppression below, which I felt suited the discussion, because as Bell (2008) noticed, horizontal oppression happens among those who are already oppressed by the wider social structures and practices and when some

of them get to assume a powerful status, they forget the plight of the oppressed and start exercising their power in a similar way as the oppressor.

b) Recognition

BWAs in the FGDs mentioned lack of recognition by the institution and colleagues as another worrying matter. They mentioned that social transformation at the UFS was also negatively affected by this. Recognition, as was discussed in the FGD, meant acknowledgement of the strengths that this group had, the strength in being productive academics and the strength to function at the level of their fellow white colleagues. The group felt that the role that BWAs as people who brought with them some knowledge capital often went unnoticed by the management, both within their faculties and in the larger university. This point correlates with the findings of Morley (2005), who found a similar case with the BWAs in the American higher education context. She states that the different forms of knowledge that these women brought into their institutions were not often given the epistemic recognition by those in power. In the case of the BWAs in this study, their suspicion was that they were only seen as '*fishing rods to fish black students and to address equity*' (R3). They felt that they were '*not recognized as people who could be resourceful*' (R1) and who could have valuable information for the students. They cited an example of placement in committees as one example that was indicative of lack of recognition.

According to the women, they were rarely ever placed in the committees in which important decisions would be taken. They were mostly in the equity committees, which they felt was just window dressing for the public outside. The belief was that most people from outside the UFS were mainly interested in how the institution was handling issues of equity. Seeing that there were representatives from the historically disadvantaged in the equity committee gives a false impression that equity issues are handled well. I posed a question to the BWAs to elaborate on the committees that they thought mattered most in important decision making. One black woman academic gave an example of her case. She was appointed to a committee for the first time in 2012. In the thirteen years she had been with her faculty, she had never served in any committee. In that year she was appointed to serve in the equity committee of the faculty. She stated that she felt very bad about it, because it was

like she had been appointed a spokesperson for the black and woman constituency. Her question was why they had to choose an equity committee for her first time serving in a committee?

Although it was not clear to some of the women why this particular BWA was complaining about placement in the equity committee, she indicated that she would have preferred to be included in for instance the research committee in which her development as a researcher and an academic would be enhanced and where she felt she would be contributing to the crucial area of academia. As a result of how she felt, she approached the head of department and declined to be involved in the equity committee.

The example above was not the only case of equity committee placement. Two other BWAs related their experience with regard to this issue. According to one, the situation in her faculty was worse, where all four of them as blacks were engaged in the equity committee and not in any other committees. The black women academics felt that this indicated that they were not regarded as people with expertise to function in any other committees.

The argument here was that the women felt that they were not privileged to be part of the UFS. Their feeling was that, although they entered as equity appointments, they had qualifications and were employed on merit. One of them said this about how she felt:

> *R1: 'I was appointed, the post clearly says we need somebody from a Health Science background, which I had and we need somebody who has an education background which I had, somebody with a degree which I had. So I'm not going to deny that I'm an affirmative action appointment, but I will not be put in a position or because of that then people see me as this underperforming person.'*

The other one also added to this by indicating that she was appointed because of her qualification. She felt that it was unfair that they were not regarded as equal to their white colleagues, because while they were at the UFS they were expected to adhere to the same requirements when they applied for promotion. For her this meant that they were on '*equal footing' (R2)* with their colleagues.

Some said that they received subtle messages that they were not as good as their white colleagues.

> *R3: 'So, you got in on your qualification and everything, so that has to show that you are worthy. But still you feel that very subtle message that is being sent to you, that you do not deserve to be here. You have to work harder to prove yourself at the end of the day that you are worthy to be at the Free State University.'*

The women showed that this frustrated them very much, because their colleagues and departmental heads even passed, although not verbally, the message to the students that BWAs were not knowledgeable. This was emphasised by an illustration of one of them who cited her experience thus:

> *R5 (BWAs in focus group): 'The HOD knowing perfectly well that I am around the department, I'm the human geographer, saying to a student, oh so unfortunately professor so and so is not around. He was going to give you the meaning of this concept. He made me feel so inferior.'*

This woman indicated that she was upset, because the head of department noticed the absence of the white professor who he deemed to have more knowledge – but failed to see the presence of a black woman colleague who also had expertise in that area. Actually one respondent in an individual interview explained that she was told directly by one professor (head of department too) that she '*was privileged to be at the UFS*' (R4). She explained that since the professor had said that to her, she always felt like she was not good enough or that she had to prove the professor wrong.

The feeling of worthlessness and inferiority that accompanies lack of recognition in a social context and in higher education in this case has been discussed in Chapter 2 as being experienced by most black women academics around the world. BWAs in international higher education also have experiences where they are pigeon-holed by colleagues and students and this leads to them feeling unworthy to be part of the academic world (Daniel, 2009). This non-recognition of BWAs by the HEIs themselves spill over to the students and the other members of the outside community who visit the institutions. The BWAs in my study indicated that they

experienced the same where students did not respect them as knowledgeable academics:

> *R5: 'What these students do at times is unacceptable. They make us feel so inadequate. I sometimes practically tremble when I go to the lecture, because I know the students don't respect us as young black female academics.'*

During the FGD cases, where colleagues would give assistance to the students without informing the staff member responsible for the course, were cited as happening in departments. In this case, students would just feel that the white academic was more knowledgeable than their black lecturer and when they had not understood concepts in the lecture, they would direct their questions to the white lecturer. The impression that other colleagues, who eventually found out about the situation, had from the situation would be that the black lecturer lacked expertise in providing accurate information to the students.

> *R3: 'You see Dr X. My students always go to her to ask her questions when they don't understand something in my class. They just feel that she is more knowledgeable than I am, because she is white and I think they have learned that she taught the course before.'*

The issue of students who do not respect or who undermine the capabilities of the BWAs in higher education is not unique to the UFS. The literature reviewed indicated that even in the United States of America and in other countries, students tend to undermine black academics. As a result, most BWAs around the globe have to work extra hard to prove that they can do as well as their white counterparts (cf. Section 2.4). They have to deal with the stereotype that they can only function at a certain level.

In fact, the feeling that their colleagues believed that they could not function at a higher level had been raised by some of the participants in this study. This made the BWAs feel that they had to work very hard to prove that they were capable so that they would be recognised as academics:

> *R4 (BWA in focus group):'Well the other thing is also sometimes that I experience that you feel as if you have to prove yourself more. You feel as if you have to work five times harder than your white counterpart, because you have to prove that you can survive.'*

The feeling of having to prove themselves to colleagues, students and the general public that they were as capable as the white colleagues influenced the BWAs and made them feel despondent and mistrusting their own capabilities. Data in this section indicated that the BWAs felt they had the ability to perform on the same level with their colleagues, but lack of recognition from the wider university and colleagues in their faculties contributed to these women' feelings of inadequacy. They believed that the institution had to find ways in which it could open spaces where the perceptions regarding BWAs as being incapable could be challenged. In this case, the question that needed to be addressed was: **what steps does the UFS take to create a space where every constituent feels recognised?**

c) Horizontal oppression

The BWAs reported that power dynamics also played themselves out even among women academics themselves. The women felt that this came as a result of the oppressive structure of male dominance, which seemed to spill over and influence the way white females who were appointed in senior positions functioned. This point aligns with the thoughts of women academics in other countries too, who feel that at times they suffer at the hands of their female colleagues, who exercise power in the same way that their male colleagues do (Morrison, 2010). The BWAs indicated that once the white female colleagues got into power, they forgot the plight of the marginalised and acted to reinforce the structures of dominance.

The state of the white woman in a position of power, which she may not be used to, was highlighted as a possible reason that could be contributing to the manifestation of power in an oppressive way. According to the BWAs, an Afrikaner woman, '*has never been given power before and immediately she is put in power she uses it as an oppressive tool by denying others the promotion that herself she got*' (R1). This state is described in literature as internalised oppression (Bell, 2007), which leads

victims to act in the same way once they also occupied positions of power. The white women in power may be unconsciously exercising their power to oppress others, because that is how the world around them operates. One WWA had this to say about this exercise of power:

> *WWA 3: 'I notice that I still have privileges which make me feel guilty and how I relate to black colleagues may be influenced by my awareness of the privileges I have. Although I do not consciously mean to oppress, I may act superior because of my internalisation of my superiority status.'*

Even though the white colleagues may not be consciously exercising their superiority, BWAs felt that this oppressive behaviour from their white women colleagues hampered transformation at the UFS. They explained some of the ways in which their colleagues exercise power as 'unbelievable'.

> *R2: 'In my faculty, there is a white lady that was put in a position of power recently. The kind of workload that she came up with is so unbelievable. And to think that she doesn't even consult with the lecturers that work with the post-grads… it is not fair. She just pretends not to understand what we have to go through.'*

It was again at this point where I felt we had to interrogate and challenge our thoughts. It could be that the WWAs who got into positions of power were oppressive. If we look at the example above, it was, however, about the workload that all staff members had to carry. Was this an isolated experience of BWAs? I posed this question to the participants, who mentioned that everybody had to carry heavy teaching loads that were accompanied by some administrative work of marks management. If this was everybody's challenge, then how were the women in positions of power showing a lack of transformation?

This point was of interest to me, because I had also at some point viewed my faculty's transformation attempts in terms of the workload that I was allocated. As a junior lecturer, I had felt that my workload was unfair and would not allow me to continue with my PhD, which I was intending to enrol for after I had completed my master's degree. I always looked at my other colleagues who were already continuing with their studies as privileged. I never took time to understand the

amount of work they had too and how they also had to juggle their work and studies. It was only after I approached one of them that I understood that she had to work extra to be able to get time for her studies. I started to understand that the workload allocation was not based on the race or gender of a person. Everybody was overloaded. How the BWAs understood this was one question that I had to pose to them.

It should be noted that I was not trying to undermine the feelings of the participants, but as needs to be done in AR, challenging some of the thoughts that could be disabling might lead to the deconstruction of our thoughts and feelings and lead us to construct and adopt a healthy and positive view of our situation. As we deliberated on this issue, some of the women came to realise that it was not an exercise of power that led the women in senior positions to allocate huge workloads, but it was mainly an issue of what needed to be done in our departments.

In an interview with one of the BWAs, the woman clarified that the workload was not a major problem, but decisions on the workloads could be better if they involved staff at the lower levels. What seemed to have been a problem was that there was unequal work distribution in this woman's department. She mentioned that the inequalities around work distribution led to her feeling that other people enjoyed privileged positions, which allowed them to publish while she and other colleagues had to carry heavy teaching loads allocated by people she thought had to fight such systems (WWAs). She said:

> *R4: 'women in power are worse than men. I think I would prefer to have a male boss forever, because they don't have any scores to settle. A woman coming into that position just acts to show how tough they can be…'*

This was also a point that I decided to table for a mixed group discussion for suggestions on practical faculty and departmental change in this regard.

The power relations also seemed to have been felt at the level of the female academics who held the same posts. The BWAs indicated that even at this level, the white colleagues still believed that there were academic tasks that they could do better than the black colleagues. In the FGD, the women complained that the setting

of exam papers and tests was a struggle for them as they had to adhere to the standards set by their colleagues. They pointed to times when their white women colleagues would scrutinise their papers to find mistakes. At first it was difficult for me to understand what this meant and I asked for clarification. They explained that they were at times accused by their colleagues of setting tests that were of low cognitive standard. This point was raised mainly by the BWAs who were teaching undergraduates. These women felt that at this level, they could not set questions that could be too difficult for the students.

Once again this issue was perceived by the BWAs as a racial attack on their part, because as some of them stated, their '*exam papers are always sent to prof X for scrutiny and my colleague tells me prof X said this paper is of a low standard*' (R6). This particular BWA said that Professor X, who is a white woman academic, never took time to explain why she perceived the questions set by this woman academic as of low standard, so the women perceived it as an attack, because she is black and it made her feel inferior. This situation may be similar to that of other black women academics in an international higher education. As explained by Harries (2007), these women also face a challenge in terms of their academic capabilities. As was stated earlier (cf. Section 2.4), the BWAs around the globe in higher education have to consistently define and defend their professional identity, which is threatened by colleagues who make these women feel unworthy to be in academia. It may be the same feeling that the BWAs were expressing in the FGD. They felt so strongly that the treatment they received from their colleagues was only meant to demoralise them and made them believe that they were not good in academia.

On this point, the WWAs mentioned that they might have been aware that they sometimes acted inconsiderably towards their black colleagues and as with those that were in power, they too were influenced by their '*privileged*' (WWA1 and 3) status, which they mentioned hampered their judgment of how others may be feeling. In actual fact, one WWA pointed out that she could see that black colleagues lacked a sense of belonging, but at times she '*pretended not to understand*' (WWA 1), because she could not share in their pain:

> *WWA 1: 'I am here buttressed by my own white privilege. I can understand how black people feel and I sometimes feel very guilty*

> *because I pretend not to understand… I think that a black woman has a double yoke, while a white woman has an agency status on the basis of colour. I think it's is just that we have internalised a position of supremacy so that we do not recognise what others are going through.'*

Once again this issue had to be discussed further in the FGD to find ways in which BWAs could take action. The suggestion, which seemed to be unanimous in the discussion, was that this was a more interpersonal issue. As such, BWAs felt that they had to handle it themselves. The suggestion was that, when a situation like that occurred, the person should approach her colleague and try to understand the colleague's point of view. The matter should only be taken up with the faculty management if it could not be solved by the people concerned. Although emotions soared as the discussions were continuing, where some women suggested a confrontational approach, at the end all of us understood that there was no need to fight, but to challenge stereotypes in a calm manner.

This section on problem identification presented an account of the concerns that the BWAs and WWAs identified as needing attention at an institutional level, faculty level and personal level. AR studies do not only focus on finding problems, but on acting on the problem, and therefore a follow-up discussion in the form of a mixed group focus group discussion was conducted, where suggestions for improved institutional practice were discussed. The other major issue addressed in the mixed group discussion was how each participant could act as an agent of change within the UFS. The next section is a report on this phase, which focused on the question: **how can we improve our work environment?**

4.3 Phase 2: Action steps (How can we improve our work environment?)

In this phase, I report on the women's suggestions on how they could improve their work environment so that it could become a place where they could feel a sense of belonging. The suggestions reported here do not only reflect what the women academics themselves felt they could do as individuals, but they also shared their thoughts on how they would like the UFS to address the challenges to social

transformation as well as suggesting what faculties could do to create a warm environment, which could be fertile for the productivity of all within such faculties. I drew these results from the data collected from the FGD, the individual interviews and the input from the HODs.

This section also reports the actions taken in this study in ensuring that the voices of the women academics were conveyed to the management of the UFS, namely the presentation of the study findings to the equity committee of the Faculty of Education (in which I am based as a researcher) and the central equity committee of the institution. In addition to these steps, parts of the findings were also presented in the series of critical dialogues organised by the Institute of Race Relations and Social Cohesion at the UFS. This section also reports what the women academics did to address their concerns and improve their practice as well as contribute towards social transformation at the UFS.

In this section, I have dropped using the participants' codes (i.e. R1, R2, WWA 1) because I wanted to report the suggestions for improvement as a united voice from the participants. So, where I use the exact words from the participants, I do not indicate which participant gave the view but present it as an example of a united view from the participants. Where disagreements on certain issues arose, I also highlight them and move to how they were resolved and what the participants agreed on in the end.

4.3.1 Action step 1: Mixed group discussion

In this section, I provide an account of the discussion of the mixed group of BWAs and WWAs in which they discussed a way forward for them to improve their practice as well as providing suggestions for improved institutional practice. The discussion, as earlier mentioned (cf. Section 3.2 *mixed group discussion*), focused on how the participants could be agents of change within their transforming institution and how they could challenge the stereotypes about one another. The change suggested at the discussion was change at three levels: institutional, faculty and personal levels, with a focus on the areas of concern raised and reported in the previous section. I focus on one point of concern at a time and indicate how the women academics proposed changes at the different levels mentioned in this paragraph. It will be noted, however, that the women academics did not make suggestions for systemic

and personal changes for all the points of concern that they raised, but suggestions to these are implicated in one form or the other in the different points discussed in this section. For example, the suggestion on how the institution and individuals could ensure that women academics gain a voice in their institution is touched upon in the discussion on dealing with white male domination.

One point to be mentioned here is that the mixed group discussion progressed smoothly without the tension I had anticipated. I had thought that the participants would get emotional when sensitive issues were discussed; issues pertaining to race, mainly where there seemed to be a difference in opinion about an area of concern. The dual language issue was one which was sensitive for many of the participants, as they regarded the use of the two languages as political within the UFS. While the BWAs strongly felt that Afrikaans did not have a place in the transformed institution (UFS), the WWAs felt that as much as the UFS could move towards adopting one language, Afrikaans did not have to lose its place as a language of scholarship. The debate of language in SAHE, especially of Afrikaans as a language of instruction and communication, had also been extensive in literature (Alexander, 2003; Webb, 2010). Congruent with the findings of this study, the literature indicates that there has been a fight for and debate on the position of Afrikaans in post-apartheid South Africa in which people who have always felt that this language is the language of the oppressor pushed for the language to be treated like any other South African language. On the other hand, as the WWAs in this study also indicated, some academics argued much on the scientific nature of the language, which made it mandatory for the language to be retained as a language of scholarship in SAHE. Because of such differences in opinion, I had anticipated that this could have a bearing on the discussion and was expecting some intense argument in our mixed group discussion. To counter this perceived tension, I designed the discussion guide in such a way that the focus would be on improving practice in terms of the issues identified in the previous discussions, not on discussing the individual experiences as we had done in the first FGD and the individual interviews again (cf. Section 3.3). In this way, the discussion was geared more on a combined effort to bring about change rather than dwelling on what was not going well at UFS within the three levels mentioned. Thus, the participants were willing to contribute and they showed respect for one another's contributions. Even in

cases where they had a difference of opinion, they were ready to listen and then, in a respectful manner, provide a counter opinion. At the end, all the contributions that we made were valuable to this study. Below I discuss each area and the suggestions made for improved institutional and personal practice.

4.3.1.1 Language barrier

As mentioned earlier (cf. Section 4.2), language was mentioned by both BWAs and WWAs as a barrier towards inclusion of the diverse constituencies within the UFS. In our mixed group discussion, suggestions on how this could be dealt with at the institutional level, faculty and personal level were discussed.

The participants felt that they could not suggest policy change in terms of language adoption within the UFS, because of the complexities that have been discussed in the previous section on language. In the mixed group discussion the fact that language was a '*divisive tool*' that seemed to separate constituencies from different race groups was, however, emphasised. This emphasis was made on the premise that due to the historical context of the UFS, which was previously a white Afrikaans-medium institution, the classes were also grouped in such a way that students from different races attended different classes. Although this point does not need to be overemphasised as it was discussed earlier, this division in classes was regarded as creating a gap between the black and white academics. As mentioned earlier (cf. Section 4.2.3.1), teaching collaborations between different race groups became very difficult and this affected the quality of class presentations.

On this point, participants suggested that it would be better if the institution could place the students in the same classes using interpreting services. A white woman colleague explained that her faculty (Faculty of Education), was already mixing students at honours level making use of interpreting services. She pointed out that in most of the classes, interpreting services had even been dropped, because of the willingness of the students to try and understand one language, which in most cases was English. She suggested that maybe this could be adopted at undergraduate level too and in other faculties.

The above point was appreciated by the majority of the participants, who felt that it could stop the divisions among staff and students. Some participants, however, suggested that if this could be adopted, the institution would have to become very sensitive, as the women academics had noticed that most students still had a sense of pride towards their own language or the language that they were attached to. As one woman academic had noticed in her classes, '*there was still a very low tolerance for groupings within the students and staff at the UFS*', and that was why *'people wanted to hold on to their language, because it gives them a sense of power, pride and control'.* The culture pride mentioned here was considered as one of the reasons why the Afrikaans-speaking constituency was so attached to the language and why a number of the Afrikaans-speaking students registered for Afrikaans classes. Thus, an attempt to integrate classes would have to be done very sensitively, as the women academics suggested. Nonetheless, all participants agreed that integration of classes could work to address the division created by language.

In line with the suggestion of integration, the women suggested that this would be impossible without developing sensitisation programmes, which could orientate all constituencies to cultural differences and tolerance therein. According to the women academics, the management needed to sensitise the constituencies to the link that exists between language and culture and what language really means as a unifying tool rather than a group identity tool that people have to hold on to. These women pointed out that the language issue for the majority of people within the university and everywhere else was very contagious, because within the institution people felt that changing the language policy '*would be like taking something away from them*' and ripping their sense of belonging from them. In this way, as was raised in the previous discussions, language within the UFS had become a tool of power and control. Some people felt that relinquishing one language would be taking away that power. The women academics felt that at postgraduate level, students were mature enough to understand that education could have far reaching positive results if an international language is used as a language of scholarship. According to the participants, the undergraduates still needed workshops on what language means generally and not how they viewed it in the groupings that they form. The workshops could also expose constituencies to what it could mean for them if the medium of instruction was to be changed:

> *'It should be remembered that the undergraduates still feel that they have to claim their right to be taught in Afrikaans, because they might be getting such orientation from their home backgrounds, so if language change could be just imposed on them, the university would be running another risk of the Reitz incidence.'*

The sensitivity around the language policy within the UFS was acknowledged and the participants felt that even we as individual academics could act as agents of change in this regard. Since changing the policy was almost impossible for the UFS, the suggestion was that the lecturers themselves had a responsibility to ensure that they created the opportunities for students to collaborate:

> *'We should create opportunities for students to share classes and hear different voices so that language cannot be seen as a device for exclusion, but as diversity that needs to be celebrated.'*

On this point, some participants suggested code switching for academics understanding both languages, and to do so in a way that the other students would not feel excluded. This could be done by translating what others say in Afrikaans, for example, and trying to help those who could not express themselves well in English. In that way, they believed, the students could adopt a changed mind-set if lecturers prepared them for such diversity. In actual fact, one participant felt that a flavour of other languages spoken by the class could also encourage students to appreciate diversity. She indicated that, since she was Tswana, she normally introduced a word of Tswana to her students and explained what it meant. She indicated that this had positive results as all students looked forward to learning a new word per day. Afrikaans could also be seen as a language which non-speakers could learn. This indicates that the lecturers themselves could act to change perceptions among their students while gradually the institution worked on the more serious issue of policy adaptation.

In terms of the language used in faculties' meetings, the feeling was that it was more a personal than a management issue. Participants all agreed that sensitivity from individuals was needed. Although they noticed that it was difficult to change what other people believed, the importance of a willingness of constituencies to be

inclusive was emphasised. The women academics indicated that, as much as the root of successful transformation at the UFS lay with the constituencies, this was the most difficult, because it involved changing hearts. The need for critical discourses on sensitive transformation issues was, however, once again highlighted as a strategy that could help provide the platform for individuals to understand one another and how they felt. The experiences of other people regarding the excluding nature of language could be discussed in such forums.

As much as the majority felt that the institution and individuals needed to put mechanisms into place to deal with the language problem, some women academics suggested that everybody should just let the policy run without interference. According to these participants the language issue would '*ultimately sort itself out*' so as constituency at the grass roots level we needed not to get stuck in forcing a '*hundred year's institution to transform'*. The reason to let things be, as proposed by some, was based on the historical reality of the UFS. Again an issue of the UFS as an historically white Afrikaans-medium university was highlighted by those who felt there was no use in '*fighting the losing battle*.' To these participants, history had shown that there had been gradual improvement throughout the years in which the institution moved from being a totally Afrikaans-medium institution to incorporating English as a parallel medium of instruction. At the time of the study, some faculties, like the Faculty of Education, were already using mostly English in their faculty meetings. For some, this indicated that the UFS was going through a gradual language transformation.

The participants agreed that meanwhile, as the gradual process was taking place, we as people who could not speak Afrikaans, had to change our mind-set to be able to operate and become productive. According to one participant:

> *'All we need to do is to appreciate the positive changes that are happening in our institution and also take the first step to learn the other language, because that is an opportunity for us to show that we appreciate and celebrate diversity.'*

Another participant indicated that she had learnt Afrikaans when she realised that it was an important component of the university's language structure. She shared her

experience with the group and mentioned that she felt she was functioning better, because she could at least use her basic Afrikaans to communicate effectively with her colleagues. She pointed to the positive results in that she felt that her colleagues appreciated her effort. Some of them had even started learning her language too. According to those who advocated a change of mind-set, most people resented Afrikaans because they felt learning the language would compromise their values and their right as equal members of the institution. With this kind of thinking, they indicated that most would push for an abrupt change; in the process, becoming anxious if that change did not come in the expected time.

It was a very interesting discussion in which the women academics did not only expect change to emanate from the top and in which they themselves were willing to challenge their own thinking towards change. Accepting the difficulty of the change process was already an emancipatory process for those in the group, who had earlier viewed social transformation in terms of language as a process that could be easy, since the '*majority of the UFS constituency is black*'. Their appreciation of what the rector of the institution was doing by inviting international scholars showed that these women were looking positively at the attempts that the UFS was making towards change. They believed that the international scholars would be helpful in neutralising the language, as most of these scholars could not speak Afrikaans. They therefore felt that more of the international constituency could be brought in as a way of making the UFS global and in the process the language issue would be addressed. As one of the women academics put it, these scholars '*will not understand this Afrikaans and the UFS will be forced to adapt to accommodate them… people should understand that UFS has to start to widen their horizon and Afrikaans is not going to do that for the institution*.'

4.3.1.2 White male domination

In the mixed group discussion, white male domination was closely linked to failure of women to climb the ladder to senior positions. As earlier discussed (cf. Section 4.3), the UFS was dominated by white males, especially in senior lecturer and professor positions. Both BWAs and WWAs felt that it was time that the woman's role was strengthened and women be appointed in these senior positions. As much as they

acknowledged that there were positive moves towards ensuring that women were appointed, the women academics felt that more could be done to further improve the situation. Although I had had some doubts about introducing this issue (cf. Section 4.2) in this discussion, the women academics showed interest in engaging in the discussion concerning what could be done to improve the situation regarding male dominance.

The discussion was more on the issue of the institution's responsibility to ensure that as it promoted women, it also considered allocating powerful positions and meaningful portfolios, which could give women a voice in the decision-making processes of the institution. The women academics felt at the time of this study that their voices were still muted and they sometimes felt that they needed a male voice to strengthen and back up their voices. They felt that the university recognised that the women could be good leaders, but somehow there were structures in place that acted as barriers towards women coming out strongly when they were in senior positions. Their feeling was that the white male at the UFS held this view about women: '*She is a good leader, but we should make sure that she does not row the boat too much'.*

Because of the feeling above, the participants re-emphasised the need for the UFS to shift its attention from race issues to those of gender in its transformation endeavours. They suggested that the UFS should work on a broad band of representation of women, from junior lecturer to the position of professor and ensure that in all positions, women were well represented. The suggestion was that if there were few women who qualified for senior posts, the rector's programme of appointing extraordinary professors could focus more on women scholars so that the incoming women professors could also mentor the young women academics within the institution to be suitable for senior positions. At this point, there was a general nod from all participants. This indicated that they had observed for some time that the extraordinary professors who joined the institution were mainly white males, which was counter-productive to gender transformation.

Some participants highlighted the fact that the UFS and its management might not be aware that the women had concerns regarding social transformation at the UFS. The women felt that it was time for them, at an individual level, to raise their voices to

alert the institution to their needs. They suggested that there should be gender talks within the institution. This was an appealing suggestion for most, but the question was '*who would initiate such talks?* 'One woman academic noticed that as an ordinary academic, it was difficult to start such talks, because attendance normally became poor when a workshop, seminar or talk was not attached to a well-known scholar who could facilitate the discussions. Earlier in my individual interviews with a colleague from the Qwaqwa campus, she had indicated that everybody could initiate talks around sensitive issues of race and gender. During the mixed group discussion the group indicated that this was not an easy task and almost impossible. Therefore, they suggested that the role of convening workshops and talks could be played by the equity committees within faculties. They indicated that equity committees were in an advantaged position to escalate the grievances of all the constituencies to the management and if they convened a meeting academics would attend.

I remembered one initiative at the Faculty of Education, which was referred to as open spaces meetings. Here, faculty members could talk about any issue that was bothering them in the absence of the faculty management and it was stated that issues discussed here should not be a management issue, but an issue which the attendees could talk about to find solutions. The meetings were not attended well and I noticed that faculty members did not take such discussions seriously. The question of who had to initiate was therefore one of the most important questions for the group to consider, as they were suggesting talks on gender.

It was at this stage that the participants talked about the importance of the willingness of women academics, both black and white, to support each other and ensure that their endeavours to be agents of change within the UFS became successful. The commitment started with this small group that they needed to attend forums that were meant to contribute towards gender and race changes within our institution.

Another point that was raised with regard to the need to neutralise male domination was that women academics themselves should be willing to assume leadership posts and senior positions. The participants saw it as a waste of time if there were talks about the need for promoting women when there were no women who '*would be willing to assume leadership positions*'. One participant demonstrated how

serious the issue of willing participants in change was, especially for women, when she said:

> *'We can't just say look, we are lacking women in senior positions, especially black women, when these women are not willing to lead… women in senior positions should not be just an issue of balancing numbers, but should be done because there are people who are passionate and can execute their duties successfully.'*

The participants pointed out that if the process of change in terms of female representation were aimed at satisfying the number demands, the UFS would run the risk of putting women in senior positions without the needed skills, and lacking interest and willingness. This, as the participants noticed, could lead to women that would not execute their roles successfully, which would perpetuate stereotyping of women as weak. Hence, the women saw it as a management role to identify women academics that could be mentored to take up posts in senior positions.

4.3.1.3 Mentoring programmes

In terms of mentoring, which the participants also regarded as crucial for social transformation, it was suggested that mentoring programmes should first be sensitive to the needs of the women academics in general and black women academics in particular. These women academics' belief was that broad formalised programmes achieved less in the mentoring of young women academics. As mentioned earlier too, some of the participants emphasised the need for less formalised mentoring programmes, which would be sensitive to what the women academics needed. As much as the participants agreed on the sensitivity issue, they did, however, have differing views with regard to the institution having a formalised mentoring programme and having an informal one.

The women academics suggested the need for a mentoring programme. Some believed that if the mentoring process was formalised, the UFS would be running the risk of developing a '*one size fits all programme'* which would fail to respond to the majority of the women academics' needs. They suggested that if the institution opted to formalise mentoring, it should do so in '*consultation with the women so that the planners could get inputs from the women on what could work best for them*

(women)'. The importance of doing this was illustrated by citing an example of an existing programme at the UFS, which worked towards fast-tracking aspiring academics to professorial positions. Some participants in the mixed group discussion explained that they did not apply for that programme, because they felt it was not tailored to fit the needs of women who did not only have to advance their academic careers, but also had other social responsibilities. The women academics stated that one component of the programme, which stated that an academic appointed in the programme would have to spend some time overseas, disregarded that women were mothers and wives and that they were very attached to these roles. One participant said:

> *'When I learned that I would have to go overseas for some years and leave my family behind, I said no, this is not for me. I mean the institution should do needs analysis and identify my needs, see what would work for women as mothers and wives, because really, women's circumstances are different from those of men. The emotional part of women would be taken into consideration.'*

The suggestion with regard to the above point was that the management could identify programmes within South Africa for women. These programmes could be of the same quality as the ones that women academics could attend overseas, but would avoid the women academics from being sent far away from their homes. According to the participants, there was '*such a big pool of experts in South Africa'*. These experts could be invited to hold seminars and workshops, as the UFS was already doing, but the seminars could be strengthened by bringing in an international flavour to the UFS. The UFS could also invite more international scholars to enhance the quality of presentations that could give an international flavour to the local discourses.

The need for a formalised mentoring programme was also discussed in terms of its influence on addressing specific goals. The women again acknowledged that the UFS, through the various programmes it was running, was already responding to the needs for capacity building. The absence of a formal document, however, made the process somehow invisible. One woman believed that a formal programme could act as a '*foundational support that could be adapted by the faculties*' to suit their specific

staff needs. It could be through such a programme that '*specific goals such as mentoring an academic for the dean or HOD position*' could be clearly stipulated with measurable outcomes and clear timeframes. According to the women academics this kind of programme could also emphasise the skills required on the part of the senior academics so that they could successfully execute their roles as mentors. Some emphasised that the postgraduate school could assume the responsibility for the mentoring programme, especially for the academics that were still busy with their PhDs. Participants who proposed this believed that the postgraduate school could facilitate the supervision programme, which to them was part of a bigger capacity building process.

Another suggestion that emanated from the discussion was for management to consider incentives for those senior staff members who would be willing to commit their time to mentoring other people. The incentive that the women academics were referring to here was not in the form of remuneration. One suggestion pertaining to mentoring was that mentoring should form part of the workload, such as that when workload weighing was done, there could be some time allocated for mentoring. This, as suggested, could reduce the teaching load on those who would be willing to take on the task. The women academics jokingly regarded this as an idealistic suggestion, which had no place at the UFS. Some noticed that in the promotion criteria, there, however, was a mentoring component. The importance of mentoring could be enhanced in the faculties by incorporating it in the workloads of the staff and could clearly be recognised by the faculty management.

4.3.1.4 Eradicating stereotyping and forming relationships

The issue of positive interpersonal relationships, which was also deemed by both BWAs and WWAs as important for social transformation at the UFS, was also revisited in the mixed group discussion. There were differing views on this point too. Some women academics believed that it was solely the responsibility of individuals to ensure that there were harmonious relationships between them and that the university management could not do much to enhance the formation of these relationships. According to the women, the constituencies themselves had to *'want it to be successful and get committed to building good working relationship amongst*

them.' The feeling was also that negative relationships were based on stereotypes that constituencies had about one another. It was up to the people themselves to challenge these stereotypes and realise that they were built on '*micro truths about which group is better than the other.*' The idea among the group was that:

> *'We do not really need anybody that is neutral to come and rescue us, because seriously nobody is neutral. Anybody that could be invited to come will still be black or white or male/female. Nobody can save us. We have to fix the problem ourselves.'*

The majority of the women academics seemed to agree with the above notion that the wider constituency was responsible for carving work relationships, because according to them, the institutions could not go as far as fixing relations. The feeling was that '*it was up to us to use our human skills to notice that beyond our skin colour and gender we are human and if we become aware of that, we can change the way in which we relate to each other*.' In fact, one of the participants who indicated that she had good work relationships with her colleagues mentioned that it was possible to view the other people without the veiled perception (Du Bois, 1989) of our racialised and genderised perspectives. She put her effort into building harmonious relationships with colleagues thus:

> *'I have worked on my relationship with other people and to change the perceptions I had about my colleagues. I mean it was not easy. I am ten years now at the UFS and I have funny stories to tell about how I used to relate to my colleagues. But you know, such past times have not benefitted me, so I learnt to get along with colleagues. This can be done colleagues, if we could put aside our womanhood or blackness.'*

To be considered, however, were that the '*human skills*' that were needed to build positive relationships were still lacking in most of us. This was the time when we all realised the role that the UFS through faculties could play in organising workshops for the constituencies. These workshops could be themed to build the skills needed for interpersonal relationships. It could also be in the workshops where '*people could talk about how they feel and get to understand and appreciate one another*.' Such workshops were already being conducted at the UFS and were organised by the

Wellness Office. In these workshops themes such as 'emotional intelligence' and 'a sense of belonging at the workplace' were treated. The question was, with this kind of facilitation by the institution, were relationships getting better? The observation of many in the mixed group discussion was that relationships did not improve much, because the workshops were not well attended. This was the reason why the majority felt that we needed to *'take charge, because as much as the institution can help us kick start with workshops, it is still up to us to make the relationships work.*'

Some felt that the responsibility lay mostly with the faculties, not the wider institution. They acknowledged the efforts that the institution, through the Institute of Race Relations, was making to organise difficult dialogues and critical discourse spaces. The question, however, was '*why can't departments themselves organize such dialogues within their spaces, and then invite experts who have skills in conducting such dialogues to facilitate the discussions*? The women academics were very much in favour of funnelling the discussions down to faculties as such that one of them said, '*I miss that in my faculty… in the faculty we don't get to know and understand one another. I think there is a need for such dialogues in my own faculty, because we are all sitting in our own pigeonholes buttressed by our own stereotypes, and we are not doing much to change perceptions*. 'The responsibility of organising the talks was suggested for the equity committees within the faculties, because these were responsible for the development of the faculties' culture that was inclusive for everyone.

4.3.2 Action step 2 (BWAs' reflections; challenging our own perceptions)

As indicated in the previous chapter (cf. Section 3.2) the ultimate goal of AR is to emancipate the participants involved in the process. It was indicated in the previous chapters (Chapters 1 and 3) that after the mixed group discussion, BWAs in particular would reconvene to discuss their reflections and how being part of the AR in this study had helped them to challenge their perceptions of social transformation at the UFS. The reflections would not only be based on the mixed group discussion, but issues from the other phases (FGD and individual interviews) would also be

taken into consideration. Although the BWAs had been involved in reflections throughout the meetings, the reflections here depict the main aspects that each one of the participants indicated as having helped her in one way or the other to change perceptions and contributed to improving practice.

In this phase I had to face the biggest challenge of getting the participants together again for a one hour and thirty minutes discussion and I could not at all find time that suited all of them. I resorted to an email discussion where I asked the BWAs to write down how they had benefitted in being participants in the action research process. The response at first was not very good and this frustrated me greatly. I did not want to impose the reflection process on them as I understood that they had huge teaching loads that they had to execute. I had to follow up by phoning each one to request that they shared their reflections with me. According to most of them, during my telephonic discussions with them, they believed that they had already shared their reflections as they had attended the previous meetings. I had to explain that at that stage I needed more of a compilation of the main points that they could clearly point to as moments in which they felt their thoughts challenged, in other words, their epiphany moments in the discussions.

I should indicate that not all eight BWAs responded, but only five of them. I regarded this as a good response, because I had at some stage given up that they would respond. Some of them also shared the diary that they had compiled with me, although they asked me to only use the content in a way that would not identify them. The entries contained specific problems that they had encountered in their departments and how they had to question the way in which, due to these experiences, they perceived colleagues and their departments in general. Some of them had even suggested in their reflections that their suggestions on how the discourses that we had had for the study could be enhanced to work within faculties. Although these suggestions were similar to what we had discussed in the mixed group discussion, I appreciated the feedback very much.

4.3.2.1 Some insights from the participants' reflections

For most BWAs, the feeling that they needed to challenge most was that of a lack of a sense of belonging, which echoed throughout their reflections. This feeling, as stated by some BWAs in the reflective e-mails, was perpetuated by the exclusion that the BWAs felt due to issues pertaining to language, stereotypes and a subtle feeling of rejection from their white colleagues. Some of them, as indicated earlier, faced challenges with their colleagues making them feel that they could not execute their teaching responsibilities well. This frustrated these women very much. In the reflective e-mails that I received, one BWA from an outside campus felt that she could sense some undermining of her ideas from the colleagues in their faculty meetings every time. She had indicated that:

> *'I sometimes don't feel like a member of staff at the UFS, I don't feel like I am at my workplace, especially when I am at the main campus. I feel like a member of the x campus, which is an appendage to the main campus. We always have to come to the main campus and if we try to contribute in discussions, our contributions are never taken seriously. I think people at the main campus even feel that our colleagues who have doctorates are still not equal to their doctorates that side… but it's just a feeling that I get, that subtle feeling.'*

This colleague wrote the above as an identification of the problem pertaining to social transformation at the UFS after the first interview. During the feedback on reflections that she emailed me, she indicated:

> *'I felt very much challenged in the first focus group discussion. When colleagues suggested that we as black women academics should sometimes take the first step towards understanding the other and getting to know them, I reflected on my own way of dealing with our white colleagues and found out that I had always been judgmental about the way they perceive colleagues from the X campus. I felt that maybe I had always carried issues of racial stereotype in me. At the moment I am interrogating myself on this. I may not be wrong that they think we are weak but I need to establish this before I judge their responses in the meetings. I think I also need to create a positive image of myself so that I*

> *don't get threatened by the situation which may not be the way I see it. And maybe voicing my concern in a meeting would help, which at the moment I don't feel I can do anyway.'*

As I analysed the above reflective piece, I picked up traces of a previous lack of confidence reflected by the BWA. She indicated that she may have been carrying '*issues of racial stereotypes*' within her (which could be that colleagues from the X campus, which was predominantly black, were less knowledgeable than those on the main campus). I noticed from this statement that she had often based her judgment on subtle messages that she picked up from the colleagues' responses in meetings, which might not have been a true reflection of how they thought about the colleagues from that other campus. Based on her internalised racialised thoughts, she had, however, earlier perceived colleagues' responses in meetings as pointing to a weakness of colleagues on the X campus. This may have led to a lack of confidence and a lack of engagement in meetings for a long time. Her reflection on this specific issue was, however, an indication that she was willing to take action to improve upon her previous perceptions.

Another colleague shared her moment of growth as the time when one BWA in the mixed group discussion highlighted that the UFS had to think of capacity building in terms of what was available for women academics within South Africa.

> *'It had never crossed my mind that I could get enrichment without going overseas and I had always been discouraged by this fact, because I could not dream of leaving my family and stay at an overseas institution. I think an eye-opening moment for me was that opportunities to grow could be created right here in SA. I think I don't even have to wait for UFS to create the opportunity. I shared this with a colleague of mine after our focus group discussion and she advised me to just write an e-mail to any senior academic I could identify at any institution and ask for mentorship and she has assured me that there are a lot of people who would be willing to help me grow.'*

The fact that this particular BWA had been thinking of overseas expertise as being better than that of South Africa had always been my problem too. In that first focus

group discussion, I too was challenged significantly to change my perception of what was involved in growing in academia.

I still believe that international exposure is important for growth in academia, but I have come to appreciate that local expertise has to be celebrated too and that it is not only up to the UFS to create networking opportunities for me, but that I have to take the first step in ensuring that I find my way in academia. I still find it very difficult to take the initiative in this regard, because I always feel like I cannot impose myself on other people, but I believe that if I have to succeed in academia I need to form the network that could help me find my way, especially with regard to publishing articles. In the case of the BWA mentioned here, her learning came from the fact that she had to change her perception to embrace a balanced view of international and local expertise. She had to understand that as a woman who was an aspiring academic, she could get capacity building opportunities by taking part in the programmes organised and presented within the UFS and to also take the initiative to empower herself.

One other BWA shared how she felt about the whole AR process that enabled us to share our feelings and concerns and also to challenge some of our perceptions. In her e-mail to me she wrote:

> *My reflection:*
>
> *'These discussions allowed me to identify my own perceptions and beliefs around issues of transformation with specific reference to gender and race. I was able to take a firm stance on my beliefs, thus very comfortable and assertive with my views. It was also very interesting to see that other women irrespective of race who share my views and were also grounded on their stance. It made me realise that there are women with an open-minded approach on transformation issues.*
>
> *It was, however, very unfortunate that some participants did not attend all the sessions. The discussions could be enhanced by including more*

women academics in top management positions (who could share their experiences with us).'

Of importance from the above, I noticed that the BWA here felt that all the discussions were beneficial as they assisted her in identifying her perceptions and beliefs. What this could mean was that this particular participant had never tried to explore her perceptions about her institution and had not interrogated her thoughts on transformation matters. The thoughts and perceptions might have been present, but the woman academic may not have given herself space to question the way she had been thinking about the UFS. The space that was provided by the AR in this study provided a platform for the women academics to deliberate on their feelings and for the first time maybe, had the chance to ask themselves: '**why do I feel this way about my institution?**' This critical question could have gone beyond just an understanding of the BWAs' needs and feelings, as well as their concerns within the UFS; to the root of the circumstances that could have influenced their perceptions. Understanding the circumstances could have led the BWAs to find a way of challenging and to some extent resolving some of the problematic circumstances that could have been responsible for the way they perceived their work environment.

Another important point that I drew from the insights shared by the woman academic above was the emancipatory nature of our discussions, which afforded this woman space to stand up for what she believed in at the UFS. It seemed that the woman had never had a platform to voice her views about her transforming institution and given one in the discussions that we had, she could firmly voice her opinions in an environment in which she did not feel intimidated by anybody. Nonetheless, we did not see a woman who defended her stance, no matter what others in the group had to say. We see this in her statement that she realised that '*other women irrespective of race share(d) my(her) views*' but adopted '*an open-minded approach on transformation issues*'. Adopting an open-minded approach to transformation issues indicate that the women both in the first focus group discussion and in the mixed-group discussion shared thoughts and were challenging each other's perceptions, and where necessary a change in perception could be adopted if an individual felt convinced.

Closely related to the reflections of the BWA mentioned above, was another reflection from one participant who felt that the whole process that we engaged in was an excellent opportunity for her to identify her own perceptions, which she had always carried within her without sharing them with anybody. The excerpt below shows her appreciation of the non-threatening environment in which the discussions were conducted. Although she seemed to have considered me the leader of the discussions throughout and not as an equal participant, she benefitted from the safe space that was created in the discussions in which she felt at ease to express her views freely:

> *'I appreciate the opportunity I had, to express my views freely. Your questions were not leading, but rather enabling one to express relevant views. Also in the group setup, you were able to conduct discussions in such a way that everyone had a turn to participate and you did not interrupt in anyway. The environment you created was comfortable. We were able to discuss controversial issues without threatening or judging one another*

Like the previous participant, this participant also appreciated that, although there were controversial issues being raised in the discussions, all participants were ready to listen to each other and understand one another's point of view. This aspect in our discussions seemed to have been the most powerful and showed that it was possible for the black and white constituencies to form warm relationships that could enable them to work together and share views. This could be extended to the faculties, where faculty members could form spaces in which they could talk about their negative and positive experiences of their work environment in an endeavour to get to understand one another for the purpose of creating harmonious work relationships and a sense of belonging for everybody.

One other BWA who provided her reflections at the end of the discussions had this to say:

'What I've gained from the discussion.

Woman, black and white, we have all experience one or other form of being marginalised by government, the opposite sex group and especially in the workplace.

What I heard from the conversation is that women are still reluctant to take on these high profile positions because of different reasons. Some still reason that our role of being the caregiver should still take a first priority and men should still lead because they don't have this role.

It was also good to see how much woman have grown in this academic profession but that it is for black woman still just a bit more difficult to prove that we deserve the position we find ourselves in at our different faculties.

I've realised how important it is for woman to stop apologising for our gender and start taking more control because we have a lot to offer.

What could be seen from the reflections was that, like the rest of the BWAs, this woman academic too realised that women, regardless of their skin colour, share similar experiences. At the UFS, what the women academics believed they shared was marginalisation by the institution and their colleagues, as reported in the previous phase on problem identification (cf. Section 4.4). The women, as shown in this reflection, believed that their situation could, however, be better if they do not succumb to marginalisation, which could lead to adopting a defeatist mind-set. As stated by them in the reflections above, the women sensitised one another to '*take control'* and believe in themselves that they had something to offer at their workplace. The woman mentioned above was made aware that other social responsibilities, such as home nurturing for women might have contributed very much to the stereotypes that led the women academics to being marginalised in academia. However, this realisation did not deter the woman academic to believe in her strength as somebody who could make a difference at the UFS. As she pointed out, she had learned that as a woman academic, she had to stop apologising for her gender as stopping her to be functional at the institution. She cited an example of other participants in the discussions who were in senior positions as models that

indicated that it was possible for women to grow in academia and occupy senior positions.

4.3.3 Action step 3: Feedback from HODs

In this part, I report on the feedback that I received from the HODs. The request for input from the HODs turned out to be unsuccessful. Out of the forty HODs from the three selected faculties, only two responded to my request. The mail delivery messages indicated that all of the HODs, to whom I sent the e-mail, had received and opened the mail. However, they just deleted the message without responding. Although this was the case, I still believe that the request served its purpose, which was to raise a voice pertaining to how women academics felt towards social transformation at the UFS. The HODs, being the ground level operational managers, received the concerns of the BWAs which might have afforded them a chance to reflect on how they could create better spaces for all other constituencies who could be having similar concerns. The essence of the e-mail was to raise managers'awareness that they needed to re-look the way in which their faculties were being managed and to identify some of the challenges that might have hindered successful transformation within their faculties. The united voice of the women academics, both black and white, had been escalated to those in power to effect some of the changes that had been suggested by the women academics. In this way, the HODs played a role of those that had to hear the voice of the BWAs, with hope that they would bring changes that would ensure a sense of belonging for all.

After the initial unsuccessful input request, I decided to telephonically contact HODs from my own faculty, the Faculty of Education as a follow-up on the request. I succeeded to secure interviews with two of them while one asked me to resend the request, which he had already deleted. I received a written response from him. So, in total, I received input from five HODs, three from the Faculty of Education.

The responses from the HODs indicated that they also had differing views in terms of the areas of concern that I had raised. While some of them regarded the concerns as valid, some thought that the University would transform in its own time. However, all

the HODs shared what their departments and faculties were doing to ensure that there was progress in terms of social transformation. Below is a discussion of their input. The response from the few HODs assisted the participants to juxtapose their perceptions and experiences with what the HODs claimed had already been achieved in their departments, in an attempt to creat a welcoming space for every member of the departments.

4.3.3.1 Language

In terms of language, one HOD pointed out that in their faculty they had a policy that mandated all faculty members in meetings or classes, especially first years, to switch to English if there was a non-Afrikaans speaking person. He indicated that this arrangement worked well and in class, the Afrikaans students did not have a problem using English. However, he argued that a change of attitude towards languages was needed in which all languages could be appreciated. He mentioned the role that Sesotho, as the other language spoken by the majority of the university community, could play in changing attitudes. Like what one BWA suggested, the HOD also had an opinion that, in classes, lecturers could introduce this language by putting in some of the Sesotho words and translate them for learners. Although he did not suggest that this could be done in all classes, he mentioned '*where applicable*', he strongly believed that this could change attitudes and enable everybody to appreciate diversity to an extent where language would not be a concern within the UFS. He further suggested that the institution should emphasise bilingualism where both staff and students could be exposed to the languages of scholarship and encouraged to understand both. He said at the UFS, '*to be an actor you must be bilingual to survive*.'

Similar to the view discussed above, another HOD indicated that he understood the feeling of the non-Afrikaans speakers, who felt excluded by the use of Afrikaans in formal settings. However, he cautioned that there was '*a bigger picture to be understood*' which was that the UFS needed to look after the '*needs of the Afrikaans community as well*.' His argument was that the UFS had been one of the five historically Afrikaans-medium universities that received most of its donations from the Afrikaans alumni (90% to be exact). According to him, this complicated the language issue, because changes to the language policy could mean '*flight*' of the

Afrikaans students to other institutions that still upheld a dual language policy. This in turn could have a detrimental effect on the funding from the alumni. This point reiterated what the BWAs had discussed in their focus groups, namely that the complexity of the language policy within the UFS lay mostly with other dynamics such as funding (cf. Section 4.3). The BWAs also pointed out that due to this fact, the UFS would find it difficult to change the culture of the institution in terms of language and that what was needed, therefore, was a change of '*mind-set*' (cf. Section 4.3) on the part of the constituencies.

The other point that was raised by the HODs which was similar to what was stated by the Language Policy Framework for Higher Education (2002), was that the role of Afrikaans as a language of scholarship could not be downgraded since this language was the only other '*academically developed*' South African language which was spoken throughout the country. One HOD objected to this statement though, reasoning that every other language could serve as a language of scholarship if given a chance to be developed. His argument was that:

> *There is no grouping that can claim any particular stance on scholarship. Doing that would be the same as claiming knowledge. Even English use borrowed words from other languages and is not pure but a jargon based on particular situations and fields.*

According to the HOD cited above, any language could be a language of scholarship and groupings should not be perpetuated in the name of a language of scholarship. To him, a language that could be inclusionary could be English since it was spoken by everybody within the UFS. He stated that the UFS management needed to '*take a stance*' in this matter and cited examples of some of the historically Afrikaans-medium institutions within the country which were at the time mostly English. He, however, admitted that there could not be any time-frames to indicate how soon the language policy needed to change. But, he emphasised the need for a move towards language change within the UFS. He also acknowledged the sensitivity of the matter for the Afrikaans-speaking community within the UFS but emphasised that the feelings and needs of all groups within the institution needed to be taken into consideration if the language issue had to be resolved successfully.

4.3.3.2 Capacity building

The issue of capacity building seemed to also be a controversial one. While some HODs agreed that BWAs and women in general needed to be prioritised when considering capacity building, some HODs felt that constructing other groups as black and women within academia would lead back to issues that led to discrimination. Hence, they stated that capacity-building programmes should be for every young academic of which BWAs were a part.

One of the HODs pointed out that his faculty was focusing on building the capacity of women. He mentioned that there were funds allocated for women to attend conferences, both nationally and internationally. The attendance of these conferences entailed presentations for those who received funds. In this way, women developed by networking with other academics and presenting on an academic stage. Furthermore, in this faculty, the HOD mentioned that developmental programmes organised by the university were dedicatedly attended and staff was required to complete a form that indicated how many of these developmental programmes they had attended each year. Although attendance of these programmes was not only for women, women academics also benefitted and received informal mentoring to survive in academia. In addition to this, all staff in that faculty were given time off when required to complete their studies or do research. The HOD indicated that if women academics used such opportunities that the faculty provided, they would grow in academia and feel less '*threatened by the male power'* as they would be functioning at the same level as their male counterparts. He emphasised that power dynamics would not be a concern if women were equipped with skills within the UFS.

4.3.3.3 Eradicating stereotypes

In terms of stereotypes, HODs emphasised the importance of talks and awareness workshops, which were also suggested in our mixed group discussion. One of the HODs referred to one incident in their faculty that involved students complaining about different treatment given to Afrikaans and English speaking students. The

HOD indicated that the faculty called a meeting between that particular class and staff where the case was stated and solutions found. This incident made him aware of the need for talks where staff and students could be given a platform to share opinions and raise concerns. As per his own emphasis, '*TALK TALK TALK is what is needed to deal with stereotypes*.'

On the point of awareness workshops, one HOD strongly objected to the idea of conscientisation during our interview. He felt that conscientising people would mean that people were objects and one person was in a position to '*tell*' them what to do or how to think. In contrast to the workshop idea, he summarised his view of creating awareness in this way:

> *We should create spaces or platforms where we can engage or where people can debate issues. People need to come up with their differing viewpoints. Actually people are already engaging in that. In academia if you don't talk, you write, present in conferences and workshops and trouble dominant discourses in this way.*

4.3.4 Action step 4: Raising awareness in the wider university

The awareness-raising exercise as reported previously (cf. Chapter 3) was done by engaging the Institute of Race Relations within the UFS, the Central Employment Equity Committee of the UFS and the Faculty of Education Equity Committee. I shared the findings of my study with the Institute and the committees, with the aim of bringing the needs and feelings of the participants in my study to people who could make a difference by discussing and improving some of the concerns that were raised during the course of my study.

4.3.4.1 The Institute of Race Relations and critical discourse contribution

The exercise of raising awareness of the feelings and needs of the women academics with the director of the Institute of Race Relations within the UFS proved to be a growth process for me too. As I indicated in the previous sections, because of the attitude that I had developed towards the 'other' before my study, I had closed doors for myself to take control of my life and identity within the UFS. It was therefore one of the very difficult challenges for me to organise a meeting with the director, fearing that he would think of me as a subordinate and just a student who could not contribute meaningfully to the Institution.

My meeting with the director of the Institute was a success. He was eager to listen and understand the findings of my study. The results of our meeting were exciting. He proposed to let me present the findings of my study to the newly established National Committee established to investigate the issues of transformation in public higher education in South Africa. This was a very important milestone for my study because it meant that the findings would not only benefit the UFS but also the wider SAHE. (At the time of the submission of this study this was not done yet but was still awaited in great anticipation).

His second proposition for me was to be part of a series of critical discourses that were held weekly/monthly within the Institute. These intellectual discourses helped to raise awareness of the sensitive issues that had the potential to hinder successful transformation at the UFS. My presentation, which was to be titled, 'Language and Belonging' was to be part of the series of dialogues. This was also a very important milestone for the study.

The other decision that we took in my meeting with the director of the Institute of Race Relations was to start a project on 'creating safer spaces for critical discourses.' This project was meant to create spaces for black academics to narrate their experiences in non-intimidating spaces. The practice with the existing critical spaces at the time was that constituencies came together as mixed racial group to discuss their experiences. This could be inhibiting for some who would not feel free to speak in the presence of the 'other' colleagues. My study had indicated that the

BWAs felt relaxed and free when they narrated their experiences in a space with people who could relate to such experiences. The project would be a continuation of what we started as a small group in our focus group discussion in this study. We invited other academics to join, not only women academics but whoever is interested, but we had to ensure that our objective of creating safer spaces was not hampered.

4.3.4.2 The Central Employment Equity Committee of the UFS

On behalf of the participants, I approached the chairperson of the UFS Central Employment Equity Committee. The purpose was to request a space in the equity committee to present the findings of the study. This committee had the power to implement some of the suggestions that came out of the participants' discussions and to initiate a plan of action for the concerns for which the participants could not provide suggestions. The chairperson gave me a chance to attend the first committee meeting as an observer so that I could present at the second meeting. In this meeting, most of the issues that were raised resonated with the findings of my study. What was striking though was that the members felt that they were discussing these issues without having a clear picture of the experiences of the people within the institution. I felt that the committee members would appreciate the presentation of the perceptions of the BWAs. I learnt from that first meeting of the Committee that the issue of language was not new to the members and language issues had been a continuing debate among members of the group. However, the fact that the UFS Language Policy was not a problem on its own, but its implementation in faculties and departments could be an issue that would steer the committee discussions towards a different direction. The language issue could then be rekindled and I felt that the study would have achieved its purpose of raising awareness of the issues that led to the women academics viewing transformation in a negative light within the institution.

My presentation at the second committee meeting was well received by the committee. The committee discussed some of the findings from my study and from these discussions I became aware that this was a necessary study since some of the members already had concerns regarding some of the issues raised. For example, the finding on retention prompted members to discuss the strategies that could be

used to ensure that BWAs were retained by the institution. The document that I distributed at the meeting was distributed electronically to all the members of the committee. This proved to have had a ripple effect in which some of the committee members decided to also distribute the document among their colleagues. I was approached by two academics who informed me that they had seen the document and complimented me on the 'much needed' study.

The Vice-rector: External affairs (who were the chairperson of the committee) also agreed to involve me in a number of transformation initiatives that existed within our institution. For example, she suggested that I attend some of the higher education external meetings as a learning process for myself so that I could establish myself within the area of transformation in HE. This was once again an opportunity for me to grow within the institution and be in environments that could help me to become the agent of change that I was aspiring to be.

4.3.4.3 The Equity Employment Committee of the Faculty of Education

As indicated in the previous chapter, I also arranged with the Equity Committee of the Faculty of Education to present the findings of my study. I chose this faculty because it would be easier to request a turn as I was both part of the lecturing staff in this faculty and a registered PhD student within the faculty. As a result, allowing me to present would be part of the faculty's responsibility in ensuring that their PhD students were allowed the scholarship spaces they need for quality output. The first meeting of the committee was cancelled but like I indicated, I sent a compilation of the findings of my study to the chairperson of the committee so that this could be presented at the next meeting of the committee. I had the opportunity to present the findings at the second committee meeting and the response from the committee members was positive. Since the committee was already in the process of compiling a questionnaire tapping on staff's input on the progress of the faculty regarding equity employment and the staff's views in this regard, the issues listed as findings in the document that I provided were also to be included in the questionnaire. The Committee also promised to discuss the document at the next meeting.

4.4 Insights from the empirical study

In a nutshell, reporting on the perceptions and experiences of BWAs has highlighted important issues that were a concern to the BWAs and therefore were regarded by this group as warranting change from both the institution and individual academics. A number of concerns have been raised in this chapter and looking closely at them, they indicate areas in which these particular women academics from the UFS felt that social transformation in their institution was progressing very slowly or in some instances was stagnant. In addition, exploring these women academics' lived experiences through their narratives resulted in some unique insights that were particular to the South African context, while on the other hand, these experiences were not isolated but linked with the challenges that BWAs in the broader higher education context face. The content of Chapter 2 regarding the broad issues identified from the literature on women academics and social transformation in higher education, and the views in this chapter showed this interlinked in most areas of the BWAs' academic life.

In Table 4.1 below, I would like to capture the important issues that resulted from this empirical study, which I believe could contribute to social transformation if heeded by the UFS and any other institution that can relate to the needs of women academics. The issues have been fitted in the interpretation framework that was presented at the beginning of the chapter but in this case, the specific issues as emanating from the chapter are elaborated. Linking the issues with the framework used as a unit of analysis was done by placing them under the four tenets of CRT as well as the themes from the literature (cf. Figures 2.6 and 3.7).

Table 4.1: Insights emanating from the empirical study

Interpretation of social Transformation	**Concerns raised by BWAs**			
Social transformation as:	**Whiteness (cf. Section 4.2.3.1)**	**Marginalisation (cf. Section 4.2.3.2)**	**Identity Formation (cf. Section 4.2.3.3)**	**Power Dynamics (cf. Section 4.2.3.4)**
An institutional process (cf. Section 4.2.2)				
• UFS's recognition	• White males are	• Male oriented	• BWAs exposed to	• Male domination

of the role of women as academics • The overhauling of the UFS culture • Implementation of procedures to allow for the review of systems and policy revision • Addressing imbalances of the past and redressing past inequities • Paying attention to gender issues as is done with race issues **A self-awareness process (cf. Section 4.2.2.2)** • Understanding the self and others • Moving beyond race and gender in institutional dealings • Appreciating one's identity within an institutional space with constituencies from diverse backgrounds • Challenging discriminatory practices	dominating the UFS space • Permanent positions mainly given to white colleagues (both male and female) • Language policy that privileges the Afrikaans speaking colleagues while it marginalising the non-Afrikaans speakers • White male academics occupying senior positions while BWAs are concentrated at the junior positions	promotion criteria • Promotion criteria that overlook the multifaceted role of women academics • Biased capacity building programs • Access that does not include quality assurance • Failure of the UFS to successfully recruit and retain BWAs	stereotypes that question their intelligence • Misrecognition of the role of BWAs as people who have the knowledge capital • Language policy that makes women to feeling like outsiders, appendages and guests within the UFS space	leads to superiority stereotypes for the males • Women voices and agency invalidated in decision making • Non-existence of women voices in institutional discourses or race and gender and in change processes • Language policy that affords a sense of citizenship only to the Afrikaans speaking community • White women academics undermining the work of their fellow BWAs (horizontal oppression)

Also discussed in this chapter were important suggestions that were made for both personal and institutional improvement. The empirical study has indicated that BWAs were regarding themselves as members of the UFS who also had a responsibility to contribute to the changes within the institution. Their willingness to engage in this emancipatory exercise indicated that they also wanted to be agents in the changes

that were taking place at their institution. I present once more a table of insights that were gained from the suggestions that came from the mixed group discussion, the BWAs and the HODs. The areas that are presented her are language, white male domination, capacity building and stereotypes and suggestions for improvement are tabled under each one of them.

Table 4.2: Suggestions for personal and institutional improvement

Personal improvement	**Institutional improvement**
i) Language (cf. 4.3.1.1; 4.3.3.1)	
• All staff to create opportunities for students to collaborate in classes by introducing other indigenous to create language tolerance • Cultivate sensitivity toward inclusion of all within the UFS space • Get involved in critical discourses that discuss diversity and difference • Adopting a mind-set that accept the multilingual nature of the UFS	• Institution to consider an adoption of one unifying language of academic expression • Institution to initiate sensitisation programs aimed at cultural difference and tolerance • Concerted effort to develop other indigenous languages to serve as languages of academic expression • Strengthening of translation services through translators that understand the jargon used in different disciplines
ii) White male domination (cf. 4.3.1.2)	
• BWAs to raise awareness of their feelings and needs towards underrepresentation of this group • Women to engage in gender talks to discuss issues of concern around dominance • BWAs to equip themselves with skills that will enable them to occupy senior positions	• UFS to develop goal-directed mentoring programs • UFS to establish programs that aim at preparing BWAs for upward mobility • Faculties to open up spaces for critical discourses that would challenge all issues equitable including employment for all • Employment equity committees to ensure that there are parities in employment procedures
iii) Capacity building	
• BWAs should take charge of their own development by organising mentors that could be willing to assist them. • BWAs should attend workshop prepared for their development	• The UFS and faculties to establish formalised and less formalised mentoring programmes that are sensitive to the needs of BWAs • The UFS and faculties to do a needs analysis to identify the needs that BWAs have that need improvement.

	• Seminars and workshops aimed at equipping BWAs with skills should be organised
iv) Dealing with Stereotypes (cf. Section 4.3.1.4; 4.3.3.3) • BWAs to take responsibility to build warm relationships with their colleagues • BWAs need to open up to their colleagues by talking about issues that hurt them • Everybody should appreciate diversity on campus	• Faculties should organise workshops on 'human skills' that assists in creating positive relationships • The institution should organise critical discourses on issues of race and gender.

4.5 Conclusions

The findings presented in this chapter have shed some light on how the BWAs as well as their white women colleagues perceive social transformation at the UFS. The findings have not only highlighted some areas in which the perceptions are similar to those of the other women academics in international higher education, but have shown the distinctions and contrasting views as well. The presentation of the findings accompanied by extensive reference to the findings of the literature review served this purpose and assisted me to show how unique the South African higher education context is compared to the other countries. An addition of the input from the HODs as discussed in this chapter has also brought out the rich perspective on how those in management positions conceptualise transformation and how their conceptualisations may or may not be in common with the views of the people working below them. This contrast has also proven important because it further highlighted areas where there is no common ground in understanding those that need to implement changes and the women academics who had to cope with and be the consumers of the changes. It could be in the light of this that the need to re-investigate the transformation plans could be realised so that all parties within the UFS can feel part of the social transformation plans and be able to own the process.

In the next chapter (Chapter 5) I address two questions:

- **How did this study unfold?** This offers an integrated discussion on the links found in the chapters regarding the experiences and perception of the BWAs in relation to the wider higher education context.

- **How did the insights from the study inform my personal growth and how does this study contribute to the emancipation of BWAs and contribute to social transformation at the UFS?**

Chapter 5: Race and gender transformation: extending the meaning-making process

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the results for this study which aimed at understanding the perceptions of BWAs towards social transformation at the UFS. The previous chapter presented a synthesis and presentation of findings from the data collected through individual interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. In that chapter, specific areas of concern for the study participants regarding social transformation at the UFS have been presented and suggestions from participants regarding improved institutional practice have been stated. These suggestions cut across the three levels, namely the institutional level, faculty level and individual level.

In the current chapter, I critically reflect on the findings of this study by looking closely at how the accounts and narratives of the women academics in this study conflate with the experiences of the other black women academics in the wider international higher education context as stated in the chapter covering the literature review. I believe that doing this places these women academics' experiences within the broader context and therefore highlights the uniqueness of their experiences by showing aspects that are either in harmony or in counterpoint to the wider context. Doing this also connects this study's discourse of social transformation at the UFS to the on-going discourses of transformation as reflected in literature and the SAHE documents reviewed for this study. Bringing in the international experiences of the transformation process could highlight the situation at the UFS for black women academics and in this way the areas that need more attention from the institution and the academic constituency could become more visible.

This chapter also indicates how the research questions of the study have been answered by both the empirical and theoretical findings of the study. The next section presents a discussion of how the findings in this study could be placed in a wider local and international context and I also provide a synthesis of how the

research questions have been addressed in the study. The limitations of the study and the knowledge claims are also presented in the succeeding sections.

5.2 Discussion of findings

This study and previous studies have indicated that social transformation in higher education, both at the UFS and internationally, is a complex phenomenon (cf. Sections 3.1 and 3.6). The complexity of this phenomenon in the wider HE context seems to generally lie in the institutional climate in which constituencies perceive others through a racialised or genderised veil and in which the wider institution is not vigilant to issues of a sense of belonging for all. Within the SAHE, historical processes and structures of the apartheid era seem to still have a great bearing on how HEIs transform. It has been noted that institutions within the South African context implement transformation programmes in compliance with the educational constitution that renders redress as the main imperative for social transformation in the country (cf. Section 3.2). The literature has indicated that most HEIs internationally endeavour to move away from genderised and racialised approaches to transformation, but strive for epistemological transformation. Issues included in this kind of transformation are the quest of HEIs to meet the demands of the economically and socially changing world and communities around them (cf. Sections 1.1 and 3.2). These institutions carve their transformation plans to respond to issues of internationalisation and globalisation of knowledge so that the graduates they produce can contribute positively to these global developments.

The fact that international higher education emphasises epistemological transformation over gender and racial transformation does not mean that international higher education has moved beyond race and gender issues. As was indicated by Wright, *et al.,* (cf. Sections 3.5.2 and 4.2.3.3), it could be that these institutions feel that gender and race issues have ‘run their course’ and focus on the issues could retard excellence in knowledge creation. For the SAHE though, the challenge of trying to balance transformation between academic excellence and redress (cf. Sections 3.4.3 and 3.6.3) have been a dilemma and the SAHE literature and policy documents indicate that the latter still takes precedence. The Soudien

report (cf. Section 3.2), which was used earlier (cf. Chapter 1) to highlight the need for this study, indicates that HEIs in SA strive to transform in response to the principles of race and gender redress. In fact, Ramphele (cf. Section 3.6.1) emphasises that for SAHE there is an interdependence of equity and excellence and no one aspect of transformation can be neglected. This seems to be the state of the SAHE transformation with institutions facing the dilemma of balancing the formal processes of transformation (academic transformation) and the informal processes (social transformation) (cf. Sections 2.2 and 4.2).

Although the SAHE documents keep emphasising the need for SAHEIs to encompass goals of epistemic transformation (cf. Sections 2.2.1.2 and 3.2) the changing face of transformation in SAHEIs generally seems to be influenced greatly by the political agendas, which emphasise the political issues of redress to serve the new social order as stated in the preceding paragraph. The mandate for SAHEIs to transform in this way is echoed throughout the SAHE documents and the White Paper 3 in particular. The document analysis of the three SAHEI institutions (UCT, UP and UFS) has indicated that indeed institutions still carry the mandate of redress in their policy documents.

The possibility for SAHEIs to bring a strong flavour of epistemological issues to transformation is, however, seen in the strategic plans of the three institutions reviewed in this study. Current strategic plans from these three institutions indicate a slight movement away from the racial issues that have been dominating higher education transformation plans for at least a decade now, to all-encompassing plans that delve into the possibility of inclusive environments which operate beyond colour and gender lines. The UCT Strategic Plan 2010 – 2014 (cf. Section 4.2) in particular, does not mention any issue of redress, but rather addresses diversity as a driving force behind its transformation goals. This strategic plan further highlights internationalisation as a powerful force that drives the institution's transformation plans.

The women academics in this study noticed that their institution in particular (UFS), endeavoured to be politically correct in its development of the transformation plans (cf. Section 4.2.2). The women felt that the UFS was more inclined towards racial transformation than any other form of transformation and this could be

counterproductive to the institution's attempts to make the UFS a place where everybody could enjoy a sense of belonging (cf. Section 4.2.1). The differences in opinion between the BWAs and the WWAs in most areas of concern tabled in the previous chapter, seemed to stem from the fact that one group held the view that social transformation attempts at the UFS had to be geared towards accommodating mainly the black woman academic as the most previously marginalised entity within higher education. This view highlighted entrenched problems of racialisation and othering (cf. Section 4.2.2) that could still exist at the UFS where each group would feel the need to advocate for the survival of its own members. Although the participants believed that successful transformation within their institution could be attained if the UFS could develop their transformation plans to respond to the needs of the communities around and within them (cf. Section 4.2.1), the BWAs still maintained their view of the need of the UFS to elevate BWAs above every other constituency in its transformation plans.

It could be that the view of BWAs that their needs be elevated stemmed from the history of marginalisation that black people in general suffered in SAHE. The view could also be perpetuated by the higher education constitution and other SAHE documents, which emphasised that BWAs deserved to be a priority in the changes that were being implemented in higher education (cf. Sections 3.2 and 2.2.1.2). In actual fact, White Paper 3 (cf. Section 2.2.1.2) had stated that it would not be unfair discrimination if this group's needs were prioritised for the purpose of redressing past inequalities and injustices. This view could be responsible for the complexities in defining transformation for the participants in this study. The interpretation of transformation by the BWAs and the WWAs seemed to suggest that these participants found it difficult to define the term without aligning it to the transformation agendas in SAHE.

The above argument could lead to a conclusion that perceptions of transformation, as seen in this study, are individualistic and depend very much on the angle from which a person looks at it. In other words, transformation is open to individual interpretation, as could be seen in the different interpretations that the women academics in this study provided (cf. Section 4.2.1). The challenge here is therefore on the issue of priorities and possible perpetuation of discrimination in SAHE. If

SAHEIs could rely on the perceptions of individual constituencies to plan for social transformation, the question of whose perception needs to enjoy recognition could raise a major problem, as constituencies (especially from the black and white communities) hold different views of what constitutes a transformed institution beyond the colour and gender lines.

Whatever complexities there seem to be around the concept of social transformation and whatever the face of transformation is in SAHE, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, I have learnt and consider it a valuable finding from the study that successful transformation does not only emanate from the institution's management and guidelines from the constitution, but is also the responsibility of the individual university community members (cf. Section 4.2.2). I have gathered from the literature and from the study participants that social transformation is aimed towards the common good (cf. Sections 4.2.3.2 and 3.3).The common good should be the goal of transformation plans regardless of the relativity of the 'good' as could be defined by different constituencies.

It is in line with the common good agenda implicated in the participants' discussions that participants themselves felt that it was their own responsibility to contribute towards social transformation at their institution through their dealings with the institution and others within the UFS. The way in which the women academics, both black and white, eventually challenged and reconstructed their view of transformation as a process that had to involve everybody and as a process in which everybody had to move beyond the colour line, is in synch with what was highlighted in literature, namely that smooth successful changes in higher education need a concerted effort and a shared understanding from all constituencies (cf. Section 3.6). Racial and gender sects could hamper smooth transformation as was indicated that challenges faced by SAHEIs' constituencies go beyond racial and gender issues (cf. Section 3.2). It is those challenges that SAHEIs need to focus on when implementing changes so that everybody could benefit from the changes effected in higher education.

The above argument may be seen as contradictory to the tenet of the Critical Race Theory, which is the theoretical basis for this study. CRT clearly advocates an elevation of the rights and voices of the black people above all marginalised others

(cf. Section 1.3). The argument of the proponents of the theory is that black people have been marginalised and oppressed the worst throughout history and it is only when such ills are brought to the fore that change can be implemented positively. Although the study itself and the document analysis on SAHE proved that black women have suffered a double-fold marginalisation of race and gender in higher education, the findings in this study have highlighted that raising and responding to this group's experiences above those of their white women colleagues could perpetuate inequalities within higher education in South Africa.

Narratives from the WWAs have shown that an Afrikaner woman had also been exposed to white male dominance in higher education and these women have felt that their needs and feelings should also be taken into consideration when transformation plans are compiled. It could therefore be argued that within the UFS and perhaps the wider SAHE, a radical adoption of CRT may have a counterproductive effect on transformation, as it makes little provision for other marginalised groups to be heard.

As noticed in Chapter 1 (cf. Section 1.3 another challenge of adopting the CRT in its entirety could be that it may also lead to the exclusion of the people that it aims to stand up for by clustering them as a homogenous group that share the same experiences. Findings from this study have indicated that, among the BWAs themselves, the concept of social transformation is interpreted differently and thus their perceptions, needs and views differ significantly in many areas of social transformation. The integration of other previously marginalised therefore needs to be strengthened and highlighted in the CRT.

I have noticed though that, despite CRT's shortfall of side-lining the marginalised other, its strength lies mostly in its advocacy of voice. Through the space that was created for the women academics (both black and white) in this study, a platform was created for them to not only voice their concerns, but also to interrogate their beliefs, perceptions and thoughts. The section on the insights that they shared (cf. in Section 4.4) indicates that the women appreciated the opportunity to voice their opinions in a non-threatening environment and not only to raise their voices, but also to work together towards finding solutions to their challenges. I feel that adopting this theory to raise a voice has had positive results in my study. Although the study was

mainly about the BWAs, inclusion of the white colleagues as a validation group has helped to bring out a very important aspect: that regardless of race, women share similar experiences within academia and that women have much in common. This realisation assisted both groups to understand that getting to know the 'other' is important for healthy interpersonal relationships that could lead to a productive work-environment. Through voice and agency, the women academics dealt with their challenging work-environment, as they had perceived it previously. In this way, it could be claimed that there has been growth on the side of participants towards a willingness to bridge the misunderstanding between them and to contribute towards the success of social transformation at the UFS.

Adopting the psychosocial model as well has also helped in exposing the factors that led to the perceptions of the women academics. Through the discussions that we had, the women academics themselves were challenged to identify and understand the contributing factors towards their perceptions. BWAs eventually understood that their perceptions regarding social transformation at the UFS were driven mostly by their need for equity and redress. This psychological and social drive that influenced the BWAs in particular to want to see more black women academics within the UFS seemed to have impacted heavily on how BWAs perceived transformation in their institution. What could be seen in this case was the psychological factors in play; those that emanated from the apartheid past of educational inequalities and influenced the BWAs to expect the UFS to fight white dominance through equity measures. The feeling that white people still held power cards over BWAs within the UFS seemed to have led the women to believe that their role as productive members of the UFS was not recognised. It also led them to believe that there were race and gender stereotypes held against them, that the institution was not prepared to build their capacity to succeed in academia and that the language of scholarship was used as a power tool to deny them quality access into the institution. All these issues, which were discussed in the previous chapter, made the women academics perceive the process of transformation at the UFS as delaying. The similar issues which lead women academics in this study to feel unappreciated, undervalued and without a sense of belonging have also been highlighted in literature as contributing to the women's negative feelings about change in a wider higher education context (cf. Section 3.5.1). This indicates that the plight of the women in this study is not a

unique case in higher education. BWAs in international higher education have negative perceptions regarding their institution too. Although the situation seems to be similar for women globally, I believe that voices still need to be raised to bring awareness to institutions regarding the needs and feelings of black women academics within institutions.

It could be seen though that an eventual understanding that the historical background of the UFS shaped the culture of the institution and immediate change was impossible, changed their previous perceptions of the women academics that the UFS was delaying to transform. Both BWAs and WWAs understood the social reality of the UFS as an institution that consisted of diverse constituencies. As a result, it would be impossible to only attend to the BWAs' needs and compromise other groups in the process. This realisation came as an epiphany for participants in this study and although they maintained that the UFS still needed to implement successful transformation, they understood that this meant considering all the constituencies within the campus.

For me, as a researcher and study participant, realising and understanding the challenges that surround language change served as my moment of growth, which helped me in changing my previous perceptions about language transformation at the UFS. I eventually too realised that I also had to challenge my previous negative perceptions regarding the dual language policy and play a part in ensuring that language, especially Afrikaans, does not become a divisive tool between my colleagues and I and a veil through which I perceive the UFS. The discussions that we had in our focus groups assisted me in realising that I still maintained an apartheid mind-set when I analysed the language issue (which was that Afrikaans is the language of the oppressor) and failed to see it as a possibility for everyone within the UFS to celebrate diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism.

The implication that this has had towards improving my own practice is that language within the UFS shall never prevent me from working together with my Afrikaans-speaking colleagues. I have to focus more on the knowledge capital that I and colleagues bring towards the advancement of the institution and faculty. Since Afrikaans is an important component of our scholarship at the UFS, getting to understand its basics will be an indication to the colleagues that I am willing to leave

the past and become a productive member of my faculty. Although it has not been a smooth process, but rather a painful reality, I have grown to realise that resistance in learning Afrikaans can only cripple my productivity (because language policy change may not be an option within the UFS) and contribute to unhealthy interpersonal relationships between myself and colleagues. Social transformation should begin with me and this may influence other people to change their perceptions too and be positive towards an inclusive spirit.

Participants in this study too thought a change of mind-set towards the dual language policy could be a move towards successful transformation. As discussed in Chapter 4, the challenges regarding the dual language policy, however, still remained the most worrying area that, according to the participants, had the potential to hamper successful social transformation at the UFS. Its exclusionary nature was a matter of concern, not only for the BWAs, but as has been discussed in the previous chapter, also for the WWAs. The concern seemed to be rooted in how the language policy was implemented within faculties and departments, where participants indicated that they felt excluded by the language of communication in meetings. This point was raised in the Ministerial Report (cf. Section 1.1) as a nation-wide problem in which staff and students continued to be excluded by language. The findings of the Ministerial Committee indicated that in historically white Afrikaans-medium institutions, non-Afrikaans speakers reported feelings of stigmatisation by the language used by white staff.

The implication for this could be that the UFS in particular needs to be vigilant regarding the issue of language in practice and ensure that the dual language policy does not act as a barrier towards inclusion within their faculties. The UFS itself though, explains its stance of the dual language policy as encouraging diversity and multiculturalism. At the time of the study there was, however, no record that indicated the measures that the institution was taking to ensure that the policy implementation was congruent to the non-exclusionary environment that the UFS advocates in its transformation plans. The challenging nature of language, especially Afrikaans as a language of scholarship and communication, seemed to go unrecognised and unmonitored by the institutions that had adopted the dual language policy. I could therefore claim that the finding of this study with regard to

the language problem, could contribute in highlighting the challenges that some constituencies face when such language policy is implemented in SAHE. The management of the UFS and other institutions that could relate to the findings in this study regarding dual language policy, could be urged to revisit the policy to ensure that it does not become a structural barrier to quality access and a sense of belonging within their institutions.

It could be argued though that, as realised after the document analysis (cf. Section 4.2), the National Language Framework for Higher Education in South Africa allows for a dual language policy. It is important to re-emphasise that the framework states that language should not be used as a tool for excluding others in SAHE. As thus, the finding that language seems to be excluding other people has to be viewed on the basis of this policy document.

The nature of language as an exclusionary tool does not surface much in higher education literature. Most studies that have been conducted in South Africa and internationally on language and its implications in education seem to focus more on the school context. For example, the literature showed that there are inequalities that are created by language in education (cf. Section 3.7), although the focus of such studies was not only on higher education. Other studies on the SAHE context focus on students in higher education, not staff. Although the experiences discussed in these articles concerning students could be replicated among staff, an exclusive review of staff and language in higher education in this country is still necessary. Researchers therefore need to shift their focus to the effects of language policies in higher education. As such, language could be an area that other researchers working on transformation in higher education could explore. This study could not explore this issue in depth, since it was not the scope of this study to look at language as a barrier in SAHE.

Another issue that emerged strongly from the findings in this study was a concern over the dominance of the white male academics within the UFS. Literature indicates that this problem is widespread in higher education (cf. Sections 3.4 and 3.6). It has been reported that in the USA higher education males are dominating, leaving women to occupy subordinate positions as lecturer (cf. Section 3.4.3). Literature also indicates that most women internationally occupy temporary academic positions due

to the multiplicity of the social responsibilities that they have. Although the multiple roles challenge is also a challenge in SAHE and for the participants in this study, the problem with white male domination seems to stem from a different reason. BWAs in this study have indicated that their plight seems to be gender and race related. They blamed the situation on the inferiority stereotypes that seem to be inherent in higher education about black people and women. Accounts from their narratives tabled some of their experiences that made them believe that they were not recognised in academia and that the white male role was still uplifted within their institution, especially in senior positions (cf. Section 4.3.1).

The problem of white male domination has been reported mostly in senior positions, where women seem to have a problem to reach. The problem of breaking the glass ceiling to senior positions was another finding in this study that correlated with the international higher education context. Women in general have been reported to face a challenge in this respect (cf. Chapters 2 and 4). Other studies have again blamed the social responsibilities of women as a factor that contributes to women academics' failure to climb the academic ladder (cf. Section 3.4.1). BWAs in this study also confirmed this allegation by pointing out that capacity building programmes, which assist in ensuring that they find their way in academia, are sometimes insensitive to the fact that they have social responsibilities to attend to (cf. Section 4.3.2). This could be an issue that SAHEIs could look into to find ways in which programmes that aim to assist women in developing capacity in HE could consider women academics' social situation.

Although the above is true about women academics, the findings in this study and the literature show that there are other negative factors that contribute to the women academics being a minority in senior positions. An issue of stereotyping has echoed throughout the literature and the women academics' narratives as hampering this group's success in higher education. The stereotypes lead to non-recognition of black women academics as competent members of the academic world, hence keeping them in less powerful positions. The women academics indicated that within their institution, white male academics were considered to be the ones who could 'row the boat', because of the superiority stereotype attached to the male academic. This is the kind of thinking that made the women academics perceive transformation

at the UFS as lacking, because their claim was that the institution's management had to try to find ways in which the situation of male domination could be solved. On this point, the ministerial report had recommended that positions that were still held by old white male professors be considered for the young black women academics, while these professors could be considered on a contract basis.

Although male dominance seems to be a problem in higher education globally, the South African situation becomes different in that the legacy of apartheid seems to still play a role in the recruitment and retention of black women academics within SAHE (cf. Section 4.2). As pointed out in South African higher education research and other documentation, the divisions in the apartheid education system led to historically white universities being predominantly white and male and the UFS, being one such university, is facing a challenge in balancing the numbers as diverse constituencies infiltrate the academic world in this post-apartheid era. Striking though is that the women academics in this study acknowledged that these white male professors were knowledgeable and had a profound contribution to make at the UFS. They, however, suggested that there could be knowledge transfer in which the professors could be allocated mentees within their faculties. If the professors provided mentoring, then young black and women academics could develop and be able to assume the challenging and powerful roles in senior positions. In this way, social transformation with regard to the balancing of power could be attained.

On the point of mentoring or capacity building, black women academics and their white colleagues emphasised a balanced view of the process. As discussed in the previous chapter, the women suggested that although they would appreciate a formal mentoring programme, this could be made flexible to allow for an informal process that could be initiated by individuals within their faculties and departments as well as from external academics with expertise. Important in the women academics' suggestion was that they looked at mentoring with an open mind by not suggesting a mentoring programme where black senior academics would be stuck to mentor their fellow young black colleagues and the white senior colleagues do the same. The fact that they suggested that the white professors, who are at retirement age, should act as mentors, suggests that race or gender cease to be an issue. This is in contrast to what seems to be happening with mentoring in other HEIs

internationally. The literature has indicated that most black women academics play a nurturing role in which they are given, either formally or informally, other young black women entrants to mentor (cf. Section 3.6.1).This responsibility seems to perpetuate a stereotype that women are nurturers and cannot advance to powerful positions that deal with important decision making within academia. What the findings with regard to capacity building suggest, is that mentoring should surpass racial and gender lines and should be based more on the knowledge capital that a senior academic possesses as a mentor. In this way, institutions such as the UFS could move beyond a situation where white males would be the knowledge bearers, as this could contribute to negative power dynamics.

Recruitment and access have also been highlighted in the findings and in the literature as areas that need attention in higher education. Across higher education, the problem seems to be caused by gender, race and class issues. The problem still bears on other people being regarded as not fitting for the academic world. In other African HEIs the causes behind recruitment and access problems are mainly gender and class (cf. Section 3.6).In South Africa and the USA, race seems to play a bigger role (cf. Section 3.4.2).This could be because these two countries have a similar history of racism and discrimination. The UFS is therefore not a unique case where black women recruitment and access is a challenge. Although this is the case, the UFS in particular seems to be making positive strides towards the access of black women academics. An increasing number of black woman academics within the UFS and the projections in their strategic plans seem to indicate that the institution is dedicated to implement changes in this regard.

Despite the attempts by the UFS towards access of women academics, the women themselves and higher education documents indicate that SAHE institutions need to adopt a different approach to access (cf. Section 4.2.4).Access should not only be measured in terms of the number of BWAs who enter academia, but also about the quality of access that institutions provide. Quality access has been discussed to mean equity and equality within the institution. Questions like the calibre of BWAs whoa reabsorbed into the system and the positions that these women occupy, should also receive priority. Disparities in service delivery within institutions should also be eradicated to ensure quality access. In this way, as was the concern of the

women academics in this study, women will not be kept at junior positions, but will gain access with the potential of climbing the academic ladder. International literature has indicated that there have been strides made by HEIs in terms of the masses that enter academia, but there are still structural barriers that keep the women in junior positions (cf. Section 3.6).I believe that these structural barriers are unique for each institution and it is the responsibility of institutions to discover the barriers that hinder quality access. One of the ways in which institutions could find out which barriers these are, could be by listening to the voices of the constituency which is affected by these structural barriers. This study has uncovered some of the barriers that BWAs consider as barriers to quality access and recruitment into the UFS (cf. Section 4.2.3).

Recruitment problems have also been underlined as emanating from the uncompetitive salaries that are offered in higher education (cf. Sections 3.6.4, 4.2.1 and 4.3.1).The women academics and the literature suggest that it could be difficult for global HEIs to offer salaries that compete with the private sector. This could remain a challenge for a long time where HEIs fail to attract competent academics due to remuneration. The question then, is what institutions could do to transform in this regard. The women academics have pointed out that if the UFS could create a welcoming environment, it could help to attract some competent people into the system. This indicates that transforming one area within institutions could have positive ripple effects on other areas that are a bigger challenge for social transformation.

Lack of voice and agency has also surfaced from the findings as a major concern for both BWAs and WWAs. Although this concern is once again a world-wide problem as has been seen in chapter 2 and 4 (cf. Section 3.6), it surfaced here as having a disabling effect for the women academics within the UFS. The results have shown that the women had fallen into the state where they felt that the back-up of a male voice in strengthening a female voice was needed in SAHE, particularly within the UFS. This finding has been a confusing one for me. The participants showed concern regarding male dominance, while at the same time they felt that male backing could assist them in raising their voices. This irony could be interpreted as the helpless state in which the women academics found themselves; a state that

they felt might never change. Opting to succumb to the forces that they indicated were a cause for their negative perception of social transformation within their institution, and could be an indication of their loss of hope that the situation would change. This is a challenge for the UFS in particular, in terms of how the institution recognises a woman academic within their space. This finding could be valuable to the UFS in raising awareness that there might be structures that need to change if a woman's voice has to be given equal recognition to a male voice at the institution.

Other findings that have been significant in this study include the women academics' concern around interpersonal relationships, power play among academics on the same level of position and concern about the promotion criteria at the UFS. Clustering these concerns here is not assigning them a lesser weight. They are clustered because they are closely related to each other. Ailing interpersonal relationships have been mentioned to affect the way in which academics in general work with each other. One issue that has been mentioned is that negative relationships led to people distancing themselves from one another, which led to individuals maintaining their stereotypes about others. Such stereotypes could be intelligence stereotypes that render other groups less intelligent in academia. As a result, individuals might feel that they need to strive to show that they are more intelligent than the other and that is where power play might begin. It could be this power play, which could also lead those in positions of power to not open doors for others to climb the academic ladder, but through structural barriers keep them in junior positions. Healthy interpersonal relationships could lead to transformed management and senior academics who could strive to understand the needs of others and guide them to qualify for promotions. My argument is that interpersonal relationships, which contribute to social transformation at the personal level, have far reaching effects in terms of the whole institutional transformation.

The discussion of the findings above has indicated how the study has responded to the research questions that were proposed for this study. Below I revisit the research questions that were set up for this study and indicate how each one of them has been answered throughout the course of the study.

1. **What is the face of social transformation in South African higher education institutions and at the UFS in particular?**

The study has indicated that SAHE institutions still battle with the challenges to implement successful social transformation. Most South African literature on higher education and the empirical study have helped highlight the challenges faced by the HEIs (Chapter 4)The attempts made by institutions in this regard have been shown to be significant. Some higher education literature (cf. Section 4.2) in particular urges those interested in the transformation agenda of SAHE to consider the strides that institutions have made towards social transformation. The radical view of institutions failing to transform could be regarded unfair when considering transformation initiatives that SAHEIs have taken towards social transformation. BWAs in this study acknowledged these attempts, but felt that there were still challenges that needed to be attended to if the UFS in particular had to achieve social transformation. The balanced view that the participants in this study had taken of the face of social transformation in their institution, showed that they were willing to contribute towards change in their institution.

2. **How is race and gender transformation at the UFS experienced and why is it perceived as such?**

There were mixed feelings and perceptions from the BWAs regarding social transformation at the UFS. Some participants felt that the UFS was delaying to transform, while others felt that the progress showed some promising results. Those who felt that there was delay based their perception on the premise that they needed to feel a sense of belonging at their institution. Lack of social transformation for these women academics suggested that they might never feel equal to their white colleagues as members of their institution. The frustration of not feeling like deserving members of the academic staff led these academics to feel that there was a lag in social transformation. On the other hand, those who felt optimistic about the strides that the UFS had made towards social transformation based their perception on the historical nature of the institution. They saw significant changes when they

compared the institution currently with the way it was some years back. These were academics who had long years of experience at the UFS.

What could be seen here, were elements of psychosocial perspective in play where the psychological factors and the social factors played a role in determining people's perceptions. The psychological factors that contributed to how women academics perceived transformation included their perceptions regarding how worthy they felt they were taken to be within the UFS. The feeling that they were not recognised as people who could bring change to the institution, led to the women's feeling that the UFS would not improve in terms of access, recruitment and retention of the women academics. They perceived the UFS as a male-dominant institution which delayed in its social transformation, because the female role was undermined. Anxiety caused by the women's' feelings of inferiority at the UFS, led both BWAs and WWAs in viewing social transformation at the UFS negatively. The social context, which is closely related to the psychological factors, seemed to presuppose to the women academics that the UFS was delaying to transform. The social factors included male dominance, unhealthy interpersonal relationships and the role of the political history of the institution. Although the women academics seemed to acknowledge that with the political history of the institution, the UFS faced a great challenge of transforming socially, they believed that the change of social space (which included reinforcing the woman academic's role) which could lead to a sense of belonging for all and could be a positive move towards social transformation. This change entailed removing structural barriers that contributed to the feeling of inadequacy and inequality among the women academics (cf. Section 4.3)

3. **How can the insights gained from the research be integrated to assist women in finding their voices in contributing to social transformation at the UFS at both personal and institutional level?**

The suggestions from the women academics in their discussions were their voices that aimed to contribute towards social transformation at the UFS (cf. Section 4.3)The dissemination of the findings of this study in the wider UFS space with all interested parties at the UFS was another way in which the voices of the women were raised, to both colleagues and the university at large. Furthermore, the findings

of the study were shared with HODs in the selected faculties (cf. Sections 3.3 and 4.5) in which the HODs were requested to give input on how some of the suggestions from the women academics could be implemented in the faculties. In this way the women raised their voices and contributed to change. The voices were not only escalated to the other constituencies and faculties, but among themselves, BWAs and WWAs found a way in which they could challenge their thoughts and behaviours that seemed to have possibly hampered social transformation at a personal level within the UFS.

4. **How can I grow during the process and how does the understanding I gained contribute to improving dialogue with the aim of creating environments of respect for diversity and difference?**

My growth throughout the study has been significant. I was continually being challenged to question my own perceptions and thoughts during the interviews and the focus group discussions. Not only did I conduct this study with the aim of finding out the concerns that the BWAs had towards social transformation at the University of the Free State, but to also find ways in which I could improve my own practice.

As I indicated earlier (cf. Section 4.5), the first focus group discussion challenged me in my view of others and the perceived treatment I received from the other (white colleague).I was challenged to change and reconstruct my thoughts in this area. Being forced by the discussions to reflect on my relationships with my colleagues and writing such reflections down, made me realise that healthy relationships at work were not the responsibility of some individuals. My role in creating positive relationships was made clear when I had to face a challenging question of whether I had approached my colleagues regarding the way I felt I was being treated within the faculty and my department. The realisation that I just assumed that they had a racial vendetta against me had colonised my mind so much that I could not take the initiative to make the relationship work.

The first step I took in initiating positive relationships was to go to one of my colleague's office and share with her what I had discussed with the BWAs in our

focus group discussion. She was very keen to listen and for almost an hour we sat in her office talking about creating a harmonious departmental environment. We discussed her own experiences about her relationships with colleagues and how to work towards better interpersonal relationships. What was a moment of growth for me in our discussion with my colleague was the realisation that my treatment in the department was not a racial issue. She stated that she also at some point felt that colleagues were inclined to work in groups which excluded her. She was referring to article writing for publication in which some colleagues had a preference in terms of who they chose to publish with. She also pointed out that she always thought that I was not a sociable person since I worked behind closed doors all the time. I realised for the first time that isolating myself alienated my colleagues and contributed to what I perceived as hostility towards me. Since then, my relationship with my colleague is very cordial. She showed me a site where conferences are advertised and volunteered to look at my study as a critical reader. I intended to extend this to other colleagues within the department.

My other epiphany came during one of the focus group discussions when we were discussing mentoring. I found that I had always adopted a stereotypical view of mentoring, where I expected a mentor to be allocated to me as a young black woman academic. The fact that I already viewed my colleagues negatively prevented me from approaching anyone of them to help me find my feet in academia. I spent most of my time blaming the faculty for lack of orientation and mentoring programmes and failed to take initiative for my own development in academia. The women academics mentioned that as BWAs we should not wait to be helped but ‘knock on the doors’ of senior academics, even outside our institution. After reflecting on this point, I decided to challenge my fear of approaching senior academics. I first talked to one colleague from another department, who publishes successfully, and asked her to mentor me. She agreed to look at any article that I had been working on at that time. I also wrote an email to a senior academic at another institution and asked her to be my mentor, stipulating my exact goals. I did not expect that she would respond, but the same day she responded and agreed to help me. I now felt that, mainly in higher education, one could not only expect change but that we, as individuals, could also act as agents of change.

Tabling the findings of my study to the HODs and asking for their input was the most challenging moment of my study. Questions like, 'what if they do not respond?' and 'will I be able to make sense in my email?' almost discouraged me adding my voice to my institution's attempts towards transformation. Although the turnover of the responses from the HODs was not good, the responses from some of them have proven that I could be an agent of change and I have assisted other women in gaining voice and agency at their institution. The non-response from the majority of the HODs could not be regarded as a failure. They opened the mail and if they read through my request for input, they had in a way heard the voice of the women academics. Furthermore, the realisation that the AR I had conducted during my study had brought a change of attitude and thought in my study participants and I, had alerted me of the role I, as a BWA, can play towards change at the UFS.

Another point of growth emerged from the AR process itself. The role I had to play in organising and facilitating the discussions had equipped me with some interpersonal skills. It was not always easy to find a date that would suit everybody and the task of writing mails and doing telephonic follow-ups was a challenge. The women academics had to cope with their workloads and writing articles while they had to find time to attend the many individual discussions and focus group discussions we had. This time-consuming task taught me patience and negotiation skills and changed my perception in believing that AR would be the easiest way of getting data with groups of people at one place. My belief was once again challenged as I noticed the rigour with which action researchers had to collect and analyse data while they kept doing member-checks to ensure the validity of the results reported. Also being challenged to change my approach to conducting the discussions and the challenge I faced to distinguish between my roles as researcher and participant in my own research led to intensive reading, which also enhanced my knowledge of AR as a methodology in my study.

My greatest moment of growth came during the mixed group discussions. The successful set-up of the discussion itself, which I had thought would be impossible due to racial differences, taught me that there were people who were willing to bring change by getting involved in difficult discourses of race and gender. Being part of the dialogue that day, and listening to and taking part in the discussion was the

moment I realised that it was possible to deal successfully with racial and gender issues that hampered social transformation at the UFS. The space that was created that day where everybody felt free to contribute to the discussion was evidence that it could be possible in a wider University space. I learnt that understanding the other meant getting closer to the person and obtaining her perspective on the debatable issues in a social environment. This came as a moment of growth for me because I realised that developing healthy interpersonal relationships within my faculty meant that I had to understand the feelings of others and get to understand why they viewed issues differently from the way I viewed them. This was the spirit in which the mixed group discussions were conducted. Both BWAs and WWAs respected one another's views and were willing to understand the reasons that led to differences in views. They were also willing to change perceptions in the process. I regarded the mixed group discussion as a contribution to healthy social transformation discourses and as the participants themselves suggested, such discourses could benefit the wider institution.

As a result of the success of the discussions mentioned above, I realised that it was a rewarding move to gather the areas of concern in separate discussions, where participants felt that they had a safe space to share their experiences. Starting the discussions with a group of BWAs only, granted them a space where they felt they would be safe to table their experiences with the group that they perceived as sharing similar experiences. Creating such a space where participants did not feel intimidated by the presence of people with different experiences suggested that people would be free to share with those that identified with their experiences. The mixed group discussion did not serve as a platform where participants had to start sharing experiences and concerns. There was already a basis of points of concern on which the mixed group could base their discussion. Also noteworthy was the fact that the points tabled for the discussion were not identified as either BWAs' or WWAs' concerns, but concerns around social transformation at the UFS. In this way, everybody owned up to the points raised and worked together to suggest possible ways in which the concerns could be challenged. This process assisted in bridging the racial gap between the participants as they worked together in suggesting improved personal and institutional practices. The participants did not challenge

each other, but challenged the issues that seemed to create a gap in achieving social transformation at their institution.

Lastly, I learnt that the responsibility to bring changes to institutions should not be the sole responsibility of the institutions' management structures. My review of the SAHE documents reflected the government's expectation that changes could only be realised if the institutions, through the management structures, could draw up plans that could speed up the change process. The Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997) emphasised the role that institutions had to play in championing the redress process and ensuring that there was equality and equity on the institutions' campuses. The Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Cohesion in Higher Education in South Africa (DoE, 2008) also carried out an investigation on the progress of transformation in HEIs. In the report, the emphasis was on the challenges that institutions still faced, which they had to address.

Although the role of institutions' management in transformation could not be undermined, this study highlighted the importance of the constituencies' roles in successful transformation within institutions. This was one important contribution that this study made towards the implementation of successful transformation in SAHE. The study indicated that, if individuals were committed to bringing change, they could come together and make a concerted effort to strategise on how such change could be achieved, as was done by the women academics in this study. It could be argued that the constituencies' contribution could be a difficult process as it entailed a change of heart and thinking from individuals; a process that could not be forced on people. However true this might be, the participants in this study indicated that the most important strategy institutions could use to persuade their constituencies to contribute towards the attempts of social transformation was dialogue. By suggesting changes that could be adopted at an interpersonal level, this constituency (women academics) showed the role that individuals could play in the process without expecting the institutions to drive the process alone.

5.3 Limitations to my study

As has been indicated throughout the study, the AR process has not been an easy journey. Activities that the participants and I had planned, had failed to materialise.

As stated earlier, it was a difficult task to organise meetings that could be attended by all the participants. The follow-up focus group discussion with BWAs to share reflections could not be held due to the busy schedules of the participants. Some participants also failed to attend the mixed group discussion, because of their other commitments. As a result, some of the participants' input was derived from individual interviews, in which case the participants missed out on other women academics' perspectives. These participants who only took part in individual interviews also did not have a chance to have their ideas challenged by others. They missed out on the growth brought about by the discussion of other participants' experiences.

In addition, the failure of most of the HODs to provide feedback to the request sent to them for their input was also a setback in the action research cycle. I had hoped that the feedback could help the women academics to understand the progress that the faculties had made with regard to social transformation and this was hoped to assist in creating a positive view of the women's work environment. Responses from the HODs would have given the women academics hope that ground-level managers, who had the power to take action on the concerns within faculties, had heard their concerns. Nonetheless, the failure of getting responses cannot be defined as a failure of the study. I believe that sending the email to the HODs had responded to one of the aims of this study which was to assist the women academics to raise their voices regarding social transformation at the UFS. It was hoped that at least the HODs had read the contents of the email and had an idea of the challenges that they needed to address to ensure successful social transformation within faculties.

5.4 What the action research has achieved – my claims

- The AR helped in assisting the BWAs and WWAs who were participants in this study to raise their voices in terms of their feelings and needs in contributing towards social transformation at the UFS. This was done mainly by escalating the voices of the women academics to the HODs who have the power and capacity to operationalise some of the suggestions that the women academics had raised. The interviews that I held with the two HODs proved to be beneficial to the purpose of this study, which was to raise a voice to

contribute towards the changes within the UFS. These HODs commented that the study was worthwhile because through it they were able to get the concerns of the members of their department, which they would not have heard without the study. One of the HODs indicated that he appreciated having been involved and would try and create a space within his discipline by allocating time for the all members to voice their needs and concerns at some meetings. He promised that he would try to implement some of the suggestions made by BWAs as a way of addressing the concerns raised.

- The AR in this study has indicated the effectiveness of creating a safe environment for dialogue around sensitive and critical issues of race and gender. In this study safe environments were created by bringing a group of BWAs together to discuss their concerns in a space where they felt they were with people who could relate to their experiences. This made it easier for them to raise issues that troubled them regarding social transformation, which included the way they perceived they were treated byte institution and colleagues. It could then be argued that the discussions and points raised were a true reflection of how BWAs perceived social transformation at the UFS. It could also be argued that involving the other group of WWAs at the beginning might have inhibited some of the women to openly voice their concerns in the midst of people who they perceived as being favoured by the UFS system. The strategy of collecting issues from these two groups separately and only addressing points of concerns in mixed groups benefitted the discussions on sensitive issues of race and gender.
- The AR in this study has indicated that platforms where women academics can narrate their experiences and challenge their thoughts and perceptions need to be created for social transformation to take place. This kind of platform was created by involving a small group, which formed part of the study participants, and from the discussions that both BWAs and WWAs had, important issues that could be used to better the situation for the women within the UFS were raised and debated. In this way, not only did the women raise their concerns but they also acted as agents of change by suggesting ways in which the concerns could be addressed. In addition, the women took

responsibility by challenging themselves first before they blamed their institution for the dysfunctions that they perceived within their environment.

- The AR in this study has assisted the study participants and I to grow and take the first step in improving our work environment. Through the discussions and the reflection exercises of the women academics, mainly the BWAs, we were able to say at the end that the AR process assisted us to debate and question our perceptions and correct some of them if we felt they were unjustified. The feedback from the participants at the end of the study indicated that they too felt that they had grown and benefited from the AR process. Therefore, the study has contributed to the self-emancipation of the women; a purpose that was also proposed for this study.
- Although this study used the UFS as a case study, the points of concern that the women academics raised could also benefit other institutions of higher learning within South Africa. All HEIs in South Africa are diverse in terms of race and gender and challenges that have been highlighted in this study could also be affecting these institutions. As such, the suggestions from the women academics in terms of how institutions could handle issues of social transformation may be useful to every institution in this country as well as international higher education. It could be a recommendation therefore that these suggestions (as discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3) be put to practice by the institutions to test their effectiveness. Future studies could also look at the effectiveness of these suggested intervention programmes in the success of social transformation within their institutions.

5.5 Contributions of my study

My study has contributed on three levels: **personal, faculty and the wider institution**. At a personal level, the study has assisted all study participants to challenge their thought processes, hence transforming through a self-awareness process. For example, personal dialogues with the self during the reflection after group discussions made both the BWAs and WWAs reconstruct their realities and their perceptions of their institution, thereby becoming productive members of the institution. Apart from the challenge that the AR process brought to the participants, these participants raised their voices by allowing findings from the study to be presented to the HODs and also suggesting that the equity committees needed to be

alerted to the needs and feelings of the BWAs in order for these needs to be addressed.

By raising a voice and escalating the voices of the women academics to the HODs, faculties became aware of the needs and feelings of the women academics in their departments. This could enable the HODs to respond and address some of these needs in ensuring that everybody within the faculties enjoyed a sense of citizenship within the work environment. The interview with some of the HODs indicated that they were willing to implement some of the suggestions raised by the participants.

Through the equity committee of one faculty, the central equity committee had a chance of also hearing about the findings of the study and, although during the cause of the study no implementation had been done yet, this knowledge could be useful when the institution reviews its policies and plans.

Finally, the wider SAHE could benefit from this study. These institutions have a similar history in terms of the past higher education landscape, and they were at the time of the study, also going through the process of transformation. Thus, the knowledge of the needs of women academics as well as the suggestions as raised in this study (although this cannot be generalised to all higher education institutions) could raise awareness in terms of improved policy development at other institutions.

5.6 This study in a nutshell

This study highlighted the challenges that the SAHE and particularly the UFS face with regard to social transformation as perceived by BWAs. I explored these perceptions, which within the action research approach, responded to the question, '**what is our concern**? 'The concerns that were raised by BWAs were categorised according to the four broad themes that were borrowed from CRT. With these themes, reasons that accounted for the perceptions of the BWAs were stated through a psychosocial approach. Figures 2.7 and 3.6 presented these themes clearly.

The study moved from merely looking at a problem to taking action from an emancipatory stance, regarding the way in which the concerns of the BWAs could be addressed. Again, this was within the ambit of action research and its other principal

question, '**how can we improve our situation**? BWAs suggested a number of approaches that could be used for both personal and institutional improvement towards successful social transformation at the UFS. From the discussion in Section 5.2 on how I have grown and improved during my own study, clear indication of such positive growth has been made. In summary therefore, Figure 5.1 below presents what this study has achieved:

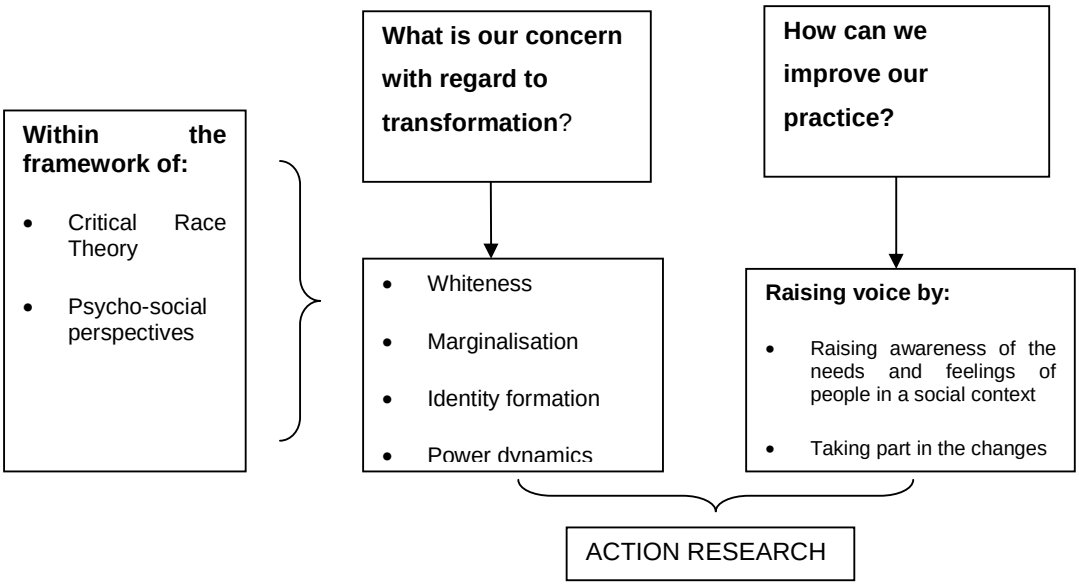


Figure 5.1: Summary of the study

Most important from this study is the role BWAs can play in transforming higher education in South Africa. This has been the peak of my study and I would like to also capture this role in a diagram as shown below:

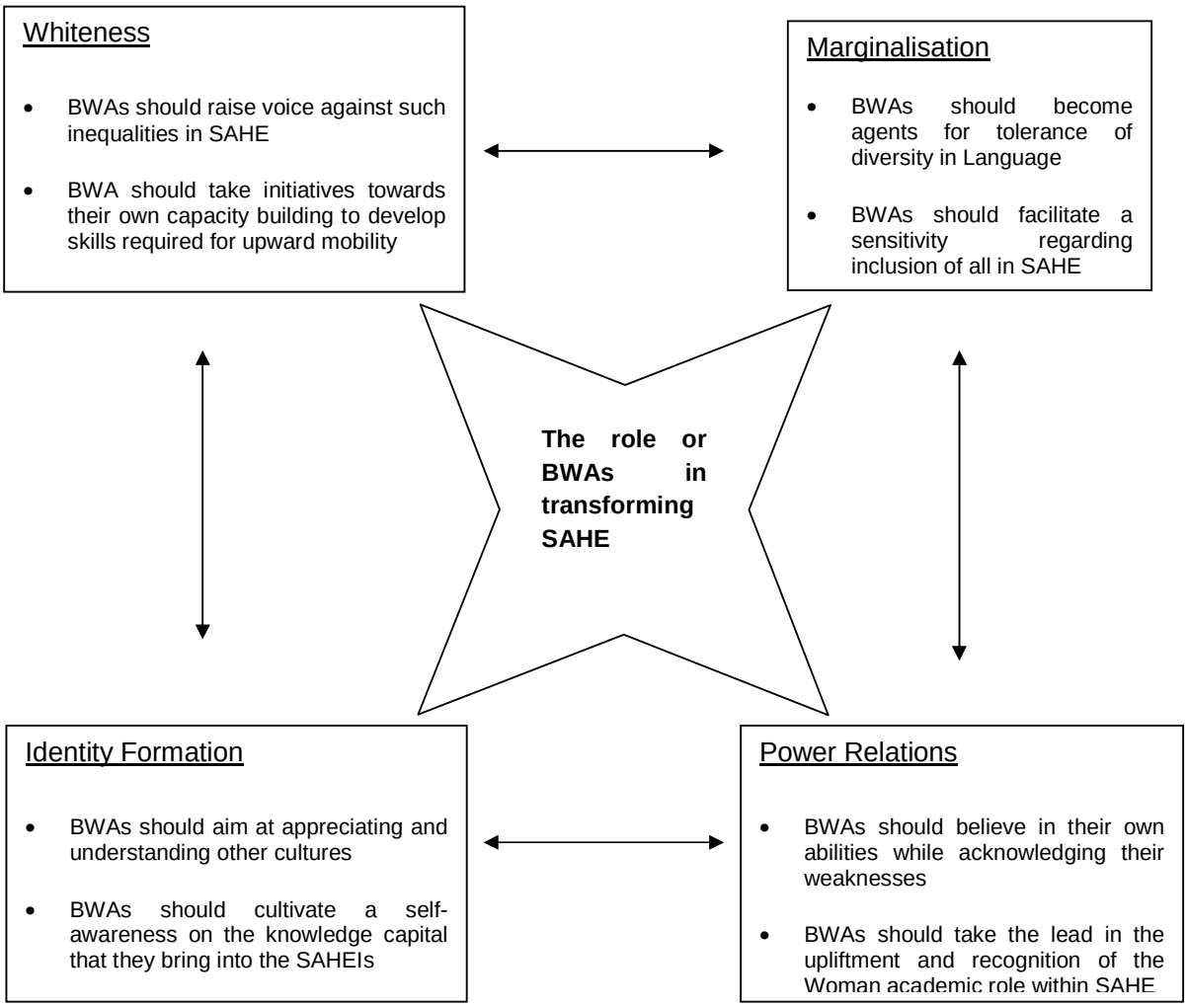


Figure 5.2: BWAs role in transforming HE

5.7 Conclusion

Critical race theory with a psychosocial perspective framed my research. I particularly embraced critical race theory in terms of its core tenets. Firstly, critical race theory acknowledges whiteness as opposed to blackness. Secondly, it maintains a social justice agenda and addresses issues such as marginalisation. Thirdly, it recognises the multiple identities and locations that women of colour inhabit and fourthly it addresses the prevailing power dynamics. By combining the critical race theory with a psychosocial perspective allowed me to use non-traditional

data gathering methods, such as narratives and storytelling to inform the research process in dialoguing for mutual understanding in the context of the social dynamics and psychological constructions of black women academics. The telling of personal stories brought the structural formation of their identity to consciousness.

Because the foundations of this study was rooted in the work of Paulo Freiré (1970) and because of the transformative potential of higher education practice, this study finally engaged in recommendations for transformation at both institutional and personal level. I used these frames to also analyse my personal experiences and insights, as well as to examine my cultural frame of reference and its relationship to black identity in order to increase cultural understanding, networking, and inclusion for the development of my own agency as well as the voices of my black women colleagues.

I had also analysed the personal experiences and cultural misperceptions that I held. I realised that we, as women academics, must be willing to engage in open, honest, and sometimes uncomfortable dialogue to eradicate negative stereotypes as knowledge decreases fear of the *other.* We, as women academics, stand in the higher education classrooms as precursors or complements to dialogue on gender, race, culture and society in education. We should rather become agents to facilitate the inclusion of diverse constituencies so that our learners will leave our classrooms fully equipped to influence others positively, instead of reinforcing patriarch-constructed binaries in our institutions and within ourselves. In this way this study contributed to transformation in higher education, which benefits both practical and theoretical concerns.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: A sample of my journal entries

MY JOURNAL ENTRIES

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 1 (28th May 2012)

My Role Clarification

This study takes an approach of Action Research (AR). The main aim is to reflect on the way we perceive our work environment and work on any challenges and concerns that we have concerning our space. This is a participatory study in which I see you as co-researchers with me. I am therefore expecting you to see me as such and come up with suggestions that you might have in terms of the direction our study should take. This will include planning and reflecting on the progress of our study and discussions. I should however clarify that, as an initiator of the study and a PhD student in this case; I will play the role of facilitator to make sure that our discussions run smoothly without any interruptions and misunderstandings.

What questions do we need to address (Nominal Group Discussion Guide)

- With the definitions and interpretations of social transformation that we have explored, could we identify the main issues that come up? (Write these on the chart)
- Could we now individually jot down in the order of importance in personal diaries the issues we feel are of concern pertaining to social transformation at the UFS?
- Let's draw two columns and on the other column indicate which issues we feel that our university is addressing well when it comes to social transformation
- Now, can we relate our experiences that make these issues so much important to us?
- Let's indicate in our little papers why we feel that the UFS is not handling some of these issues well.
- Please bring the papers. I will try to identify from your responses the issues and we will discuss them according to their order of importance.

- Could we now discuss openly the issues we have noted? Let's start with ……..
- LASTLY NOW: How has today's exercise been of benefit to us?

Lessons Learnt

- **T**ransformation is not an easy term to explain or define. Some participants indicated that they could not **really** define this term but they would like to raise issues that they relate to transformation. I have learnt today from the interpretation of this concept from the participants that there can never be a single definition of transformation. I think what this means within our institution is that, the process of transformation cannot satisfy every member of the University community since we have different perceptions. The institution can only attempt to develop transformation plans that could accommodate constituencies in terms of making the UFS a place for all. What I have learned today though, is that the UFS has the responsibility to approach the constituencies so that the policy makers could have the needs and feeling of the people that are served by the institution when they develop policies. Hmm! I think it is a good idea that I am conducting this study because the voices of some of the constituencies who are going to take part here will be raised to those that can address them. However, from this study I need to understand from the women how they expect the UFS to transform when it is so difficult to interpret transformation. Theis is the question that I have to keep in mind for the duration of the study:

  If transformation is such a difficult concept - as I have noticed from the BWAs responses of their understanding of the concept, in what way do BWAs expect the institution to transform?

- **Another lesson for me today**: I have learnt that transformation is not just the responsibility of the UFS management. The discussion today has helped me to see that I am also responsible to make the UFS a better environment for myself and other people. The question that I will continue asking myself is: **how can I make my work environment be a better place for me**? The participants have raised what I consider an important issue: **Self-awareness**! I couldn't have known that this word is so loaded with meaning. So, self awareness extents to understanding the other as well. I think this is an important point. I am going to start now to get to understand my colleagues. This will be my other goal for the duration of this study. Maybe I will be able to influence them

to also understand me. In this way, interpersonal relationships will be positively enhanced. Let me write this as the main aim for myself:

NB: GETTING TO UNDERSTAND MY COLLEAGUES (Goal 1)

My reflection (taking the first step)

Our discussion on self awareness has been so valuable to me. Looking at my situation now within my department, I think I have not taken the first step to try and solve my problem and to try and understand why my colleagues are behaving in this way. I have always doubted myself as a deserving member of my faculty. I have actually contributed to how my colleagues view me, because I always feel that my colleagues are superior and I have nothing to offer. I am not aware of my self-worth and this may be reflecting on other people... Mmmm, was I hasty to judge the situation as a race issue? I think the problem here is that I haven't tried to understand why my colleagues are treating me the way they do? No, I am not a problem here! And I know I can be productive if I let myself accept that I have something to offer. Therefore, what am I going to do? I will discuss my concerns with my HOD first...oh NO!

- A question that has bothered me throughout the discussion was whether it was possible to find a **common understanding of this concept** which we (as BWAs) could take forward in our endeavour to voice our needs and feelings towards transformation at our institution.
- I also noticed in the discussion that the points that BWAs were raising were mainly connected to **race**, which made race more an issue than **gender** in our discussions. The women seemed to believe that the kind of treatment that they got from both the wider institution and their colleagues was a result of their race more than their gender. Could this be so? Or could it be that race and gender are intertwined and understanding why one get a negative treatment becomes difficult? I listened carefully to the discussions and would like to reflect on this to see if the issue in this case is that racial mistreatment/oppression and gender oppression/mistreatment are such intertwined that it becomes difficult to tell them apart.
- I also noticed that the SA and SAHE historical situation played a major role in how the women felt. They mentioned issues like that in this country and in this institution, when you are black you will never be treated like a white person. They also mentioned the stereotypes that they feel are still being levelled against them. They pointed out that they could not at times point to overt issues but they strongly suggested that the subtle racial treatment that they get is very difficult to define. They pointed mainly to being

stereotyped as people who do not have expertise in the academy and always have to be treated as just equity figures. Some examples of how senior members of their faculties always send students to get assistance to the white colleagues even though they themselves also have expertise is indicative of the inferiority stereotypes that they suffer. I will have to interrogate my own perceptions against this too to find out if in some way I am also influenced by the told experiences more than my lived experiences. Could my perceptions be a result of my pre-perceptions of the UFS? Maybe these are hampering my objective assessment of social transformation at my institution? Could it be also that the participants themselves can't **move beyond the past**? I will have to deal with this if I want to contribute towards making my work environment a better space in which I can realise my full potential as an academic.

- The women also pointed to how the students themselves treat them. They feel that the students don't respect them as knowledgeable members of the faculties. Their experiences reflect that students often challenge them in class and they believe that they have to work extra hard to prove themselves to both the students and their colleagues. They also pointed to cases where students come to their offices to fight for marks, not in a way a student would approach a person they respect but in a very disrespectful manner. They indicated that at times when the students ask for a remark in test or exams, the scripts are sent to internal moderators who are white colleagues who normally mainly give unjustified marks to the white students. (**Why do they not challenge this?)** They indicated that they could not do much about the situation as at times the marks never get sent back to them but they are sent to the marks administrators who only enter them in the marks sheets. I think this may hamper productivity, so it needs to be challenged in our FGDs. I think it is an issue which needs attention by faculties' management.
- Some of the women pointed to their challenge of being denied to set exams because the belief is that they could not set questions that are at the standard of the students' level. Although they indicated that they challenge this issue every time in their faculties, this was another point that needed to be discussed and get suggestions on how it could be handled. **Could it be a race issue?**

The women raised an issue of lack of mentoring as their other major concern at their institution. They believed that capacity building was important for them to be able to climb a ladder into senior positions in academia. They indicated that they had not experienced any mentoring and they had to grapple with finding their way in academia. They further indicated that even though there were induction programmes for newly appointed staff at their institution, this did not equip them enough for their work at the varsity. They seemed to

believe that more personal mentorship programmes where a person could be assigned a mentor was important. **We had to look at the commitment that people who would be appointed mentors would have to make alongside the workload that the UFS staff had and if this would be easy.** We also had to look at the formal mentoring idea and if it would not feel like a forced thing on the academics, which could end up not going well. In the session with the WWAs I would like to raise this issue to find out if they also have a problem with mentoring and how they acquaint themselves with the ropes in the academy. (Could this also be a race issue or a gender issue?)I also would like to go deep into the mentoring /capacity building programme of the university to find out how it is conducted.

Appendix 2: Sample of an analytic memo

ANALYTIC MEMO: focus group discussions and individual interviews with BWAs and WWAs

Institutional culture	Focus groups	Individual interviews (BWA)	Individual interviews (WWAs)	Questions arising
Language Problems	R 2: For me the challenge was the whole language issue in the meetings but then unfortunately the policy of the University is supporting that. R3: The other people they said you know just talking in the corridors now she's not sure, yes with her Afrikaans was not perfect as such, she also said that. But I wanted that lady to be given a chance	R 1: These include language which is used within the institution (it is not the first signal though). . The Afrikaans is used as a passive aggression tool, so that no one can say you are hurting me. The language is used to maintain authoritarian structures. .At the beginning I asked her if she would mind if I combine the students into one group and she joins to observe as this was a practical course. She went uphill because now the rule of the university is saying students should be taught in the language they are comfortable with	R1 (WWA in individual interview): I told prof X that we are in different positions here, not because he is in a high position but because he has a linguistic capital that I don't have in English. I got used to expressing myself in the language I am most comfortable with and English is a real challenge for me. R2 (WWA in individual interview): people who could have expressed their opinions (in meetings) may keep quiet because they don't understand the English language… so you see language can be used to exclude people. R1 (WWAs in individual interview): … in the corridors, tearooms and other spaces people are being excluded because of language	**How could the institution find a middle ground when they dealt with the language issue within the UFS?**

Power dynamics/ male domination	R3: I think, social transformation is when we look at the background of the University it used to be a male dominated R3: They say it was only the female worriers in Italy that made a difference. So it was an insult to us saying that you women, there is nothing that you can do." R1: Health Science Department in the medical school which has always and still is a male dominated field and I come from a nursing background which is a female profession and then here I come into a white male dominated environment .you're going to go to other places where you are going to interact with white people and obviously white people are more learned than you, R2: Sometimes for example if Prof X can stand and make a statement I promise you whether you hate him or you love him or you are neutral everybody will listen because his voice carries some weight.	R1: Let me take an Afrikaner woman, she has never been given power before and immediately she is put in power, she uses it as an oppressive tool. . When the person climbs the ladder, immediately you see the power relations because those that are down start fearing her. .You see she couldn't accept my help because according to her she had a PhD and I was just a black master's lecturer and I couldn't help her, that's how I felt .When I asked the exam questions, she would tell me that the questions are low in cognitive understanding because she had taken my exam question paper to professor so and so and that was what the prof had said		**How does the UFS ensure that the constituencies in all levels function harmoniously and that it addresses the male dominance?**

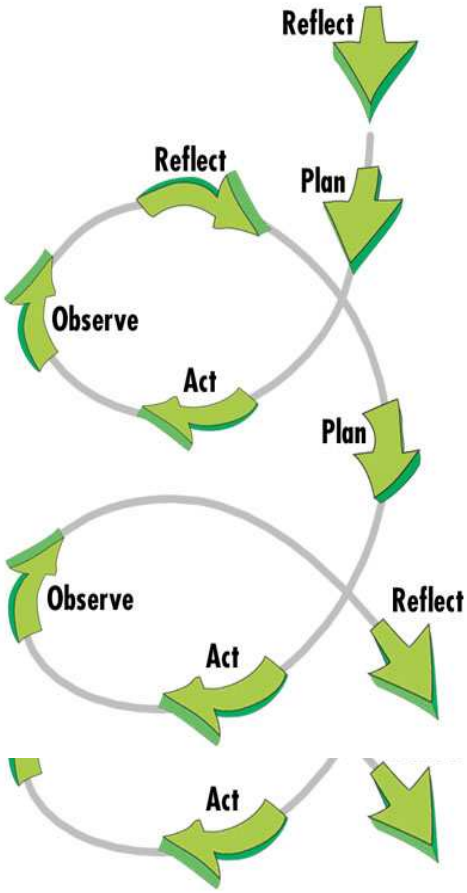
Capacity building/mentoring/ supervision	R3: What do they do about developing the black female academics this University? . Being developed, being in management, given recognition in our or their departments where they work, all that stuff. I would say that there is social transformation in the University." R4: the female role is really not uplifted enough and it is the same situation for the University of the Free State R2: You are independent, do your own research. How far you develop is also dependent on your own effort, collaborations and all that. Much of it is also dependent on you as much as maybe the HOD and the dean still need	R1: There was a time when my supervisors were not yet appointed formally but they were informally guiding me, they knew that they were going to carry on but this year they were prohibited to give me feedback. How do they expect me to grow when they do that?	R2: mentoring shouldn't be a power issue. The essence of being a mentor is seeing how a person grows; it should be handled with care. I do not mean that it should not happen but we should look at power relations here. It should be to the advantage of the person being mentored R1: I never had any mentoring when I first came to the university. Maybe black women need it because their circumstance is different	**Does the UFS develop the mentoring process based on the needs analysis of the different constituencies?** **What should the UFS through the faculties' management do to ensure that the supervisors carried out their responsibilities effectively to ensure throughput within the expected completion period?**

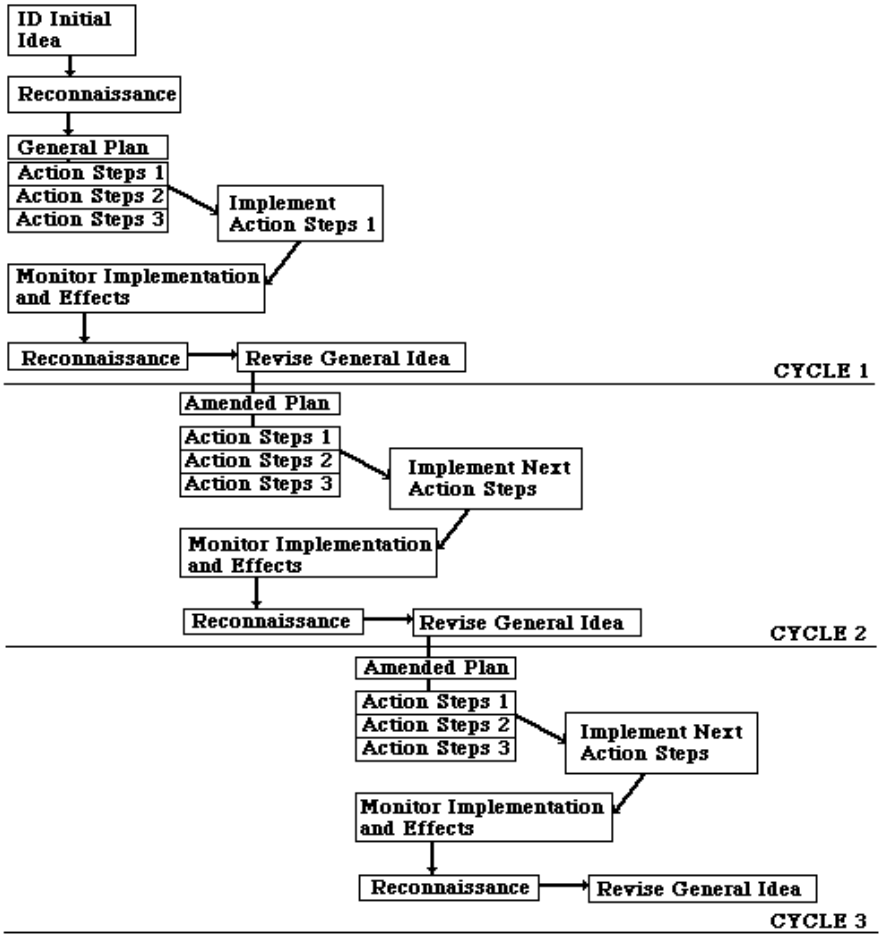
Appendix 3: Sample of a document analysis

Main issue	HE mandates and recommendations	The UFS	UCT	UP
1. Institutional culture				
i) Language	**Higher Education Act of 1997** - Language. The Act stated that the Minister must determine a language policy for higher education, to guide institutional language policies **Language Policy Framework for Higher Education (2002)** - Acknowledges the current position of English and Afrikaans as languages of scholarship - Development of other languages by HEIs	**Language policy 2003** - The UFS uses a parallel medium of instruction – English and Afrikaans and uses these languages in formal settings - Encourages the development of other indigenous languages e.g. Sesotho - A member of PANSALB	**Language Policy (2003)** - Recognizes English as a medium of instruction and an international language of communication in Science and business	**Language Policy 2010** - Undertakes to use Afrikaans and English as valuable instruments of science Sepedi is accepted as a 3rd language of communication - There is to be no discrimination against any staff member or student who has command of only Afrikaans or of only English or of only these two languages

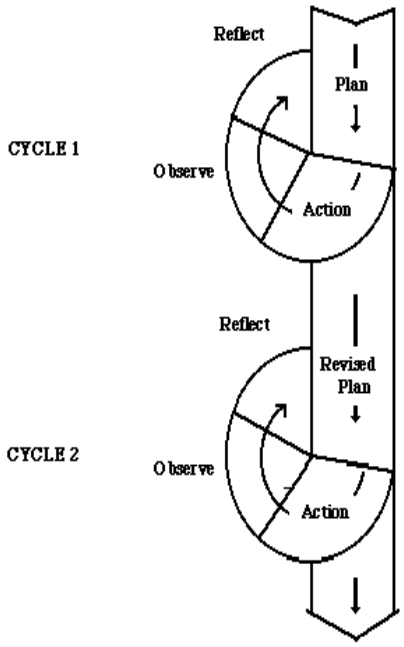
Appendix 4: Action Research Models

O'Leary's AR modelEllliot's AR model

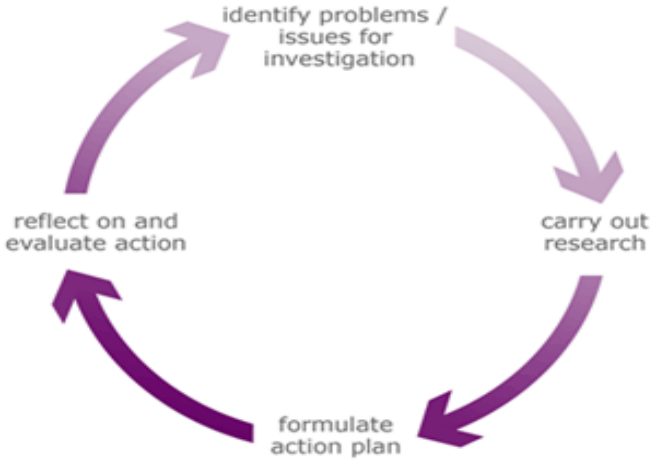




Kemmis and Wilkinson's model



McNiff and Whitehead's Model



Appendix 5: Letter requesting participation in the study

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PhD STUDY

Title of Study**:**A living journey towards understanding black women academics perceptions of social transformation in South African Higher Education

You are hereby asked to participate in a PhD research study conducted by Juliet Ramohai, student number 2003100019 supervised by Professor Rita Niemann, from the Faculty of Education, School of Higher Education Studies at the University of the Free State.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to find out how Black women academics perceive and experience transformations at the University of the Free State so that insight could be gained into the way Black women construct social transformation at the University of the Free State with a view to contributing to transformation at the institution.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I am going to ask you to participate in face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions that will be held at the Faculty of Education over the period of a year. There will also be an open seminar at the end of the study in which you will be invited to participate. Participation in this seminar will be voluntary.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Some people may experience discomforts with regard to narrating their experiences during the focus group discussions.Please do not do that.You will be given a platform to narrate your experiences in a more confidential space during the face to face interview and full confidentiality in this regard is ensured.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND THE INSTITUTION

Participating in this study may be beneficial to you in finding voice within your institution and contributing towards social transformation within the UFS. The study is also important for the

institution as transformation plans should be done with the feelings and needs of the constituencies in mind.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential.No information will be used to directly identify any of the participants and several steps will be taken to ensure that confidentiality is maintained.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time when you feel uncomfortable to continue participating in the study.Should there be any questions that you do not want to answer during the discussions, you will be free to indicate this to the researcher.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS

Once the research is complete, a thesis will be available for people who might be interested.

Thank you in advance for you participation

NB:If you are willing to participate in this study, please send anemail back to ramohaij@ufs.ac.za with this statement

I agree to take part in the study and I have read all the sections of the letter requesting me to participate.
Please sign the email at the end.

Appendix 6: Letter requesting inputs from HODs

To: Heads of Departments

Date: 12 November 2012

From: Juliet Ramohai

Subject: Request for inputs

Dear HODs

I am a current Faculty of Education PhD student registered with the School of Higher Education Studies. I am working on a study titled '*A living theory towards understanding Black women academics' perception of social transformation in higher education*.' I am using the UFS as a case study and am engaging both black and white women academics as participants in my study. Through an emancipatory action research approach that I employed in the study, I have journeyed with these women through interviews and focus group discussions in my endeavour to add to the voice of 'women academics' in an attempt to contribute towards social transformation at our institution.

The main aim of the study was to understand how the women academics perceive the UFS during this period of transformation and to explore what gave rise to their perceptions. Data from interviews and focus group discussions conducted with both Black and White women academics indicated that the women have concerns around aspects, such as the institutional culture, which resulted in a lack of sense of belonging.

I would like to share some of these findings with you and **would appreciate your input as leaders in terms of**

- Your experiences of the issues listed below, and
- **Actions you have taken or what you believe should be done to address some of the women academics' concerns.**

1. **Language barrier** – the women academics regard the dual language medium used mainly in meetings and in classroom presentations as exclusionary and they feel that it acts as a divisive tool for both staff and students who are not fluent in both Afrikaans and English.
   Question: Have you experienced problems in this regard and if so how can faculties and departments contribute to resolve the language issue to ensure that staff and students do not feel excluded by the dual language policy within the UFS?
2. **Capacity Building** - another issue that raised concerns for the women academics was a lack of comprehensive 'visible' capacity building programs within faculties and departments. They were referring mostly to mentoring programs and supervision guidelines that would ensure that both the supervisor and student understand the contract that they are getting into in the supervision process.

Questions: Within faculties are there documents that guide the supervision process and are those visible to postgraduate students? What mentoring programs are in place for young academics and women academics in your faculties?

3. **Power dynamics** – most worrying for the women was lack of voice and agency for the women academics in decision making processes within their faculties and departments. This point also touched on capacity building in which there was a need for young academics to be mentored into powerful position (senior lecturer and professor positions).
   Question: What do faculties do to ensure that they build capacity for their staff to equip them so that they could also climb the ladder to positions that would grant them voice and recognition within academia?
4. **Stereotypes** – the women academics were worried that gender and racial stereotypes (superiority and inferiority) are still continuing within their faculties. While they acknowledged that this was an interpersonal issue, they were concerned about the measures that the faculties took to ensure that relationships within the faculties and department they led were warm. They noticed that ailing work relationships could lead to some constituencies within faculties feeling unwelcome and lack a sense of belonging.
5. **Question**: What do faculties do to ensure eradication of stereotypes among their constituencies?
6. **Access and retention** – the concern in this case was, 'what do faculties do to ensure that they provide open access to, and retain the female constituency, especially Black women academics?

I would really appreciate your contributions to these areas of concern in terms of what your faculties and departments could do or are doing to ensure that the culture within the faculties is welcoming for everybody.

Thanking you in advance for your inputs.

Regards

Juliet Ramohai

Appendix 7: Presentation of my study Findings to the Central Employment Equity Committee of the UFS

UNDERSTANDING BLACK WOMEN ACADEMICS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AT THE UFS

- Social transformation involves HEIs' introspection of how well they handle social issues within their campuses; E.g. student and staff access, employment equity and representation of women - Shackleton, Riordan and Simonis, 2006)

- HEIs looking within themselves to ascertain areas that need to be addressed for the smooth social functioning of the institutions (for stability and productivity from all the constituencies - Eckel, 2001)

Why this study?

- My personal experiences within the faculty alerted me to the transformation challenges facing the UFS
- The women concerns raised in the preliminary investigation on their perception of transformation at the UFS substantiated my urge to get an understanding of the challenges that came with transformation.
- The report of the ministerial committee (Soudien) showing a slow progress of transformation in SAHEIs
- To facilitate awareness of the experiences of BWAs with the aim to establish a common ground and shared understanding in terms of social transformation at the UFS.

Theoretical Framework

- Using Critical Race Theory as lens as it allows for the advocating of the voice/narratives of the people of colour and the issues surrounding gender by raising awareness of their needs and experiences within social environments

- Providing a psycho-social perspective by accounting for the psychological and social factors that shape perceptions about social environments and how the consequent challenges could be dealt with.

Main research Question

- **How do BWAs at UFS experience and perceive the everyday practices of gender and racial dealings within their transforming institution?**

Subsidiary question

- What is the face of social transformation in South African higher education institutions and at the UFS in particular?
- How is race and gender transformation at the UFS experienced and why is it perceived as such?
- How can the insights gained from the research be integrated to assist women in finding their voices in contributing to social transformation at the UFS at both personal and institutional level?
- How can I grow during the process and how does my gained understanding contribute to improving dialogue with the aim of creating environments of respect for diversity and difference?

Methodological vehicles

- **Action Research** – What are we concerned about? And how can we improve our situation?
- **Participants** – 12 Black women academics; 4 White women academics (complementary group);
- **Methods** – individual interviews, focus group discussions, mixed group discussion, document analysis

Findings

Issue of concern	Challenges raised in terms of transformation at the UFS	Suggestions for personal, faculty and institutional endeavours to address the challenges

Language (Policy and Practice)	- Language becomes a barrier to inclusion/successful participation in: • Meetings (departmental, faculty) • Faculty social gatherings (End-of - year functions) • Lectures (Students-lecturer relationships) - Language used to maintain a sense of power, control and pride - Parallel medium is regarded as being divisive for students and staff (lack of dialogue between policy and practice) - Lack of a sense of citizenship and incapacitation (outsiders from within, space invaders, appendage) (not explanatory enough) - Lack of monitoring in terms of policy implementation (i.e, practical implementation in faculties and departments that counter the inclusion stipulated in the policy	- Adoption of a common language that could serve as a unifying language? - More effort in developing other indigenous languages to serve as languages of academic expression - Monitoring of the implementation of the language policy at faculty and departmental level. - Strengthen translation services (expertise in different fields to understand the jargon)
Access (with success), recruitment & retention	- White male domination - Access that focuses on head count massification - Failure to recognize the role of the Black woman academic - Problems with access to senior positions/upward mobility (mentoring) • BWAs mostly concentrated at the Junior & Lecturer position - Access that fails to promote a sense of belonging for all - Quality of BWAs recruited to join the UFS (Does this ensure success - Recruitment Plans (Quality of PhDs – pool of potential academics) - BWAs leaving the UFS -	- Development of access programs that include quality assurance for new entrants - Attracting senior academics from the international higher education (not only Europe but also African higher education) to serve as mentors to the BWAs existing in the system - Move beyond being local but aim for quality - Revive the GOOT program? - UFS to create a welcoming environment that encourages stay (environment that ensures that the UFS is a space for all)
Capacity building	- Absence of visible mentoring programmes in faculties (and the institution) - Biases in PhD supervision (especially	- Development of a mentoring programme with clear goals (where is the program aimed to take them?)

	for staff members that are busy with their PhDs)	
		- Clear stipulations on throughput (for PhD candidates) - A look at the quality of supervision is necessary (supervisor's passion and knowledge) - More workshops on 'writing for publication' and training for novice women researchers (skills building programs) - Career development programmes and a psycho-social support (in faculties maybe?)
Women recognition, voice and agency	- Non-recognition of the Black woman (as capable academics) - Invisibility of the changes that women in senior positions bring to improve the space for other women (Are they just a window dress?) - Hyper scrutiny of BWAs work - Lack of women academics' voices in the critical discourses of race and gender - Placement in committees	- There should be an upliftment of the woman academic role - Awareness workshops regarding the role of the woman academic in senior position - Credibility should be given to the work that BWAs do (research, teaching and learning) - UFS to ensure that the needs for women are not seen through the male gaze and conveyed through the male voice
Unequal Power relations	- Overrepresentation of white male academics (especially in senior positions) - Employment in Contract and permanent posts - Going an extra mile to prove oneself as worthy of a permanent appointment (stereotypes of underachievement) - Horizontal oppression (women in senior positions oppressing those in junior positions)	- If the role of the woman academic is strengthened, then their contribution within the UFS will be recognised
Interpersonal relationships and sexual harassment	- Stereotypes (intelligence stereotypes) - Sexually suggestive dealings with male senior staff	- Creating social spaces where people can talk about sensitive issues (trying to understand the other) - UFS could have non-intimidating structures where incidences could be reported