The Colours of Diversity: Women Educators
Turning the Gaze onto Australian Universities

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Statement of Authentication

I, Caroline Gopalkrishnan, affirm that this thesis is entirely my own original work. All the research and writing was undertaken by me, and no part of this thesis has been presented for prior assessment for any other academic degree.

………………………………….
Acknowledgements

To be academically vigorous, you find your academic voice, Caroline.
And for goodness sake - keep yourself out of it.

- The Critic and the Voice of Reason

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Abstract

The internationalisation of universities has attracted significant political and even media attention, as well as internal focus. Concurrently, global discourses evolving around the notion of borders, terrorism, security and identity have taken on a renewed significance. Today, the articulation of identities has significant and even dire consequences for many people living in different parts of the world. In Australia, too, the matter of what it means to be ethnic, indigenous, non-indigenous or mixed-race is highly contested, controversial and for some groups of people, in particular contexts, even dangerous. In Australian higher education, the term international is commonly used to refer to the other - citizens of other countries (including those who visit our educational institutions). They are seen as the global citizens and we are not. Cultural diversity is widely celebrated and legislated through the Commonwealth Government’s Living in Harmony policy. Yet there is a dearth of knowledge and/or discussion around members of staff who are different in our own universities. This raises questions about how we come to differentiate between us and them in an Australian socio-historical context, understanding how race and ethnic difference is made salient in identification, and the knowledge production process.

This is a small-scale, in-depth qualitative study, which addresses a significant gap in the literature on higher education by focusing on the experiences of four women educators of colour, each of whom has brought with her a complex collage of diasporic experiences, histories, identities and ways of knowing. By employing a multi-race/ethnic dialogic methodology and a research conversation method, the study
presents the women’s experiences in narrative form, integrating the autoethnographic writing of the researcher with the women’s stories about difference. The inquiry provides new insights into what race and ethnic identity mean to the women in an everyday, professional and ethical practice context.

The women’s stories are not of the traditional career or romantic multicultural kind, but reach into the realms of the personal, political, philosophical and spiritual dimensions of human experience. As they traverse the political terrain of the Academy, the women have looked within and outside the university, navigating multiple identities to make sense of their work. By documenting four women’s experiences that have never been documented before, this small-scale study provides basic research for others to build on.

This research affirms the salience of race and ethnicity in the university and the new higher education knowledge creation ethos. The study reveals there is little current evidence that Australian universities are capitalising on and applying opportunities provided by research on race, ethnicity and difference to higher education debate and reform. The women’s stories reveal that the issue of under-representation of women of colour is not unique to the university, but is reflective of the powerful and constitutive impact of discourses of race and difference in Australian society. By highlighting the issues of who has the power and authority in the university to determine what counts as a valid identity and how identity and knowledge boundaries are policed within the Australian university, this research raises questions about the wider implications of epistemological racism embedded in university practices in relation to governance, curriculum, policy, teaching and learning. Through its
development and exploration of a multiple race and ethnic dialogic methodology, and the use of research conversations as a method, the study sheds new light on the complexities of Australian race politics in knowledge production and on women’s differentiated experiences in higher education.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

In a post-9/11 world, global discourses relating to the notions of borders, terrorism, security and identity have evolved to a point of renewed significance. Today, the matter of what it means to be ethnic, indigenous, non-indigenous, mixed-race or indeed anybody is increasingly controversial, often highly contested and may even be dangerous to articulate in many parts of the world. The so-called war on terror has precipitated a new era of global struggles around identity, world resources and power.

It is in this global context that Australian universities have successfully managed to position higher education as one of the top ten exports, largely, but not exclusively, to Asian countries. Although Australia has embraced internationalisation of curricula, the need for greater understanding of different epistemologies and cultural traditions that accompany internationalisation has put enormous strain on the Anglo-Eurocentric sector and its workforce. This research story, the initial focus of which was women educators of colour and that developed into a study of relational understandings of diverse cultural identity experiences in the social realm, provides new insights into how Eurocentricity operates in higher education knowledge
production. Eurocentrism refers to the practice of placing often unconscious emphasis on European or western concerns, culture and values over those of other cultures. The notion of Eurocentrism is particularly relevant to my study because of its historical influences on current and past power structures in the world (Said, 1993). It is arguably typified by recent Australian foreign and domestic policies which have realigned closely with those of the United States of America (US). At the same time, universities have had to reach outside their Eurocentric borders to access new and profitable relationships with other countries’ educational markets.

This inquiry takes place at a time when global discourses are becoming more deeply embedded within key social institutions in English speaking countries, including Australia. Studies in Australia and overseas affirm that recent global changes have filtered through to the higher education sector in the last decade with universities embracing a free-market approach to education, which has profoundly impacted on staff and students (Burton, 1997; Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997; Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997; Nixon et al., 2001; Ramsay, 2001; Shore, 2003a, 2003b). In today’s free-market world, the notions of what education is and what the common good is are increasingly being constructed in a monetary fiscal rather than a social context, as if these were unrelated. My argument in the thesis is that social justice ultimately translates into both profit and loss. What is needed is a careful examination of the link between the two so that universities can be more fully accountable for their power to produce knowledge and identities as products.

Today’s higher education discourses tend to construct education and educators in monetary rather than overtly ideological terms (Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997). For
example, it is important now more than ever for academics to satisfy the neo-liberalist policies, values and objectives set by government and by the university and generate kudos and status as well as essential income for the university. In this conservative climate, questions of ‘What is education?’ and ‘What is the common good?’ are increasingly being realised in terms of dollars and cents. This is because a neo-liberal approach tends to place emphasis on outcomes, productivity and knowledge content over knowledge production processes, while a product focus overlooks the issues of who has more or less authority to produce knowledge, deems that not all knowledges are afforded the same value (Burton, 1997; Scheurich, 1997; Martin, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000) and is aware of the potential contribution of multiple knowledge perspectives to the university.

Dimitriades and Kamberelis, in their analysis of global educational discourses and patterns of disjuncture arising from the movements of peoples and ideologies across the world, conclude that:

... [w]e are no longer sure what education is all about, how best to prepare students for the uncertain futures they face, or how to link questions of equity with those of social justice (Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997: 149).

This is a compelling argument that calls for further inquiry into what the concept of social justice means in a higher education context for different stakeholders, including women educators and scholars. Such an undertaking, however, proved difficult for a range of reasons, one being the lack of documentation on a diverse range of women’s experiences in higher education (Morley, 2003). In a contemporary global higher
education context, ‘[w]omen are discursively framed as problem areas’ (Morley 2003: 20). Moreover:

The transcripts of women experiencing higher education, both as students and staff in Commonwealth countries remain relatively hidden. Lack of published literature does not imply lack of activity or lack of cultural capital. Rather, it can reflect the power relations and gendered and racialised gate-keeping practices embedded in publication and research awards (Morley, 2003: 7).

Morley’s reference to gatekeeping resonates with critical race and whiteness theorists who argue that the centrality of whiteness performs particular gatekeeping functions around what count as important identities, knowledge and epistemologies in the university. In this study, I have foregrounded the issues of identity, difference, race and ethnicity. This is to bring attention to the blind-spots or disjuncture in higher education literature. There is a perception within Australian universities that race/ethnicity and cultural diversity should belong to and are located in equity and diversity units or student services. To counter this perception, I have placed these, within my study, as central to knowledge production and ethical university practice. A focus on race/ethnicity and difference in the university enables a different kind of analysis of how the internationalisation of higher education is currently progressing. The gaps in knowledge and the silences surrounding these concepts in Australian universities demonstrate the need to create more opportunities for dialogue that transgresses the boundaries created by the mainstream/margin binary. This research story illustrates how such dialogue can offer a more in-depth and sensitive understanding of the many colours of cultural diversity from the perspective of
disenfranchised groups. My study focuses, in particular, on women educators and their experiences, including the barriers they encounter both within the university and in the wider society.

**Background to the Study**

This research began largely as a result of anecdotal conversations I had with a range of educators in the secondary, post-secondary, youth and higher education sectors. During the last seven years of teaching social and educational policy in universities, I began to recognise how dominant voices and knowledge perspectives are often taken for granted and are beyond reproach. In contrast, non-dominant perspectives appeared to be either virtually invisible or highly contested. I also began to question the extent to which I had internalised whiteness as the normative centre. As my doctoral research progressed, I could validate my own and others’ minority status and experiences through the lens of critical race and whiteness studies. These theories of knowledge enabled me to confirm that the prevailing white-dominated demographic of staff populations in educational institutions is a prominent feature not only in Australia but also in Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and, to a lesser extent, universities in the US. Hence, the experiences of the women in my study are not unique or merely ad hoc statistics but are situated in a broader global social and historical context.

Although multicultural education policy has become a taken-for-granted feature of the Australian educational landscape, there are few safe institutional spaces in which to openly question the silence surrounding identity, race/ethnicity and difference in the
university and explore what kinds of sense making strategies minority staff and students employ in their everyday lives and in the workplace. It was for these reasons that I wanted to talk to other women educators who had similar experiences to mine. I approached eight Australian universities using random sampling to locate *women educators of colour*, but trying to find participants for the study was not an easy or straightforward task. It emerged that site-specific information and statistics about the race/ethnicity of staff populations in higher education were variable, inconclusive and muddy.

I was informed by a university equal opportunity practitioner that a new initiative in the higher education sector required universities to collate data on ethnicity (although not on race) of employees. By word of mouth, I was able to make contact with an employee in the statistics section of the Federal Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) via email to find out more about this initiative. The response to my email was:

*The only data we collect on staff ‘ethnicity’ are indigenous status, country of birth and language spoken at home. Indigenous status has been collected since 1988 but data for all but the most recent years is of doubtful quality. The other two elements will be collected for the first time this year and are being introduced as the result of a whole government decision that all Commonwealth administrative data sets will collect this information. At this stage DEST has no plans for any analysis of this information (DEST, 2002).*
Given the relative infancy of this initiative, it appeared that there was no established national database to provide an overall picture of who was represented at different decision-making levels of the university and where they were located. I relied on word of mouth and contacts through university networks and colleagues to locate women for the study. My project was originally to be a qualitative study and the lack of quantitative data on staff demographics in Australian universities was the first indication of the challenge that lay ahead. While principles of diversity and social justice are enshrined in university policy, there is a dearth of knowledge about what actually happens on the ground for people who are positioned as the other, and how discourses of race/ethnicity and difference operate in the university and are implicated in the knowledge production process as well.

This study is a small-scale qualitative narrative involving four women of colour, with myself included in that group. The women in the study collectively acknowledge the lack of race/ethnic diversity at senior decision-making levels throughout Australian universities. Until all universities collate information which incorporates the complex dimensions of race/ethnicity and self-identification processes, the issue of diverse race/ethnic staff representation cannot be quantitatively verified; however, the lack of race/ethnic diversity at senior levels of the university indicated in this study certainly invites further inquiry and debate. I chose not to labour on the issue of statistical representation as such an approach would not have yielded the type of detailed and sensitive data I was interested in, although the study does indeed identify the need for collection of data on the diversity of university staff and provides some fleshing out of information that may assist in the development of relevant categories and issues for discussion. The kind of knowledge I sought was not quantifiable, but tangible
nevertheless. It related to the ways in which people take up, reject or renew subordinating discourses of race/ethnicity and multiculturalism that have very real consequences in the everyday lives of both minority and majority staff and students in the university. I have drawn on critical race, standpoint, social constructionist and relational theories and narrative knowledge traditions for their capacity to offer conceptual tools for generating rich and detailed descriptive data on each woman’s experiences in universities (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

**Exploring the Language of Difference**

Study of the politics of the language of difference almost demands consideration of Derrida’s (1982) concept of *différance*. His neologism *différance* insists on being read as the conflation of the terms to *defer* and *differ*, but not in direct reference to meaning. For Derrida, signs do not necessarily and automatically point to their referents and they never provide final or guaranteed meaning. Instead, their meaning comes from the context of their usage. This is the *différance* which undermines the presumed clarity of binary oppositional categories such as *black* and *white* or the *mainstream* and *margin*. For example, when black and white are juxtaposed, neither word directly and specifically points to its dictionary definition, but to the other in that binary. Their meaning cannot be stabilised because meaning itself slides between each word so that *black* means black principally in relation to white, and vice versa. The space between them is filled with this movement and meaning/s and their *necessary* difference is dissolved into *différance*. Derrida’s notion of *différance* serves to bring to light the constructedness and contingency of the apparently *normal* or inevitable organisation of society and the university into black/white or
mainstream/marginal. One of the main reasons, it may be argued, why women and other marginalised groups in the university and in the literature landscape are rendered invisible is because of the ambiguity of the language of difference.

Like Derrida, Fairclough points to the contestable nature of language and the complex relationship between *words* and *meanings*, calling for questioning by those who are at the receiving end of this meaning making process about the world and our place in it. As Fairclough explains:

... *[t]he problematic of language and power is fundamentally a question of democracy* ... *If problems of language and power are to be seriously tackled, they will be tackled by the people who are directly involved, especially the people who are subject to linguistic forms of domination and manipulation. This is as true in educational organisations as it is elsewhere* (Fairclough, 1989: 221).

I have positioned the women in the study not only as the receivers of the concept of difference in the university, but also as producers of knowledge.

*Women Educators of Colour*

The descriptor *women educators of colour* became a main point of comparison and debate in my research conversations with each of the women involved in the study. This was developed into a strategic mechanism for highlighting the issue of who can, is allowed to or wants to identify (Mahtani, 2002) as a woman educator of colour and
what it means to the women in the study. In other words, I have not assumed that it is a descriptor that can be easily transported from one historical context (in the USA, UK and Canada) to another. I also use the term other to refer to those groups positioned on the margins of society and in the university. I use the term white to refer to a subject position occupied and used in a range of ways by members of the dominant cultural majority in Australia and acknowledge it is a position which can also be used and inhabited by some women of colour at certain times and in various contexts.

*Race/Ethnicity*

An exploration of this topic would not be complete without a discussion of the terms race and ethnicity and my reasons for combining these. Some studies have attributed the lack of emphasis on black and other non-white minority groups of educators to a tendency in the teaching profession and in educational studies to de-racialise interpretations and analyses of teachers (Bariso, 2001). *De-racialisation*, in this context, is the ‘conscious or unconscious disregard of issues of ethnicity and race from researchers’ interpretative and analytical frames’ (Bariso, 2001: 167). The notion of de-racialisation assumes that whiteness or an Anglo or white identity is the normative starting point from which knowledge is constructed. This effectively renders the identities, experiences and knowledge of some educators invisible. Alternatively, and in contrast to de-racialisation, I use the term *racialisation* to refer to the practice of highlighting an individual or group’s status based on race or ethnicity and in terms of difference. This difference, however, is not just any
difference, but is more often assumed to refer to the non-white subject as the other (Hage, 1998b).

In the study, I have combined the terms race and ethnicity not to imply that they are interchangeable, but to highlight the effects of using them interchangeably. When they are used interchangeably, the effect can be that of homogenising and masking the saliency of the dimension of race/ethnicity in the lives of those individuals and groups who are constructed as being different or on the margins. As a result, women educators of colour are often constructed as invisible or peripheral to the university, or they tend to be subsumed under the broader headings of Diversity Studies, Women’s Studies and Multiculturalism Studies. It is because of the slipperiness of the language of difference and the particularity and historicity of race in Australia, which continually re-configures the meanings associated with these concepts, that the women’s experiences in this study are important.

This inquiry highlights the saliency of race/ethnicity, not only in the ways individuals are identified by other people and institutions but also in teaching, research and policy practices. Because whiteness is rendered invisible in the university, current conceptions of difference in the Academy play a constitutive role in the construction of othered identities and knowledge at a hidden level. The invisibility of whiteness is enabled through its tacit relationship with the non-white subject (Hage, 1998b). The descriptor women educators highlights the ways in which visible and less visible markers of difference are employed by the women as a mechanism of resistance and agency. In an otherwise un-race-conscious environment, the descriptor acts as a mechanism for developing race consciousness - or critical self-awareness of how the
act of self-identification and identification by others is laden with hidden assumptions (Stewart Brush, 2001) - for the purpose of unveiling struggles for power between the dominant white group and subordinate groups, as well as ethno-racial relations between and within minority groups.

**Globalisation and Education**

Literature on global change and education has enabled the experiences of the women in this study to be understood as more than individual stories, but existing within a wider historical and institutional context. Studies have acknowledged that forces of globalisation have had a tremendous influence on our lives at an international, national, individual and state level as well as on our social institutions (Appadurai, 1990; Faist, 2001; Tisenkopfs, 2001; Page & Sosniak, 2002). Debates about globalisation, nationalism and their relationship to violence, power and education have gained momentum in recent educational debates. In the US, scholars have begun to look at education through the experience of, and in reference to, the attacks in Washington and New York on 11 September 2001 (Hansen, 2002; Haywood Metz, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Willinsky, 2002). These events and subsequent shifts in geopolitical relationships have opened up debate in educational literature about the purpose of education and the different assumptions underpinning reform efforts.

The influence of globalisation forces can be illustrated through reference to Appadurai (1990), who highlights the increasing importance of global flows of knowledge, information, media and peoples. The author offers a useful nuanced framework for understanding the complex nature of global interactions and change. In order to
understand this complexity, Appadurai asserts, we need to find new ways of thinking about the relationships and flows between various cultural, social, economic, technological and representational phenomena. The connections between these are far from straightforward, natural or immutable and are highly fluid and complex, involving a range of intersections. To this end, he uses the concept of -scapes to assist in the understanding of these disjunctures, which include: *ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes* and *ideoscapes*.

Ethnoscapes and ideoscapes are particularly helpful for illustrating the impact of global forces on education and their subsequent relevance to the experiences of the women in my study. Appadurai defines ethnoscape as referring to the inevitable expansive movement of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we all live (Appadurai, 1990). These include immigrants, refugees, exiles, tourists, temporary visa guest workers and other moving individuals and groups of people. Appadurai argues that it is because of the increased global movement of peoples that traditional boundaries around nations, communities and identities are altering and shifting. The women in this study are part of this global diaspora having migrated to Australia after multiculturalism was introduced as a social policy in the mid-1970s. Each woman brought with her different geographic and linguistic histories and experiences from countries in South-East Asia, Latin America, North America, Scandinavia and the UK and, therefore, issues of immigration, histories and identities play an important constitutive role in their narrativised experiences in Australian universities.

Dimitriades and Kamberelis (1997) draw from Appadurai’s model to demonstrate the power of shifting global ethnoscapes on educational reform. They argue that global
educational reform responses are often articulated through the project of multicultural education. The weakness of this approach is that it tends to overlook the issue of power differentials, where difference is reduced to an individual and personal issue rather than in terms of systems of power and the power of global discourses (Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997). This is applicable to Australian multicultural education efforts in that it assumes goodwill of the dominant cultural majority (i.e. tolerance), but when goodwill is frayed – as it has been by asylum seekers and the war on terror - there is no legal framework to protect or preserve individual or group rights.

According to Dimitriades and Kamberilis, while there are new kinds of diversity evolving as a result of these global movements of peoples, significant demographic changes in countries such as Australia can be seen as the cause of, or trigger for, various forms of violence, including racial violence. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge power differentials in educational contexts. Grossberg (1996) and Massey (in Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997) believe that such violence is related to the overlapping of different cultural spaces that are occupied by groups with different kinds of mobility. Socio-economic mobility is vital to a person’s ability to access the labour market. Such access brings different kinds of material advantages as well as knowledge, status, income and life opportunities which enable access to healthcare, education and other social services. A group’s ability to move – whether upwards, sideways or down the social ladder - is reliant on its position in relation to other social groups.
Racial violence, therefore, cannot be explained in simplistic terms as a *naturally occurring*, universal and thus inevitable aspect of human behaviour. It needs to be understood in its full complexity as precipitated by global power structures and government policies that produce specific social and material conditions within a country. These conditions add fuel to people’s struggles and conflicts over resources that can result in social unrest and racial violence. Racial violence then, or violence which arises due to the articulation of difference that is undesirable and threatening to the dominant majority, is an indicator of historical and global political circumstances.

In Australia, racial violence assumes a range of forms, epitomised perhaps by ongoing public debate about the high mortality rate of Australian Aboriginal peoples and the human rights of adults and children who are involuntarily detained by the Australian Government while seeking political asylum. Anti-Asian sentiment, espoused in Parliament in 1996 most notably by Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party and in the 1980s by the Australian National Movement’s front man, Jack van Tongeren, has resurged in the new millennium. While the latter’s sentence for inciting racial violence received considerable attention a decade or so ago, upon his release from prison over twenty years later, van Tongeren’s media statements expressing no remorse for inciting racial violence attracted relatively less attention by the press. The legal and socio-cultural status of Aboriginal people in Australia is another source of contention and debate (Lee, 1995, 1998; Arber, 1998, 2000; Hage, 1998b, 2003; Stratton, 1998; Anderson, 2002; Gunew, 2002). More recently, a growing anti-Muslim sentiment in Australian society has emerged in response to Australia’s *war on terror* stance, highlighted by incidents such as the Cronulla race riots of 2006. All
these incidents signify the broader social and political climate in which this research is situated.

Bauman (1998), who writes extensively about the globally available types of mobility, points out that people from the whole world are moving, but the poor and oppressed are being pushed as illegal immigrants or refugees while the wealthy go as tourists. Not everyone is positioned in the same way in society and we all have varying degrees of access to opportunities at different stages of our lives. These life opportunities are accrued on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, able-bodied-ness and sexual orientation and these factors can facilitate as well as hinder our mobility; sometimes people do get stuck. This is consistent with Massey’s discussion of mobility (in Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997).

Massey utilises power geometries to explain how one group’s mobility is often enabled through another group’s exclusion or stasis. While mobility directs our attention to flows and movements, it does not take into account that access to these is not evenly distributed. Massey also suggests that social categories such as class, race, gender, sexual preference, age and occupation can greatly restrict one’s ability to engage in global movements. Similarly, Moreton-Robinson (2000b) argues for the political primacy of Indigenous people in Australia and that the mobility of all other groups and their interests are contingent on the subordination of the needs and interests of Aboriginal people. To help us understand these kinds of inter- and intra-group conflicts, Dimitriades and Kamberilis (1997) guide our attention to the differential distribution of power within different ethnoscapes and how these are linked to global educational discourses. It is for these reasons that the notion of
ethnoscapes has to be understood in the context of and in relationship to both global higher education and political discourses or ideoscapes.

Appadurai defines ideoscapes as relating to ideas, concepts, language and images such as freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation and democracy. These are used to construct a dominant narrative of the Enlightenment, which in turn helps to shape the kinds of political narratives that emerge and circulate through communication between the elite in different parts of the world (Stanley, 1996; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Extending this idea, Dimitriades and Kamberilis argue that contemporary education is marked by multiple and conflicting ideologies as well as multiple reform efforts. They identify three dominant ideoscapes (or ideologies and discourses) within educational debates: conservative, liberal-pluralist and critical pedagogy. While their discussion centres on debates in the US, it can also be applied to an Australian higher education context.

Firstly, Dimitriades and Kamberilis argue that conservative ideology places great emphasis on the importance of acquiring mobile skills and the promotion of cultural literacy, national goals and school choice to this end. This approach tends to construct education in terms of nationalistic and capitalistic interests as if these are natural and, therefore, as a matter of course, acceptable. Secondly, a liberal-pluralist ideology is seen to have emerged from an earlier progressive education era as a response to changing population demographics. According to the authors, such an ideological lens places emphasis on sharing and sameness. The aim of education is therefore striving for greater tolerance, understanding and goodness through the sharing of perspectives; however, this kind of surface approach tends to construct difference and distribution
of power and mobility as if there is a level playing field for all. Thirdly, the authors cite critical pedagogy as having the greatest potential for bringing together both democratic and educational ideals (Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997) as it places a strong emphasis on literacy as a key emancipatory practice for enabling people to define and understand themselves and their worlds in more meaningful as well as politically transformative ways. I would add that critical pedagogy also lends itself to other analyses of power relations (Lather, 1986, 1991; Harding, 1987), particularly within feminist pedagogy (Wing, 1997a, 1997b; Marshall, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As Dimitriades and Kamberelis note, proponents of critical pedagogy ideology have called for emancipatory agendas more than supporters of conservative and liberal-humanist ideologies have.

Of the three ideological approaches described, a critical approach, especially, directs attention to the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions in relation to race and difference and the purpose of higher education. It also assumes all knowledge claims are open to questioning, including its own field of reference. Rather than seeing educational discourses as hierarchically positioned, and thereby implying there is a single best way to deal with educational reform, it is perhaps more useful to think of ideoscapes as powerful and composite ideas which shape institutions. Each idea and type of discourse has its own flaws in its attempt to represent an educational ideal that is realisable and that meets the needs of those who are unable to access various cultural global flows.
A focus on ethnosapes and ideoscapes is particularly salient in the light of Australia’s international re-positioning and its increased closeness to the US as an ally in the *war on terror* and the war in Iraq. This can be viewed as a significant political alignment with dominant nations and organisations in an emerging cultural global order and has particular implications for the ways in which policy in Australia is evolving. From a global educational perspective, one can assume that neo-liberalism continues to circulating more widely, traversing geographic borders. Such discourses also enter and become part of the imagination of citizens and institutions outside the US through broader international political and commercial alliances, the rapid distribution of information through technology, and educational institutions.

In short, globalisation is a major force that continues to destabilise previous understandings and notions of identity and citizenship. It gives rise to enormous tensions between the global and the local. Appadurai’s and Dimitriades and Kamberelis’ research helps to situate my study within a prevailing global and national conservative climate where universities are being shaped by global flows. By linking ethnosapes and ideoscapes, it is possible to recognise the relationships between flows and how these combine to create various identity collectivities. This study argues that global social, political and economic forces have precipitated restructuring of our universities and, consequently, the lives of those who are working in the university including the subjects of the study. The four women in this study, through their particular experiential lenses, contribute new insights and knowledge to the higher education sector and to research on race/ethnicity.
The broad aim of my thesis was to document the experiences of women educators of colour so that these might inform debate about cultural diversity and the project of social justice in Australian higher education.

**The Study Aims**

The *study aims* were:

1. To document specific identificatory practices employed by women educators of colour and other social actors in Australian universities.

2. To document specific gatekeeping practices operating in the university relating to the construction and policing of boundaries set around identities and knowledge.

3. To explore the implications of gatekeeping practices in an identity and educative practice context.

4. To explore ways in which the concept of difference can be used in productive and innovative ways in knowledge production through research, teaching, learning, curriculum and policy reform.
The Research Questions

The main research questions are:

1. How does the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class work through processes of identity construction for four women of colour in Australian universities?

2. What are the experiences, within Australian universities, of women educators who are born in countries outside Australia?

3. What kinds of discourses are currently circulating in Australian universities and wider society about women of difference?

4. What are some of the barriers women encounter in universities and what kinds of resources do they draw from that enable them to navigate these barriers?

5. How do the women create meaning in the name of education for social change?

The study is based on a series of unstructured research conversations. The narrative method and the use of research conversations, as opposed to more formal interviews, provided a safe space for rich, in-depth dialogue and exploration of personal experiences. The data is presented in narrative form in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. While there are no empirical generalisations to be drawn from the women’s storied experiences, it is argued that the indicators or themes that emerge across the women’s
stories have theoretical and practical relevance to the knowledge production process and Chapter 7 is an analysis of these recurring thematic indicators. These include discourses of spirituality, motherhood, culture and different understandings of what these mean and why they are important in ethno-racial identity-making and education for social change. Other emergent indicators shed light on the importance of questioning the frameworks we use for research and analysis and on conceptions of diversity and social justice in higher education. The women’s stories about identity-making bring attention to the need to think outside of single category concepts and affirm not only the importance of documenting experiential data but also the potential dangers of applying a universal conception of difference, equity and social justice to people in all situations and locations, not only in higher education but also in other institutional contexts.

**Women in Academia**

The following is a discussion of the higher education literature landscape. Given the dearth of knowledge about race/ethnic diversity in Australian and global higher education studies, there are very few resources relating to diversity beyond a human resources context. In this section, the reasons for developing a conceptual framework about the diversity of women’s experiences in the university for the purposes of this study are outlined. The discussion begins with an analysis of higher education studies in Australia and in other Commonwealth countries. Through an analysis of Australian and overseas higher education and gender equity literature, the reasons for developing a multiple theoretical and disciplinary approach in the study are established. The key arguments underpinning this chapter are that debate about difference has yet to filter
through to Eurocentric university curriculum. In the majority of Australian studies on gender equity in higher education, the dimension of race/ethnicity tends to be overlooked, calling for greater reflexivity within the field itself.

It is from feminist research perspectives that we have learnt about the ways in which women have historically been excluded from the Academy (Olesen, 2000) (I utilise the phrase the Academy to identify higher education as a pivotal and powerful educational and social institution.) Neal (1998) explains that feminist research emerged as a direct challenge to the exclusion of women from social science research. Indeed, many writers have highlighted the ways in which women have been excluded from political, public and intellectual spheres until relatively recently (Ah Nee-Benham & Dudley, 1997; Brooks, 1997; Burton, 1997; Cotterill & Waterhouse, 1998; Bin-Sallik, 2000; Moreton-Robinson, 2000b; Ramsay, 2001; Currie, Thiele & Harris, 2002; Morley, 2003). Neumann and Peterson summarise women’s position in the Academy as follows:

*Historically, women have been excluded from the intellectual affairs of academic men; institutionalized intellectualism has assumed a male face and one that, historically, has been Western and white* (Neumann & Peterson, 1997: 4, drawing from Harding, 1986).

These kinds of gender divisions are maintained through different kinds of knowledge hierarchies within the Academy (Munn-Giddings, 1998). For example, the division between formal educational knowledge and informal knowledge acquired through personal versus public knowledge tends to construct subjective forms of knowledge as
academically invalid (Munn-Giddings, 1998, drawing from Spender, 1983, 1985). Academia, both as an institution and in its writing, also tends to marginalise and devalue emotions. In this research, however, I demonstrate that the concept of cultural diversity is highly contested in our universities (Ahmed, 1997). It is precisely because our understanding of this concept is tied up with that which we all hold dear to us - our worldview, beliefs and values - that it evokes high emotions and feelings ranging from fear to joy. These are important signifiers of how everyday reality is experienced differently. For some, the experience of oppression or subordination is a rarity, while for others it is experienced often on the basis of race/ethnicity and/or in relation to other markers of difference such as religious beliefs, gender or sexual orientation.

Thus, subjective experience and knowledge are more often seen in feminised terms and outside of the core business of the Academy (thereby relegating it to the private domain). Dualistic thinking in these terms, however, has been challenged by many feminist scholars (Neumann & Peterson, 1997). In particular, black feminist scholars such as bell hooks, Williams, Hill Collins and Ladson-Billings have deconstructed knowledge boundaries, successfully demonstrating that the personal is political (Hill Collins, 1997, 1999; hooks, 1990a, 1990b, 1994). In my study, it is assumed that the private, personal and public spheres are inextricably interwoven and not discrete and unrelated aspects of social experience. I have used a narrative approach to indicate recognition of experiential knowledge as valid (Neumann & Peterson, 1997; Edwards & Ribbens, 1998) and to provide detailed insights and a sensitive approach to exploring race and other related aspects of the interviewed women’s experiences.
Gender Equity in Higher Education

The field of gender equity studies has informed us of the impact of feminist and human rights movements on the inclusion of women in academia. According to Blattel-Mink, ‘women in higher education from all over the world [are] highly and culturally differentiated but equally positioned’ (2001: 3). That is, women across the globe remain under-represented at senior decision-making levels of the university. The author attributes this to socio-cultural and economic-political forces that play a pivotal part in ‘a society’s recognition of and dealing with gender inequality in higher education’ (Blattel-Mink, 2001: 4). This is consistent with Dimitriades and Kamberelis’ (1997) argument that wider historical and political forces shape dominant educational discourses and that these have a discursive impact on social relations in and beyond the university.

In Blattel-Mink’s (2001) summary of the key issues emerging from studies on women in higher education, she explains patterns of women’s under-representation in terms of vertical and horizontal inequality. Vertical inequality is used to describe a pattern of positioning within the university, where the higher in status the hierarchical structure of higher education, the lower the ratio of women tends to be. Horizontal inequality is a pattern that emerges from women choosing other fields of study to men (indicating gender discourses at work).

Blattel-Mink’s commentary in the introduction of the special edition journal on women in higher education, the International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, is that the collection is ‘without claim of completeness or representativeness’ (2001:
3). This implies that there is more to learn about different women, including the experiences of women, in general, and women educators within the university, more specifically. In the 2003 Clare Burton Memorial Lecture, Morley affirms that women in Commonwealth universities remain under-represented at senior university levels and calls for further qualitative and transcriptive data and the inclusion of more independent and unfunded research from diverse perspectives so that a clearer picture of how women educators’ experiences in a global context might differ from men’s and from each other’s may be gained (Morley, 2003).

In Australia, writers including Chesterman (2000), Barker and Kelly (2001) and Ramsay (2001) paint a favourable, if not highly complimentary, scenario for women in Australian universities. Ramsay suggests that:

*The situation of women in higher education in Australia is remarkably better than in other English speaking countries like the USA or the European countries. This is true for vertical as well as horizontal inequality* (Ramsay, 2001: 105).

According to Ramsay, there has been an overall increase in participation of women students in higher education courses and an over- and under-parity of women in various disciplines. The author also suggests that women’s participation in postgraduate studies has increased as have the number of females who have completed postgraduate degrees. An assumption made in much of the Australian research on gender equity in higher education is that these women will automatically become part of the pool from which universities can recruit staff in senior academic
positions (Burton, 1997; Ramsay, 2001); however, evidence of this has yet to emerge.

One of the few shortfalls mentioned by Ramsay (2001) is the continuing low levels of permanency and higher proportion of casual and part-time positions occupied by women relative to their male colleagues.

At first glance, it would appear that women are faring well in Australian universities. The Colloquium of Senior Women Executives in Higher Education highlights the successful efforts to ‘increase women’s representation of female vice chancellors in Australia to 24%’ (Blattel-Mink, 2001: 13) and Blattel-Mink further supports Ramsay’s research, in stating that ‘with these numbers and with the proportions of women in “male” disciplines like engineering or sciences, Australia positions itself at one of the top ranks in the world’ (Blattel-Mink, 2001: 12). In these key studies, however, there is no mention of how the dimension of race/ethnicity interacts with these findings or whether statistics used in the study have taken race/ethnicity into consideration. There is no mention of how women are positioned in different ways in the university nor how policy is constructed in relation to the contradictory conceptions of difference.

In the majority of Australian studies on gender equity in higher education, discussion pivots around reasons attributing to the improving status of women in the Academy. To further illustrate this claim, I refer to Wyn (1996) and Burton’s (1997) research on women in the university. Burton’s report entitled Gender Equity in Australian University Staffing provides invaluable insight into the micro- and macro-political influences at work in the university. Burton appears to arrive at a similar conclusion to Blattel-Mink: that women are more likely to be at the lower position ranks in the
academic hierarchy than their male counterparts and women are more likely to be
working in *caring* vocations such as nursing, social work and teaching. She also
acknowledges some recent changes in terms of women’s increased participation and
inclusion as students, postgraduates, staff and senior decision-makers in different
locations of the university. She attributes this to the development and implementation
of strong equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action (AA) policies
in the last decade.

In her narrative study of a small group of senior women working in Education
faculties in Australian universities, Wyn (1996) acknowledges the impact of
globalisation on higher education. She suggests that recent free-market driven or
conservative ideologies have caused major restructuring, impacting disproportionately
on women in academia. She notes that while reform goals have remained the same in
higher education (as articulated in the 1975 Karmel Report on improving the
experiences of girls in schooling), the overall political context in Australia has
changed dramatically. Wyn’s findings are consistent with research into adult
education (Usher *et al.*, 1997) and the impact of globalisation on higher education, as
discussed in the previous section. From Wyn’s perspective, the news is not as good as
the surface suggests.

Both Burton and Wyn’s discussions centre mainly on the experiences of white women
in the university. Overall, their research demonstrates how agendas of control and the
dominance of certain groups are maintained through particular mechanisms of
recruitment, selection and promotion, which tend to favour white middle class men.
The key point of contention between the two writers is on whether EEO and AA
policies and programs help or hinder the career advancement of women in higher education.

On this point, Burton (1997) notes that universities have recently shifted away from concerns about compliance with EEO legislation to examine the extent of their impact on institutions. In other words, research on women in the university has shifted away from interest in women’s personal attributes and job choices to questioning what the barriers to women’s progress might be. Burton argues that EEO programs and policies correlate directly with the achievement of gender balance in staffing and women’s representation at senior decision-making levels. She writes that for some stronger EEO university programs, a positive relationship exists between these and women’s employment profiles. Stronger programs are equated with the development of specific goals and mechanisms for achieving these. Burton also suggests that while some universities have made substantial progress towards integrating EEO into strategic planning exercises, others have not. Although there is evidence that some universities have implemented EEO principles in a critical and strategic way, what remains unexamined is the issue of how many universities have yet to develop strong mechanisms for achieving equity goals. This suggests that universities need to look beyond the organisational and employment context to the production of knowledge in the university and the communities outside the university with which it is affiliated through its research, teaching and learning.

While Burton argues that strong EEO polices correlate closely with women’s progress in the university, Wyn critiques EEO legislative discourse as limiting and even counterproductive because it:
... [Does] not challenge the system that is already in place. Equal opportunity measures simply have the goal that disadvantaged groups will take up the same ‘opportunities’ that advantaged groups already avail themselves of. This approach misses the point entirely that it is the system of merit, promotion and work practices that restricts the full participation of all groups (Wyn, 1996: 5).

For Wyn, the weakness of EEO discourse lies in its use of gender-neutral language, which merely serves the status quo rather than interrupts it. On this issue, I must agree as the findings of her study support criticisms aimed at the philosophy and practice of equal opportunity. That is:

The terms, conditions and notions of merit which women have to measure up to in order to reach seniority remain largely those which have traditionally been reflected in the experience of males. Equal opportunity measures in universities have, if anything, tended to reinforce these standards (Wyn, 1996: 16).

I would further add that the omission of race/ethnicity and whiteness in gender equity research also has a powerfully constitutive effect. For example, while Ramsay (2001) makes no reference to the dimensions of race/ethnicity, Wyn’s research on senior women working in faculties of education acknowledges the multilayered nature of women’s experiences. Marginality is acknowledged as both positive and negative; simultaneously both a strength and weakness. Overall, it seems that the subject position of woman is treated as a homogeneous category and the diversity within the category of women educators of colour is largely overlooked in the majority of gender
equity studies. This leaves the experiences of the women in this study, and many others, unacknowledged.

To further illustrate this point, reference can be made to a recent study by Barker and Kelly (2001). Their research follows on from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs’ (DETYA) national comparative analysis in 2000, tracking the number of women entering senior levels of the university. Their findings show that senior women’s progression has improved, albeit marginally. At the 2006 International Women’s Executive Development Conference on Gender Equity it was reported that this number remains much the same. Overall, the rate of progression of senior women in higher education in Australian universities is slow (Barker & Kelly, 2001). The statistical information from which they have drawn their conclusions (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) does not, however, take into account dimensions of race/ethnicity and the complexity of the identification process.

This oversight might also be partly attributable to the discourse of new managerialism (Zipin & Brennan, 2003). Like dominant discourses of masculinity and patriarchy, managerialism tends to place greater value on competitiveness over cooperation. Such a culture of competitiveness is seen to reify existing hierarchical structures in the university, effectively silencing ‘dissent and democratic participation and contestation’ (Wyn, 1996: 2). For Wyn, dominant discourses operate as a form of oppression that stifles rather than stimulates knowledge production practices in the university in much the same way as dominant discourses of difference suppress debate about what counts as important dominant cultural narratives and thereby excludes peripheral identities, knowledge and histories.
The Australian Technology Network (2006), in collaboration with the Women’s Executive Development, reiterate that while numbers of women have increased in the university, their vertical and horizontal mobility remains stunted. Progress is slow, not only in Australia but also in other Commonwealth countries (Bjork-Billings, Warnock & Lawrence, 2006; Ramsey et al., 2006; Shah, 2006; Winchester, 2006; Yuen-Tsang, 2006). Gender equity studies is one of the fields that has allowed debate about diversity to emerge. This body of knowledge has traced and advocated for women’s progression and inclusion in the university, confirming that women are under-represented at different levels in the university largely as a result of patriarchy and other forms of oppression, including racism. That is, forces of oppression are acknowledged as having an accumulative and combined negative impact, creating a range of barriers to career advancement.

Key issues highlighted within gender equity studies point to:

- Different kinds of barriers attributable to the prevailing male culture of universities.
- Forces of globalisation which have a disproportionately negative impact on women and other disenfranchised groups.
- The impact of institutional processes that hinder women’s access to education and employment (for example, the practice of employing staff on a casual basis impacts significantly on women who are over-represented in junior and non-continuing positions in the university and on other disenfranchised groups).
• The lack of parity in terms of representation of women across different knowledge fields and the operation of gendered knowledge hierarchies and systems.

In short, the prevailing climate in the university is linked to a cultural predisposition that privileges males and is a cash-oriented value system. Given the over-representation of men in higher decision-making communities within the university, it is no surprise that the institutional values and priorities are seen by many as serving dominant white male interests above other groups.

An observation in my reading of Australian gender equity studies is the tendency to whitewash the issue of diversity by focusing on gender as separate from race/ethnicity. This is in contrast to certain Canadian and North American counterparts who acknowledge the intersectionality between race, ethnicity, sexuality, class and other social dimensions. This narrow focus on gender (and class) in Australia tends to mainly frame women’s experiences in terms of barriers to career progression in the university. According to Burton (1997), the notion of success is seen by many as contingent on their conformity to values of university, which is increasingly tied to the state and industry (Usher et al., 1997). Similarly, the assumption underpinning much of the Australian gender equity literature is that career advancement to vice-chancellorship is the primary motivational force for women in the university. What remains un questioned is the discourse of employment opportunities and career advancement as conceived within the context of individualistic, masculinist and meritocratic ideals.
While Morley (2003, 2006) continues to point to the gap in knowledge regarding the diversity of women’s experiences in higher education, the aim of this study was to respond to this lack and collect in-depth descriptive data on the experiences of women educators who were positioned as other in the university. This required a qualitative approach that went beyond a question of locating and counting the women (although this would be a worthy project on its own). My focus was to find out who was out there, where they were working, what had happened to them while working in the university and what resources they drew from to make sense of their everyday lives and work. Through the exploration of life stories (Ahmed, 1997; Bochner, 2000; Charon, 2001), the women’s narratives shed a new light on the contribution of women of diversity in Australian higher education and function as indicators of how the project of education for social change is faring in the current socio-political climate.

The women’s stories in this study are not conventional success stories nor tales of victimisation. Instead, they challenge the concept of work as it is presented in gender equity and general higher education studies through their narrative constructions of race/ethnicity. Although the women have been able to attain relatively senior positions in the university, they question whether career advancement necessarily affords the kind of influence of power that is needed to affect social change within the university and in the wider society. Furthermore, they look to a range of alternative resources for creating meaning around work - to spirituality, motherhood, culture and identity - which are currently missing from the Australian gender equity landscape and in general higher education literature. By placing the women’s narratives within a specific institutional context with an analytical focus on difference, race/ethnicity and whiteness, this study provides alternative insights into how difference is enacted in
university practices and how race and ethnic identities are partners in the global *knowledge economy* production process.

**Constructions of Culture in the University**

One of the few writers in Australia who has explored the diversity of women’s experiences in the university is Luke. In her study of female managers in universities in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, Luke (2002) discusses the dimensions of race, ethnicity and gender in different historical and geopolitical contexts. She argues that the conceptualisation of barriers to women’s career advancement is a western concept that is not universally applicable to all women. For the women in Luke’s study, the taking up of western and feminist discourses was integral to their work as managers, but they also perceived it as a barrier to their career advancement. This paradox exists for these women because the cultural attitudes and values of the wider societies in which they live actually militate ‘against meritocratic equality and academic career aspirations to senior management levels’ (Luke, 2002: 2). Some of the women saw this as compromising their safety and standing in communities both inside and outside of the university. Clearly, historical and geopolitical contexts are important as, in some contexts, the taking up of feminist discourses can have potentially negative consequences if these transgress local cultural norms.

As in the case of the majority of general studies on women in higher education, Luke’s findings reveal the difference in experiences between men and women working in South-East Asian universities compared to men and women working in
Luke’s study provides important insights into how local cultural value systems have a discursive impact on men and women. It also shows how essentialising cultural value systems can determine gender roles and relations of power, and the variety of consequences this might have in different historical and geopolitical contexts. That is, there are different ramifications for the women in her study who were positioned as
different on the basis of gender and culture. She writes that ‘women’s roles and conduct in public life are framed by cultural expectations that still place a premium on women as wives, mothers and homemakers and on women’s conduct as “subdued”, “quiet”, and “withdrawn”’ (Luke, 2002: 5). The women in Luke’s study had to negate and challenge these local value systems in subversive ways while also avoiding being in the line of fire. In short, the study illustrates how easily essentialised notions of culture are re-inscribed as well as the variety of consequences these have for women situated in different locations and contexts.

I have two concerns, however, related to Luke’s study. Firstly, Luke’s uses of the notions of work and success are framed in terms of globalisation and equity discourses. There is an assumption that the aspirations of women in the university are primarily career-focussed. This, and her omission of race, only partially interrupts the neo-liberal paradigm which is reflected by these discourses. My second concern relates to Luke’s use of the term western. According to Said, implicated in the eastern/western binary is the tacit assumption that European or western identity is superior to non-European, non-western peoples and cultures and that the latter are lagging behind in development and progress (Said, 1978). Said’s concept of Orientalism signifies the system of ideological fictions which depend on this same positional superiority, which places the westerner in multiple possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing the relative upper hand in that relationship (Said, 1978). That is, in using the term western unproblematically, we cannot escape Orientalist distinctions between us/them and east/west by pretending they do not exist, but we can trouble these binaries and the historical trajectories underpinning them (Said, 1978). In response to these concerns, I avoided using the east/west binary in my
study due to its tendency to homogenise the notion of culture and the values upheld as important within different geopolitical contexts. The east/west binary also tends to reify the divide between us and them on the basis of an overly simplistic understanding of difference.

Although success is acknowledged by the women in my study as relating to individual status, income and compliance with university goals, their individual understandings of success do not fit neatly within this paradigm. The barriers encountered by the women are also resources for reinvention. This suggests that gender cannot be thought of as disconnected from issues of race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and other social dimensions, but rather that these overlap and intersect in highly complex ways. This study draws on mixed-race theory and my own identification as mixed-race as this enabled me to acknowledge the enormous complexity of concepts such as culture, race/ethnic difference and how these relate to women’s work in higher education. It highlighted the importance of questioning the assumptions underpinning the frameworks used to define and understand women’s work in the university.

Introducing the Women

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the reader will become more familiar with the four women in this study, which includes me, Caroline, as one of the four. The other three women in the study were given or self-nominated a pseudonym: Satra, Kali, Manuela. The field stories are presentations of my interpretation of the women’s narrativised experiences. They are based on the transcripts of the research conversations and were constructed in consultation with the women in the study. I have presented the data in narrative
form, juxtaposing the women’s narratives with my own to capture the complexity of the women’s lived experiences, the contradictions within the research process itself and the nature of the dialogic research situation and knowledge construction. I have integrated verbatim excerpts from the research conversation transcripts: Chapter 4 is based on my research conversations with Satra; Chapter 5 is based on my discussions with Kali; and Chapter 6 is based on conversations with Manuela.

Although we had individually pondered the salience of identity in relation to our pedagogy and life in the university, this was the first time that we found ourselves embarking on a research venture where we were the subjects drawing from our own autobiographies; a challenging task but one that each of the three women generously embraced. The women wanted to share these stories with others, to collectively unveil the silence around race/ethnicity in Australian universities and to make sense of and explore new ideas about what it means to be different and to teach around the subject of difference in a variety of contexts. In my study, I have analysed the implications of these storied experiences (McCormack 2000a, 2000b), not in an abstracted way but in an embodied and situated way. My inquiry is grounded in the lived narrative experiences of four women educators of colour - Satra, Kali, Manuela and me - each of whom was working in a different state and at different sites throughout the country at the time of the study. Underpinning these storied experiences is the premise that the personal and professional are not mutually exclusive but integrated aspects of everyday life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Brettell, 1997; Neumann & Peterson, 1997; de Certeau et al., 1998; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).
The Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its development of a conceptual framework which enables the diversity of women’s experiences in the university to emerge. The study reveals that although policy relating to diversity, equal opportunity and gender equity is being implemented, there is no cohesive national framework or mechanisms at present for addressing the issue of race/ethnic representation in Australian higher education. In this study, it is demonstrated that not only is there a lack of documentation about the race/ethnicity of staff, but the language of difference used to describe and classify various disenfranchised groups is limiting and even misleading. This makes it difficult to evaluate potential improvements or gains within the project of education for social change in higher education.

The study opens up debate about the silence surrounding race in Australian higher education. Through the ensuing chapters, it is argued that the gap in knowledge about the diversity of women’s experiences in the university is the result of various racialised discourses and gatekeeping practices operating in the university. The study documents the various kinds of epistemological gatekeeping practices encountered by the women in the university and the impact of these on the women. Therefore, the study contributes to our growing understanding of: the university as a place of whiteness; multiple navigations of identity as an important conceptual resource for enacting agency; and how and why these practices are employed by the four women in the study.
The practice of multiple positioning is revealed as both an important resource and a strategy for countering any essentialising classification and categorisation of the ethnic other. It also makes it easier to identify dominant discourses of race. In doing so, it renders visible taken-for-granted assumptions about difference in the university so that multiplicity can be valued and recognised because of its ability to question taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin current discourses, policies and practices relating to cultural diversity, equity and the question of ‘What is education?’

This research reveals not only that race matters but also how race matters in Australian universities. Our stories challenge existing frameworks underpinning cultural diversity and gender equity which overlook the ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class intersect and cannot, therefore, be treated as separate dimensions of lived experience. The study provides a partial glimpse into the diversity of experiences of women and a range of alternative interpretations of how power operates in the university. The women’s stories indicate a need to create new meanings about work (in education for social change) based on these varied understandings.

This study highlights similarities and differences across the women’s narratives. From these, consistency of particular indicators that appear across all the women’s stories are identified and analysed. The discussion on the implications of these emergent indicators for the women in the study and in a broader higher education context is an important aspect of the study. The study brings attention to the kinds of resources the women draw on to construct meaning and purpose to the project of education for social change and in their own social change practice. A range of suggestions are
made for interventional strategies and future directions for research to build on this study and further fill the enormous gap in knowledge on race/ethnicity, women in higher education and the conception of social justice in higher education pedagogy.

A Time, A Place, Another Context

This research is located in the here-and-now time that is comprised of an accretion of histories, material conditions and personal circumstance, and in the place and contexts of external forces that inform and shape the women’s life choices and decisions such as globalisation, recent geopolitical shifts and past and current educational and social policies at both national and local levels.

It is assumed, in this study, that race is a socially-constructed category rather than a naturally occurring category or scientific classification system (Omi & Winant, 1993; Zack, 1998; Jones, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Anthias, 2002). While race is a construct, many people continue to experience oppression on the basis of race and other markers of difference in very real terms. Some studies have shown that the unquestioned discourse of race as a naturally occurring classification and categorisation system continues to resonate in political and educational contexts (Omi & Winant, 1993; Scheurich, 1997; Hage, 1998, 2003; Stratton, 1998). Following on from this premise, a considerable body of work has recently emerged in Australia examining the ways in which boundaries relating to identity and community are delineated (Gunew, 1994, 2002; Hage, 1998a, 1998b, 2003; Ang, 2000; Dolby, 2000a). For instance, Perera’s research on the Australian One Nation party (an, arguably, extreme right-wing political party formed in 1996) convincingly
demonstrates that the 1990s saw a return of the earlier white Australia policy rhetoric and its racist underpinnings (Perera & Pugliese, 1997; Perera, 1998, 2000). Such politics, however, are not confined to the government or mass media. Dolby argues that essentialising conceptions of identity, community and difference are also deeply embedded in educational discourse - a hidden aspect of multicultural education (Dolby, 2000a). Like a barometer, dominant discourses or ideas accepted as *commonsense* indicate the fluctuations in the social and political climate at different historical moments.

In Australia, debates about identity are not a recent phenomenon but a reflection of the shifting historical circumstances in which Australia, as a federation and a colony, was established. In social policy terms, we have travelled some distance from declaring this an empty and unoccupied land (*terra nullius*) and traversing the White Australia and assimilation policies to reaching today’s multiculturalist state from which these former policies are now widely recognised as overtly racist (Gunew, 1994, 2002; Hage, 1998b, 2003; Stratton, 1998). At the time of its inception in the 1970s, multiculturalism was seen as a form of social management, a means of fulfilling international treaty obligations and a foundation for building new and solid trade partnerships (Jakubowicz, 1984; Kalantzis & Cope, 1986).

In an educational context, multiculturalism is now a concept that patrols the corridors of our schools and universities with a familiar rhythm and ambit (Arber, 1997; Dolby, 2000a; Obidah, 2000). The subtle connections among whiteness, *Asian-ness* and other identity constructions are, however, rarely explored outside of cultural theory in Australia (Gopalkrishnan, 2002). For this reason, and because of the lack of debate
about the issues outside the fields of cultural and postcolonial studies, I had to look beyond higher education and Australian studies for the resources needed to acknowledge the diversity of women’s experiences.

**Positionality**

For many that are rendered invisible or silent on the margins of society and the Academy, the notion of agency, or possibilities for rethinking and rearticulating a sense of self, becomes an integral dimension to any meaning making and knowledge production process. This offers possibilities for a range of *ways of knowing* the world and how we might be situated. It is through the interaction between the *self* and *others* within the social world that we are able to ‘map our way out of the constructions that we might find ourselves constrained by in our everyday lives’ (Diamond, 1995: 80).

This study combines the aforementioned theoretical approaches to enable this mapping process to emerge and, therefore, a key concept underpinning this research is *positionality*.

Positionality is explained by critical race theorist Stewart Brush (2001) as a politicised and oppositional consciousness of race and racism that requires reflection and awareness of the self. Alcoff affirms its importance, that:

\[ ... \text{[within a given situation, identity is a product of a person’s interpretations and reconstructions of her own history. The discourses available for understanding and interpreting experience, discourses that change with different historical conditions, mediate identity (Alcoff, 1988: 177).} \]
Another narrative writer explains that if:

_We position self, and not powerful others, at the centre of the cosmology of ideas and practices, the chief resource that we each bring to this work is us, the person we are, the viewpoints that we represent, and the concerns that we voice._

_We mark our way through the universe by our inquiries_ (Diamond, 1995: 80).

In the following section I position myself as both researcher and a subject of the research. Often, when I am asked to identify myself in race/ethnic terms, my reply is ‘Mixed, actually’. Born in Malaysia, I am a product of what is commonly referred to as a mixed-race union. From my mother, I have imbied the identity of Chinese-ness and from my father Indian-ness. I have lived in Malaysia, the UK, Sweden, and in Australia for the past thirty years. I have undergone schooling in the UK, Sweden and Australia. My first language is English (Australian Standard) and my second language is Swedish. This education has enabled me to pursue studies in higher education and to acquire considerable social, cultural and intellectual capital (Webb, Shirato & Danaher, 2002), culminating in over twenty years’ experience as an educator in a range of institutional and community settings. As a consequence, the identification process in singular, unitary and monocultural terms has always been highly problematic for me as I have always self-identified as mixed-race or multi-racial. Given Australia’s increasingly diverse, or mixed, population demographic, there are many people who have multiple cultural and race/ethnic influences who might also find themselves positioned in ambiguous and even exclusionary ways because they do not wish, or for various reasons are unable, to express their group membership identity in narrow terms.
I have drawn on my own experiences as a starting point for developing a multiple race/ethnic standpoint dialogic framework that highlights intersectionality in a lived experiential context and allows for the similarities and differences in the women’s experiences to emerge. My own positioning is a constant obstacle to an objective understanding of what constitutes valid knowledge and ways of knowing in my educative practice. This is one of the key reasons for me developing a multiple perspective dialogic framework and for wanting to speak with Satra, Kali and Manuela.

An Overview of Ontology and Epistemology

The following is a brief explanation of the methodological approach and methods used in the research, which is further elaborated on in Chapter 3. Here, however, I explain the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning the study through a discussion of the kinds of ethical challenges that emerged during the research and how I resolved these. I argue that because of the nature of the inquiry, the under-representation of people of colour at senior levels of the university and the lack of demographic data on race/ethnicity, the practical and theoretical aspects of the research proved to be challenging. I discuss key concepts and theories of knowledge that have informed my construction of a multiple race/ethnic standpoint dialogic methodology and my choice of method.

The historical formation of traditions in different fields of knowledge has been considerably well critiqued from Maori (Tuhiwai Smith, 2001), Australian Indigenous (Bin-Sallik, 2000; Moreton-Robinson, 2000a, 2000b) and feminist scholarly
perspectives (Neumann & Peterson, 1997). Therefore, it was important for me not to reproduce the same colonising and appropriating practices in this research in terms of ontology and epistemology.

I have assumed that ontology, or the nature of being, is not a universal or unitary given. What is real for one person is not necessarily real for another or in the same way for all people. Our social realities are not simply determined by the personality traits we exhibit but are also dependent on how the dimensions of race/ethnicity/class/gender/sexual orientation and other differences are embodied and inhabited. These dimensions intersect for each of us in a range of different ways. Also important to the study are the ways in which societies prioritise or privilege particular identities, social values and ways of knowing by creating norms around these. These types of concerns have originated from critical race scholarship in the US (Olesen, 2000). Scholars of colour, notably Du Bois (1953) and Said (1978), and others, have written about the ways in which ‘discursive, social, and institutional structures have created a sense of “otherness” for those who are outside of the dominant culture paradigm’ (Ladson-Billings, 2000: 258). Collectively, these perspectives bring attention to the ways in which systems of knowledge contribute to this process of othering individuals and groups and to differential power distribution.

In this study, I have assumed epistemology to be more than individual ways of knowing and knowledge; it also relates to systems of knowing that have ‘both an internal logic and external validity’ (Ladson-Billings, 2000: 257), supporting Ladson-Billing’s premise that there are ‘well-developed epistemologies, that differ to the dominant Euro-American epistemology’ (Ladson-Billings, 2000: 258). This was an
important consideration in order to respect and acknowledge the parameters of what was real for the women in the study and the ways in which each woman negotiated her particular way of knowing and knowledge perspective. Moreover, as the researcher, I wanted to examine the contours around what constitutes different identities and epistemologies through the women’s narratives.

In my analysis, time and place become important dimensions. Rather than hold the women to the epistemological foundations that have emerged in this particular research context, I have assumed that our epistemologies change over the course of our lifetimes (White, 1997). This research story is, therefore, a partial representation of my knowledge and interpretation constructed through interaction with the women in the study at a particular moment in time. Rather than purporting to be a true description of events and incidents in the women’s lives, this is a reconstruction of my dialogue with the women. It is one of many possible analyses of the narrative experiences of the women, constructed by the researcher and critically informed by the women in the study.

Drawing from social constructionism, standpoint, narrative and critical race theories of knowledge, my understanding of the nature of knowledge is that knowledge production is not a value-neutral enterprise (Harding, 1986; Schutz, 2000). As both researcher and a subject of the research, I am complicit in the knowledge production process (Kohler Riessman, 1993; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). From this perspective, theory does not spontaneously materialise from abstract generalisations or thoughts which are disconnected from particular situations or contexts, but, rather, theory draws from experience and is generated through individuals and social groups
(Schutz, 2000). Instead of viewing knowledge as the property of the individual, it is assumed that knowledge is constructed in situ and through relationships (Gergen, 1995; Wenger, 1998; Hruby, 2001). Therefore, another important conceptual building block of the study is the concept of our *lived relation* to the physical world and to other human beings, or *relationality* (van Manen, 1990). My particular interests lay in the implications of identity in relation to the women’s work in the university and the similarities and differences between the women’s social realities.

Greenbank argues that there is no value-free research, especially when government-funded research has a significant impact on research agendas (Greenbank, 2002). Values have a tremendous influence in shaping policy and practice. Within the research situation too, I had to consider how my own values, the values of the interviewed women and also the values of key decision-makers in the university would have a bearing on the research. It is in this context that I have tried to address and explain the reflexive approach in my writing of the thesis (Greenbank, 2002). If I had assumed that research is a value-neutral enterprise, I would not have been able to trouble the knowledge production process, including educational and pedagogical processes, which is central to this inquiry. In this thesis, I argue that research methodology and methods are not the same and that neither can be value-free in its application. These values are likely to be reflected on both an unconscious and a conscious level (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991; Greenbank, 2002). Chapter 3 is a discussion of how values inevitably impact upon all forms of research as seen, for example, in the researcher’s selection of the method of sampling, design, the way in which data is gathered and presented, how knowledge is defined and even the epistemologies brought to the research. Indeed, it is not only the researcher who
brings particular assumptions to the research but, in the case of this study, also the interviewed women and other stakeholders in the university.

In this research story, assumptions about universal truth and objectivity give way to intersubjective experiences and multiple truths. Rather than assume I could objectively report on the women - a perspective that would have, ethically, been highly problematic - I accepted the premise of the researcher’s complicity in the knowledge production process and the complexities and responsibilities that this entailed.

**Establishing Common Ground**

The categories used in Australian universities to describe difference can also delimit ways of thinking about identity and race/ethnic group membership of various kinds (Ladson-Billings, 2000, drawing from Narayan). This was a problem from the very start of the research journey as the process of locating women who identified with the descriptor of *women educators of colour* proved more difficult than I had originally anticipated. Not all the women I approached for the study were willing to identify themselves in such terms or felt comfortable about engaging in dialogue about it. Some of the women I approached were visibly different to the majority and this raised concerns about the participants’ identifiableness in the study, making it more difficult for me to find willing participants and also to protect their privacy, which are issues fully explored in Chapter 7.
Some women, for example, expressed an interest in the research but offered to be critical readers rather than participants. Implicit in this refusal were concerns about the nature of the study such as its biographical and narrative approach, its intimate relationship with the concepts of race/ethnicity and the potentially sensitive nature of experiences associated with these. One woman, after a preliminary meeting during which she acknowledged the difficulty of her ethnic positioning within her faculty, informed me that this was obviously a form of personal therapy for me, wished me luck and promptly left. Another woman felt frustrated and angry because I was unable to call her at the agreed times. People’s private lives and commitments, including my own, together with disparate interstate time differences sometimes proved to be difficult obstacles to negotiate.

Some colleagues and some supervisors whom I approached expressed discomfort in talking about racism or naming their own whiteness or even exploring its relevance to the relationship between the supervisor and the postgraduate student. This made it important for me to search for supervisors whose theoretical knowledge base included poststructural, postmodern and critical race theory (CRT) and whose political approaches were compatible with my research. My reason for not including white women educators in the study was because of my particular interest in exploring the notion of whiteness as a colour (Frankenberg, 1993; Roman, 1993a, 1993b) from a range of non-white perspectives. It was of particular interest to me to examine how the non-white subject is constructed as the other.

Other important criteria for the research conversations were that the women educators had personal experience and knowledge of oppression on a race/ethnic basis, that they
had thought about and were aware of this and were willing to articulate these experiences in a public way. None of the white educators whom I approached early in the study articulated this experience. This does not mean that white educators do not have such experiences; however, it does point out the importance of problematising race consciousness (Stewart Brush, 2001). While critical whiteness studies, in particular, calls for white women to examine their own race position, it is more often assumed that women of colour already have acquired race consciousness (Stewart Brush, 2001). As I elaborate on in Chapters 3 and 7, this assumption became problematic at the early stages of selection of participants and of the analysis. These factors and time constraints helped to narrow down my research interest to the exploration of difference through the non-white subject.

In the research situation, it was important to establish rapport so that the participants felt comfortable exploring their life stories and race/ethnic identities with me, the researcher, and visa versa. Establishing rapport on this basis enabled an in-depth exploration of the concepts of racism, and other forms of oppression, and their effects on the self and others, not just in theory but in a lived and embodied sense. Speaking with other educators who had experienced oppression on a race/ethnic basis and who had taught around this subject allowed for an analysis of how theory can be applied to practice in anti-oppression education. Through the study of racism, I was able to extrapolate similarities and differences and apply these to a higher education context (Manglitz, 2003). For these reasons, it was important to develop common ground for the research conversations to unfold as smoothly as possible. In hindsight, the women who participated in the study accepted these research assumptions and from this point
of departure we were able to explore and compare multiple situated social realities. Without this common ground, it would have eventuated into quite a different study.

Though I initially approached some of my Aboriginal colleagues to participate in the research, none of these women were included in my study. Indigenous women scholars have entered the Australian Academy only very recently, for reasons Mary Bin-Sallik and the women in her book expand on in some detail (Bin-Sallik, 2000). Participation and retention rates of Aboriginal students in schooling and in higher education have been of great concern to educators and policy-makers. Although there are now Indigenous centres for research and study in most universities, many are struggling to maintain their positions due to significant funding cuts in higher education over the past eight years that have impacted on centres for Indigenous, Women’s and Multicultural studies.

Other postgraduate students and staff in the university questioned me, in the initial stages of my research, on the appropriateness of speaking with Indigenous women and it became apparent that the histories and concerns of Aboriginal women are perceived by many as very different to those of ethnic or multicultural women. Some Indigenous colleagues with whom I already had a working affiliation or friendship at the university where I worked expressed an enthusiasm for such an exploratory process. It became obvious over time, however, that I could not interview women who were working at the same university as this would have limited the scope of the study too much and might also have increased the chances of the women being identifiable.
Furthermore, although we shared similar experiences of oppression and being othered, the Indigenous women seemed to be talking about very different, if not divergent, political concerns. The concept of the mixed-race subject that was of key importance in my research did not have the same priority in these women’s lives nor in their current political projects. Instead, the notions of my people and my country were evoked in the context of exploring, healing and coming to terms with the long-term and systemic racism enacted on Indigenous Australians since British colonisation and the disastrous impact this has had on Indigenous peoples. Most of the Indigenous women whom I approached expressed a primary political commitment to ameliorating injustice within Indigenous communities as a key priority. My interest for the study, however, was to bring the broader social context to the women’s experiences in the university. For the sake of maintaining my existing friendships and working relationships with certain Indigenous friends and colleagues, I decided to dismiss the possibility of dialogue with Indigenous women in my university for this particular study. I also decided that because the Indigenous women I had approached expressed such different concerns to my own – indicative of our vastly different histories and issues arising from these – their contributions would be outside the scope of my intended study.

Rather than look for a cohort that shared a single unitary race/ethnic identification (e.g. all Asian women), I wanted to investigate identification and knowledge construction processes and any links between the two. So I continued my search in a number of directions for a range of women across the country through informal word of mouth networks through universities and colleagues, or snowball sampling, to ensure the diversity of the final group in terms of race/ethnic representation, believing
that selecting participants who were each born in a different place and who had different histories would enable me to test and explore the process of \textit{power sensitive dialogue} (Haraway, 1988).

A critical conceptual framework was utilised in the study to highlight the issue of power in the process of knowledge production. This approach to pedagogy allows for a broader exploration and questioning of concepts and assumptions underpinning pedagogy in a \textit{social change} context. Traditionally, ‘pedagogy has been conceived in the context of “the control of the individual”, with institutional governance characterized by collegiality’ (Clegg, 2002: 805). Rather than assume that there is single definition for the term \textit{educator}, however, the term can be interpreted through a range of different pedagogical models which was deliberately left open so that the women could bring their own meaning to this descriptor. During initial conversation with each of the women, I did not use the term to refer to a specific job title or \textit{profession} that required formal qualifications to \textit{legitimise} the women’s work. Instead, I emphasised a commitment to education for social change as an important criterion worthy of exploration.

Although it could be argued that \textit{men of colour} are also under-represented in the university, I opted to speak only with other women. In the study, it is assumed that if the dimensions of race/ethnicity, gender, language, class, sexual orientation and other forms of difference are embodied, then an exploration of the identification process would yield insights into how power relations operate in the wider society and in the university. Discussion with men would further complicate my position as an insider/outsider in the research. Given the complexities already at hand, I decided not
to include males in the group. Also, given the sensitive nature of the discussions, I wanted to leave space for exploration of the topic of sexuality and decided it might be more comfortable to discuss these issues on a same gender basis.

**Conclusion**

Many groups are swept to the margins of the university on the grounds of disability, gender, colour, socio-economic background and other grounds. I view this as a systemic issue affecting everybody, including disenfranchised groups. The focus of my study is on women educators of colour in the Academy as one example of the various groups exposed to what I perceive as the systemic exclusionary tactics of the university. That is, women educators of colour are one of many other communities of special interest in the Academy whose concerns are increasingly, it seems, pushed to the edges. These are tacked on to a central norm and reflective of both ideological and infrastructural influences at work. I have not assumed that the stories presented represent what it means to be of a particular race, ethnicity or cultural group (Mahtani, 2002). Rather, this approach is one of many possible representations of women’s experiences and concerns, which is interpreted through my particular meaning making lens. It is a representation of the ways *particular* educators and scholars ‘have developed specific epistemological stances informed by their own cultural and identity positions’ (Ladson-Billings, 2000: 260).

This study calls for further research and debate on the viability and use of unquestioned concepts of difference in the name of multicultural- and diversity-related policy rhetoric to examine how these are embedded in university practices. In
the thesis it is argued that, at a broader societal level, current global discourses of race/ethnicity are reflected in the prevailing climate of conservatism in Australian universities. At this particular moment, these forces have, in many cases, created a climate of fear and suspicion of the other. In this context, the self-identification process for minorities becomes an important survival strategy for marginalised individuals and groups to enact agency and to undertake social action that might challenge and expose nationalist discourses and symbolic and other kinds of violence. It is argued that the university, as a pivotal social institution, is seriously implicated in the project for social change; however, because difference is conceived in simplistic ways, Australian universities are lagging behind their US, UK and Canadian counterparts. Where our international counterparts have legislated language for the social demarcation and recognition of visible minorities, black and people of colour, Australian terminology is cloaked in euphemistic acronyms such as Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD). The absence of integrated debate about difference in Australian higher education suggests that the university has yet to embrace the challenge of valuing and recognising multiplicity rather than singularity. Multiplicity must be seen as a pivotal conceptual tool for internationalising the curriculum.

It is hoped that this research story provides an entertaining, thought-provoking and enriching read for anyone interested in race politics and how we work and live together in all kinds of spaces and places in Australian society. I have written this thesis in the hope that it provides useful ideas and strategies for others to think about and to question the hidden assumptions underpinning knowledge construction in higher education and to understand our own educative and research practices in
greater depth through valuing and recognising different ways of knowing, not only in the context of scholarly pursuits, but in the practice of everyday living (de Certeau et al., 1998).
Chapter 2 - Intersections of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the University

Introduction

I have read extensively on women in higher education, teacher education and anti-racism education research. My findings in these areas of educational research have been collected in the Appendix for further reference. In this chapter, I will concentrate on studies on higher education and women, as they are the focus of my study.

Given the relative silence around race/ethnicity in Australian higher education studies, and for comparative discussion on these topics, I looked to writings from Canada, the UK and the USA. These enabled me to acquire the conceptual tools for my study. While discussions about race/ethnicity occur in pockets of academia such as cultural studies, social science and the humanities, they are not integrated insights that provide directions for university practices in the context of internationalised higher education global economism in Australia. Through a discussion of multicultural education, critical race, critical whiteness studies and global studies on gender equity in higher
education, this chapter points to the de-racialisation and re-assimilationist restructuring of universities, argued through an analysis of how marketisation and managerialism have impacted on the university. This summary is followed by a discussion on debates about cultural imperialism in the Australian educational landscape as Aboriginal scholars are reversing the gaze away from the other to question university practices from Indigenous perspectives (Moreton-Robinson, 2001a, 200b). Building on these, it is argued that because of the gap in the research literature there is a need to identify work that addresses the de-racialisation of curriculum. Under the current climate of conservatism, difference has become de-racialised, calling for a shift away from a multicultural additives approach in higher education to more complex identity work.

The Challenges of the Changing Face in the University

Australian universities have necessarily been brought into the globalisation process of so-called knowledge economy and the internationalisation of curricula and have primarily done so through restructuring in managerial terms. In the UK, Nixon et al. (2001) question current and future directions of higher education and paint a rather bleak scenario. The issue of what academic freedom means, and whether this translates into freedom for the academic or freedom for the communities outside of the university, is questioned. The authors suggest that universities are seriously hindered in any efforts to effect social change for the good of the wider community because of the increasingly close relationship between the state and the university (Nixon et al., 2001). In particular, the authors draw attention to the dramatic
expansion of student numbers in universities and the increasing heterogeneity of student populations. Along a similar vein, Usher et al. write that:

... [h]igher education is undergoing a series of complex and overlapping changes, which are profoundly affecting its organisational structures, traditional practices, and the way in which its institutions and those who work within them are viewed by the public (1997: 229).

A free-market approach to higher education and, with this, a strongly conservative ideological approach has conceived the project of higher education in liberal free-market terms (Kemmis et al., 1983; Usher et al., 1997; Nixon et al., 2001; Clegg, 2002; Clegg, Parr & Wan, 2003). In a free-market world, ‘What is the common good?’ is increasingly being constructed in a fiscal rather than a social context, as if these are unrelated.

For Nixon et al. (2001) universities are part of a broader culture of consumption and tertiary students and academic staff are increasingly perceived as commodities. Usher et al. (1997) similarly suggest that the activities of educators and researchers are seen as ‘increasingly governed by managerialism and the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness’ (p. 14). This, in turn, has impacted on the way universities produce knowledge. That is:

The valuing of knowledge in terms of its performativity suggests that there is co-implication of contemporary discourses of individualistic learner-centredness and current trends towards the marketisation of learning opportunities (Usher et al., 1997: 14).
We can, therefore, assume that educational discourses currently circulating in Australian society and the university tend to construct education and educators in monetary rather than overtly educational terms. For example, it is important now more than ever for academics to meet the free-market driven policies, values and objectives set by government and by the university for the purpose of generating kudos and status as well as essential income for the university. All in all, it appears that the discourse of neo-liberalism has come to roost very comfortably in the university.

Clegg, in her case study of learning and teaching policies in higher education in a British university, writes about the impact of recent reform on academics. She argues that, traditionally, pedagogy has been thought of as ‘the control of the individual, with institutional governance characterised by collegiality’ (Clegg, 2002: 805). She emphasises, however, that ‘there is a complex dialectic between pressures towards managerialism co-existing in tension with collegiality and between different and contesting interpretations of core pedagogic concepts’ (Clegg, 2002: 805). This has meant that developments in the university have tended to be policy-driven rather than deriving from the development of new knowledge. Clegg and other writers also highlight the presence of hierarchies in knowledge disciplines; that not all knowledges are afforded the same value (Burton, 1997; Scheurich, 1997; Martin, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000). This suggests that forces of change reify rather than disturb existing stratification systems that help maintain rather than trouble the concept of knowledge as a commodity and the complicity of the knower in the knowledge production process.
It would be difficult for a conservative educational ideological approach to justify investment in research that reaches outside the square or operates other than in cash terms. It also does not take into account knowledge that is created in areas where there is no current demand, who constructs knowledge and for what purpose, and the ways in which knowledge is produced in relation to wider societal and global change. It is perhaps no wonder that the current approach to higher education has resulted in a crisis in professional identity (Nixon et al., 2001) if it limits the function, role, identity and scope of educators and scholars in the university and their work. This suggests that academics are being asked to think within rather than across subject and discipline boundaries and in terms of increasing diversification of curriculum and courses, calling for closer examination of the tension between the interests of the university and the academic.

Clegg’s concern is that the discourse of managerialism, an integral aspect of a free-market approach to education, influences the development of models of higher education pedagogy in a restrictive way (Clegg, 2002). Although some academics resist this discourse, the push to attain generic outcomes promoting neo-liberalism as a new educational ideal is so powerful that managerialism has, in fact, superseded debate about the importance of disciplines and subject-based knowledges. While Clegg importantly identifies a crisis in identity for academics, the focus of her analysis is on the knowledge periphery and the knowledge production process. The diversity of academics located on the periphery remains outside of the scope of her analysis.
Zipin and Brennan (2003) discuss the state of the Australian university for its workers. Using a personal narrative approach, the authors highlight the paucity of narrative research or *telling* kind of data, which speaks to the ‘current conditions of our professional practice in the Australian university’ (2003: 355). Restructuring in the last decade and the push towards fiscal management in the 1990s, according to them, has translated into ‘significant massification, a simultaneous 30% increase in student numbers, and reduction in teaching only, and teacher/research staff by 8% and 1%’ (p. 352). This made the university highly vulnerable to shifts in federal government policy so that its survival has become increasingly dependent on its links with the state to supplement existing funds. It is argued that it is under these particular conditions that the growth of managerialism has flourished in the Australian higher education sector, structuring relations of academic governance in such a way as to restrict relationships between staff and management. This has, in turn, created an oppositional culture between workers and management, altering the very functions and nature of leadership positions in the university.

Furthermore, the authors suggest that this new governmentality suppresses debate about ethics in higher education to the extent that:

*Ethical issues can become swallowed and obscured within institutional procedures, and the boundaries of what counts as permissible discussion are intersubjectively policed (at a habit level) by other members* (Zipin & Brennan, 2003: 362-3).
Unfortunately, their analysis resonates all too closely with the work of Nixon et al. who write that career mobility is increasingly realised through ‘the individual’s reputation and influence outside their own institution’ (2001: 23). These works invite further investigation into these important ethical issues in an Australian higher education context from a range of experiential and situated perspectives. It also raises the question of whether career mobility is the primary motivator for all academics.

Clearly, managerialism and neo-liberal economics have tended to entrench centralist structures and authoritarian policy steering (Morley, 2003, 2006). This, in turn, has tended to disenfranchise women and other fringe groups. Restructuring of universities has made the professional progression of women difficult and slow. In a global higher education landscape, horizontal and vertical patterns have hardly shifted (Bjork-Billings et al., 2006; Morley, 2006; Ramsay et al., 2006; Shah, 2006; Winchester, 2006; Yuen-Tsang, 2006). It is in this context that diversity is being either structured out through casualisation of workers or through targeted (usually senior) recruitment to add diversity. There is a need to understand that such tactics are a new form of cultural imperialism/colonialism and understand how this solidification of structures and opportunities in universities has been experienced. This has only very recently begun to be documented.

Rather than examining the frameworks that are used to identify different groups and question their circumstances within a global internationalised higher education context, universities tend to construct disenfranchised groups as the source of the problem and as being in need of fixing or help. Such a simplistic and reductionist framework undervalues and misrecognises the contribution of multiple identities and
epistemologies to the Australian university in the context of internationalisation, giving us limited insight into and understanding of the experiences, concerns and interests of various groups who are excluded from higher educational decision-making processes in educational and political spheres.

In Australian universities, as is the case in the higher educator sector in other countries including the US (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) and the UK (Nixon et al., 2001), global, social and political forces have impinged on university reform in a range of ways with negative effects on different stakeholders. By situating the women’s stories within an Australian higher education institutional context, this study aims to understand how universities commonly conceive of difference, suggesting that the other is largely located on the margins of the institution. Reforms in higher education in the last decade, however, have, in global and economic rationalist terms, seen the rapid proliferation of local and offshore university sites and courses for generating profit. Therefore, I see the questioning of difference as also having important implications for higher education in market terms, the potential of which has yet to be both acknowledged and explored fully.

**Cultural Imperialism in the University**

Universities operate as part of broader societies and it is instructive to recognise how recent the debates on race and ethnicity are in Australia. Multiculturalism, as a movement in social and academic circles from the 1970s, provided Australians with some meta-language to describe shifting social scapes and lived experiences
In particular, Young’s (1990) concept of cultural imperialism is a useful tool for understanding the shifting sands of multicultural discourse. For Young, cultural imperialism is about how some minority identities are constructed as being there and at the same time not being there. That is, a group might be marketed and stereotyped in a particular way while at the same time rendered invisible. For example, Aboriginal Studies is a relatively new inclusion in the Australian higher education curriculum. At the same time, Aboriginal staff (and other non-dominant race/ethnic groups) are significantly under-represented across different faculties and further up the decision-making ladder in universities. This makes it difficult to see who is producing knowledge (Young, 1990) and what and how knowledge is produced, and difficult to hear how concepts are received or contested by those who are discursively subjugated by language (Fairclough, 1989). The mainstream/margin binary becomes a mechanism for reifying and essentialising difference and the margin becomes a metaphor for the excluded without really paying attention to how the language of difference helps to construct social group identities as the other.

While the mainstream/margin binary is widely accepted as commonplace in the university, cultural imperialism renders it difficult to see that when we use binaries, this tends to construct the identity and ways of knowing in simplistic ways. It is a reminder of the political nature of the issue of representation in social research and ‘[t]he shifting and relational nature of identity, the mutually constitutive relations of race, ethnicity, gender, class and other social relations, and the complex ways that
these relations locate us all socially’ (Pettman, 1994: 45-6). The four women’s stories in this study are not representative of the experiences of all women educators of colour. Rather they provide partial insights into the experiences of educators that are ordinarily left unaccounted for.

Clegg and her colleagues acknowledge the important contribution of Australian research for its analyses of the historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism. These are seen as having created particular conditions under which ‘non-white identities are racialised, and “white” is not assumed to be a racial identity’ (Clegg et al., 2003: 163). They note that work that looks specifically at racism in higher education is relatively recent compared to ‘the extensive work in the school sector’ (Clegg et al., 2003: 163). From a small study involving staff at a British university, the authors describe the experiences ‘of African-Caribbean and Asian males, with African-Caribbean students being seen as having behaviour problems’ or ‘Asian males as socially conformist and high achieving’ (Clegg et al., 2003: 163). They turn our attention to racialising practices operating in universities as well as schools, suggesting that these might be ‘organised around the projection of different characteristics’ (Clegg et al., 2003: 4). Modood, Beishon and Virdee (1998) reveal that, in the UK, the experience of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men is racialised, evidenced by their under-representation in British universities.

The work of hybridisation scholars such as Bhabha (1990) and Lo (2000), as well as mixed-race theorists in the UK such as Ahmed (1997), Ang-Lygate (1997) and Mahtani (2002), enabled me to acknowledge the importance of notions of belongingness and *Australian-ness* in my analysis of the experiences of minorities,
including the experiences of the women in my study. The questions ‘What does it mean to be Australian?’ and ‘How does this relate to a higher education pedagogy?’ became important issues in my research conversations with the women and later in my analysis of the transcripts. I did not articulate these questions explicitly during the conversations; however, our dialogues rested on implicit and explicit assumptions relating to these issues in that each of us knew about the evolution of Australian social policy.

In Australia, Hickling-Hudson (1997) is one of few educational scholars who explicitly identifies as non-white. She positions herself as a Caribbean educator working in Australia. According to her, there is a limited understanding of how culture is conceived in educational research in Australia at present (Hickling-Hudson, 1997). She argues that culturalism prevents us from recognising how the concept of culture is conceived in the majority of educational studies in Australia. In other words, the ways in which researchers and educators think and reason about socio-cultural relations and processes is generally conceived and understood in overly simplistic terms. This is seen as an all-pervading feature of pre-service education programs in Australia.

Hickling-Hudson’s contribution is unusual in that there are so few perspectives authored by individuals other than Anglo-Celtic and Euro-Australian educators in the educational research landscape in Australia that it is a rarity rather than a commonplace occurrence. Where Singh touches on the significance of autobiography in her work, Hickling-Hudson questions the taken-for-granted assumptions of the concepts and terms used in educational and multicultural discourse, opening up the
means for further exploration of the concept of epistemological racism in the Australian university.

Clegg writes about how academic identity is framed by discourses of education and difference (Clegg, 2002; Clegg et al., 2003). She calls for more evidence on ‘the nature of practice and processes in higher education, and how learning and teaching practices are conceptualised and enacted’ (Clegg, 2002: 804). What remains unclear, however, is the issue of which academics Clegg is referring to. Although she writes about the knowledge periphery, we know little about the diversity of academics on the periphery of the university, how many there are, where they are located and what we can learn from their experiences.

To further my argument about cultural imperialism operating in the Australian university, I will next discuss the concept of epistemological racism. In my study, I draw from Scheurich and Young’s (Scheurich, 1997) theorisation on racism to enable me to recognise the complex ways in which racism operates in the university. In his writing on a white discourse of racism in the Academy, Scheurich (1997) acknowledges the importance of racism’s grouping effect and the positioned experiences this produces. According to the author, it is because the culture of the Academy is dominated by whiteness that ‘the predominant view of racism and the ways racism works’ (Manglitz, 2003: 126) are masked. As a result, he argues, white scholars and scholars of colour often have very different understandings and experiences of racism. That is, white scholars tend to assume that being racist is about an individual’s behavioural or attitudinal expression - an overt form of racism. In contrast, scholars of colour tend to assume it refers to more systematic forms of
racism of the covert kind. The former interpretation of racism tends to obscure the ways in which inequities in our social structures work to privilege the social realities and knowledge perspectives of some race/ethnic groups while denying others (Scheurich, 1997). To counter this, Scheurich and Young propose a model of racism which acknowledges multiple forms of racisms. These are: individual, institutional, societal, civilisational and epistemological.

Firstly, the overt form of individual racism is described as:

... a public, conscious, and intended act by a person or persons from one race with the intent of doing damage to a person or persons from another race chiefly because of the race of the second person or persons (Scheurich, 1997: 133).

The covert individual form of racism is similar but with the exception that the person/s ‘making covert, racially-biased decisions do not explicitly broadcast their intentions [but] veil them or provide reasons which society will find more palatable’ (Scheurich, 1997: 133-4). The authors point out the tendency to assume that a critique of epistemologies is a personal attack or act of character assassination. This is seen as restricting our understanding of racism and delineating the parameters by which we can or cannot explore the ethical arena of social research.

Distinct from these is institutional racism. The authors describe this as occurring ‘when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races
in relation to members of the dominant race’ (Scheurich, 1997: 135). This is seen to occur on a covert basis when ‘racially biased beliefs or assumptions are embedded within a research discipline or a particular community of researchers or within the normalised variables, labels, or concepts of a discipline or community’ (Scheurich, 1997: 135, drawing on Paredes, 1977 and Standfield, 1985, 1993).

At an even broader level, societal racism is seen by the authors in similar terms but ‘exists on a broader, society-wide scale’ (Scheurich, 1997: 136) where the dominant culture’s social and historical experience is socially promoted through the media, legal practices, government and educational programs of what a good family and good education is. Civilisational racism refers to the ‘most primary assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the ways of knowing that reality (epistemology) and the disputational contours of right and wrong or morality and values (axiology)’ (Scheurich, 1997: 137). I have drawn on Scheurich and Young’s argument that ‘ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies are not outside history or sociology’ (p. 139), but are enmeshed in the social histories of civilisations and groups within these.

The premise that racism has multiple forms (or ways of operating at individual and systemic levels) in society was important in this study. According to Scheurich and Young (Scheurich, 1997), most members of society are generally not conscious of this complexity. It is because of our divergent histories, positions and cultures that we experience and interpret realities in different ways. In this light, the authors propose that dominant cultural members can only name and know from within the social context available to them and from the social history in which they live. The dearth of knowledge about women educators of colour in the Australian Academy and the
relative sparsity of social historical perspectives constructed from Aboriginal and other non-Anglo Celtic social historical perspectives certainly suggests that the epistemologies valued in the university tend to privilege and legitimise the social history of the dominant race/ethnic group.

Drawing on the works of scholars of colour, such as Stanfield, Gordon, Miller and Rollock, Scheurich and Young (Scheurich, 1997) go on to argue that the crux of the matter lies in our epistemologies, ‘not our use of them, but the epistemologies themselves, which are racially biased ways of knowing’ (p. 132) or what the authors refer to as epistemological racism. In other words, the issue is not that individual researchers are racist as such, but that the dominant epistemologies in positivism, postmodernisms and poststructuralism are derived from a particular logic of inquiry (Stanfield, 1993 in Scheurich, 1997) which limits the range of possible epistemologies, thereby creating ‘profoundly negative consequences for those of other racial cultures with different epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies’ (Scheurich, 1997: 141).

Drawing from the work of Scheurich and Young, our epistemologies and ontologies along with our axiological positionings inevitably become integral dimensions of higher education pedagogy and university practices. In my study, epistemological racism emerges as an important theme. The concept of epistemological racism enables me to recognise that anti-racism and multicultural discourses are important parts of the broader higher education landscape, each with their own historical and political shades of meaning and interpretation. It is when we engage in power sensitive and critical dialogue that the notion of the common good and what constitutes education
can be examined from diverse perspectives. A critical race framework should not elevate the anti-racist project above other educational approaches. Rather, it acts as a mechanism for enabling a more ‘critical interrogation of all knowledges’, including the conventional understandings of ‘merit’, ‘excellence’ and the ‘cultural norm’ (Sefa Dei, 1999: 401, emphasis added).

Educational Research Perspectives in the United States: A Comparative Analysis

In a higher education context, hooks (1984, 1991, 1992b, 1994), Hill Collins (1991) and Ladson-Billings (1997) have written about their own experiences as black women teaching in the Academy. These and others scholarly works (Anzaldua, 1990a, 1990b; Wing, 1997a, 1997b; Zack, 1998; Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1999; Asher, 2001) provide alternative knowledge and experiential perspectives, many of them emanating from feminist studies, critical legal studies (CLS) and CRT. In particular, hooks is one of the most prominent black female scholars who, drawing from Freire’s notion of critical pedagogy, has paved the way for new ways of thinking about and researching particularised knowledges (hooks, 1984, 1990a, 1991, 1992b, 1994; Olesen, 2000). These kinds of critiques have reversed the gaze within educational research from white researchers studying the other to vice versa. They have enabled a range of diverse, partial and situated knowledge perspectives to emerge and inform our understandings of how educational institutions shape the lives of students and educators.

From studies in critical pedagogy, CRT and standpoint theory, we have learnt that the majority of educational studies have traditionally overlooked the experience of
historically marginalised groups in a range of ways. For example, critical race theorists Parker and Lynn explain how the majority of educational studies have tended to use research paradigms that rely on genetic or biological deterministic approaches (Parker & Lynn, 2002). These approaches tend to view disparities between different social and educational groups in deficit terms and often to the disadvantage of the African-American and Hispanic groups in American Studies. Solorzano and Yosso bring our attention to educational studies that explain how students of colour have been constructed as not only lacking the biological traits needed for success in the educational system, but also are rendered deficient through cultural explanations (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). That is, ‘culture continues to be cited as the leading cause of the low socioeconomic status and educational failure of students of colour’ (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002: 31).

In the UK, Bariso (2001) and Osler’s (1997) research encapsulates some of the key concerns and arguments articulated by black educators in the British higher education and school system. These studies bring attention to structural explanations of racism in education. In her review of the broader educational research landscape, Osler concludes that, ‘[I]n institutions of higher education, and notably within teacher education black and ethnic minority people are significantly underrepresented among the teaching and administrative staff’ (Osler, 1997: 59 drawing on research by Casey and Ghuman).

Bariso (2001) writes about the failure of the British educational system ‘to address issues of equality and social justice partly as a result of de-racialising educational discourses promoted during the 18 years of Conservative rule’ (p. 174). The author
suggests that some of the resulting practices from this period have had an adverse effect on all educators and on black educators in particular (Bariso, 2001). Moreover, Bariso attributes the lack of knowledge about the experiences of black educators to the tendency to de-racialise interpretations and analyses of teachers and the teaching profession in educational studies. The author’s concept of de-racialisation relates to researchers’ ‘conscious or unconscious disregard of issues of ethnicity and race’ (Bariso 2001: 167). The argument that de-racialisation renders invisible the collective experiences of some groups of educators is convincing. De-racialisation, a pattern that is recognised in universities in Australia and their Eurocentric curricula, is part of the process of cultural imperialism and a point to which I will return to later in the chapter.

The aforementioned works acknowledge the impact of structural and institutional racism. They demonstrate the value of educational perspectives constructed from non-dominant cultural perspectives, offering alternative insights into the experiences of educators and the ways in which educational institutions are organised and operate.

**The Language of Difference in Australia**

Pettman explains that in teachings about Australian society and politics, Aboriginal people and migrants are often rendered invisible or tokenised in a lecture or two (Pettman, 1994). As I searched the educational literature landscape, it became apparent that the descriptor *women educators of colour* rarely came up in Australian studies. In contrast, the descriptor *women of colour* is accepted and used widely by scholars in the US, Canada and the UK. By observing studies from the US and UK, I
was able to recognise that one of the reasons why *women educators of colour* are rendered invisible in the Australian educational literature is because of the way in which the language of difference varies in each context.

For example, studies in the US and UK tend to use a different vocabulary from that of Australian educational research studies. This is because the term *black* has different historical, social and political resonances. For example, in educational studies in the US, *black* is used in reference to African-American people (hooks, 1990a, 1990b, 1992a, 1992b, 1994). The descriptors *people of colour* and *women of colour* are widely accepted and used to refer to Hispanic and Asian people (Anzaldua, 1990a, 1990b; Delgado Bernal, 1998; de Root, 1999). In the UK, the term *black* has been used to refer to people of Caribbean, African-Caribbean and Asian descent, and people whose heritage is from South-East Asian countries such as Pakistan (Modood *et al.*, 1994; Osler, 1997; Bariso, 2001). Feminist scholars have also problematised the black/white binary on the grounds that *blackness* has become an essentialised position from which many women are unwilling to speak (Ang-Lygate, 1997; Rassool, 1997).

The women in my study chose to speak out about this issue. They interpreted the descriptor *women educators of colour* as referring mainly to black women, but also to other possible identities. In spite of not feeling entirely comfortably about being positioned as *black*, they were interested in exploring identity. Other women I approached did not wish to affiliate themselves with this position or the project, possibly because of their wish to distance from the *black* position.

In comparison to educational discussions in Canada, the US and UK, in Australia the term *black* tends to be associated in Australia with Indigenous peoples (Gunuw, 1994, 2001). Gunew also observes that, over time, the term has shifted in meaning away
from its earlier inclusion of groups such as Greek and Italian immigrants (Gunew, 2002). Scholars in cultural and post-colonial studies have also drawn attention to the hyphenated variations such as Asian-Australian (Ang, 1996, 2000; Lo, 2000) and the implications of this self-identification. Overall, this suggests that the ways in which researchers and educators think and reason about socio-cultural relations and processes differs in a range of historical contexts. It also suggests that societal norms are shifting so that difference does not mean the same thing over time, but varies from context to context. While the use of language varies across historical contexts, a commonality underpinning the terminology is the reference to visible and less visible markers of difference.

On this, Powell (1999) writes about visible difference in terms of *pigmentocracies*, or hierarchies of skin colour in Latin American countries. Critical legal scholars have also examined the impact of visible difference in the American legal system in the US (Davies, 1994; Gilmore, 1997; Wing, 1997b; Jones, 2000). In Australia, the history of colonisation and the discourse of miscegenation here and in other places in the world have meant that there are many negative connotations associated with social identification processes based on references to lightness and darkness of skin colour. For many people in Australia, the issue of skin colour is used as a primary marker of difference. This is an important and complex issue. For example, some fair-skinned or white Indigenous people find themselves having to negotiate their Aboriginal identity in a range of ways both in the wider community and within their own particular communities. For many, the shade of whiteness and darkness is a source of contestation in legal discourse related to Aboriginal land rights claims (Hollinsworth, McConniche & Pettman, 1994; Moreton-Robinson, 2000b).
Another contributing reason for the absence of women educators of colour in Australian universities is the discourse of multiculturalism. Gunew explains that:

*Australian usages of multiculturalism tend not to signal articulations of racialised differences and this may in part be because the category represented by race is often predominantly reserved for the Aboriginal peoples who in the Australian context (unlike indigenous peoples in North America) have succeeded in disassociating their concerns from discourses of multiculturalism* (Gunew, 2002: 3).

In other words, many Indigenous people have deliberately rejected *ethnicity* as a concept for identification and, in doing so, have stepped away from multicultural discourse to maintain their own positioning as unique (Hage, 1998; Gunew, 2002). This suggests that, historically, the ethnic and Aboriginal identity ascriptions have been constructed as different or the other in relation to the norm of whiteness. That is, the other is implicitly understood as not just any other, but the non-white subject (Hage, 1998, 2003).

Drawing from Gunew’s (2002) critique of official multicultural discourse and Hage’s notion of a *white nation fantasy* (Hage, 1998), I would argue that general education studies in Australia tend to avoid the term *race* in preference for *ethnicity*. This differs markedly from studies in the US and UK, where the term *race* is not only included but also problematised. Perhaps in response to the explicit racist rhetoric of the earlier white Australia policy, I have heard many colleagues object to the use of the word
In this research, I have explored this issue of choice (and agency) through an exploration of the identification process from the diverse perspectives of the women I interviewed, highlighting the significance of both visible and less visible markers of difference. In the study, I have assumed that difference is constructed in a range of ways and in a range of contexts. For example, a white person can also be marked as visibly different if located in the home of Indigenous Australian people, on a Native American reservation or in particular suburbs in some cities. Given that Australia is...
comprised of a dominant white majority, however, I have also assumed that difference
is more often conceived as the non-white subject in relation to the whiteness as a
privileged signifier (Hage, 1998). The women in the study are ascribed identities in
the university and the wider Australian society of, for example, NESB or CALD, yet
they self-identify in a range of ways and not always in the terms ascribed to them.

Clearly, the language of difference, which is historically situated, highly contested
and political, varies between the US, UK and Australia. The social demarcation
around visible minorities, blacks and people of colour is recognised in a very real
legislative sense. My study highlights the need for a language that articulates a more
complex identity and examines both visible and less visible differences (Viernes-
Turner, 2002). The study explores the notion of pigmentocracy or the politics of skin
colour (Powell, 1999) as a feature of Australian social and educational discourse and
how it matters to the women in this study. Indeed, the language of difference is a
dialectic that re-emerges in the field stories that follow in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 and in
the last chapter of the research story, calling attention to the silence surrounding race
in Australian higher education and inviting further discussion about how the field of
education in Australia positions itself in relation to race/ethnicity.
From Difference to Critical Whiteness

In Australia, the main way to discuss diversity, apart from Aboriginality, has been through gender equity where cultural diversity is acknowledged but not problematised. In my research, I drew from critical race theorists and critical whiteness scholars for their capacity to trouble difference. The area of whiteness studies is a recent addition to the higher education landscape. It describes the body of scholarship which emerged from the US during the mid-1980s that explores what it means to be white in a country-specific and a global context. It emerged in response to the burgeoning interest in people of colour and the notion of diversity, examining the ways ‘that White and all other racial identities have been historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced over time and do not refer in an essential or biological way to human bodies’ (Omi & Winant, 1994, in Manglitz, 2003: 122).

At the 2001 United Nations Conference on Racism and Xenophobia in Durban (South Africa), whiteness was recognised as an important new mechanism for advancing global debate on race and cultural diversity. As Giroux (1997a, 1997b) points out, however, it is a relational identity. The heart of its inquiry has been the source of interest of critical and feminist scholars for some time. A seminal work by Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folks (Du Bois, 1953), has been cited by many scholars across various fields of knowledge as one of the earliest inquiries into the construction of blackness in American history and society (Manglitz, 2003). In the last two decades, a growing number of writers from a range of disciplines, including history, sociology, cultural studies, critical whiteness studies and education, have examined the
relationship between whiteness and blackness (Bhabha, 1990; Aziz, 1992; Haney, 1995; Root, 1996; Carby, 1997; Baca-Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1999; Dolby, 2000a, 2000b; Lo, 2000; Mahtani, 2002). These writers have analysed the social construction of whiteness and its links to power and privilege (Manglitz, 2003).

Some academic writers have looked specifically at whiteness (Delgado Bernal, hooks, Ladson-Billings, Rodriguez, Scheurich, Solarzano). These works inform us that the majority of students, faculties and administrators are largely oblivious not only to what it means to be white but the extent to which their whiteness dominates the campus culture and curriculum, making it uncomfortable for many non-white people. Maher and Thompson-Tetreault (1997 in Manglitz, 2003) confirm that whiteness shapes ‘classroom knowledge and how these social positions are susceptible to critique when they are explored rather than ignored, individualized, or universalized’ and I would add that whiteness has been internalised by many minorities as normative.

In my study, I also use the term white race privilege. This concept refers to the benefits accrued to those who have been constructed as possessing whiteness or who are viewed as white (Frankenberg, 1993; Manglitz, 2003). While the subject position of white is complex, fragmented and heterogeneous, all white people are seen to benefit from racial privilege, albeit unequally. White race privilege is not about skin colour per se, but a useful tool for recognising how racialised systems of privilege operate.
From Whiteness Studies, we have learnt that whiteness acts as a privileged signifier that influences societal norms and social experience. In an educational context, Cynthia Levine-Rasky refers to critical whiteness studies as a scholarship comprised of white researchers who have begun to analyse the ways in which whiteness is produced as an object of change and how white educators negotiate such complexities (Levine-Rasky, 2000). It is in this light that critical whiteness studies has emerged as ‘a radically new approach to the problem of educational inequality of racialised groups of students’ (Levine-Rasky, 2000: 271), many of whom have drawn on Frankenberg’s (1993) analysis of whiteness as a social construct.

According to Sleeter, the overwhelming monocultural white majority demographic of faculty and the increasing race/ethnic diversity of student populations means that there is a kind of cultural incongruence or a cultural divide emerging between teachers and students (Sleeter, 1993). Differences in experiences and world views between these majority and minority groups are seen as contributing to this cultural incongruence. I have assumed that the differences in life experiences and world views between diverse student populations and monocultural teacher populations are so far removed from one another that this creates the conditions for whiteness to be placed at the centre of knowledge production.

Clegg et al. (2003) argue that when whiteness is placed invisibly at the centre of knowledge production, this has particular implications for how the issue of student learning is conceived and enacted by educators. In their small-scale study of academic discourse in a British university, Clegg et al. suggest that ‘racialising practices are likely to operate in higher education as potently as they do in schools, albeit organised
around the projection of different characteristics’ (2003: 164). This affirms Sleeter’s argument that ‘teacher race does matter’ (Sleeter, 1993: 157) in both schooling and higher education contexts. The lack of diversity within faculties remains true in 2006, both globally and in Australia (Gopalkrishnan, 2006; Hildyard & Guberman, 2006; Phillips, 2006). It is a concern which some universities are trying to address overseas (Gopalkrishnan, 2006; Hildyard & Guberman, 2006; Phillips, 2006) and even in Australia (Harman, 2006).

There is a tendency in Australian universities to assume a colour-blind position. Colour-blindness lies in the denial of the salience of skin colour as a marker of difference. For example, there is a perception in Australian universities that the label international student is synonymous with the other. Here, the international is associated with the other, rather than with the local residential students. This makes it difficult for students who identify as Australian to think of themselves as part of the global; the global is situated somewhere outside of our national borders rather than within them. Here too, skin colour becomes a visible indicator that is used to mark difference, without it ever being explicitly articulated. A colour-blind lens does not allow us to recognise the heterogeneity of identities and different knowledge perspectives within our universities. In the new era of internationalisation of the curriculum, Australian universities cannot afford to take such a position. This part of neo-liberal humanist or even assimilationist discourse tends to overlook the power of whiteness as a privileged signifier (Giroux, 1997a, 1997b), the epistemological dominance of whiteness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000) and its relevance to the new knowledge economy ethos.
In addition, the discourse of equality which dominates in the university, is based on the premise that meritocracy works for all students in all situations and instances. If one works hard, merit or achievement will be afforded accordingly to the individual. The issues of mobility, immobility, access to capital, background or circumstances are overlooked. Also underpinning a universal equality approach to education is the discourse of individualism. An individualistic frame of reference is unable to take into account the ways in which different groups are placed differentially, hierarchically and in racialised ways in the wider society nor how some groups have unequal access to cultural global flows (Massey, in Dimitriades and Kamberelis, 1997). For Sleeter:

*Educators of colour are more likely to bring life experiences and viewpoints that critique white supremacy than white teachers, and to engage in activities that challenge various forms of racism ... The life experiences of people of color can be politicised to challenge racism in education more readily than can those of white people* (Sleeter, 1993: 168-9).

While the call for greater diversity in viewpoints is valid and important, one of the weaknesses of Sleeter’s argument is the implication that merely belonging to a minority race/ethnic group will translate into a critical pedagogy approach. The assumption that belonging to a marginalised group equates with a self-awareness of how power differentials are created and maintained in the wider community and university is problematic. Here, the individual is seen as automatically acquiring double consciousness (Du Bois, 1953; Scheurich, 1997) through the process of othering. Double consciousness is an awareness and understanding of how to be and how to act in both dominant and marginalised social contexts. When I approached
various scholars to invite them to participate in the research project, however, it did not always seem to be the case that they possessed double consciousness. This supports Stewart Brush’s (2001) point that what underpins dialogues about race is the taken-for-granted assumption that all women of colour have undergone a process of race consciousness. Stewart Brush’s work and my research reveal this is not the case.

Another weakness of a critical whiteness approach is the somewhat naïve assumption that racism in education can be challenged solely by increasing race/ethnic diversity in teacher populations, faculty and general staff. Perhaps of more use is a multiple strategic approach (Smith, 1996; Nixon et al., 2001; Johnson, 2002). Rather than locating the source of oppression within a single location, this approach leaves space for debate about what the barriers to education might be and multiple understandings of this. This enables questioning of not only what constitutes barriers in terms of equity in access, but also equity of treatment of social groups. Such an approach allows us to question theory-building practices in higher education pedagogy to analyse how difference is framed and also frames educators’ identities and educational problems from a range of perspectives.

In the US, Smith presents similar arguments in his research on diversity in higher education (Smith, 1996), summarising the fundamentally important reasons for striving for greater race/ethnic diversity of staff and explaining that:

... diversity is likely to contribute vitally to what is taught and how it is taught.  
Further, without diversity in institutional decision making, the perspectives are apt to be too narrow, not considering alternative viewpoints and solutions.
Diversity creates an intellectually exciting and dynamic environment in which various ways of knowing and seeing are introduced (Smith, 1996: 4).

Diversity, in Smith’s terms, therefore, enables the questioning not only of institutional forms of oppression, but also epistemological biases (Schurich, 1997) in knowledge production. Thus, social justice in higher education can be conceived in more than professional and vocational knowledge terms. The purpose of social justice in higher education can also be seen in terms of its potential social contribution where the social is both an economic and moral consideration.

In a similar vein, Johnson (2002), in her study of pre-service educators, suggests that ‘Dialoguing about race and the introduction of perspectives on racism from those who had experienced it proved a key to the development of racial awareness in education’ (Johnson, 2002: 163). I support Johnson’s view that a multiple-strategy approach to address the growing cultural and racial divide between educators and their students and among staff would open up possibilities for dialogue from a range of situated race/ethnic perspectives, thereby shifting the focus away from research by whites about white educators in critical whiteness studies to include a range of situated perspectives. Of particular importance is Johnson’s point that the privileging of white educators’ viewpoints adds ‘little to the understanding of how concepts of race and racism are experienced from different racial standpoints’ (Johnson, 2002: 163). Ironically, this is a key criticism of critical whiteness scholarship in that analysis generated by white researchers about white educators and researchers actually re-centres whiteness rather than interrupts it.
Like critical pedagogy and critical race theoretical perspectives, whiteness studies by white scholars and critiques by non-white scholars have allowed us to question the way classification and categorisation systems frame different individuals and groups as problems. Together, these have opened up possibilities for understanding educational inequality as a systemic rather than an individual problem (Levine-Rasky, 2000); however, we know little about who is framed as different in the Australian university or about the diversity of women educators’ experiences and how they create meaning around their work in the context of a commitment to education for social change.

This presents an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, many staff, academics and senior decision-makers are actively constructing knowledge, curriculum and policy. On the other hand, patterns emerging from pre-service education studies are rarely linked to higher education pedagogy. Schick, Shore and Clegg’s work are notable exceptions that acknowledge the silence around the way in which difference and whiteness frame higher education pedagogy (Schick, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Clegg, 2002; Clegg et al., 2003; Shore, 2003a, 2003b).

It is due to the lack of demographic data on staff race/ethnicity across universities in Australia that analysis and debate about the lack of diversity in staff demographics is difficult. This invites further questioning of the assumptions underpinning the concept of difference in policy-making practices, curriculum development and higher education pedagogy. Also important is the fact that critical whiteness scholarship is comprised of a majority of white researchers analysing the social experience of white educators. What remains unexamined, as hooks so aptly tells us, are the ways in
which representations of whiteness might be constructed and negotiated in the imaginations of educators who speak from a range of non-dominant positions (hooks, 1991, 1992b). This calls for further analysis and reflection on whiteness to understand when, where, by whom and for what purpose whiteness is rendered invisible and taken for granted as the norm in knowledge production.

**Bringing in Alternative Filters and Other Perspectives**

There is a significant body of work, in the US, on the experiences of Afro-American and Chicana women in education, illuminating our understandings of diversity in higher education. Collectively, accounts by women of colour on the subject of the university draw attention to the power of white privilege in constructing dominant cultural narratives. These provide invaluable alternative insights into the experiences of women in higher education. Some of these writings focus on women entering higher education at undergraduate and graduate levels, while others examine the status of women already working in the university. Overall, what emerges from these is that many universities are white male-dominated institutions and, as a consequence, women face a set of complex social conditions within and beyond the university.

By drawing attention to the lack of debate about whiteness from non-white perspectives, hooks shows that whiteness, positionality and hierarchies are interconnected. In her writing about representation of whiteness from black perspectives, hooks draws attention to the lack of debate on this subject (hooks, 1992b). Although critiquing postcolonial scholarship, hooks’ notion of epistemological dominance is important. For hooks, it is the way in which whiteness
is referred to as if it ‘exists without knowledge of blackness’ (1992b: 339) that is problematic. Drawing from her own experience of teaching in the American Academy, hooks captures how whiteness is constructed as invisible in an educational context:

[T]here have been heated debates among students when white students respond with disbelief, shock, and rage, as they listen to black students talk about whiteness, when they are compelled to hear observations, stereotypes, etc., that are offered as “data” gleaned from close scrutiny and study. Usually, white students respond with naïve amazement that black people critically assess white people from a standpoint where “whiteness” is not the privileged signifier (hooks, 1992b: 339).

Also resonating across many educational studies on women in the US and the UK is the theme of positionality. Hill Collins’ (1991) seminal work, Black Feminist Thought, is cited for her theorising of the complex notion of positionality in relation to hierarchies of oppression. Affirming the presence of both, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996), in their narrative study of black women re-entering the university, suggest that ‘Black women are adversely positioned’ (p. 154) in the university and in American society. The women in their study ‘perceived their position in the university to be different and separate from that of other women and from Black men … [i.e.] at the bottom of the hierarchy’ (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996: 154). The authors suggest that societal forces of racism and sexism impact negatively on the lives of black women and, most importantly, it is argued that race/ethnicity interlocks and intersects with other social dimensions. It is this intersectionality of various forms of
oppression that has a profound impact on the life positions and everyday lives of black women (Hill Collins, 1991). This is supported by Jones’ (2000) research on the law and meanings attributed to different shades of skin colour and by Johnson-Bailey and Cervero’s educational study (1996). The women in the latter study expressed an acute awareness of their subordinated status in society and how this, in turn, has produced an internalised form of self-hatred and intra-racial discrimination based on skin colour.

Using the notion of *majoritarian stories*, Solarzano and Yosso (2002) demonstrate how whiteness constructs normative dominant cultural narratives in ways that subordinate the other in American society. The authors show how majoritarian stories, or dominant cultural narratives, are accepted as commonsense, such as when:

... darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighbourhoods and bad schools. It informs us that limited or Spanish accented English and Spanish surnames equals bad schools and poor academic performance (Solarzano & Yosso, 2002: 29).

This correlates with Hage’s (1998b) thesis, although he refers to the ultimate white nation fantasy as a dominant cultural narrative in Australia. In Australia, an Asian-sounding surname, accent or Aboriginal kinship declarations can invoke similar negative associations. In my own teaching experience, it was not unusual to hear pre-service educators express stereotypic understandings around group social identity, particularly Aboriginal identity. According to Osler (1997), racist behaviour and stereotyping are part of society’s norms and are sanctioned by the broader society.
These are internalised by members of minority groups and may result in a negative image of themselves or lower ‘their expectations of what can be achieved in a racist society’ (Osler, 1997: 194).

Anzaldua (1990a, 1990b), in her writing on the ethics and politics of activism in the US, writes about how systems of domination, including racism, have been internalised by members of minority group to the extent that these are also enacted by minority groups on others, thereby perpetuating a cycle of hegemony. In particular, she writes about women of colour undermining one another through such internalised racism. This results in a competition between minority groups over sparse resources. Rather than joining forces to more effectively exert pressure on political leaders to effect change, internalised racism perpetuates hierarchical systems of oppression in a dog-eat-dog fashion, restricting the potential for building political coalitions and alliances.

Adding further insight to the hierarchical nature of the university, the women educators in Johnson-Bailey and Cervero’s (1996) study acknowledge their experience of being ‘assigned roles and rules based on status and place that served to authorize and to restrain’ individuals and groups in the university (p. 153). The practices of exclusion and stereotyping were also experienced as everyday occurrences for students and faculties alike. According to the authors, systems of oppression such as ‘racism, sexism, classism, and colorism (intraracial discrimination based on a preference for lighter skin shades)’ (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996: 153) also operate on overt and covert levels through institutions such as the family, university, government, churches and through relationships within these contexts. In response to these systems of oppression, the women in their study created and adopted
a range of coping strategies, such as silence, negotiation and resistance, for survival and attainment of personal goals, including education.

Firstly, silence is described as a coping mechanism used when it was either too painful or detrimental to speak out or take resistant action. For the women in Johnson-Bailey and Cervero’s (1996) study, silence was considered a ‘safer course of action’ (p. 149). Secondly, negotiation is described in terms of the respondents weighing up the options available to them, which ‘members of the majority don’t have to entertain’ (p. 148). Negotiation is seen as a matter of a person or group having to weigh up options within their specific, situated and socio-economic circumstances. It is about degrees of privilege. The less access to capital, the fewer choices and less mobility individuals tend to have. This also links back to Massey’s argument that the mobility of some groups is inadvertently and advertently enabled through the stasis of others. Negotiation was seen as the most commonly employed strategy used by the women in the study. Thirdly, resistance was seen as the ‘open defiance of rules or actions’ (p. 151) that were perceived as unfair. According to the authors, the internal strategies of silence and negotiation were used more frequently by the women in their study than the external strategy of resistance. They concluded that the women’s lives inside academia were very much structured by the power and privilege ‘of the secular world’ (p. 153) and that the world of the university is reflective of these relations of power.

In a similar vein, Alfred’s (2001a, 2001b) research on African-American women’s experiences in higher education encapsulates common themes, although Alfred links family socialisation of women to their preference for employing strategies of silence and negotiation in the university. Cho (in Viernes-Turner, 2002) discusses the issue of
parity in the university. In her study on Asian Pacific Americans in the academic workplace, she suggests that numbers in American universities show over-parity in some fields and under-parity in others. Moreover, she suggests that over-parity tends to mask under-parity in other fields. That is, over-parity status at the earlier entry level does not necessarily lead to the same over-parity higher up in the promotions stakes and inferences drawn from an aggregated over-parity status basically render invisible the diverse needs of a heterogeneous population. Here, the key argument here is that it is the very assumption of homogeneity within disenfranchised groups which helps to maintain the status quo (Cho, 1996 in Viernes-Turner, 2002).

Lising Antonio’s study on the status of *faculty of colour* in American higher education, based on a comprehensive national database that includes references to race/ethnicity, highlights the issue of heterogeneity (Lising Antonio, 2002). The author demonstrates that not only is there heterogeneity within *white faculty* and faculty of colour, but there are also differences between them. One of the main differences is in the activities and priorities of faculty of colour and white faculty, as well as demographic, disciplinary and institutional differences between the two groups, including ‘variation in factors such as age, academic rank, academic department, and institutional type’ (Lising Antonio, 2002: 587). Particularly interesting are Lising Antonio’s claim that faculty of colour brings different kinds of epistemological resources to their work in universities compared to their white colleagues, and his notion of value orientation.

Integrating existing research on female university staff who are marked as *different* or *minority* in American universities, Viernes-Turner (2002) illustrates how multiple
identities shape women’s opportunities in higher education. Drawing from Kanter’s analysis of white women’s experiences, Viernes-Turner explains the positioning of women in higher education in terms of cumulative disadvantage and advantage. That is, those who differ from the norm within the corporate hierarchy encounter a cycle of cumulative disadvantage, whereas those who fit the norm are more likely to experience a cycle of cumulative advantage (Kanter, 1977 in Viernes-Turner, 2002). The author, however, does further Kanter’s argument by suggesting that ‘(S)ituations in which a woman of color might experience marginality are multiplied depending on her marginal status within various contexts’ (Viernes-Turner, 2000: 77). This resonates with Henry’s observation that ‘individuals or groups who shift away from traditionally accepted academic disciplines and dare to question the status quo are essentially ostracized’ (Henry, 1994: 51). Thus, the further away from the mainstream an individual is situated, the greater the cumulative disadvantage such a positioning might entail.

Other relevant comments about women’s experiences in the university include: being more visible and on display; feeling more pressure to conform and to make fewer mistakes; becoming socially invisible and not standing out; finding it harder to gain credibility; being more isolated and peripheral; being more likely to be excluded from internal peer networks; having limited sources of power through alliances; having fewer opportunities to be sponsored; facing misperceptions of their identity and role in the organisation; being stereotyped; and facing more personal stress (Viernes-Turner, 2002, drawing on Kanter, 1977).
While some US studies acknowledge the intersectionality of different forms of oppression, I am wary of the concept of hierarchies of oppression and its tendency to essentialise difference. To assume that hierarchies occur naturally actually reifies existing hierarchies of oppression so that people rank themselves and others according to who is worse off without questioning how social groups are framed as problems and by whom. An essentialist approach to race and racism is not very useful as the focus is not on how epistemologies or systems of thinking produce difference, but on identifying people as problems and who has the worst problems. It is argued that such an approach is more likely to maintain stasis as it gives limited recourse for engagement and action to work against forces of oppression. Rather than assuming hierarchies of oppression occur naturally, I have, on this issue, assumed that these are socially constructed through relations of power.

Diversity and colour, including whiteness, are written and embodied in faculty and, as importantly, in curriculum and teaching enacted in the university. Thus, the focus on social justice becomes a symbolic de-racialisation of powerful content that can trouble curriculum of the university. Individual practitioners in the university have, however, managed to use the surface simplicity of social justice to smuggle in more radical concerns, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

**Troubling Curriculum**

In education, concerns with social justice might pop up under a plethora of different disciplinary or subject headings in the university including Diversity Studies, Aboriginal Studies, Anti-Racism Studies and Multicultural Studies. According to
Levine-Rasky, there is little evidence to show that these measures have translated into more equitable outcomes for students who find themselves marginalised, for various reasons, let alone for educators who are already working in the system. In particular, she critiques the ways in which equity programs look to educators as a primary source of change. This calls for further questioning around higher education curriculum.

In a North American context, Levine-Rasky writes that:

*In faculties of education in today’s urban centres, it is increasingly common to find courses or entire programmes aimed at improving educational equity for students marginalised on the basis of race and ethnicity. Multicultural or anti-racism education are the usual institutional responses to this form of educational inequity* (Levine-Rasky, 2000: 271).

In Australia, Malin explains that government policies today ‘explicitly legislate for equity of access and accommodation of diversity in all its forms within the Australian legal, economic and social system’ and our educational systems (Malin, 1999: 1, citing Morris & Mowlishaw, 1997 and Vasta & Castles, 1996). She argues that universities and schools are responding to such reforms by introducing anti-bias programs, including the anti-racism teacher education program that Malin writes about in her study (1999). Kamler, Reid and Santoto (1999) also suggest that the conservative social and political climate impacted negatively upon their study of teacher educators and pre-service educators and attribute the year-long delay for receiving approval from the Victorian Department of Education to go ahead with their study to ‘a climate of political conservatism and nervousness’ (Kamler *et al.*, 1999: 64). In their reflections on the research process, they concluded that:
It does appear more likely that projects seeking to explore controversial questions of identity, race and difference may be silenced and less likely to gain approval than those that bolster the status quo (Kamler et al., 1999: 64).

These Australian studies collectively reveal that the prevailing conservative political climate has precipitated a range of curriculum responses, mainly in the form of multicultural and anti-racism education. The studies also recognise racism as having a significant impact on educational institutions, the people within an educational institution and the curriculum. Racism and race, Moreton-Robinson explains, are more often represented and taught in Australian universities as a problem associated with people of colour (Moreton-Robinson, 2000a).

Expanding on this idea, Singh (1994) illustrates the salience of the eugenics and cultural studies arguments in his discussion of Australian curriculum context and practices. He argues that curriculum is closely linked to a society’s particular social interests. That is, public forms of knowledge are constituted under particular socio-historical conditions so that ‘the social interests in society are internal to, and constitutive of, the curriculum’ (Singh, 1994: 9). Drawing on Young’s notion of cultural imperialism, Singh explains that this has historically framed what counts as curriculum knowledge in Australia:

Differences based on race, class, gender, ethnicity or ability that do not accord with the dominant group are construed as deviant, inferior, lacking or as a negation. Cultural imperialism is enacted, in part, through the dominant
group’s assertion that its perspectives and experiences are universal or neutral,
if not both (Singh, 1994: 3).

Singh’s analysis of educational curriculum is damning as he presents evidence of curriculum which has been traditionally racist and ‘continues to work against the emancipatory human interests’ (Singh, 1994: 9) of Indigenous people. Singh illustrates the kinds of knowledge practices which have been used, and continue to be used, widely and systematically against Aboriginal people in Australia. These arguments are just as relevant to higher education curriculum.

Aboriginal people in Australia have begun to reverse this colonial legacy by struggling for significant representation in education authorities and by producing alternative knowledge perspectives and histories (Moreton-Robinson, 2000a). I would add, however, that cultural imperialism has also worked against other groups who have been classified and categorised as different. Remaining outside curriculum policy discussions is the issue of representation of a range of women educators and how they negotiate the conditions described by Singh in a higher education pedagogy context. Therefore, as Mohanty succinctly explains, ‘the central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged’ (Mohanty, 1994: 146, author’s emphasis). This is not only true of schools but also of universities.

There is a dearth of knowledge about the experiences of Aboriginal women educators in the Australian university. Moreton-Robinson’s important writing about the politics of knowledge production in Australian higher education is powerful (Moreton-
Robinson, 2000a). Bin-Sallik (2000) is a writer who has succinctly summarised the position of Australian Aboriginal women:

*Until recent years very few non-Aboriginal women in Australia had crossed the barrier in the male-dominated world of academia, let alone indigenous people... There are now dozens of Aboriginal women with university degrees around the country. Our participation rate is higher than that of our men, as is our numbers of postgraduate awards* (Bin-Sallik, 2000: 2).

The authors in Bin-Sallik’s book, *Aboriginal Women By Degrees: Their Stories of the Journey Towards Academic Achievement*, speak about the survival and maintenance of Indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions, not just in the university but also in the wider Australian society.

It seems that Australian curriculum and teaching practices tend to be framed by a Eurocentric perspective (Lee, 1995, 1998; Arber, 1997, 1998, 2000; Osler, 1997; Dolby, 2000a, 2000b; Bariso, 2001). By ethnocentricity of the curriculum, I am referring to curriculum content that privileges European histories or presents these as the sole or primary accounts. This narrow focus reinforces conceptions of normality associated with only these histories, obscuring alternative histories and knowledge perspectives. The way in which marginality, exclusiveness and the otherness of minority educators is addressed in a Eurocentric approach is by emphasising the others’ experiences as isolated from and outside of the broader social context in which they are situated (Bariso, 2001). The participants in Osler’s (1997) study name one of the main reasons for choosing not to enter teaching as the absence of minority
perspectives in the national curriculum. That is, the Eurocentricity of the curriculum was cited as a disincentive for entering the profession of teaching (Osler, 1997).

Henry brings attention to the presence of hierarchies in knowledge production, claiming that in Britain, feminism has come under considerable scrutiny and debate (Ahmed, 1997; Ang-Lygate, 1997; Ifekwunigwe, 1997; Mirza, 1997). Henry critiques feminist scholarship that does not distinguish between black and white women’s experiences on the grounds that:

... [t]here are significant historical differences between black and white women in terms of access to key structures in higher education. The relationship between black and white women has become part of a wider debate about feminism (Henry, 1994: 50).

She argues that the generic representation of the subject position of woman within feminism scholarship does not adequately address these complexities. Henry’s point is that when whiteness is taken for granted as the norm, as if it describes the world at large, then the differences between women are ignored and racism and its incumbent issues become invisible (Henry, 1994).

On the operation of hierarchies in a curriculum context, Henry argues that ‘within the university curricula, traditional divisions of status and gender’ (Henry, 1994: 51) are clearly demarcated. This has a constitutive effect on non-traditional groups in the university. I found Henry’s analysis of university curricula very helpful in that her analysis takes into account individual and institutional forms of racism as well as
epistemological bias in university curricula. On this, she acknowledges the general lack of awareness within the faculty of the ways in which ‘existing bodies of knowledge and whole disciplines have developed through western, white, male knowledge perspectives’ (Henry, 1994: 51). The bottom line for Henry is that universities have thus far failed to rethink and assess the content of curriculum across disciplines in ways that acknowledge these complexities (Henry, 1994). She concludes, on a sobering note, that although universities might want to employ measures to prevent employment discrimination, often the resources are not enough to effect long-term significant changes in practices (Henry, 1994). Overall, Henry is critical of the university’s recent drive towards quality and efficiency because it places equal opportunity issues extremely low on the university agenda and even worsens the situation for the disenfranchised.

In the current climate of conservatism, it is difficult to raise the issue of race and cultural diversity as central to knowledge production. Conservatism has a masking effect, framing difference and cultural diversity in terms of recruitment and human resources operations rather than positioning it at the core (knowledge production) in the Australian university. My argument is that difference is not a peripheral issue, but central to university governance and knowledge production. It is a core concept which inevitably determines what counts as important knowledge in the knowledge economy. Presently, both re-racialised and racialised discourses of difference continue to inform multicultural and anti-racism educational initiatives which play a constitutive role in curriculum development (Singh, 1994) and in identity-making. This calls for closer examination of the kinds of discourses of race and ethnicity taken up by the Australian university.
Chapter 3 - Knowledge as Dialogic not Dualogic

Introduction

Within traditional epistemologies, the production of knowledge is only possible if one insists on and strives for objectivity (Harding, 1986, 1987; Hill Collins, 1991; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scheurich, 1997; Edwards & Ribbens, 1998; Fine, Weseen & Wong, 2000; Greenbank, 2002). Hence, research becomes a means for progress via the attainment of unbiased knowledge and a knower must continually seek to overcome his or her partiality and social location as if these were weaknesses or impediments (Haraway, 1988; O’Brien-Hallstein, 1999). Knowledge production and reasoning, in this context, are seen as separate from the historical context (O’Brien-Hallstein, 1999). When educators make claims to knowledge, it is important to question the nature of such claims. The idea that knowledge is produced collectively (Sefa Dei, 2002) calls for close examination of the fundamental assumptions and priorities underpinning research and teaching practices. The following is a discussion of the kinds of theoretical traditions underpinning this study and reasons for drawing from these.
Harding (1987) makes an important distinction between methodology and method. Methodology refers to the theories of knowledge and the interpretive frameworks that guide every research project, while method refers to techniques for gathering empirical evidence. Methodology relates to very particular assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the ways of knowing that reality (epistemology) and the changing contours of morality and values (axiology) which the researcher brings to all research projects (Scheurich, 1997). In other words, the conceptual issues are not separate, but entwined and define, for that researcher, the nature of the world, the individual’s place in it and the range of possible relations to the world and its many parts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To separate methodology from what the researcher perceives as conceptually salient would be to ignore some of the deepest assumptions underlying much education research. These assumptions are so embedded in dominant discourses about western civilisation, science and scholarly endeavours that they have, over time, become taken for granted as natural and invisible (Scheurich, 1997).

In this research the notion of validity had to be based on a very different understanding of what counts as valid knowledge and ways of knowing than that offered by a traditional approach. This is not due to a rejection of the value of positivist epistemologies, but of the application of these in unquestioning ways. I have assumed that both narrative and scientific knowledge are:
... comprised of sets of statements and rules specific to each particular kind of knowledge, therefore making it impossible to judge the existence of validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge or vice versa, as the criteria are different (Sarup, 1993: 136).

Given that the subject of the study was the experiences of women educators of colour, a critical and dialogic approach enabled the exploration and questioning of the criteria for validity in a way that recognises multiple voices, multiple interests and ways of knowing and being in the world (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). I developed criteria which opened possibilities for a more nuanced understanding of the project of education for social change and the need for collaborative action.

Validity has an important role to play in qualitative research. It is more than a tool for verifying the truth. It can extend to the engagement of democratic practices and the development of coalitionary relationships that take research out of the Academy and into the communities where it is conducted (hooks, 1994; Fine, 1994; Hua, 2003). McTaggart writes that:

> Our thinking about validity must engage much more than mere knowledge claims… [It must be] comprehensive enough to reflect [what] the social action researchers ... are committed to ... (Gergen & Gergen, 2000: 1032).

These understandings of validity acknowledge the importance of the political motives of the researcher and the researched as a means of gaining a deeper insight into the narration of subjective experience.
Racial Discourses

Given the tendency of the majority of current research in higher education to either overlook race or to treat social groups as stable and homogeneous entities (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; Arber, 1998; Anthias, 2002), my interests lay in the exploration of the identification process and social power. For this reason, I have drawn together theories of knowledge from across multiple disciplines, which have enabled me to look at the ways in which certain stabilities as well as instabilities or disjunctures of meaning associated with race are produced (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). I wanted to distance myself from the essentialising discourse of race to examine ‘the unequal effects of racism for different groups of people’ and understand how race ‘operates in daily practice as a set of complex and changeable meanings’ (Roman, 1993b: 5-6). This was important given that ‘most qualitative methodologies are deeply infused with individualist conceptions and ideologies’ (Gergen & Gergen, 2000: 1041), including the genre of life stories and autobiography. A focus on the individual’s experience, feelings, identity and life narratives, without a macro-level analysis, would imply that experience is the product of individual cognitive processes. Such an approach would overlook how experience is also produced through historical, social and political conditions.

To avoid a traditional problem/victim approach, it was important for me to be clear about how racial discourses work. This required critical reflexivity on how I chose to represent the women and their experiences and the implications of my particular representation. I could not pursue this inquiry as if the descriptions and explanations were transparent reflections of the subject matter; this would reinstate the modernist
tradition of objectivity and (a singular) truth (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). I also found the idea of hanging out the stories on the postmodern washing line, whereby all social identities and social positions occupy equal status of difference, somewhat problematic. In their analysis of key tensions within qualitative research, Gergen and Gergen (2000) examine the traditional binary between research and representation. From this perspective, the relationship between observation, or the collation of data, and reporting on this process is seen as straightforward and unproblematic. As Gergen and Gergen point out, however, there is an increasing recognition in social science research ‘that because observation is inevitably saturated with interpretation, and research reports are essentially exercises in interpretation, research and representation are inextricably entwined’ (Gergen & Gergen, 2000: 1027).

A growing number of scholars in the US have adopted critical race theory (CRT) methods and theoretical frameworks in educational research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker, 1998; Olesen, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT developed from CLS (Davies, 1994) and through African American, Latina/o and Native American critical social perspectives (Parker & Lynn, 2002: 8). The aim of CLS was primarily to:

... legitimate narrative and story telling that presents a different interpretation of how the law has been used to justify an ideology of racism against persons of colour (Parker & Lynn, 2002: 10).

Fernandez (2002) summarises the function of narrative in a CRT context where the narrative: is a vehicle for reflection on lived experience; enables the silenced to speak
publicly about their story within a mediated setting; subverts the dominant story and/or reality that is socially constructed by whites (Fernandez, 2002, drawing on Delgado, 1995); and provides the means for sharing experience in a way that raises individual and collective consciousness and possibilities for social action (Ferndandez, 2002). CRT draws on the principles of CLS, applying these to social and educational contexts.

A CRT approach assumes that the performative and discursive aspects of identity and knowledge construction processes are fundamentally important to achieving social agency (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker, 1998; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In her analysis of the way in which the construction of race has underpinned the Euro-American epistemological tradition, Ladson-Billings stresses the importance of acknowledging not only individual epistemologies, but also systems of knowing. In a discussion of the historical conditions which have led to the unquestioned construction and acceptance of race in the Academy (Ladson-Billings, 2000), she argues that a view of epistemology as both individual and systemic enables a deeper analysis of how racism operates in knowledge production at a covert, institutional and epistemological level. In other words, worldviews and systems of knowledge operate in relation to one another, so that:

\[
\text{How one views the world is influenced by what knowledge one possesses, and what knowledge one is capable of possessing is influenced deeply by one’s worldview. Thus the conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and their worldviews (Ladson-Billings, 2000: 258).}
\]
In this study, I have drawn from these assumptions for their potential to interrogate ‘what counts as knowledge about a particular group’ (Parker & Lynn, 2002: 13) and applied them to an analysis of Australian higher education. Educational studies, using a CRT approach, provide invaluable insights into the way in which ‘race has fluid, decentered social meanings that are continually shaped by political pressures’ (Calmore, 1992, in Parker & Lynn, 2002: 11). Moreover, a CRT narrative approach is an established methodology for counting those who are traditionally silenced or excluded from higher level decision-making processes in educational institutions (Casey, 1993; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994; Chase, 1995; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Ah Nee-Benham & Dudley, 1997; Neal, 1998; Rakhit, 1998; Erben, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Scott, 2003). In this study, my aim was to investigate how race and ethnic constructions are related to meaning making. It also was a particularly appropriate method for generating the rich and thick descriptive data needed for this project.

While the aim of my study was to document the experiences of diverse women, I realised that the process of critical self-reflection on race and ethnicity is not a given for all women of colour. Within critical race circles, feminists of colour have asked white feminists to interrogate their own whiteness as a racial category to raise their own awareness of how race and gender consciousness coexist (Anzaldua, 1990b; hooks, 1990a, 1990b, 1992a; Hill Collins, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Frankenberg, 1993; Foster, 1997; Haggis, Schech & Fitzgerald, 1999; Hill & Volker, 2000). There is little evidence, however, of the same kind of discussion among women of colour themselves. That is, ‘the race consciousness of women of colour has not been similarly problematized’ (Stewart Brush, 2001: 173). According to Stewart Brush,
race consciousness denotes ‘a politicized and oppositional consciousness of race and racism’ (Stewart Brush, 2001: 171). This concept helped me to analyse my own race consciousness as part of the theorisation of my unconscious and conscious experiences in dealing with issues of race, gender and other oppressions in everyday life. I used this knowledge to analyse and compare the transcripts of the research conversations and in relation to the research literature.

The discovery of Stewart Brush’s work affirming this gap in knowledge has put into new perspective the early difficulties I experienced in my search for women educators of colour. In hindsight, my own developing race consciousness played an important role in the construction of a research methodology and analysis of the women’s narratives. It enabled a deeper and more integrated understanding of subjective experience with theory. Privileging the dimensions of race and ethnicity allowed me to question how the concept of difference is related to whiteness. After some time, this became less of a subconscious and more of a conscious process of looking both inwards and outwards. Rather than linear, it was an ongoing cyclical or spiral process of reflection and analysis, which led to the identification and exploration of women’s work in the university and their interest in the themes of intellectual, spiritual and practice knowledges. These themes differ from the recurring theme of career aspirations in the majority of Australian studies on gender equity in higher education, confirming that the personal is also political (hooks, 1990b, 1992a, 1992b; Hill Collins, 1991; Stewart Brush, 2001).

While attempting to theorise race/ethnicity, identity and higher education pedagogy in the early stages of the research, I was largely unfamiliar with the recent and emerging
politics of transnational feminism (Ahmed, 1997; Ang-Lygate, 1997; Ifekwunigwe, 1997; Anthias, 2002; Mahtani, 2002; Hua, 2003). At the time of my conversations with the women, I relied heavily on the scholarship of earlier feminists of colour, who wrote about and challenged the exclusion of black women and women of colour in a white- and male-dominated Academy (hooks, 1984, 1991, 1992a; Anzaldua, 1990a, 1990b; Hill Collins, 1991; Lorde, 1984) and on feminist research (Hua, 2003). I later extended my reading to include mixed-race theory from the UK. This shift in focus is reflected in an article I wrote around this time (Gopalkrishnan, 2002), which was an earlier draft of this chapter. It was not until well after the official research conversations had ended and during the writing of the final draft of this thesis that I encountered Hua’s (2003) illuminating description of critical race feminism and, with it, the potential to transcend the limitations of the black/white binary. I was delighted and relieved to discover that the development of my research methodology confirmed the key principles of critical race feminist theory. An earlier encounter with Hua’s historical analysis of feminism would have allayed many of the concerns and personal injuries accrued during the more challenging phases of my research journey.

My research follows and builds on a CRF approach in that it (Hua, 2003):

1. Incorporates into (educational) theorising an analysis of the intersectionality and interrelationality of race and racism with gender and other oppressions in a new light from multiply-situated perspectives.

2. Argues for an acknowledgement of social difference and multiplicity of communities and identifications as generated from women’s various positionings in society.
3. Offers a distinctive epistemological framework which provides room for exploration and testing of the shifting parameters of identity and knowledge boundary construction with reference to the notion of harm in the context of educative practice.

A Multi-Race/Ethnic Dialogic Approach

A researcher is automatically positioned as an outsider looking in on the research/ed (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Richardson, 1995, 2000; Delph-Janiurek, 2001); however, experience as a mixed-race person has taught me that one can be simultaneously an insider and an outsider (Rassool, 1997; Mahtani, 2002). In my study, I positioned myself as both. I was an insider, in that the women and I had identified (albeit very superficially in pre-research conversation mode) that we shared a common experience of being othered in the university. I was also the outsider simply because of the multiple race/ethnic standpoint dialogic framework I created. Before we’d even met, I had positioned the women as belonging to race/ethnic groups different from my own. I suspected that this would be contested in some way, which it was. To position oneself within an inquiry involves a conscious explication of the researcher’s conceptions of the nature of knowledge, the knower and ways of knowing. It also involves questioning how participants/co-participants/subjects/informants are portrayed within the research, the kinds of categories used to describe them, where these come from and their impact on the subject (Gunew, 1994; Arber, 1998).
In order to pursue these issues of interest, I explored the hidden assumptions underpinning an essentialist conception of identity, which my own positioning in the research provoked and also challenged. It was for this reason that I decided not to select participants on the basis of a presumed sameness or singular affiliation with a particular race/ethnic group (i.e. all Asian), but to make the criteria simply women educators whose race/ethnic affiliations differed from each other and from me. My use of this multiple race/ethnic concept was not intended simply to reify our otherness and slot the women into new ethnic boxes, but to disturb the assumption of the singularity of identity. To this end, my methodology needed to show how race and ethnic identity is negotiated as a marker of identity and how ways of belonging to a singular race/ethnic community both constrain and enable access to ‘the structured mobilities of contemporary life’ (Grossberg, 1996: 105). Thus, I have tried to avoid the politics of singularity. In my view, and drawing from Grossberg’s (1996) discussion, such a project requires an understanding of how theories of difference and theories of otherness meet.

Grossberg (1996) differentiates between these two theories. Theories of difference derive from structuralist and poststructuralist theory where identity always emerges out of the economies from which identities are produced. In contrast, theories of otherness are based on the assumption that ‘difference is itself an historically produced economy, imposed in modern structures of power, on the real’ (Grossberg, 1996: 94): that is, the other is both existing and independent of any specific relations. Grossberg argues that ‘the articulation of difference on top of otherness … becomes the material site of discursive power … which is … a fundamental logic of formations of modern power’ (Grossberg, 1996: 96).
The challenge for me was how to reconcile these contradictions in my study. Grossberg’s thesis pushed me to question whether I was using a theory of otherness or difference. I began to look for points of intersection and overlap of these in my own research. In order for me to recognise the very different assumptions underpinning both these theoretical approaches, I developed a situated and embodied theory of difference that attempted to acknowledge the pitfalls outlined by Grossberg. The gap in knowledge by and with women educators of colour in Australian universities required that I place them at the heart of the research; however, by placing the women at the centre of the study, I othered them. My only means of interrupting the othering process was to make space for contestation and exploration of the economies from which identities are produced: that is, to develop a theory of difference that acknowledges the ways in which race and other markers of difference are operationalised and a framework that is not essentialist, but based on the process of belonging and becoming (Hall, 1990, 1991, 1992b; Grossberg, 1996; Anthias, 2002).

As the researcher, I was responsible for creating the epistemological and ontological space for an in-depth exploration of the issues at hand. I tried to make explicit to the women that the differences and contradictions that emerged in conversation would help direct the analysis of our experiences. I was mindful, however, that limiting dialogue only to the differences between us would have merely slotted us into yet another set of essentialised identities. It was important to develop the dialogic part of my methodology because of the complexity of narratives of location and positionality and to show how they relate to dominant discourses of whiteness and white privilege.
The Binary: Half Full or Half Empty?

In the process of constructing the research and then writing up the narratives, it was very important to resist the temptation to think in binary categories. Binary arguments and the use of oppositional categories such as us/them, black/white or east/west are not very useful for understanding how certain stabilities, instabilities and disjunctures of meaning associated with race are produced (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). As discussed in Chapter 1, the premise that there is only one way of thinking about the world and our place in it – in either mainstream or in non-mainstream terms - is highly problematic. Young’s (1990) theory of cultural imperialism demonstrates how a dualistic view of the world tends to reify social identities and knowledge in ways that presume these are unchanging and that disembody and distance these from the knower or the producer of knowledge. Binaries such as mainstream/non-mainstream, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual and white/black assume that each half is potentially equal. It implies that a simple reversal of the halves will somehow restore balance and harmony. This is, arguably, a misleading assumption.

Although women are increasingly represented as students and staff in the university and in traditionally male-dominated professions such as engineering or medicine, lack of parity remains a key issue (Burton, 1997; Blattel-Mink, 2001; Morley, 2003). Women are located in far greater numbers within the caring professions such as teaching, nursing and social work (Wyn, 1996; Burton, 1997). In a wider social context, women still earn a lower average income than do their male counterparts. The language and legislation available for same sex parents is lacking, embedded within dominant public discourses of heterosexuality. At senior Australian federal and
state government political levels and in universities, non-white people are significantly under-represented, yet they are part of a demographically and statistically burgeoning constituency. By overlooking the ways in which each half of the binary is interrelated (and linked in a particular way), dualistic systems of thought are unable to adequately account for such disparities in social relations or to facilitate strategic action to alter conditions that maintain unequal social relations.

In the black/white binary:

One must be either black or white in such thought systems – persons of ambiguous racial and ethnic identity constantly battle with questions such as ‘what are you, anyway?’ This emphasis on quantification and categorization occurs in conjunction with the belief that either/or categories must be ranked. The search for certainly of this sort requires that one side of a dichotomy to be privileged while its other is denigrated (Hill Collins, 1991: 225).

Binary arguments do not question the distribution of power and the system of rank and hierarchy itself. If, instead, emphasis is placed on the social and on the construction process, the interdependency between the two halves of the binary is made explicit. That is:

Race being a social construction means that white and black has to be understood in relationship to each other. Social and political power, as well as implications in social terms, must be identified. There is no black without white; there is no white without black. In this sense we are mutually and
continuously defining and constituting our race by what we include and exclude of the racial other. Black and white are not only co-dependent though in different ways, but black is necessarily a part of white and white is necessarily a part of black in a fluid and destabilizing dance of consternation (Powell, 1999 :149).

In the binary argument, differences within categories are underplayed. As a result, the black/white binary assumes an internal coherence, suppressing similarities or overlaps between the categories (Aziz, 1992). In this study, a reversal of the white/black dichotomy to a black/white one would not allow the interruption of discourses of separatist politics, but merely suppresses it. Given the absence of critical interrogation of black/white discourse in the Australian university and that discussions about the subtleties between whiteness and otherness are rarely explored outside cultural theory (Gopalkrishnan, 2002), binaries and dualistic thinking provide limited means for making such contradictions more visible. For these reasons, I have drawn from critical, discursive and narrative theories in order to transcend the dilemmas presented by binaries such as public/personal, mainstream/non-mainstream and black/white to challenge academic discourses that privilege one half over the other (in many cases denigrating the other).

**Storying**

Stories and storytelling in an educational context are not new concepts. Storying has been used as a strategy by therapists (Freedman & Combs, 1996; White, 1997; Plummer, 2001) and is linked to early consciousness-raising groups and social
movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Stanley, 1996; Stewart Brush, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Stories have also been used by teachers to examine their own practice in secondary education settings (Chase, 1995) and in the higher education context (hooks, 1991; Henry, 1994; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Guinier, 1997; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Christian-Smith, 1999; Erben, 2000; Viernes-Turner, 2002). In this context, narrative has been recognised as one of only two primary knowledge forms and as distinct from scientific logic. The value of story lies in its capacity for self-construction and acknowledgement of diverse ways of knowing and acting (Ah Nee-Benham & Dudley, 1997). Through the appropriation, interpretation and telling of the past from a perspective of the present, the individual constructs the self (Ahmed, 1997; Anthias, 2002). This personal form of sense making is part of an ongoing dialectic between the individual and collective in relation to his/her social and cultural location (Troyna & Rizvi, 1997; Taylor Webb, 2001).

In the study, I have assumed that ‘life and narrative are inextricably connected. Life both anticipates telling and draws meaning from it’ (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 732). It is through the retelling that we discover new insights about the self, the other and the society (Chase, 1996; Etter-Lewis, 1996; Josselson, 1996; Widdershoven & Smits, 1996). Therefore, the narrative is not simply a textual product or a fiction. It is both a product and a process where writing itself becomes a method of inquiry that involves different ongoing stages of self-reflection. Conle draws attention to the way in which the interrelatedness between the process and the product creates a tension in which the researcher/writer finds herself or himself in continual struggle for an understanding of how content is connected with methodology and methods. In other words, the thing you end up with - the narrative - is both a product and a process methodology (Conle,
It is a place where writing, producing and analysing happen, not in a chronological way but in a spiral and simultaneous way and not in a vacuum but in dialogue with others. Similarly, Dhunpath (2000) uses the term *narradigm* to describe the ways in which ‘our lives are intrinsically narrative in quality and we experience the world and re-present our experience narratively’ (p. 546). Therefore, the study of the narrative becomes a means of studying ways in which humans experience the world (Polkinghorne, 1988; Dhunpath, 2000) and a life story is seen as a social and cultural construction.

I knew that structured questions in the form of a written questionnaire would not be adequate for the purposes of my study. This led me to oral history literature, life history and life story research methods (Polkinghorne, 1988; Borland, 1991; Etter-Lewis, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Brettell, 1997; Kellor, 1999; Charon, 2001; Haight, 2001; Keats Whelan *et al.*, 2001). The main difference between a life history and a life story approach is that life history denotes a record of the entire life span and a life story highlights a few key events or important relationships (Brettell, 1997). In life stories, the narrative is neither assumed to be a true, accurate nor objective portrayal of people and their circumstances (Brettell, 1997). Rather, it rests on the question of whose authorial hand has intervened in the research and how the process of representation, editing and the reconstruction of an oral text been transformed into a written text and whether that is accessible and understandable enough for the reading audience to engage with and follow. The concept of a life story ‘emphasizes the subjective experience of the narrator and the form of the narrative itself’ (Brettell, 1997: 225).
A life story approach is therefore more than an extraction: it is a mutual and dialogic process ‘where the researcher and the researched learn from each other’ (Rakhit, 1998: 66). Its aim is not to seek a definitive external truth that verifies accuracy of memory recall, but to explore the idea of truth from a lived and situated perspective. Such an approach does not assume that the researcher is the expert authority on the life of those with whom she or he speaks but is the translator of experience (Etter-Lewis, 1996; McCormack, 2000b). This translation process recognises subjectivity and seeks to understand how and why we create meaning in our lives. If the narrator of a life story is seen as having authority over her/his life story (Kohler Riessman, 1993; Freedman & Combs, 1996; White, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), the conversation can be a resource for developing a relationship of mutual trust and benefit to explore the research objectives and any ensuing ambiguities. Conversation can imply that the researcher and co-researchers are mindful of the ways in which they engage with each other for the purpose of the research study. They can together explore common ground and differences, respect and value diverse standpoints and generate ethical and moral questions about education for social change. This was a more likely method of encouraging mutual personal and even private disclosure.

For this study, I use autoethnographic writing as ‘a method for circumventing the colonizing and exoticising action’ (Banks & Banks, 2000: 234). In autoethnography, the writer looks inwards for an interpretation of socio-cultural experience and outwards at how social conditions in a culture and power relations in a cultural space constrains the meanings available for understanding the writer’s own life and text (Neumann, 1996 in Banks & Banks, 2000). Rather than directly representing the
meanings intended by each speaker or knower, the narrative, in its constitutive form, is a performative action that can provide insights into the process of meaning making (Hall, 1992a, 1996; Ang-Lygate, 1997; Anthias, 2002). Moreover, my use of autobiography and autoethnographic writing was (Ellis & Bochner, 2000):

- For the disclosure of emotional experience that challenges the rational model in which social performance is conveyed in a higher education context.
- To fracture the boundaries that usually separate social science from literature.
- To trouble the traditional view of the reader as a passive receiver of knowledge, thus re-positioning the reader as an active co-participant in dialogue.
- To compel an active analytical and emotional response to the issues and questions raised in the research.

The power of the positivist paradigm in the Academy is such that research which places the self at the centre is often regarded as not rigorous enough. This is because dominant positivist paradigms continue to carry more weight and resonate more widely in the Academy than do non-dominant paradigms. Autoethnographic research arguably occupies an even lower status than more traditional research approaches (Ronai, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kellor, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) given the difficulties in establishing validity or replicability through such a method. In my study, however, it would have been inappropriate, given my theoretical framework, to attempt to verify the *truthfulness* and *accuracy* of the women’s stories. The fact that they said something made it objectively valid for them at that time and place and,
consequently, a useful point from which to analyse the issue of their experience of positioning.

The act of positioning has important implications in storytelling because it tells us how we are placed by others in society (identification) and how we ourselves choose to place ourselves, either differently or the same as others place us (self-identification). The concept of positioning allows us to question who and what we identify with and why through stories about identification and ‘our practices and the practices of others, including wider social practices and how we experience them’ (Anthias, 2002: 498-99). That is, narratives of location and positionality reflect existing structured social relations and, conversely, social structure and social place are implicated in narratives (Cohen, 1992; Anthias, 2002).

In highlighting the value of narratives of location and positionality, Anthias critiques both essentialist and anti-essentialist identities, arguing that both models remain stuck on the assumption that identity has a singularity of meaning (Anthias, 2002). Her point that even anti-essentialist notions of fragmented and multilayered identities still maintain ‘that identity might be a possessive property of individuals rather than a process’ (Anthias, 2002: 495) is relevant to my study in which multiplicity and process, as opposed to singularity, are emphasised. For Anthias, identity has run its course. In pointing out the issue of the singularity of meaning of identity, the author advocates the use of narratives of location and positionality. Narratives of location and positionality are a way of countering ‘the residual elements of essentialization retained within the idea of fragmented and multiple identities’ (Anthias, 2002: 495). Narratives of location and positionality are enacted and therefore do not involve fixity
or permanence, but are expressions and ‘forms of social action’ in which social agents are ‘actively participating in the very construction of subject positionalities’ (Anthias, 2002: 501).

The issues of representation and ethics are, of course, intimately connected with discursive practices. In the study, I assumed that:

\[\text{Discourses constitute ubiquitous ways of knowing, valuing, and experiencing the world. They can be used for the assertion of power and knowledge and they can be used for purposes of resistance and critique. They are used in everyday local texts for building productive power and knowledge and for purposes of regulation and normalization, for the development of new knowledge and power relations, and for hegemony (Luke, 1999: 170).}\]

Gee and Green (1998) argue that rather than being a product of individual cognition, the ability to make sense of one’s experience is located in the social world and its practices. They write about Discourse (with a capital D) as referring to language, bodies and thought. This explanation suggests that language is not the sole medium for meaning making, but that participation in social practices can take us beyond the limitations of language. Such a discursive approach recognises all data and research artefacts as discourse, including symbols, words, objects, places, practices and even meaning making communities themselves. Discourse does not stand alone and individual and social groups have an active role in (unconsciously and consciously) taking up and shaping a Discourse.
Like Gee and Green, Fairclough (1989) sees meaning making as a dynamic process of organising and being organised by the available resources including ‘other people, types of language, objects and spaces’ (Fairclough, 1989: 291). This interpretation of meaning making also moves beyond the premise that language is the primary tool for mediating meaning. It opens up possibilities for other non-language-based resources, such as the socio-cultural belief systems, values and imagination, to be incorporated in the meaning making process so that ‘individuals can be placed with reference to a number of discourses and be situated in a number of ways’ (Haw, Hanifa & Shah, 1998: 25). Both treatments of discourse imply there is a direct relationship between discourse, the researcher and the researched, positioning the researcher/researched as active producers of meanings within the immediate research context (Haw et al., 1998). In the research conversations, we negotiated dominant discourses through the taking up and re-negotiation process so that as we were constituted by Discourse we also reconstituted it.

There are a number of ways in which stories and storytelling have been used in group work: one is the simple telling of a story for the purpose of speaking out and to name experience (McCormack, 2000b). Another approach involves the extensive analysis of stories over a number of group sessions, as in collective memory work. Haug’s (1987) memory work emerged from feminist writings in Berlin during the 1960s in response to the huge divide between theory and lived experience in social research. Haug sought to bridge this gap through exploring alternative narrative research methods. Bringing theory and lived experience together, her collective memory work approach involved participants and the researcher in a group meaning making process.
Although my study involves the participants in a relational meaning making process, this did not occur in a group setting. I have, however, borrowed from Haug’s interpretation that memories, rather than being direct quotations from experience, are reprocessed continually during identity formation (Schartz, 2000). In this view of memory, the surface validity of memories is not the key focus. Rather, the emphasis is on how memory plays a part in the identification process (Brettell, 1997). Memories, like meanings, are constituted in actions and the conditions in which stories are told, giving insight into the kinds of interpretations that we bring to the individual and the social in the retelling of our life stories (Haug, 1987). The women’s narratives were re-presentations of events and memories of the past revived in the present research moment. My interest was not in verifying the accuracy of the narratives, but in understanding how different life stories influence the identification and meaning making process (or vice versa) and in exploring the implications of this in knowledge production practices.

**Situated Knowledges**

Given that I wanted to explore identity in the context of broader struggles over social and economic inequities, political disenfranchisement and cultural and ideological repression (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993: xxi), my study needed to do more than name identities; it had to scratch beneath the face value of identity to understand how relations of power operate in the university. For this I looked to situated knowledge perspectives and standpoint theory. Rather than provide a detailed description of standpoint theorists (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993; Hill Collins, 1997; Hartsock, 1997; Hekman, 1997; van Schalkwyk, 1998; Burack, 1999; Preston, 1999; Stoetzler &
Yuval-Davis, 2002), I instead draw your attention to important debates that have emerged from standpoint literature and explain how these relate to the inquiry.

It is from within both feminist and critical race circles that scholarly works have revealed how academic knowledges have emerged from a historical perspective and are organised around the notion of disciplines and fields of knowledge in the Academy. The questioning of epistemologies, interrelations of knowledge, identity and politics is the cornerstone of feminist scholarship. Moreover, feminist scholarship has opened up possibilities for questioning the ways in which hegemonic paradigms and narratives have ‘claimed to be the only legitimate way to view the world’ (Ladson-Billings, 2000: 258). The aim of some of these writers has been to challenge positivist notions of objectivity and truth from a range of different standpoints (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

Van Schalkwyk (1998) refers to a standpoint as a position derived from the realities of members of society who have less access to power. There are people who, due to their own disadvantaged position in the social stratification, have a kind of double vision or knowledge of both marginal and dominant social realities. This double vision gives them a more complex view of their immediate social condition and of others who are more advantaged. A feminist standpoint therefore implies an epistemology derived from an individual’s awareness of their social location and the relationship between this location and their lived experiences (van Schalkwyk, 1998). Standpoint theory has been described in a myriad of different ways. O’Brien Hallstein (1999) argues that there is actually no unified body of writing that constitutes feminist standpoint theory. Although there is a wide range of approaches to these issues within standpoint
scholarship, most of these are grounded in the central idea that it is important to ‘account for the social positioning of the social agent’ (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 315) and ‘that knowledge is socially located and arises in social positions that are structured by power relations’ (O’Brien Hallstein, 1999: 2-3).

Different feminist standpoint scholars have applied this central tenet in a variety of different ways from a range of unique social locations and, in doing so, have acknowledged that it takes science and politics to achieve a standpoint; women’s ways of knowing emerge from women’s subordinate locations in a patriarchal and predominantly white dominant culture (Etter-Lewis, 1991, 1996; Roman, 1991, 1996; hooks, 1994; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 1998; van Schalkwyk, 1998; O’Brien Hallstein, 1999). Standpoint theorists range from feminist empiricists, whose aim is not to challenge or reinvent the framework of science but to improve on the existing ones (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002), to postmodernist theorists, who reject outright any notion of objectivity and truth (Flax, 1990). These differ mainly on the issue of how epistemology accounts for the situatedness of the knowing subject (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

For the study, I drew from Haraway’s (1988) concept of power sensitive conversation as I found her standpoint epistemology particularly helpful for thinking about the knowledge construction process within a dialogic framework. From Haraway’s standpoint view, knowledge can only ever be partial and situated, never the whole or absolute truth. Knowledge can only be approximated by engaging in situated and power sensitive dialogue from a range of partial perspectives. Haraway claims that it is through power sensitive conversation that we can begin to approximate truths about
how structures of power intersect to position the individual and particular social groups on the margins of a society or, as in the case of this study, the margins of an institution. This conception of knowledge enables a deeper understanding of how we are all interconnected with others, and how we can interrupt relations and structures of power that create inequities and privilege. We are all knowers and producers of knowledge, capable of taking action from our diversely situated perspectives.

Haraway’s truth does not refer to the positivist conception of truth, where fundamental laws of the universe, society or human nature necessarily beam us into our particular social locations. Rather, the object of her study is to unveil the truth of power. Power sensitive conversation allows us to develop a shared epistemological map of multiple perceptions and different social locations from different standpoints, to understand how relationships of power operate and to re-structure the social space of the university. Power sensitive dialogue is a vehicle for exploring a collective political project. It raises very particular questions about: how the researcher understands the issue of positioning from a standpoint perspective; the relationship between the individual and community; and whether the researcher sees any of the dimensions of race, ethnicity, class, gender and other social dimensions as having (or not having) a privileged ontological status (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). In my study, I drew on situated knowledge and standpoint perspectives as these position the self as a process that is in continuous, although not necessarily linear, motion and which has a coherence through time connecting past, present and future (Wenger, 1998). It is through the telling and retelling of past events, histories and feelings associated with these that we can begin to explore the political framework
underpinning the project of education for social change in an Australian higher education context.

The issue of epistemic privilege as problematic is a recurrent theme in debates about standpoint epistemologies. While standpoint theory, on first impressions, appears to open up possibilities for new voices and dialogues to emerge, the notion of epistemic privilege that underpins Gilligan (1982) and Hekman’s (1997) standpoint epistemologies has been strongly criticised. From their perspectives, it is assumed that women’s ways of knowing have direct access to a better truth simply because of their particular social location. Most standpoint theorists, however, reject the notion of an automatic correlation between social location and standpoint (Stoertzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). Hartsock, in particular, contests this approach by reminding us that feminist standpoint theory evolved in response to, and for the purpose of, challenging this so-called naïve viewpoint (Hartsock, 1997). One could argue similarly about the use of the black/white binary.

For example, as a non-white educator/researcher woman I cannot assume that these labels actually entitle me to a deeper insider’s insight. In a racially-conscious society, although the colour of an interviewer’s skin is likely to influence the way an interviewee responds, it is ‘erroneous to assume that a qualitative difference necessarily implies that one type of account is intrinsically superior to another’ (Rhodes, 1994). The different types of accounts (white on non-white, non-white on non-white, and non-white on white research) merely offer different insights and not in the sense of any one being superior or inferior to another.
When considering a methodology, I drew from feminist discussions about the interplay between epistemologies and ontologies in a way that acknowledges multiple standpoints and dimensions of experience (Harding, 1987; Stanley, 1996; van Schalkwyk, 1998; O’Brien-Hallstein, 1999). I also assumed that the relationship between the individual and the community remains unresolved (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). As Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis explain, because of ‘the importance of the collective experience in the epistemological process, the definition of “a group” is obviously one of the most important issues in standpoint theory’ (2002: 318). It was obvious from the beginning of my research, however, that not all women ‘hold the same views or share the same political goals, moral values or even the same interests’ (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 318). Although the descriptor women educators of colour denotes collectivity of some sort, I deliberately selected women who did not share a common singular race/ethnic affiliation in order to create a space for exploring the relationship between the individual subject and community, and the criteria for collectivity. Through the dialogic process, other heterogeneities emerged affirming the importance of addressing questions about epistemic privilege.

If I had used the notion of epistemic privilege as grounded in an understanding of the group to (unproblematically) refer to those sharing a common location in a particular positioning, or who belong to the same identity community (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002), this would have framed the discussions within the ambit of ethnic absolutism (Hua, 2003). Ethnic absolutism describes the tendency to essentialise ethnicity in absolute - immutable and fixed - terms. Research on mixed-race theory, however, offers evidence to the contrary (Ahmed, 1997; Mahtani, 2002) showing that race/ethnic identification is fluid, fragmented and dynamic and evolves according to
situation and context. It also supports the premise that, when race and ethnicity are used interchangeably, it implies identification is a matter of individual choice and that the individual has unlimited freedom of available choices. For these reasons, the use of the descriptor women educators of colour provided a common location for the other to speak about their understanding of and commitment to education for social change. At the same time, my methodology had to transcend the mainstream/margin binary so that the women’s alternative epistemologies could help interrupt the hegemonic discourses. I also assumed that dimensions such as race, ethnicity, age, class, gender, sexual orientation and other markers of difference intersect and overlap differently in people’s lives. I do not perceive race or ethnicity as more important than other dimensions, but made these dimensions salient because of the tendency within studies of women in higher education to overlook these (thereby privileging gender and class) and, in the case of Australian higher education studies, often to avoid race altogether.

In the study, I have assumed that neither of the social dimensions of race or ethnicity have an elevated ontological status, but are interdependent and intersectional. The aim of my methodology was to try to understand how the transition from lived experience to situated knowledge/positionings to practices take place through these dimensions. That is, race and ethnicity cannot be read in isolation from other axes of difference as this would merely reinstate existing hierarchies of oppression as naturally occurring phenomena. For this reason, I have emphasised the intersectionality of axes and their combined impact on people’s lives. If hierarchies are seen as being produced to maintain the normalcy of hegemony, then we need to re-focus our attention to the scaffolding upon which hierarchies of all kinds are inscribed.
Hill Collins (1991) argues that there is no single worst position within hierarchies of oppression. This is a reminder of the dangers of going down the futile ‘who bleeds more?’ path. On this issue, Hartsock suggests that ‘the criteria for privileging some knowledges over others’ (Hartsock, 1997: 372-3) needs to be seen as ethical and political rather than as epistemological. That is to say, there is no automatic correlation between one’s social position and standpoint. The women’s narratives in my research support Stewart Brush’s (2001) criticism of the tenuousness of such an argument. I am more inclined to agree that, rather than make a beeline for social positionings and thus reduce knowledge to its social base, we need to ground situated knowledge in social practices (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

Clearly, the issue of epistemic privilege is the thorn in the side of standpoint theory. Preston (1999) writes that objectivity in research and the social and political contexts of any research are not, and should not be seen as, mutually exclusive issues. He also critiques the view that marginalised standpoints are privileged because they provide better access to the truth (Preston, 1999). Epistemic privilege, according to Preston (1999), helps to bring attention to the ways that marginalised groups learn or assimilate dominant viewpoints; how some people may be more open to seeing and knowing social conditions of both the disadvantaged and the more advantaged. This double vision offers a superior perspective only in comparison to those who are never (or less likely to be) positioned in ways that drive them to question the strengths and/or limitations of their dominant viewpoints (Preston, 1999). In other words, the notion of epistemic privilege can be seen as problematic if it is based on the assumption that there is only one prevailing truth. Although I am reluctant to accept the term objectivity, as it generally assumes knowledge production is a value-neutral
exercise, I concur with Preston’s view that the saliency of a standpoint perspective cannot rest on the assumption of a qualitative degree of validity where one perspective is better than another. This excludes particular groups of people from producing valued knowledge and knowing a range of different standpoints/productions other than their own.

On the question of objectivity/subjectivity, Bourdieu argues that objectivity is unattainable. He posits that reflexivity helps to establish the validity of a subjective research position (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b; Bourdieu & Accardo, 1993; Schirato & Webb, 2003). If the concept of epistemic privilege reifies the metaphor of the margin and the centre, then we have to move beyond notions of epistemic privilege to find new ways of envisioning a shared purpose and goals. It may be more productive to utilise the term epistemic saliency, as it enables us to focus on the importance of allowing subordinated voices to count (Sefa Dei, 2001, personal email communication). Dialogue on the margins that remains only on the margins, however, is not very helpful. As Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis explain, the paradox lies in the issue that:

... access to the hegemonic positions of power is the most difficult to attain. Emphasis on the importance of the lives of the most marginal elements in society can sometimes collude with the attempts of hegemonic centers to remain opaque, while at the same time maintaining the surveillance of marginal elements in society (2002: 316).
In a similar vein, Preston (1997) argues for a dialogic which enables multiple standpoints to be acknowledged, incorporated and even cultivated, not because the truth can be attained only from privileged standpoints, but because multiple standpoints are a rich resource for the generation and criticism of hypotheses and ideas. The diverse experiences of various ethnic groups, religious groups, men, women, heterosexual individuals, homosexual individuals and members of various social classes may give rise to fruitful ways of looking at social and natural relations (Preston, 1999).

The Limits of Identity Politics

In a critique of identity politics within cultural theory, Grossberg brings home the importance of examining how agency is conceived and achieved in any project for social change (Grossberg, 1996). He argues that a model of identity, as singular and unitary, needs to be rearticulated to allow for ‘the possibility of constructing historical agency, and giving up notions of resistance that assume a subject standing entirely outside of and against a well established structure of power’ (Grossberg, 1996: 88). To this end, Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis’ (2002) notion of a situated imagination offers the potential for individual and also collective agency. The following is a discussion of how the situated imagination plays an important role in this research.

According to Gergen and Gergen (2000), most qualitative methodologies are founded on individualist conceptions and ideologies, including autobiographical approaches that focus on the individual’s recollections of life events, experiences, feelings and identity. The self/other dichotomy already delineates the individual and the social
world, constructing individuals as separate and self-contained. The authors argue that we need to create the reality of a relational process in order to generate a new consciousness of connectivity. Through a relational re-conceptualisation of self and an understanding of connectivity, our attention is redirected not only to the division between the self/other but also to the interdependent relationship of the researcher with their subjects and audiences (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Under this premise, knowledge is viewed as more than just a product. It is a co-constructed process where meaning is negotiated within and through relationships. This has ramifications that go beyond the individual as a relational focus replaces the question of individual agency with the possibility of collective agency (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Relational theory enabled me to shift the focus of the research beyond the description of divisions of all kinds in a way that reduced difference only to its markers (e.g. race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation). Relationality offered scope for a deeper questioning of connectivities between differences and commonalities and the opportunity to look at how space for identity is conceived and allocated and how one is allowed to move to and away from such places (Grossberg, 1996).

Given that the political project of identity politics within cultural theory has been strenuously critiqued (Rattansi, 1992; Gergen, 1995; Grossberg, 1996), I will elaborate here on the dilemma of a singular conception of identity in order to make the political, and therefore the ethical, dimensions of the study more explicit. In his work on identity formation, Hall refers to two models of explanation on how identity is formed: essentialist and anti-essentialist. As I have argued earlier, an essentialist conception of identity assumes that there is some intrinsic and essential component of any identity defined by a common origin, structure, experience or all of these (Hall,
1990, 1991, 1992a, 1992b). Here, the nature of oppression is more often understood in terms of the production of negative images and stereotypes in the wider society. This is underpinned by the assumption that it is possible to counteract this through a replacement of positive images (Rattansi, 1992). An essentialist conception of identity, therefore, assumes that there is a true core self residing within the individual awaiting excavation. The driving force of an essentialist model of identity tends to pivot around struggles over representations of identity which can only be realised through an offering of a ‘fully constituted, separate and distinct identity in place of another’ (Grossberg, 1996: 88). Its aim is to seek out authentic identities that have been submerged or rendered invisible and bring them out of the closet or to find ways to simply reverse the white/black binary.

In contrast, the anti-essentialist model highlights the impossibility of this idea of ‘fully constituted, separate and distinct identities’ (Grossberg, 1996: 89). It rejects the existence of authentic identities based on ideas of a universally-shared origin or common experience. Instead, identity is seen as relational, incomplete and always in the process of being produced and established through the negation of an other (Ahmed, 1997; Hall, 1990, 1992a, 1996). The emphasis of this model is on the multiplicity of identities and differences rather than on a singular identity or interconnections between differences (Grossberg, 1996). It seeks to interrogate the issue of ‘how identities are produced and taken up through practices or representation’ (Grossberg, 1996: 104) through an understanding of the effect of power. In my study, I drew on the anti-essentialist model because any model pinned on singularity sets limits on the meaning of identity. Concurring with critics of identity politics, it would seem that the political project of ‘pursuing inclusion and incorporation into society
and achieving full social rights’ (Anthias, 2002: 496) has seen the failed attempt of identity politics to fulfil this goal. This is because, in its application to the individual, identity politics ‘acts as a reductive agent by circumscribing one’s identity and reducing one’s potential to be otherwise’ (Gergen, 1995: 5).

Clearly, location is a place from which we can explore the divides between the margin and the centre and how people think and act from each of the sides of the binary (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). In the research conversations, we recalled and retold stories about our histories and experiences in Australia and other places; sharing, reflecting and analysing significant events and peoples in our everyday lives, including work in the university. We talked about what difference, belonging, oppression, borders and social change practice mean to each of us, reaching into the hypothetical realm of desire or the situated imagination (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). We drew on the imaginary sphere to render ourselves visible and to imagine together the potential of what the project of higher education for social change might mean in the university and the society. In this context:

... our imaginary horizons are affected by our positioning gaze. But at the same time, it is our imagination that gives our experiences their particular meanings, their categories of reference ... the particular meanings we hold of the concepts are embedded in our situated imaginations (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 327).

Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis describe the imaginary realm as not referring to a false perception, or some kind of twisted truth. Rather, the situated imagination, like the
cognitive mental process, is influenced by society and the individual’s experience of reality through the corporeal or the embodiment of that experience (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

According to Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, imagination has historically been located outside rational or scientific knowledge. The general tendency within hegemonic universal knowledge is to overlook and/or render marginalised experience, imagination and knowledge invisible in a way that dichotomises and relativises truth so that, ‘OK, your claims are valid for you, but mine are valid for me’ (Harding, 1993, in Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 327). Of course this claim for validity implies a mere reversal of a binary (e.g. centre/margin = margin/centre) without acknowledging where and how hegemonic power tends to operate. To counter this kind of universalist positioning, standpoint theorists have used the notion of dialogic truth as an approximation of truth; however, this still leaves unanswered the question of how one grounds positioning and practices. In response to this, Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002) claim that dialogue and the process of critical thinking do not start solely from our own lives but from a recognition of what we can think of or imagine. That is:

... what we expect, are ready to perceive and admit as (valid) experience depends on the particular mental setting that lies within the faculty of the imagination – which in this sense both constructs and is constructed by experience. The same holds for whatever concept we have of ‘truth’. Whether we talk about approximate or absolute, accessible or inaccessible truth is primarily not the outcome of rational arguing, but of what Castoridias calls the socially constitutive imaginary (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 326).
Experience is seen as produced through the senses and mediated through intellect and the imagination and ‘along with them … meanings, values, visions, goals, and critical and creative, along with reactionary and destructive, potentials’ (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 326). Dialogic becomes a collective process for social imagining through a common denominator which enables us to transcend our different positionings and identities and establish some kind of common ground that perhaps was not there to begin with. Through dialogue, our common and divergent values become the conditions and markers of boundaries and our creative imagination can envision new and different transformative ways of thinking and talking beyond our situational differences (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002).

This study draws from a paradigm of knowledge that is dialogic (rather than dualogic) and which views knowledge as ‘always unstable and shifting, open to different readings, and is not the exclusive property either of the hegemonic elite or of any particular identity grouping’ (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 327). Drawing from Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, I have assumed that situated imagination is a product of feminist social practices, which occupies a space adjacent and equal to rational/scientific knowledge. The women’s narratives do not provide definitive and universal answers to the questions and issues raised in the research conversations. Rather, they are a reminder of the need for ongoing examination and questioning of how we frame difference and the consequences of such framings. It is in this context that I identified the importance of constructing a multiple race/ethnic standpoint dialogic as a way of creating space for exploration, contestation and sharing of common and divergent experiences among women of colour. This space is not separate from history and social life, but necessary for a group of women, myself
included, who are socially located differently and who have tried to achieve a conscious political awareness or race consciousness in relation to their work for social change.

**Autobiography and Identity**

Given the unforeseen lack of research subjects, I included myself as the fourth subject, which requires an explanation as to how and why autobiography can be a valid research method. If visibility and invisibility work in conjunction with power, then the matter of who is describing difference and how and why this is used to construct group identities becomes important. Such a focus gives rise to a whole new set of concerns and questions about: how learning is achieved; what is considered valuable knowledge; why research should be inclusive; who are othered through their social and historical location; and who has access to double consciousness (Du Bois, 1953; Scheurich, 1997). In my study, I had to highlight my own and the women’s multiple positionings as ‘something strategic, a coalition, a way of resistance, a precursor of agency and yet at the same time something relational and contingent, mediated by, and mediating, a criss-crossing of understandings and ways of doing’ (Arber, 2000: 46).

In a similar vein, Ahmed (1997) writes about the importance of autobiography as an identificatory practice. She shows how the subject is rendered visible as located, divided and immersed through the peculiar dance of discourse; a continuous process of negotiation that changes according to context. For Ahmed, a critical reflection of the self - of the history of the becoming of the self - helps to ‘dramatize the unstable
but determinate relation between the subject and its others’ (Ahmed, 1997: 154). Thus, the self as the subject is an embodied and locatable entity which is representable only through its partial negation or loss. She explains who she cannot speak for, and in so doing reveals the subject as living in the social and the political:

*I cannot speak for either white British women, or for South East Asian women in Britain or, really, for any particular or clearly demarcated group of women at all ... my inability to speak on behalf of any group of women is not an exception of biography or place, but a trace of a dynamic that troubles the very collision of race and gender in structures of identification* (Ahmed, 1997: 155).

Ahmed calls this personal form of discourse and writing *disidentification*. Disidentification is about re-tracing the ‘particularity of, and antagonisms between, subject positions’ (Ahmed, 1997: 156) to learn how we become the subject and how we can also resist imposed identifications.

In my study, the *auto* in autobiography allows us to find a collective address and a politicised voice to counter ‘the impossibility of the racially marked and gendered subject being addressed through a singular name’ (Ahmed, 1997: 155). It becomes a kind of filter that shifts our attention to the relationship between the subject and its others. Due to the movement through the filter, we notice items too large to pass through; the residue stuff that gets stuck in the filter. The movement between the subject and its others - the discursive dance - is difficult to trace without the presence of such a filter.
For these reasons, I have used writings of the self by combining autobiography and autoethnographic writing, and have juxtaposed and re-presented these together with the women’s words (verbatim) from the research conversations. These articulations of self are central to the research story and, therefore, to the development of my methodology. More than providing insight into the individual’s experience, autobiography and discourse together provide a wide-angle lens view, linking the micro to the macro and the individual to the collective, and insight into specific historical, social and political conditions operating in a society at a given time.

**Researching**

As a woman of colour, I wish to give voice to and empower my sisters to speak our common concerns, uncover and articulate our visions for education for social change and celebrate our shared understandings. Sounds simple, but it isn’t. In my early writing, I tended to use many terms rather unproblematically. It was only later that a shift took place in my understanding of the language of difference after a broad and exhaustive analysis of literature across various knowledge disciplines and geographic contexts that theorise race, ethnicity, identity and the politics of knowledge production. Later, during the research conversations, the women’s challenging of my use of the term *women educators of colour* made me consistently re-evaluate my position, thereby informing my own race consciousness. This manifested in the gradual realisation that I had naively assumed that women of colour would have all undergone such a process because of their life experiences and be able to readily articulate their own race consciousness for the purpose of resisting various oppressions. I was, in many instances, mistaken, especially on the latter. The
following is a discussion about the issue of representation that arose from the research, what kinds of ethical challenges these presented and how I negotiated them.

Kobayashi (1994) reiterates the importance, when conducting all research with individuals and communities, of thinking about and planning for the possible long-term impact the research may have on the communities with which the researcher has engaged. Therefore, an important meta-level issue informing my methodology was the ethical dimensions of the research. By *ethics* I refer to the politics of practice I employed in the study. In the process of getting ethics clearance for a social science research project, there is a range of ethics discourses to consider, usually revolving around maintaining the anonymity of the participants’ identities, the issue of consent, storage of data and the potential harmful effects of the research itself. In my study, I assumed that discourses of ethics must go beyond such project-specific requirements to be inclusive of more profound epistemological concerns about the theory of knowledge and interpretive frameworks that guide every research project (Harding, 1987).

The issue of ethical practice is, of course, tied to the research paradigm itself and its conceptions of the nature of knowledge, the knower and ways of knowing. That is, the researcher, simply by engaging in activities and practice, for the *common good* of all (Widdershoven & Smits, 1996) or in the spirit of *good science* (Preston, 1999), is enacting his or her understanding of the concepts of knowledge and power. How we relate to something or how we enact knowledge and legitimise some knowledge forms over others, is dependent on what we pay attention to in power relationships.
In other words, the issue of harm (Gopalkrishnan, 2002) was central to my study. My position on this is that if dominant narratives embody practices of violence and racism, we cannot condone their effects. We have to challenge such practices individually, collectively and structurally. Pierre Bourdieu refers to symbolic violence as a form of violence that is enacted on individuals in a symbolic, as opposed to physical, way such as people being denied resources and a voice or treated as inferior or constrained in their aspirations (Bourdieu, 1990a). On the inevitability of misrepresentation, I concluded that it was precisely because of the social proximity between me and the people questioned that any effort to objectify them would inevitably involve an objectification of myself (Bourdieu & Accardo, 1993). That is, the potential harm resulting from the research would affect all of us.

Another way in which I tried to anticipate and counteract any obvious harmful effects of the research was to clarify to the women that although I had no wish to upset them or pursue a therapeutic path, if they were at any time upset I would assist them in seeking external counselling. None of the women showed particular interest in this issue.

The dialogic framework allowed me to negotiate the research dilemmas with the women at different stages and in a variety of ways. In my application for ethics clearance to the university, I stipulated that every effort would be made to notify the women about where our stories would circulate in public arenas, journals, websites, teaching situations, workshops and seminars. Over time, this possibility has become logistically unviable (although I continue to communicate with two of the women). At different times during the research, I asked the women to read the drafts of their
stories for clarification and guidance on issues of privacy. As a result, Kali and Satra suggested restructuring parts of their stories for coherence, clarity of theme and expression. As Kali was ill at the time of our conversations, she felt that she was incoherent in many parts and I accommodated these changes to improve coherence. Satra’s concern was about her use of personal pronouns in the telling of her stories about what happens in the university. At her request, I changed the personal singular to a plural pronoun to maintain confidentiality. After the official conversations had ended, Satra told me that when she read her own story chapter, it made her feel uncomfortable to read about the ways in which she positioned herself on behalf of other communities.

To comply with the requirements of a doctoral dissertation and at the women’s request, I omitted many stories that did not relate directly to the research questions. I also stated up-front that although I saw this as a collaborative process, the resulting study would be a representation of my particular reading of the conversations. After speaking to the women and listening to the audiotapes of our conversations, I realised they often told me contradictory things. It was also difficult at times to empathise with the women’s version of the world (Johnson et al., 2004). Johnson et al. explain that:

*Though value positions and side-taking are always present in research, they should be open to questioning and change. Making them explicit, for both researcher and readers, is a fundamental condition of an adequate practice. By the same rule, as researchers, we have to make a commitment to interpret accounts with as much sensitivity as we can muster to the value systems of*
those being researched. We do not have to be in agreement with them in order to understand the reasons for such values (2004: 241).

I developed the following list of criteria based on my own experience to set the parameters of the research conversations and areas of common interest. Using a judgement sampling process (Burgess, 1984, in Rakhit, 1998), I came up with the following criteria for establishing commonality with the participants. We all:

- were born outside of Australia and had lived in Australia for at least ten years or more
- expressed interest in exploring the parameters of the race/ethnic identification process
- had five years or more experience teaching in a university setting
- self-identified as agents of social change
- articulated an understanding and prior knowledge of critical theories
- expressed willingness to talk across race/ethnic boundaries.

Furthermore, we had lived in Australia for between fifteen and thirty years, having migrated for very different reasons after multicultural social policy was introduced. We were each at different stages in our lives and careers. Our ages ranged in age from early 40s to mid-50s. Three of us were mothers, two of us single parents. Three were bilingual and one spoke English as a first language. Three of us had begun our careers as teachers and had prior experience outside of higher education in the youth, community development and arts sectors. We had all worked in the university for between six to fifteen years in the roles of academic teaching, advocacy, policy work
and research in the humanities area. Three of us had completed postgraduate studies with the exception of me, a novice researcher. All of us had conducted research and taught around social justice and difference in the university in different knowledge fields.

During preliminary negotiations with the women, I made explicit my own research interests, the centrality of the themes of identity, race, ethnicity and my interest in collaboratively building on this knowledge base to understand what we do in the name of education for social change and the implications this has for the university. The women were invited to add their concerns, questions and topics of interest. Rather than use structured questions, I referred to the topics broached in our preliminary negotiations as a trigger for our conversations. The resulting field stories revealed the reciprocity of conversation and the extent to which both researcher and researched direct the course of action at different moments.

In my respective research conversations with Satra, Kali and Manuela, I was able to explore different understandings of how and why identity mattered in our teaching and research work in the Australian university. Since the research conversations have ended, all of us have shifted horizontally within, or outside of, the university rather than vertically.

I included myself as the fourth participant due to the acute shortage in numbers of potential participants, the contradictory nature of the language of difference and the overall under-representation of women of colour at senior levels of the university across the country. The prospect of memory work (Haug, 1987) or group collaboration
and shared analysis was logistically and financially unviable as the women worked full-time and had other family and community commitments which prevented them from prolonged engagement in the research process.

Method

Having located my research within a methodological and ethical framework, the practicalities of the method needed careful consideration. If I had asked closed point-blank questions such as ‘Have you experienced racism in the university?’ this would assume a particular conception of oppression and racism. I wanted to allow for the necessity of engagement, intervention and interruption to explore contradictory understandings between us in a way that structured, written surveys and closed questions could not (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Chanfrault-Duchet, 1991). Conversation was more likely to precipitate disclosure about a range of experiences and understandings and allow for more detailed and complex information to emerge.

Kvale describes the qualitative research interview as ‘a construction site for knowledge’ (1996: 14). The specific research situation or interview scenario becomes the background and context for a particular type of engagement between the people involved in the research (Mishler, 1986; McCormack, 2000a, 2000b). This can play out in a variety of ways (Scheurich, 1997). Given the complexities of the topics under discussion, a written questionnaire or structured interview would not generate the kinds of rich data I sought about women’s experiences and about constructions of knowledge from the diverse standpoints of the women. There was little point in observing the women in action undertaking their work for social change, as my
purpose was not to match what they said with what they did. Rather, I saw the research conversation as a site for shared or co-constructed knowledge and imaginings to emerge. This form of knowledge is the basis from which educators draw from, as well as generate, in their work for social change.

The data for this research was collected through a series of two one-to-one face-to-face unstructured research conversations ranging from four to six hours in length and taking place in a variety of settings: the women’s homes, public spaces such as a café and a workplace. The only times that English was not used was when Manuela spoke Spanish on occasion to clarify her understandings of culture and when I sometimes used Swedish to explore the meaning of certain words and expressions in our research conversations. These were tape-recorded and later transcribed by me while I was still engaged in a process of immersion (Kohler Riessman, 1993; McCormack, 2000a, 2000b). Only one of the subjects asked for a copy of the audiotapes. After each meeting I wrote up field notes, which were an account of what I had noticed, heard, thought and felt at the time to trigger lines of inquiry in my subsequent analysis (Kohler Riessman, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994a, 1999; Taylor & Bogdon, 1998; McCormack, 2000a, 2000b). In spite of the small number of participants, the multiple race/ethnic dialogic framework and the use of unstructured research conversation as a method, the conversations yielded over 16 hours of dialogue. This was an enormous sample of rich, thick descriptive data.

After chronologically transcribing the research conversations, I listened several times to the audiotapes and re-read the transcripts, linking these to the original research questions. I did not use existing computer software to analyse the transcripts, but saw
the manual highlighting of similarities and differences across the stories as an important part of the immersion process. As I began to recognise patterns of similarities and differences, the implications of which I describe in Chapter 7, I excised and organised transcribed narratives under the headings of Identities, Barriers in the University and Practice. To avoid repetition, I then selected the excerpts that most resonated with the research questions, omitting information about specific persons, work relationships and workplaces that would make the women identifiable. In this way, many private stories about relationships with partners and colleagues remain private and outside the realm of the research story. From these selected transcript excerpts, and using autoethnographic and narrative forms of writing, I constructed the field stories.

Early on, the women in the study had individually agreed that references to their country of origin were of fundamental importance in the telling of their stories as generic references to South-East Asia or Latin America would imply an assumption of homogeneity, which was something they were politically inclined to challenge. It was only during the writing of the final draft of the study that this issue was revisited and after consulting on the issue again, it was decided that specific references to specific countries of birth and any associations with this (i.e. language, people) would be replaced by the letters $X$, $Y$, $Z$ and by generic references to South-East Asia, Latin America or North Africa (country, language and people) to maintain the women’s anonymity.
In the process of transcription and writing up, rather than focusing solely on linguistics, semiotics, grammar and syntax, I tried to capture those things which are easily lost in a written text such as gestures, doubts, silences, the interpersonal dimension of the research and the co-constructed nature of the research conversation itself. In the field stories, I have interwoven verbatim excerpts from the research conversations that illustrate the role of memory in the research situation to highlight subtleties of tonality, mood and expressions which are inevitably lost in the audio and written texts (Kohler Riessman, 1993).

The analysis of the women’s stories is my own, following the themes I derived from the research questions (Haw et al., 1998). In my analysis of the field stories, I was guided by the following questions: What are the consequences of producing this narrative? What kind of a person does the narrative shape me and others into? What new possibilities do the narratives introduce for living our lives and for realising pedagogic goals and ideals? (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The draft stories were shared with the women during many post-research conversations via phone, email and in person right up to the writing of the final draft of the thesis. In my final analysis of the stories, I have assumed that the processes of understanding and explaining are intertwined (Bourdieu, 1997a). Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the resulting field stories based on my conversations with each woman with verbatim excerpts from the research conversations integrated into the stories. Only those parts of my autobiography which I saw as relevant to the research questions at hand are visible (Haw et al., 1998). The field stories, like the research story, are an invitation for the reader to play and wrestle with the multiple possible endings and readings that these offer.
Johnson *et al.* (2004) describe a similar approach to research. Using the term *multisi(gh)ted texts* they write that text:

... *does not simply record a multiplicity of viewpoints, but those where dominant versions are challenged, extended or repositioned. The new voices may be aligned with the researcher’s own voice and point of view or they may not. Indeed, conflicts may be staged as interruptions to the researcher’s own perspective* (p. 240).

According to Kohler Riessman’s (1993) narrative approach, the analytical process is complex because there are various levels of representation involved in the research process. These include the primary experience itself, attending to this experience in hindsight, telling and sense making about the experience with others and, in relation to theory, transcribing, which involves a different kind of analysis and selection process, and the reading of this final representation, which rests with the reader. She explains that we, as researchers, ‘do not have direct access to another’s experience’ but instead ‘deal with ambiguous representations of it – talk, text, interaction, and interpretation’ (1993: 9). In this sense, ‘representational decisions cannot be avoided’ (Kohler Riessman, 1993: 9) at different moments of the research process. My construction and analysis of the women’s narratives relied greatly on the work of Kohler Riessman (1993) and McCormack (2000a, 2000b), who highlight the constructed nature of knowledge and narrative research.
In this study, it is argued that ‘racial difference is the product of human interests, needs, desires, strategies, capacities, forms of organization, and forms of mobilization’ (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993: xv). Power, then, does not reside innately within the individual’s psyche, processed only through cognitive schemas and processes, but is located and deployed in the organisation of subjectivity in the identification and knowledge construction process (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). In this way, relations of power and dominant discourses that produce the omissions and blind-spots highlighted in Chapter 1 are continuously moulding and re-moulding the concept of race. Variables such as identity, race and ethnicity are thus ‘subject to change, contradiction, variability, and revision within historically specific and determine contexts’ (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993: xv). Rather than re-inscribe race as a fixed category, and because the women’s narratives increasingly indicated this was not the case, the resulting field stories are representative of ‘subjects-in-process and communities in-the-making’ (Hua, 2003: 1). While concepts of race, ethnicity and racism are acknowledged as social constructs, these have very real emotional, economic and social impact on people’s lives in quite significant and different ways (Sefa Dei, 1999). A multiple race/ethnic standpoint dialogic framework enabled a closer examination of the many changing meanings of difference within difference as a site of identity construction as well as power relations where what has conventionally passed as the norm and what is culturally implicit can be critiqued and re-storied from the partial and lived perspectives of the women.
Conclusion: the limitations of life history and including the self in the study

I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter that there are a myriad of ideas associated with the genre of life history, which I have drawn from in my research design. Definition varies according to the kinds of theoretical understandings of life narrative one draws from (Tierney, 2000). It is a somewhat problematic genre because ‘the distinctions between life stories, oral histories, auto/biographies and life histories is not as clear as methodologists might desire or claim’ (Shacklock and Thorp, 2005: 56). Life story as I have applied it in this study is a ‘personal account in the teller’s own words’ (p.156) about specific life events, significant relationships and ideas that the teller chooses to tell in the research context. From this perspective the narrative becomes a selective and culturally produced narrative which is not reflective of a (f)actual truth which already resides somewhere out there. Rather it is a subjective construction, an amalgamation of fact and fiction. Through the process of subjective mapping the teller creates their own meanings surrounding their lived experience thereby enabling experience to become a valid foundation for deriving knowledge and thinking about issues of social justice.

Of course, the act of the women telling stories did not happen in a neutral setting. Because of the discursive nature of the conversational process as the researcher I needed to give the reader a flavour of the whole. The aim was not only to untangle the participants’ individual meanings. This was important but given it was not a phenomenological study but a critical study, it was equally important to understand the nature of the way people interact in the institution and how racism is also
structured in this context. Because I shed the role of disengaged observer I had to pay close attention to the kinds of ethical vulnerabilities which come into play in social research of this kind (Tierney, 2000).

Including my self as a subject in the study was challenging because it required deep questioning of the agendas and assumptions which we brought to the research conversation, the analysis and the presentation of ‘findings’. Rather than justifying or triangulating findings in terms of measuring ‘accuracy’ or ‘truthfulness’ of the women’s life stories or belief systems - highly inappropriate and not the aim of a critical inquiry – the emphasis of my study was on identifying and differentiating between contradictory multiple perspectives, individual women’s ways of thinking and telling of stories about the salience of race in knowledge production in Australian Universities, with my own. In the study I have differentiated between the women’s (verbatim) stories and my own thinking about our stories and the topics explored together. This was positioned in relation to the established literature on women’s experiences in higher education, in a wider historical, societal and institutional context.

As with any research relationship where there is in-depth dialogue, different relations emerge from the process. With one participant in particular there was a close connection of affinity whereas with another the relation of the power dynamic was very different. As researcher I tried to be vigilant around working towards the most open dialogue and the significance of power imbalances. I had to pull myself back to question my analytical framework and to keep the dialogue as free and open as possible.
An important research limitation which manifested was the issue of power in the research relationship. Over the course of the study I recognised the extent to which the women had ideas and plans that did not always coincide with my own, and that they at times expressed or enacted their opposition to my own expectations and belief systems. Trying to capture the complexity of positions and counter positions in my engagements with each subject, individually and later as a group entity was very challenging. It became obvious that the dialogic negotiation process was not a straightforward prescriptive one. Rather, dialogue with each woman was highly complex and different. To counter this I had to take into account the balance of power in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Whilst as noted earlier, each of the women had the opportunity to comment on transcripts and the first draft of their own chapter, important as this is, it only goes a small way in addressing the issue of power. Power is always present and requires constant reflexivity on behalf of the researcher.

The purpose of integrating the researcher’s autobiography within the study enabled me to raise questions about the ways in which social science research suppresses individual voices through the taken for granted acceptance of the omniscient voice of science as if it were our very own (Richardson, 2000). I tried to interrupt this homogenising tendency by highlighting the contradictions in my discussion of the findings, by acknowledging similarities and differences between our individual stories and by situating the group within a broader societal and institutional power context.
The process of ‘writing up’ the stories was important as a method of inquiry in itself, to make transparent as much as possible, the research practices through which we investigate ways we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and to highlight how standard objectifying practices of social sciences can limit us and social science (Richardson 2000). The study does not by any means purport to be an exhaustive analysis of the data. Instead I have tried to integrate and highlight the issue of interpretation, drawing attention to that which remained ambiguous or unresolved in the research.

A key limitation of this study was that it allowed certain questions to be asked but it does not and will not be generalisable because of the uniqueness of the women’s individual lives. However by critically utilising aspects of my own autobiography within the thesis itself, I have tried to make visible important questions about how we place ourselves in our own texts, and with what consequences, and how we lay claim to knowing something and at the same time affirm the power of race and gender in shaping multiple and contradictory social realities (Richardson, 2000). The juxtaposition of multiple perspectives enabled a range of alternative insights and social commentary on power in knowledge production to emerge in an Australian educational and wider social context. The autoethnographic style of writing of the data chapters is to invite the reader to critically engage with the questions raised by the inquiry, at an emotional and intellectual level, and to continue to ask questions presented by the inquiry.

The issue for the conclusion of this discussion on the use of life story is to highlight something of the limitations. The issue of how race in structured in the Australian
university is an area that has not been studied much. Therefore there are not even categories which are already defined and useable – e.g. the term ‘women of colour’ which did for some time fit the USA setting but is not really helpful in the Australian setting. The gathering of stories provides basic research on which later categories and further research can be developed. In one sense, this is an important limitation of the study in that without broader terms used by a community of scholars, it is hard for the outcomes of the research to be transferable to institutional change, to policy and interventions. However, without discrete, contextualised studies of this type, it is not possible to make visible particular experiences, which in and of themselves have the potential to enable the development of key concepts and terminology that can then become the basis for more generalisable research.

This study reveals particular dynamics and highlights the potential benefits of further research in this area. The study reveals that we do not have the capacity to develop some terms of reference in the practice of research, and alerts us to the complexity of power dynamics within the University and the need for further research into the area. It is an invitational work that allows for engagement of the reader and calls out further such stories to flesh out the lived experience of specific individuals who are members of particular groupings.

These stories of a particular marginalised grouping within academia can also be used as the basis for analogic research among other groupings also marginalised within the institution of the university –for example among academics with disabilities, or new to the country or with divergent sexual orientations. This will build a greater literature in the methodological orientation which can then be subject to greater debate and scholarly scrutiny.
Chapter 4 - Satra

Meeting Satra

Born in the UK, Satra is about 50 and married. She describes herself as having a mixed background. Her father was born in a North African country (X) and her mother in the UK. Satra migrated to Australia during the 1980s and has worked in the human rights area for several decades both in England and Australia. She has had a diverse career involving teaching, youth work, policy work and research. At the time of our research conversation, she was employed at an elite university, where she had been working for over a decade. Satra is a high-flier, has worked as a grass-roots practitioner and policy-maker and has received recognition at state and national levels. She has worked with academics, students and general staff in a range of teaching and non-teaching capacities. In short, Satra has worn many hats within and outside of the university.

The first conversation with Satra takes place in her home and the second at her workplace. On the first day it is raining heavily. As I scour the street directory looking for her address, I cannot picture her face. It has been about eight years since she was on the interview panel for a job I applied for, now a faded memory. I wonder if she recalls that occasion. If she does, I hope she doesn’t remember my nervousness at the time. It feels like an awkward blind date. What if we simply don’t trust each other or
can’t connect. What if we can’t stand each other. What if the recording equipment stuffs up?

Fortunately, my anxiety is unwarranted. I find her house number after driving up and down. I stop the car. I run through the rain puddles to her front door. My mouth feels dry. As I stumble on the doorstep, she opens the door. She is warm. Smiling. We laugh and embrace. How easy, I think. But there’s more to come. She welcomes me into her home. I look around her house. Dark wood, splashes of colour, objects made in other places, large French windows in the living room. Her hair is black with whispers of grey, tied up in a loose bun. She is wearing an embroidered waistcoat over a shirt and slacks. Comfortable. Stylish. Back straight. Self-assured. She speaks softly and very quickly. I have to pay careful attention to her words as they flow into one another. I think to myself upper middle class. She takes me to the kitchen where she is brewing coffee. We chat.

Soon the conversation turns to Satra and her work in the university, only I have forgotten to turn the tape recorder on ten minutes into our conversation. This throws me off-track. I hear myself waffling inanely, trying to re-negotiate a starting point. I stare at the third ear on the table. Its eyes move slowly around in circles. Our words melt onto the thin brown tape. Suddenly the urgency of Satra’s voice lifts me out of my confusion.
Narratives of Identity

‘Ask me any questions you wanna ask. You know, ask me the questions you’ve always wanted to ask a black person’

Satra talks about herself in relation to the university, to colleagues, academics and to participants in her anti-racism training sessions. Within these stories her many selves come to the surface. She tells me through her recollection of an earlier conversation with a co-worker, Adam, how the participants in her anti-racism training sessions in the university position her as an object of curiosity in the university.

Satra: Adam and I actually do quite confronting training in many ways. And, you know … I know that at the end, if they’re asking questions, we’ve moved them in some way. And the fact that Adam and I do it, you know, you can see them curiously looking at the two of us doing it. And I say, ‘Ask me any questions you wanna ask. You know, ask me the questions you’ve always wanted to ask a black person. Go on. See how you feel about that’. You know, they sort of look at me.

So Satra signals her and Adam’s dark skin colour as being significant not only to her but also to the people in this particular anti-racism training situation. Implicit in this story is the assumption that the majority or all of the participants in this story about an anti-racism training session are white.
Satra: But it is interesting because some of them have actually never had a dialogue. Why? I talk about why is it uncomfortable to have a dialogue. And we have dialogue. And, you know you can. And I think that is important, that whole dialogue stuff. [pause] ‘Remember the first time you saw a black person? What was going on for you?’ We talk about that. You know, they can’t mention it …

I look at her, imagining Satra from one of her white participants’ points of view.

Caroline: Especially not if you’re black. And you’re asking the question.

We both raise our eyebrows in recognition and agreement. Skin colour is an aspect of the identification process that is brought up early in our conversation, but one that we negotiate in very different ways though the issues of skin colour and race/ethnicity are closely connected. With hindsight, I think Satra is the first of the two of us to use the term black woman and she uses it quite often. I use the descriptors woman of colour and black woman. It is easy and comfortable to appropriate black woman in reference to myself, though this has not always been the case.

‘I don’t care what happens to my skin in the sun’

Satra tells me another story about Adam. Here, the salience of skin colour comes into the conversation. I hear how she constructs herself in relation to her colleague, Adam. She refers to Adam’s self-consciousness about his skin colour. It is a visible marker of difference, a topic we talk a lot about. The next story offers further insight into the many possibilities for Satra’s black/white politics.
**Satra:** Yeah. And I always find it interesting with Indians because they’re obs … they are obsessed about shade. You know, like Adam who I work with. He’s a very *beautiful* looking man. You know, in the summer, walking down the campus, he was hiding himself. We talked about it. ‘I don’t want to get dark’, he says, ‘Why not? Forget it. You’re in the sun. I don’t care what happens to my skin in the sun’.

I take a deep breath. My face feels hot. For a split second I hesitate. Should I disclose this very private self?

**Caroline:** Haven’t you ever been ashamed, the colour?

**Satra:** No!

Her reply is adamant, immediate, certain.

**Caroline:** You’ve *never* been ashamed?

I prod and a touch of surprise or disbelief comes through in my tone of questioning. Again, she reiterates the point.

**Satra:** No. No.

**Caroline:** Oh god, I envy you!
I laugh, relieved that she has not constructed me as psychologically scarred or somehow deficient because of my self-disclosure of my past shame about skin colour. Not everyone is comfortable talking about skin colour. Not everyone is constructed in terms of skin colour or race/ethnicity in the same way. Some even deny the salience of their skin colour in Australia, even though others around them construct them as different – a sign that not all those who are othered are conscious of their race or ethnicity. But I also wonder silently if Satra really doesn’t care about her skin, if not the colour, the smoothness (she mentions her age several times, and the fact that she is older than me) – an indicator of the kinds of expectations we as women set upon ourselves in a consumerist society that commodifies and promotes youthfulness and sex appeal as important ideals.

It seems my query has triggered a memory for Satra.

**Satra:** No. No. I don’t think … I don’t think so. I might be kidding myself but even, look. No. I can remember when I was young, ‘cause I told this story to Nena [her daughter], that I can remember thinking … I wonder if I scrub my skin if I’d be white, will I ever be white, you know? And I worked with black kids and they used to put bleach on their skin, just to get white. I can remember thinking… I wonder what life would be like, if I was white. How different life would be, you know? Because, it’s hard, it’s a hard life, I think, being a person of colour in some situations, many situations … My parents always taught me, ‘You are beautiful. You should be proud of what you are. And you must NEVER be ashamed of anything’. And err, and … and. No, I don’t. You know, maybe when I was a child I had those feelings. But I can’t remember them.
Increasingly, Satra mentions her daughter, Nena, and her own Anglo-African heritage and in our conversations family issues coincide with disclosures about our personal experiences.

**Satra:** So I moved into being a teenager at the time when, thank god – if I hadn’t I don’t know what my identity would have been like! – ‘Hey Black is Beautiful’. Soul music? My brother was one of the best soul DJs in our town. So he collected all the soul music. And you know we’d go out and see the Four Tops and The Supremes. You know, all these black people on stage doing music. So for me, it was like, it was the soul and the 60s and Black is Beautiful. And I mean, that’s what, that’s what took me to America because I grew up on soul and you know, Martin Luther King. All that sort of stuff.

**Caroline:** So you lived in America?

**Satra:** No. No. No. I grew up in England. But when I went to America, that was why I wanted to explore, you know, the whole concept of the Black is Beautiful, Angela Davis, you know? I remember reading about her when I was about 14 or something, pictures of her, because there were no icons in England at that stage. You know, it was all coming out of America. And we were very aware of that, particularly because I have a big brother. And yeah the AIDS, the anti-apartheid movement - I was very involved with that. So those movements gave me my political identity. But they also gave me that knowledge that Black is Beautiful [laughs softly] and I say it to some extent we should have more movements like that.
It occurs to me that Satra is ten years senior to me and perhaps that is a significant
generational difference. The history and influence of feminism, Black Power and the
Civil Rights movements assume importance in Satra’s stories, all of which made little
difference to me until I went to university. In comparison to Satra’s, my childhood in
Sweden during the late 1960s/early 1970s and youth in Australia from 1974 onwards
has left a different kind of legacy.

Satra returns to the topic of her daughter many times, revealing how important the
experience and role of motherhood is for her.

**Satra:** Mm ... I’d say that Nena is probably more skilled as a teenager about
talking about some of those issues than a lot of adults. Because she’s grown up
with it, you know? And I think that’s the stage we want to get people at. Like I
always said, you know at dinner parties - whatever forum I’m in, let’s normalise
this talking about race. Let’s talk about it. Let’s get it out on the table, and you
know, not make it seem like a taboo subject.

When I meet Nena later on that first day she looks like a paler version of her mother,
an obvious reminder of the visible differences between my own children and me.
Sometimes, this difference takes on a range of meanings when we go into public
spaces together as a family. Racism, race and ethnicity are topics that Satra and Nena
have spoken about many times. In this way, ideas about race and ethnicity are told
and re-told from generation to generation, in the form of stories, worldviews and the
values underpinning these. Satra’s passion indicates that the unpaid work of
motherhood is as important as her commitment to working for social change.
Satra does not shy away from discussing skin colour in her anti-racist training, as she reveals in a reference to an earlier experience in England. Naming whiteness is a strategy I have also begun to employ only recently in my own educative practice, although I employ this differently in different situations and contexts. Prior to my research journey and early in my teaching career, I taught mostly from a white Australian dominant cultural perspective. When I acquired a Graduate Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and started teaching adult learners for whom English is a second language, things began to feel different. My preconceived notions and assumptions about cultural identity and cultural difference no longer made sense when I found myself surrounded by a sea of people from a myriad of places in the world with a vast knowledge of a world that was largely unknown and alien to me. Rather than assuming I was an authority on all the peoples and cultural traditions in the world, in these teaching situations I positioned myself with the marginalised students as other and acted as a tour-guide to make explicit the culture of power (Delpit, 1993) in Australian education institutions. Our shared and different experiences and understandings are always informing the teaching and the learning processes. Sometimes in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, I am challenged on the basis of gender or class, but rarely on the basis of race/ethnicity. In contrast, when I teach in white majority classrooms, I position myself as part of the dominant majority by emphasising class and other kinds of capital. This is like a subconscious reflex I use to counter any lack of credibility which might be imposed on me by others on the basis of race and gender.

At the end of our five or six hour conversations, we are both exhausted. It is an emotional process of mutual disclosure and tentative testing. Yet emotions and
feelings are often constructed as outside the knowledge production process or relegated to the domain of woman. Here, Satra talks about the emotional impact that working for social change has on her. In the process of trying to understand a commitment to working for social change, we try to articulate the need for particular kinds of social change in Australian society in race relations or gender relations or both of these and more.

‘I’ve got identity as a woman, identity as a black woman. But for me, a common identity is my politics’

For me, black woman is a self-identity that I have used only in more recent years in my life. Prior to that it was a label used by others, occasional passing strangers in the street, from a car, or in a public social setting. Satra, on the other hand, appears to use the term as if it were a comfortable and well-worn jacket. It is months later, when I am re-reading the transcripts, that I realise that we both talk about discovering our political identities later rather than in the earlier years of our lives.

Satra: It’s funny you know, when you talk about identity … I’ve got identity as a woman, identity as a black woman. But for me, a common identity is my politics. You know, not the political mainstream. And when people, my friends in England, first meet Stephen [her husband], because they’ve known my other partners, they [pause] they are quite surprised. And then they say, ‘What do you have in common?’ The politics. We’re very intimate. We’re a very close couple.

Caroline: So, when you say politics, what do you mean?
**Satra:** The politics - the things I believe in, my beliefs and values, how I view the world, how to interpret things … It’s come later in life, an emerging identity that is very important.

Satra fleetingly draws on her mixed-race subject position and lived experience in the UK to talk about how she is positioned in Australia.

**Satra:** Mmm. [pause] You’ve got to understand that hierarchy of oppression, in a sense, because I’d said that in the training. You know, you’ve got a ladder of oppression and in England I was on the bottom of the pile. Well, I’m not on the bottom of the pile in Australia. Aboriginal people are. But therefore, you’ve got to … I can understand that position. That they could be, that they are in. And the reality that they have, you know. And … then, you know, you’re looking at it, and you can see some people who’ve NEVER even thought about it. You know, they sort of just stare at you, ‘cause I’ve … one of the things that always amazes me in training is that people actually have never talked about these issues, whereas it’s our daily bread. They never talked …

I hear Satra include me in the reference to *our* daily bread. I do not challenge this inclusive reference. How complex the us/them binary is. We use it to differentiate between those who are positioned in empowering ways and those who are not and to delineate boundaries between white and non-white in racist and traditional anti-racist fashion. We also use the binary to re-negotiate the very real impact that hierarchies of oppression has on those who are constructed as invisible or part of a minority. The
us/them binary may be a socially-constructed concept but we reproduce it as natural and at the same time try to re-negotiate its meaning.

‘They go into that space, total denial, total denial about these issues’

There are multiple communities of practice operating within the university. Satra talks about herself in relation to other scholars of colour in the university, who are a minority in terms of their comparative and statistical representation at senior decision-making levels in universities across Australia. How do they construct Satra?

**Satra:** There’s one CEO who is a person of colour, the CEO for a government organisation. William. He’s Indian. He totally denies his background. Totally denies racism, that sort of stuff. So he’s playing the game. Now, if I were in his position, he would *hear* the word racism. You would hear that sort of stuff. So, I wouldn’t deny it, you know? So [pause] I don’t think I’m answering the question. Like, there are a couple of professors, Indian professors who sat on a committee, and we’re discussing something like that. And then I’d say to them afterwards [whispering], ‘Why didn’t you say something?’ ‘Oh Satra, I couldn’t’ [they say]. ‘Well, why not? You *know* what I’m talking about, don’t you?’ They’ll say, ‘Oh. I know what you’re talking about. But why should I expose myself?’ I said, ‘Either is false. You know it is’.
For some academics, although they might be constructed as other within the university, the colour-blind position is still the most expedient or comfortable. I ask Satra, where do those who are unable or unwilling to speak out go?

**Satra:** Oh they probably go … they *become* these people I call fence-sitters. It all goes on in their head. When I do racism workshops for that research for the Commission, on racism in the workplace, a lot of people ask, ‘Why do you just talk about race, Satra?’ They go there, they go into that space. Total denial. Total *denial* about these issues. And they survive on them.

**Caroline:** But there’s somewhere, you know, caught up in this … I can recognise *my* position and, and my feeling about this too, is to be a fence-sitter, is to wimp out. But what right have we got to go in and say to another woman, ‘Be racial, be this, be that’? You know, for me, there’s no cost. And I reckon … you know I also feel the same way, in the sense that what have I got to lose?

**Satra:** Yeah.

Satra and I frequently refer to gender and skin colour during our conversation – a highly visible difference for both of us. Interestingly, we do not explicitly name less visible differences. It is only later, after speaking with Kali and Manuela, that I realise how visible and less visible differences intersect in our lives so differently for each of us. Visible difference refers to meanings we attach to the external or phenotypical characteristics. Less visible differences, such as class, religion, values and belief systems and sexual orientation, inhabit our inner world, hidden *within* bodies.
Perhaps, for those Satra and I refer to as fence-sitters, self-identification plays out in other than race/ethnic terms. Having access to or acquiring double vision or race consciousness - having knowledge and awareness of dominant and alternative cultural ways of knowing and doing things - does not mean all women of colour have acquired such knowledge. Being black is not synonymous with being a social activist just as being white is not synonymous with being a racist.

In our conversations Satra and I draw heavily on the Americanised use of the term *black*, without question. What Satra and I do not acknowledge, is that the use of *black* in America is not the same as in Australia. Here, it would be perceived as racist to even name skin colour whereas in America it is part of a much older conversation on Civil Rights. In the research situation, *black* allows us to articulate our political identities and re-claim an empowering sense of self. The term can, however, also represent a separatist political position which sees difference in black or white terms, as if there is nothing in between. The biggest problem with this black/white binary is that assumes that either one or the other must be superior to the other. This is not simply an issue of power struggles between black and white. It highlights the need to question hidden assumptions of all knowledge traditions, including antiracism and diversity discourse.

Here, Satra describes her response to being excluded from a group of mainly white women (feminists) and her understanding of how Indigenous women are positioned in her university.
Satra: I’m strong enough in myself … and I’ve gone through enough experiences where I have, like that women’s thing ... Like these women were my friends, and colleagues, who completely excluded the view of people like me. And, err … it was very painful, very, very painful experience. And obviously I’m still very pained by that. But I’ve gone through enough things to realise that as long as I say what is important, what I think is important, in terms of those issues, I don’t care what people think about me. It was very, very painful. What it made me shift right into was the black women’s network [makes lightning sound], like that. I retreated … and in fact refused to even go to them for about 6 months … and I went through this year observing Aboriginal units, giving units in education. I wanted to see how they do it. I wanted to see the reactions of students. And you look at the cost of that. That’s, it’s all personal stuff, you know? Very personal stuff, and it’s very, very pain … very painful [in quiet voice]. They’re so strong, dignified, you know.

It sounds as if Satra feels more closely aligned to the Indigenous women in her university than with the white (feminist) academics.

‘She’s too much of a troublemaker’

Another time during the research interview, Satra and I again explore the issue of a fence-sitting position. What exactly does it mean in a political context? Is it a good or bad thing?
Satra: It is, it’s the cost and the risk. Now that’s one of the things I never calculate. I don’t give a shit about the costs and I don’t care about the risks. Because what can happen to me, you know? … And therefore, those things are not important, you know? For an academic, I can see - their academic credibility, internationally all that sort of stuff …

But you know, some people might say, ‘Oh, that Satra, she’s too outspoken, she’s too full of her own opinion, and she’s too much of a troublemaker’, or something like that, whereas other people might say the opposite. And I don’t care. And that’s one of the things that Adam, who I work with, actually says to me, ‘You don’t really care what people think about you, do you?’ And I don’t.

‘You’re either passive or you’re brave’

Satra has created a support group for herself in her workplace. Here, Satra talks about how she is positioned by a woman within her support group at the university.

Satra: And I’m in that group usually with other women. And, you know I’m pushing it. And [one of the women in the group] always says, ‘Satra, you’re so brave, you’re so brave’. And I’ll say, ‘Hang on a sec. What do you mean I’m brave?’ And they say, ‘But you’re always coming out, you’re always outspoken’. And I said, ‘Well, don’t you actually understand? The reality is that you cannot be anything else if you’re a black woman’.

Her voice grows louder.
**Satra:** You’re either passive or you’re brave. I don’t see myself as brave.

Because I mean I’m very outspoken, and I challenge issues. And I’m never, like in a debate, or in a discussion or in a forum, you know … Usually there’s silence and they sort of go …. ‘I’m gonna have to say something here’ [makes clapping noises]. And my hand goes up. Hang on a second here, you know. And I’ll deconstruct it from that race perspective. And yeah, they position me as the brave one. And I don’t even like that. Because in a sense, I don’t know what it does. To me, because, for me, I have no choice, I have to speak out against those things. And the fact that they see me as being brave, what does it say about them? And that is one of the most difficult aspects, I think, to deal with when you’re challenging these issues.

I hear my own contradictions repeated in Satra’s sometimes contradictory statements. Here she rejects the brave title and on the other hand also constructs herself as brave, confronting and outspoken. At times she sounds aggressive and angry, certainly not passive. I wonder if this is because of the very nature of activist work, because she is tired and burnt out or because of her worldview that things are black or white. The fragility of this binary stance, especially for those of us who identify with multiple heritages and identities, is that we end up overlooking heterogeneity and multiplicity. While walking the binary treadmill it is impossible to keep an open mind. For now I am relieved Satra is not directing her frustration and anger at me. I only hope that our connection is genuine and honest at this moment in time, for without mutual trust there is little hope of developing a dialogue, let alone any political alliance. I am moved by her frankness, her willingness to share feelings, opinions and experiences.
Hearing Satra’s experiences and thoughts affirms how important it is to have a broad understanding of how power works in our society and how harmful it can be to pathologise the individual as abhorrent or different. I wish I had access to these resources for understanding the world when I was young.

‘Most white men position me either as a prostitute or stupid. Where do you position me?’

Race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and disability are social markers that weave in and out of our everyday lives in unremarkable ways and at other times fly up into our faces. As a novice researcher, it is difficult to shake off traditional notions of the extraction-style interviews during this first research conversation as these are not very useful. Gradually the notion of rationality and objectivity go out the window and I listen to Satra in a different way. Later, with Kali and Manuela, I feel less conscious about the reciprocity and interruptive nature of our exchanges.

As Satra and I continue to talk, gender, class and race/ethnicity begin to interweave and play out in different ways.

**Caroline:** Mmm. It’s … It’s such a dichotomy, isn’t it? You either…. It’s like, you play the story of heroine … or there are all these roles you can take up. And if you can’t take up either passive coloured person, or woman, or aggressive, radical, then you’re brave. I mean, so these are various constructions. What other constructions? There’s brave, passive …
**Satra:** Aggressive!

I wonder if she has read my mind.

**Caroline:** Sexual.

**Satra:** Sexual. You know …

This is a sensitive issue to broach, for both of us, but I am curious about the silence around this topic. How do gender and sexuality intersect with race/ethnicity and class? I ask her.

**Caroline:** I mean [laugh]. How do you deal with this issue?

**Satra:** Well, I once said that to my … when I first started working ten years ago at the university, you know … I can remember the most senior person whom I reported to, you know. They [pause] you know, they couldn’t deal with me. They could never look at me. I’m sure they couldn’t deal with the fact that he had to look at a black woman. And … And I said to him one day [referring to her co-worker Adam again], ‘you know, Adam. It’s interesting because most white men position me either as a prostitute or stupid. Where do you position me?’

Satra and I look at each other and burst out laughing. When I listen to the interview tapes afterwards I can’t help but wonder about her treatment of her co-worker. Why would she ask him such a question – a man of colour – and with such sting? What
does this jibe say about Satra’s ethos of justice? What was she trying to achieve? Although I understand her frustration, I feel uneasy about her position on race politics because of its reductionist, simplistic and universalising tendencies. It is the binary in reverse – instead of white/black, it’s simply rolled over to black/white.

**Satra:** You should’ve seen his face. Get down to it! You know, he’s sort of looking at me, as if to say. Oh, my God. I don’t know what to do. ‘Of course, I look at you as a sex symbol’. And it was really weird, you know when I said, and he said. I remember him saying, ‘Oh, don’t be so silly, Satra’. I said, ‘C’mon, of course it is. You know. I’m either a prostitute, or I’m as dumb as two short planks. People talk to me as if I’m stupid around this bloody place because they’re all racist’.

**Caroline:** And … knowing you?

**Satra:** Well, they didn’t *know* me, when I first started.

**Caroline:** Before? Yeah.

**Satra:** Even now … because you’re dealing with academics who are cloistered and their social skills of five year olds. Difficult, very difficult environment, but one of the things I’ve always been very clear about, that I’m … regardless of what anyone else does, I think [pause] … I, I don’t ever play the sexual card, or call that. And I know someone … I’ve watched some women. I have very clear
boundaries because, if I don’t have boundaries, I have problems. Growing up, because I looked unusual, and I was reasonably attractive, if I even let those boundaries down, I would get so much attention from them. I couldn’t stand it. I can’t stand that. You know, just walking down the street, you know. And that sort of attention, I don’t like it. It makes me feel very uncomfortable. Violating in some ways.

And so, I’ve had to put boundaries around myself. So in a sense, in a situation like uni[versity]. I’m very formalised in the way I communicate. And I never have any problems, you know. And most men, most people … men, men in particular, will probably describe me as the … aloof, slightly aloof. And probably … you know, they’ll actually say, ‘She terrifies the pants off me’. Something like that, you know. And that’s because of the fact that I’m outspoken and I’m very strong about some things [pause] … But even people like, there’s a woman here. She’s the head of the Tribunal, very strong feisty woman, very feisty. You know, [she] is connected with the workers union. She’s out there yelling and screaming and aggressive. She’s a friend of Stephen’s [Satra’s husband] … And she was over here one night. And she said, ‘Oh Satra, I’ve just been talking to such and such, a lawyer, about you. And he was saying how terrified he was’.

The title of academic is a new identity for me and I’m not as comfortable with it as I am with educator. During my research journey, I have felt estranged by some of the induction practices of the Academy. This is why I stifle a laugh at Satra’s undiplomatic and insulting reference to academics. I hear how she too distances
herself from the world of academia. Many in the university would find Satra’s derogatory attitude to the Academy a strange contradiction given that she has chosen to work there and with academics. I wonder if she wants to position herself as non-academic. If she is not an academic then what is she? It makes me wonder why she is participating in this project and why she identified with my call for educators and researchers committed to working for social change to join in. I wonder what she hopes will come of our conversations? Perhaps Satra’s disdain can be read as an indicator of a more general cynicism within the non-academic world towards academia - a view that recognises the culture of self-interest within a market approach to education.

‘I have to play a game that is within the culture that I work in’

Listening to Satra’s stories makes me question the issue of power in the research relationship and in the university itself. Here Satra talks about the university as a place of whiteness, how she works within the culture of the university and the importance of being perceived as credible.

Satra: … it’s white power. But, I’ll give you an example. I went to the Vice Chancellor’s advisory group about three weeks ago to present … three policies. One new policy, two policies I’ve reviewed. And my role is really to say to the Dean, ‘Show responsibility. You filter it through your system’. And I go and give a presentation. Now, the way I give the presentation now is very different to the way I did it ten years ago. I’ve got a lot of credibility in the university, a lot of respect. People actually value what I say. And, I’ve never done my job, as
a sort of policeman like a lot of them do, I do it as a sort of, we work in partnership, you know?

And I know *exactly* how to play the game when I go in there … It’s sometimes *foreign* to my personal roots in many ways. I have to play a game that is within the culture that I work in. Now you see me in the government organisation I’m involved with, and I’m very different. I’m senior vice president of this organisation. I’m on the [V] Community Association and the [W] Community Association. When I’m out there, lobbying for them, I’m lobbying for their rights I’m a *very different* activist in many ways. Whereas in my work environment, ultimately, I know what my goal is. And it’s getting to that goal. And I will use a mechanism that is culturally within our organisation.

Here Satra tells us the university is a place of whiteness and yet whiteness is invisible. Notably, throughout our conversations, we do not explicitly acknowledge the heterogeneity within whiteness. Our silence on this can be read as an implicit agreement about the power of racism. We are women but are marked as racially different women. For us, and perhaps for many other women positioned as the other, race and gender intersect differently than is the experience of many of our white colleagues.

**Reflections on Positioning**

Together, Satra and I explore the complexity of the identification process. Our stories reveal that the language of difference is empowering and constraining at the same
time. The us/them and black/white binaries we invoke act as political practices, which allow us to engage in dialogue about the politics we pursue, while also setting the parameters for our discussions. We draw on multiple identities and access to high cultural capital as resources for examining constructions of difference and comparing our experiences. Satra emerges in this story as having greater capacity to enact power in the university than I do. But am I simply talking up to her? In hindsight, I know that at times we position each other as equal in status, and at other times not. What appears to counteract the differences in our employment status, position titles and incomes is the darkness of our skin colour and how this intersects with gender, class and sexuality in similar ways. No matter how fluently we speak English or how we choose to dress, our skin colour marks us as different from the white majority; however, the visibility of our difference does not position us in the same way in all contexts and situations in the university. Although difference is negotiated and experienced in racialised and gendered ways, as we are both dark-skinned women, class is an important resource we draw upon to re-negotiate the status of the other in the universities.

Both Satra and I identify as multi-racial or as having multiple connections with more than one race/ethnic group. By hearing Satra talk about herself in relation to the university, I start a process of reflection on my own positioning in society and the university. I know if I open my mouth and speak, I too can dispel or re-negotiate boundaries imposed on me through labels such as Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) although I speak English and Swedish. I have enormous room to move within the space of otherness, ranging across Asian, Australian, migrant, ethnic, Aboriginal or international student. If I keep silent, it is more likely that a stranger will assign an
identity to me in terms of a single race/ethnic category rather than a mixed-race category as I do.

Like Satra, I have lived in Australia for a large part of my life (30 years), I have learnt to assimilate and I speak Australian Standard English. Both Satra and I have acquired a repertoire of practices to draw on through our work in different institutional and organisational settings. As we have gone about our lives, we have become multiple identities. Some of these identities do not easily fit into the neat folds of multiculturalism, where Indian-ness, Chinese-ness or Malaysian-ness are immutable and unique or essential identities. We have lived in other places - she in UK and I in Sweden - and there I acquired the language and the cultural values required in that setting. Through these experiences, we have acquired a double vision or knowledge of both the dominant culture and alternative worlds. Yet the discourse of multiculturalism in Australia requires an easy fit in a particular collective. It is only in private, with close friends or others who identify with or share the diasporic experience, that my voice takes on other registers and expressions. For these reasons, the black political identity is not only an expedient one, but it is also representative of a set of guiding principles for social change practice and for being and doing things in the world that both Satra and I are negotiating and re-negotiating.

It is only in hindsight that I realise that Satra and I do not share the same race politics. I hear her articulate a traditional anti-racism position that views oppression in black/white binary terms. I suddenly feel at a loss on how to respond to this difference between us. I decide to push it aside for now, and decide to revisit it when I later analyse our conversations
Some months after the official research conversations have ended, Satra tells me on the phone that she feels very uncomfortable reading the printed transcripts of her own words. She finds that the public aspect of the research and the risk of identifiability made her feel vulnerable. Reading her own words have also made her question the way she positions herself in her work and as spokesperson for different race/ethnic communities and what this means for her own ethical practice.

**Working for Social Change**

‘*You know, the ultimate achievement that I want to get from any of the work I do is to remove the level of discrimination’*

As we continue our discussion, Satra and I identify and navigate a range of issues relating to the barriers we encounter within the university. Quite early in our conversation, Satra talks about her reasons behind her work for social change.

**Satra:** It’s ... it’s weird. And in a sense I found it a bit strange. But that happens and I think; I think it’s partly that link to the community, partly a link to theory and practice. And also the fact that I *don’t* sell my soul like some people do, you know, I don’t sort of compromise those beliefs and ethics. For *me*, you know, the ultimate achievement that I want to get from *any* of the work I do is to remove the level of discrimination. But I also have another layer … I also want to ensure that there are as *many* people of colour coming through the system as possible. I mean that’s my hidden agenda. I have that agenda in everything I try to do. And it, that gets stronger, in a sense. ‘Cause I know that the doors are not
open for some people. And it’s based on skin colour. That’s the reality. You know?

Satra locates the effects of racism within the structures and institutional practices of the university; however, because of her constrained (black/white) view, she does not appear to question the assumptions underpinning her own anti-racist position. By talking with Satra (and later Kali and Manuela) I started to untangle our different political positions.

‘It’s position!’

Satra and I talk about power and position within the university. Her conception of power, here, is that it is both located in the individual’s actions and in the position they occupy in the university.

Satra: Mmmmm. It’s all about power. And in this state, as you know, it is the school you went to, the university you went to. And if you don’t have those connections … You know, forget it. You look at migrant, different migrants’ CVs [curriculum vitae]. None of that …

Caroline: So have you fulfilled that power checklist [laughs], in terms of … you know?
**Satra:** I don’t think, well, I don’t fit into the, the checklist that would be the *norm* of power. I’m not saying I’ve got power but I’ve got a … level … I would hope. Well, I tend to think that because of the things I’ve *done*, the work that I’ve done, I’ve got a measure of, you know, credibility. Yeah … In a sense, I have that positional power. And trying to bring them into the centre of the stage … So, you very *rarely* have me talk about anything at the university where there isn’t race in, you know. And I do say that a lot of programs predominantly really benefit the university [very softly] … But I’m really changing that now. You should see them shaking at their knees when they look at me [very quietly]. They get very angry.

I assume that *they* refers to senior decision-makers in the university. To me, power lies in the practice of self-knowledge and is practiced by others in the university in very different ways. I ask her for clarification about the importance of power to further my understanding of what she means.

**Caroline:** I suppose that’s why I want to clarify. Do you see that power *in* the position? Is *power*, you know, that is, you know, in our heads or is it…

**Satra:** It’s position!

**Caroline:** It’s in the position, is it? So it’s somewhere *out there*? Mmm.

I am not sure what she means, so I probe further.
**Caroline:** It’s through the interaction and *use* of all these resources, money, socio-economics?

**Satra:** Position!

**Caroline:** Knowledge!

**Satra:** Position. I know that, I have a lot of *power* at the university because of my position, because of my level, OK?

**Caroline:** But is it only because of that?

**Satra:** Yeah.

**Caroline:** Is it?

I am not sure if I agree with Satra that acquiring positions of power are the only valid means of enacting power. But I don’t want to interrupt her flow of thought. Listening to her triggers other questions about how power is conceived and where it is located.

I notice how we interrupt each other. Through this mutual interruption each person pulls the conversation this way and that. It feels like a process of overlapping, turntaking and layering of hers and my meanings. Here, my interruption directs the course of conversational topic, prolonging the discussion of power.
**Caroline:** But there are, like you said, women who are in very high positions, and who are *not* competent?

**Satra:** No! But they …

**Caroline:** Then there’s something else then? You know, you can have a position …? Yeah. So just for, for more clarification, so power, what does the, what is power for you? Like, what does power actually mean? Power to have, power to enact power, like what?

I have interrupted her and feel suddenly concerned. Trying to find the words to challenge and clarify her understanding of power is awkward at times. If she becomes defensive about my questioning of her politics, she might back off.

**Satra:** [pause] Why do I want power, or …?

**Caroline:** No, no. What *is* the power? You know what I’m saying?

Again, I have interrupted. But our conversation is not based on polite turn–taking. It follows on from the intensity in our response to different topics. Satra asks me very few questions about my own practice. So I try and assert my equal right to respond to her position for fear of being positioned as merely a passive admirer or an inquisitive journalist. What I really want to explore is whether Satra is interested in power for herself.
Satra: I think, I think power is different if you’re black or you’re white. Because it doesn’t matter how much research we do, or how many qualifications we’ve got, or how good we are, we still won’t have the power of the white people. I think this. I mean this is the basis. Because I see them operating, and it’s like it’s assigned to them automatically. We have to fight for that power. And so, … within the sort of network of people of colour, for want of a better word, they know that to get power, like the white people who’ve got it, we have to play a slightly different game, in some ways. I don’t know.

Satra sounds very determined and ambitious compared to me. Or is she? Perhaps I am a closet power junkie. Through our different interactions, I have identified that conceptions of power differ between us and/or we understand the nature of power and the location of it in quite different terms. This contradiction makes it difficult for us to agree on the direction and aims of higher education for social change. On this topic, Satra relays her views but does not ask for mine – an indicator, perhaps, of the power dynamics operating within the research situation itself.

‘I wish sometimes I had a video camera in my eyes’

Satra has been on many interview panels and policy committees. She talks about her observations and thoughts on how racialising occurs through recruitment and promotion practices in the university, identifying this as a key barrier to equity and access.
Satra: Well, it doesn’t matter for them because they’re white, and get away with. You’d be vilified if you’re black and you’re …

Caroline: OK. Maybe there’s a difference.

Satra: There is a huge difference.

Caroline: You know, if you’re a white person?

Satra: Oh yeah. We fall much harder. I mean, you can tell. I see that happening. I see it. I interview professors at the university. I set all professorial appointments [is involved in the recruitment and promotion processes of scholars]. And I wish sometimes I had a video camera in my eyes. When I listen to what goes on when they interview a person from Thailand or a person from Indonesia and a person from America. One question, ‘How do you develop teams?’ I don’t know if I’ve told you this story?

Caroline: No.

Satra: You know, the man from America says, ‘Open door policy. Blah, blah, blah’, comes out with the speak that they, you know, that they can identify with. And often I say to the committees, ‘You just want to clone yourselves, You don’t want anyone that’s different. Well, they want to be like you. Whereas, if there were six black people sitting around here we’d clone ourselves, we’d get
more people’. You should see them when I say that. They just sort of get, they
don’t know quite what to say. So there is a cloning.

Satra describes the ways in which dominant epistemologies construct the recruitment
and promotion process in the university. The ability to promote oneself and move up
the hierarchy in the university is contingent on meeting selection criteria. This is often
culturally-biased and does not recognise alternative ways of knowing, knowledge and
ways of conveying; however, Satra has access to knowledge about how such
gatekeeping practices work. This might help someone like Satra to access power to
effect change that is not readily available to everybody.

**Caroline:** Because they’re not recognising that it’s a kind of *white* discourse.

Yes, on a psychological level, ‘We wanna employ like us,’ but that’s, it’s like,
an individualistic?

**Satra:** Their, totally, way of doing, but …

**Caroline:** … kind of way of view of the world.

**Satra:** Yeah, whereas the Indonesian person would talk, say … ‘I develop
team’. We might go out to dinner and share a nice meal. But that’s not validated.

Yeah. It’s a joke! Yeah. So it’s *that*. And I want that to be validated. But it will
only be validated when there’s representation on those committees who *can*
validate. If you’re in the minority ...
Satra reveals how diversity, at a simplistic level, is conceived as a way of valuing the exotic or the ethnic other in relation to whiteness as a normative centre of lived experience. Underpinning the invisibility of whiteness is the expectation of assimilation to dominant cultural ways of doing things and being in the world in order to get the job or have the opportunity to enact power within the university. The interview process is not a mutual exchange process but one-sided, perpetuating dominant cultural norms about what counts as important knowledge and ways of showing this knowledge.

‘There is a problem with the descriptor’

Satra and I talk about the complexity of the language and politics of difference in the university, identifying this as yet another barrier in the university.

**Caroline:** But over here, what I’m hearing about at my university is, basically, we don’t have … it’s … it’s breaching privacy acts. People don’t feel comfortable disclosing that kind of information. And that’s the justification that’s used to actually not gather such data. Because …

**Satra:** Yeah!

**Caroline:** To have data like that is to have evidence. We just want to keep it, and let it remain at a very abstract and inaccessible kind of way.
**Satra:** There is a problem with the descriptor.

**Caroline:** Mmm.

**Satra:** There is no doubt. It’s *not* Non-English Speaking Background *first* you know, category 1, category 2. So the whole statistical analysis is *vague*. I mean in England, you don’t have that. You tend to have Afro-Caribbean, Asian, African. But, you have a category of *black* as well, that they collect. Statistics.

**Caroline:** Aha.

**Satra:** Whereas here they don’t have that.

**Caroline:** But it’s not just representation. Because you can have representation but it’s also got to be somebody who, who can act as a conduit for making …

**Satra:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Caroline:** Knowledge incl … included and …

**Satra:** Yeah.

**Caroline:** … and validated. To simply be there isn’t enough!

Satra’s point is that there are few who move through these gates of access. For me, however, there is a difference between simply entering into a space and closing the
door behind you and moving through a space and leaving the door open behind you. Rather than occupation, a revolving door implies a sharing of power, which the former image does not. Increasing access to senior levels in the university and occupying a position of power does not ensure power is practised for the common good of other marginalised groups.

‘I don’t personally like the word hybrid’

We talk more about the language of difference in the Academy. The notion of hybridity is deeply embedded in discourses of race and difference. We are both familiar with it. It is not a term we use in reference to the self.

**Satra:** I don’t personally like the word *hybrid*. I haven’t read theoretically around the issue. So, and, it’s a very gut reaction to the *word*. It, for me, it means like mongrel. The same as mongrel in some ways, you know?

**Caroline:** It’s a very devaluative kind of description?

**Satra:** Yeah. But it’s also not … a *strong* description. The hybridity is a weakness isn’t it?

**Caroline:** Mmm.

**Satra:** It’s like the breaking away of something.
Caroline: Yes. Yes.

Satra: And …

Caroline: Dilution!

Satra: Dilution or something … rather than looking at it the other way. You know what I mean?

Caroline: Aha. Ahem [agreement].

Satra: I don’t know. I mean, I don’t know anything about the theories of hybridity. So, I’ve read few things. You know, like Homi Bhabha’s stuff.

Caroline: You see, there are people who theorise and … and they create some, you know, term that’s supposed to encapsulate these things, but the thing is, you have to open up the meanings ‘cause meanings are changing.

Satra: Yeah.

Caroline: So, instead of, you know hybridity - to this person [a colleague] told me it was a scientific yuck description. Same, very much, as what you’re saying.

Satra: Yeah. One of the interesting questions you might … because this has come up for me. One of the interesting questions, you probably have thought about it, is that, I think that question is more prevalent with people who have
…what we call multi, the, the sort of backgrounds that we have. Not the people who are totally, totally.

**Caroline:** The monocultural thing! Yes!

**Satra:** Yeah! Yeah!

**Caroline:** It is something.

**Satra:** Because I find that when I work with people who are black, you know, totally Indian, and they have that Indian culture around themselves, you know, that big extended relationship, they’re the ones who don’t challenge racism. Whereas, the ones, multilayer and multicultural backgrounds like ours, do. That’s just the gut feeling I’ve had in training.

**Caroline:** Mmm. Maybe, you see, the youthfulness of the *hybridity* term is, it is describing a, a space, a dislocation. But you see a dislocation is still a location.

**Satra:** But, mm. Yes, it is, if you *make* it that. Like the margins *can* also be the centre stage. That’s what I do.

**Caroline:** Yeah.

An Indigenous colleague at my university has a similar response to the word *hybridity*. Descriptors of difference tend to lock us into static categories or conflate us into a uniform group, but I am reluctant to create a new language that oversimplifies
the epistemologies and social realities of the women in this research story. There are so many contradictions in the language of difference. Here, Satra makes the important point that hybridity is not always recognised or valued amongst marginalised groups. In other conversations, both Satra and I identify as mixed, in terms of our family histories and our parents having diverse race/ethnic backgrounds. The concept of mixed-race or multi-raciality feels empowering, yet I am mindful that for others these do not feel comfortable at all. These terms can also have negative connotations, so that mixing is equated with diluting that which is pure and not be pure is to be impure. How many of us like to think of ourselves as impure? The discourse of biological determinism is taken for granted until we make the self-identification process a conscious one. This is why self-identification in multiple ways is empowering, as it allows us to shift and to return the gaze on the university and society.

Stories about Social Change Practice

‘It’s not my role to intervene’

An important word that pops up regularly during our conversations over the two days is racism. Here Satra talks about the question of whose responsibility it is in the university to address racism.

Satra: What I found really amazing is, maybe because it’s part of my daily bread that people actually don’t even think about it. They might, you know, on one level, they think that all students are the same and treat them the same. But one of the classic case studies I give them is, you just … bell hooks talks about
providing a safe classroom. Unless you feel safe in the classroom you can’t really give what you need to give to yourself, and to the subject, in that sense. And I talk about some of the cases that I’ve dealt, with the students, who didn’t feel safe on the basis of race. And they, the academics will usually say something like, ‘Oh, you know, it’s not my role to intervene, Satra, is it?’ ‘Why is it? Let’s explore that?’ People actually don’t believe it’s their role. You know, when it comes up in a tutorial. And there’s a very good video that I use in the training of that, which is all about … I never used to intervene, but now I do intervene. And you can intervene in a very positive way.

Satra’s story reveals the relationship between the way we see ourselves as agents of social change and the politics of pedagogy for social change. Her stories point to the operation of multiple forms of racism in the university: overt, covert, individual, systemic and epistemological, and the lack of debate about whose responsibility it is to enact existing equity policy that deals with forms of discrimination, including racism. Her story implies that responsibility should lie with the individual practitioner and those in governance.

‘I’m never going to work with an all-white team’

Here, Satra talks about social change practice in her terms. She refers to different strategies she uses to circumvent the structural and institutional barriers within the university. She tells me about an early experience of working with a white colleague while facilitating anti-racist training in the university, highlighting the salience of skin colour and the meanings attributed to this.
Satra: Because I work with people of, you know, I’ve co-trained with Adam, who’s the same colour as me. And, the fact that he’s gay, and I … I’m doing a lot of stuff now on homophobia in my training. And I co-train with women of colour. I co-train with white women. And it’s interesting. Do you know Fran [an anti-racist trainer] very well?

Caroline: Not really, not very well, not intimately.

Satra: Yeah, yeah ‘cause I had an experience with her. She’s regarded as a sort of guru of anti-racist training and my experience of her when we did the anti-racist training eight years ago - her program was totally ripped off and modelled on the English system, which I worked in. And I became a co-trainer. When they wrote the report about that, you wouldn’t believe I even existed as a trainer.

Caroline: … There’s, there’s this kind of polarity between and within different groups, or marginalised groups. And this is where the dialogue needs to come in. So if there’s any, you know, national dialogue I’d see that as a priority … to look at that.

Satra explains her reasons for not wanting to team teach with white colleagues.

Satra: Because I’ve actually said that for the first time in my life, I’ve actually realised, you know that, I politically speaking, I’m never going to work with an all-white team … Yeah. I’m actually gonna make sure that I position somebody immediately underneath me who is a person of colour. And it’s in this discussion
[softly]. And I use that, cause Adam and I have so much in common. When we’re in a meeting now and race comes up, I’ve got somebody I can look at for a contact. And I’ve got somebody who understands what’s going on.

I have mostly taught alone or with white colleagues in classrooms on topics of social identity and various forms of oppression, except in the occasional co-lecturing situations with other women of colour. Satra’s stories about power struggles that have emerged in her relationships with colleagues make me question her need to work only with other people of colour and how difficult this is given the under-representation of staff of colour in the university.

I sense a kind of dissonance between Satra and myself as I listen to how she describes her work and what she sees happen in the university. It makes me think about my own practice. I wonder what exactly our assumptions about white people are, and whether these are shared assumptions or not. If someone heard us talking they would probably say we sound racist. It is all too easy to generalise and homogenise. But how useful is that? There is so much heterogeneity within the category of whiteness just as it is within the category of otherness. I agree with Satra about the importance of naming whiteness, but it strikes me that how we go about naming whiteness in the university is just as important — whether confrontationally, aggressively, euphemistically, passively or questioningly. From my own experiences and mistakes, I have come to believe that as practitioners we need to create safe spaces to do this in a respectful and constructive way.
While our political assumptions differ, Satra and I both identify with the concept of multiplicity and recognise our multiple positionings and social realities from our own and our children’s experience of mixed-race heritage. Satra’s parents were white and African. Mine were born in Malaysia, one Chinese the other Indian. Talking to Satra helps me to see how race and gender are simultaneously experienced. In our case, we draw on class and acquired intellectual capital to counter the act of subordination on a race/gender basis. Perhaps all these links – we are dark skinned mothers with fair skinned children and both of us have lived in white majority English speaking countries for most of our lives – are what facilitate this dialogue. While our politics are divergent, there is still mutual recognition of our common experiences as women, mothers, daughters and as human beings.

‘**What does it feel like to be a white person?**’

The naming of whiteness is another important strategy which helps me to identify and think about gatekeeping practices in the university. Satra talks about the invisibility of whiteness, skin colour as a visible marker of difference and the impact of this on her work in the university.

**Satra:** And I do that now, while I’m talking to people. I say, ‘cause they’ll talk to me about colour issues. And I say, ‘Have you ever thought about what it’s like to be white?’

**Caroline:** Hmm.
Satra’s statement of ‘that’s a new thing I’m doing’ is symbolic of this process of self-invention and renewal of the understandings of the self we bring to our everyday life practice.

**Satra:** And I’ll say, ‘Are you aware of all the privileges you have because you’re white?’ and ‘What does it feel like to be a white person?’ You know, and they look at me as if to say, “How dare you!” It’s actually quite interesting when you turn it around. But I’m doing that quite a lot now. That’s a new thing I’m doing. You know, with people, and particularly if they want to push my boundaries and step inside my private space. I’m actually, in the training, when I’m doing diversity training at the university, or a racist training or something, I’ll actually say to the group, ‘Tell me three things that you can do as a white person that I can’t. And what privileges do you have over me?’ And it gets to them, first time in their whole bloody life, to realise that they’re white, you know? Yeah. And when I’m doing training, I’m acutely aware, that when we’re dealing with racism it touches [pause]. There are private things within me, you know. Because, it’s the trauma of that, that connection or something … And so, as a trainer, I’m very acutely aware of how different the impact of training is on me than it is on a white person.

A white person can go in, do the training, walk away. I go in, I give so much, I walk away and I’m traumatised. I have to be debriefed. It takes me a long time to recover from the experience. And usually I’m very … careful about who I co-
train with. And as a black trainer for me, or a black educator - the first thing that happens often … because they want to discredit me … They want to knock me off my pedestal. So there’s a lot of that challenging of me. I could, I could co-train with a white man, and they could get away with murder. And I can do the same and I’m … ‘You know, who does she think she is!’ you know? So, in a training session, I allow people to, to feel comfortable about asking you know stuff with me, in many ways.

**Caroline:** Creating a *safe* space.

The issues of safety and harm apply to students and educators alike. I empathise with Satra as I have taught in similar situations to her. Rather than assume the world is black or white in reductionist binary terms, however, I prefer to think that a focus on the issue of privilege (that includes white race privilege) broadens our vision. Thus, we need not lock ourselves into the immutable black versus white or indigenous versus non-indigenous, but explore the spectrum of ambiguities within and between dominant and non-dominant perspectives.

Satra’s story reminds me of my first teaching experiences in the university. After teaching a social policy history class, I approached a colleague - a white woman teaching the same subject - to ask if her authority to teach this subject had ever been challenged as had happened to me. She looked confounded, before replying, ‘No. Never’. I explained that my authority to teach the subject was challenged by some students on the basis of my race and gender. Like Satra’s story, implicit in such exchanges is the assumption that there is a taken-for-granted subject position of
Australian, where Australian-ness is a possessive property afforded the authentic (i.e. white) Australian subject. This racialised discourse negates the Indigenous population and a range of other positions in society. Perhaps by assuming that working for social change is part of an ongoing process of life learning, we can construct and re-negotiate a sense of worth and purpose without completing the self in this way.

‘Before I probably would have either given up or been a bit upset’

So how often do we acknowledge our own ethnocentricity? This is much harder. Satra tells me she asks the hard questions but does she ask herself the same questions? Her passionate concerns for anti-racism education make her quite narrow in some ways, even quite racist.

**Satra:** But the issue *for me* is and I’ve, I’ve actually been *telling* Adam this, what do we want in the end? And I’ve said, ‘What did you want in the end? This is the way we’ve got to deal with it, you *know*?’ [softly] And we’re not going to change heads overnight. We’re not going to change house in a lifetime, sometimes, but we’ve got to get action. And we’ve got to get moving on this sort of stuff. And it’s a catalyst movement. So, *that’s* the difference. Whereas *before* I probably would have either given up or been a bit upset and carried it with me. Now I don’t. And I very rarely come out of an interaction like that without achieving what I want to achieve, very rarely … and being aware of your own ethnocentricities in many ways because I’ve got it. I certainly do that, you know. And …
I do not challenge Satra’s political views as they are integral to her worldview and sense of self. This makes me complicit in the moment.

**Caroline:** And do you acknowledge that as part, part of your training?

**Satra:** Yeah.

**Caroline:** Yeah.

**Satra:** Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah, I mean, I don’t put myself up. I put myself up as a facilitator. And you know, and I’ll expose my own issues around stuff that I, you know, have a challenge for me. I mean, I, I haven’t, you know, I mean … I’m actually introducing homophobia now into my training and, when I train with Adam, you see, I do the homophobia. Not him, because it’s too difficult for him to do it.

**Caroline:** It’s very easy to intellectualise.

**Satra:** Mmmmmm.

**Caroline:** I find it’s more comfortable to intellectualise, but to tap into my feelings when it comes to actually doing it, which is what the whole thing is about in some ways …?

**Satra:** Mm.
Caroline: It’s very difficult. And I think, maybe that will happen retrospectively. I don’t know.

Satra: Yes. ‘Cause I always think, yeah we are too often in our heads, and not in hearts … about … [softly]. Although these issues in a sense [pause] you have to be in both, I think - your head and your heart.

Caroline: Yes.

Satra: That’s the reality ...

As Satra talks about her practice, I am silent, preferring to listen and think about how her stories relate to mine. Many of her stories sound familiar and yet are new to me. Some aspects of our experiences are mirrored while others, such as our politics, are not. The metaphor of the head and the heart resonate with me, I hear the difference in her voice when Satra talks about her daughter, Nena, softly, lovingly, from the heart. When she talks about her work in the university her register shifts to hardness; the head, of course. Rationality and logic have very little to do with individual or institutional practice: *terra nullius* policy (the declaration of Australia as an empty land), the white Australia policy and the war against terror were and are all based on and generated by feelings of fear (of the other) and desire (for power over others).
**Personal and the Private Selves**

I am acutely aware of how many of Satra’s references are to particular people and organisational settings. Including these private stories in the research story would make her identifiable and I decide to leave them out. Our personal histories and stories about family and the heritage of multiplicity are, however, an important resource from which we both draw to construct identities and meaning in education for social change.

**Satra:** Like one of the things I’ve always known about my father. My father was born in [A]. But my grandmother was [B]. And my grandfather was half [A] and half [B]. But they’re predominantly [A]. But they’d re-located across borders and things, moved a lot, very nomadic. It’s a very oral tradition.

Satra’s mixed-race construction is similar to my own, although I describe myself in essentialist terms as half this and that (Indian/ Chinese with a sprinkle of Swedish and very Australian). The discourse of miscegenation hangs between us. Many Aboriginal people in Australia ascribe to themselves (and are ascribed) identities in terms of half/quarter/full-blooded percentages. It is a reminder that discourses of race and social Darwinism are alive and well, where purity and wholeness meet impurity and fragmentation. Sharing stories about multiplicity and what it means to us as mothers as well as the implications this has for children, is a powerful way to counter the pathologising discourses of difference. Only time will tell if and how Satra’s and my journeys and perceptions might differ from our children’s.
Satra’s Narratives: Researcher Reflections

Reflected in Satra’s stories is the need for more safe spaces in the university to collectively untangle the many meanings of difference and their salience in everyday life and in knowledge production. Presently, we can only talk about these issues under subject headings such as Cultural, Multicultural and Aboriginal Studies, Diversity in Educational Settings or in research, but rarely in some knowledge disciplines such as Agriculture, Law, Engineering and Medicine or at policy level. But I wonder for whom is it important or safe and where can we find these spaces? All too often the responsibility to push difference to the forefront of higher education debate falls on the individual educator’s shoulders.

Satra’s stories suggest that the self-identification process and the knowledge production process are co-implicated. Her own mobility and stories about practices of enacting power through her job and her positioning in the university highlight the complexity of relations of power in the university. Her narratives tell us that specific systemic and epistemic gatekeeping practices operate in the university and that these compound difficulties encountered by some non-white women to access higher levels of decision-making power in the university. Satra acknowledges the impact of racialising identification practices and the use of epistemologically-biased selection and recruitment practices. This kind of epistemological racism (Scheurich, 1997) makes it very difficult to engage in dialogue to effect social and cultural changes in thinking about difference, whether it is among interview panel members, general policy-makers or scholars and practitioners in the university. If the gatekeepers of power in the university (policy-makers, educators and researchers) are conceiving
racism solely in terms of individual behaviours, then we are speaking very different languages.

Satra’s stories suggest that peripheral social identities and knowledge perspectives can and do interrupt hegemonic discourses of race and difference. To assume that all white students and staff in the university are racist is, however, an unfounded and unhelpful position; a burden. I am not sure if Satra believes the premise to be true but it sounds as if she does at this time. Hegemony shapes social realities, materiality and mobility in very real ways. Her stories suggest that the university has yet to learn to recognise and value the peripheral practices that many new members bring to the Academy.

Throughout our conversations, I wait for Satra’s invitation to cross boundaries with her. Some boundaries are traversed while others remain undisturbed. In our conversations, Satra and I draw on and point to the concept of hierarchies of oppression in the university. An acceptance of hierarchies of oppression allows us to talk about the differences in experiences between white and non-white academics and educators in the university. We use the black/white binary as a kind of shorthand for identifying white race privilege in the university to differentiate between dominant and non-dominant positions and to include members of a range of alternative race/ethnic groups who have a presence in Australia. By naming whiteness and hierarchies of oppression we identify epistemological and structural barriers in the university. Such hierarchies, however, also lead to practices that reify difference and negate cross-boundary alliance-building and acceptance (not tolerance) of difference, which are the foundations of education for social change. I can hear that Satra has
already thought about and acted on her particular understandings of oppression/racism, which have informed the many changes initiated by her in her university and I am aware that others there have acknowledged, welcomed and also criticised these changes.

Of course it would be much easier to take the celebratory and simplistic government policy line of Living in Harmony, as multiculturalism does not question but merely expresses itself in *exotica* (dance and food). Trying to counter the reductionism of multiculturalism on an everyday basis is tiring as Satra’s and my frustrations indicate. In a way, I am - we all are - racist, viewing the world through reductionist lenses. We label and categorise to make meaning, albeit in divisive terms. The challenge remains to find ways to interrupt epistemic violence and to catch ourselves in the act of making reductionist assumptions about the other that cause harm. This is a question of ethics in practice.
Chapter 5 - Kali

Meeting Kali

Now in her late 40s, Kali migrated to Australia about 12 years ago, leaving her family behind, and has worked in the university as a lecturer since her arrival. Though she comes from Y (a South-East Asian country), Kali does not self-identify explicitly as Asian during our research conversations. Kali has worn many hats in the university and at the time of our conversations was teaching an Asian language in a university and had started research in another knowledge discipline, exploring issues of culture, identity, gender and difference. She was employed on a permanent basis and had recently attained a senior research and teaching position.

A mutual friend introduced me to Kali via email almost a year earlier. We exchanged brief emails intermittently. She sent me photos of her convocation and a copy of her doctoral thesis. Today she is attending a Global Environmental conference close to where I live. It is a sunny and cool Easter Friday. I drive to the city to pick her up. As I drive into a parking spot I search for a woman wearing a red coat. I find her lighting
up an otherwise grey and colourless street. She is carrying tulips and a package. The flowers are for me. The package contains chocolates for my children.

We chat easily in the car. A confident quiet unfolds in the way she sits and in the manner and speed at which she articulates her carefully considered thoughts. The words have a comfortable rhythm and I like their sound. She spends the afternoon with my family on the front veranda. Later that day we drive up to a nearby observatory on a mountain. As we stand looking out at the view, Kali asks me about my research. After I tell her my spiel she asks me if I can interview her. She tells me she would love to be involved in my research. I laugh, surprised. So obvious, yet it hadn’t struck me.

Months later she meets me at the airport looking pale. She is sick with a high temperature. She drives me to her house. I wonder if she will be too ill to participate. I tell her if she is, so be it as I’m here to spend time with her regardless. We walk into her house and I am greeted by running shoes and an expanse of smooth wooden floorboards. I hand her a gift to thank her for letting me stay in her home for two days; a small candleholder to add to her clutter-free home. A veranda lets in light and provides a view of the surrounding green and leafy suburb.

Kali and I talk for two days on and off in between her visit to a local doctor. We begin by sitting on the rear veranda enjoying ripe strawberries and coffee. I ask Kali if I can press the recorder on button. We start to negotiate our way through the research conversation. Her voice is a little hoarse, yet rhythmic in its slowness. She punctuates
thoughts with slow breaths. I am lulled by the syntax of her first language melding with her drawn out *lilting* vowels.

**Stories About Identity**

*‘Just a lecturer’*

The following excerpts from the research conversation tell us about the relevance of narratives of location and positionality (Anthias, 2002) and how power has a discursive impact on the lives of those who are at the receiving end of the language of difference (Fairclough, 1989).

Job titles and a commitment to work for social change do not always go hand in hand. Through my career, I have been described as a course coordinator, teacher, education officer, youth worker, doctoral student and scholar. None of these titles foreground the identities that I invoke in the name of social justice. These dimensions of the identification process remain invisible. When I first spoke to Kali about my research and she asked me if she could be part of the project, I assumed that she worked in the faculty of Education and that accounted for her interest in my research. Kali had in fact taught in the area of education; however, it was only later during our conversation that I realised she was teaching a language other than English. Kali does not specifically position herself in terms of her work or job title in the university, so on the second day we talk about job titles.

**Caroline:** So you’re employed full-time?
**Kali:** Mm.

**Caroline:** What, so what’s your title, ‘cause you said *that job in the city* before?

**Kali:** Oh, senior lecturer, just a lecturer.

**Caroline:** It’s not *just* a lecturer? But that’s what it feels like, is it? Is there a big difference between a lecturer and a senior lecturer do you think?

**Kali:** Mm. I think senior lecturer’s got more administration.

As Kali refers to the hierarchical nature of position titles and structures in the university, I detect a fleeting twinge of cynicism.

**Caroline:** Is that what you really want to do?

**Kali:** Oh yes. It’s a very prestigious kind of thing I think. But … yeah, I wonder sometimes is that where I want to go. Not really, not particularly inspiring …

I am reminded of Satra’s earlier references to power as situated in job positions.

**Caroline:** Maybe you don’t want to? Can you see yourself in academia? Or do you see yourself doing work outside of academia?
**Kali:** I quite like, um, I quite like it. I quite like the um, you know, freedom of thinking all these things in a way. But then I guess I believe in education. So, I feel I’m doing something worthwhile. Yeah, I don’t know.

Like Satra, Kali refers to job titles and status. The acquisition of senior positions is an important prerequisite for effecting change in the university.

*‘I never really experienced, you know, being yellow’*

The issue of visible difference (skin colour) takes on a different nuance with Kali than it did in my conversations with Satra. We talk about the way in which Kali is positioned in the university.

**Caroline:** The first woman I spoke with [Satra], I think, also experienced that racial … you know, looking through the world through the racial lens a lot. And it doesn’t sound you have in the same way.

**Kali:** Mm.

**Caroline:** You’ve done it differently somehow?

**Kali:** Don’t know. I … Mmm [long pause] I think for me, it’s more like, it’s more than how I look, but it’s their expectation they have about Asian women.
**Caroline:** Who?

**Kali:** Just … anyone. I never really encounter, I never really experienced you know, being yellow. I’m very yellow [laughs to herself].

But, it’s more like, yeah, their expectation. [pause] I don’t know. It’s never been an issue for me, to, to um. Never thought about it since I was very small. When I was growing up, I didn’t know anyone from overseas. I had no problem relating to people from other countries. I don’t know why I never, never thought about it. My mother always asks me if I have Asian friends. I say, ‘Oh, yes. One or two’. But then, it’s never been an issue for me.

Why am I troubled at the possibility of her denying the salience of skin colour? Who constructs Kali as Asian in the university? What does Asian mean in an Australian historical context? Kali and I contrast physically. I am clearly dark and she is light yet we are constructed by students and others in the university as belonging to a homogeneous Asian people. Even I construct Kali as Asian and in terms of her country of birth and first language (Y), although she tells me she does not construct me in race/ethnic terms.

**Caroline:** So when … has it never occurred to you that, when we first met or during our conversations, ‘There’s an Asian woman’ or the race thing didn’t come into it at all for you?
**Kali:** Did it to you?

I really like the way she questions me. I feel less like an interrogator and more like a conversationalist.

**Caroline:** Maybe … I think I see things through a race lens.

I am thinking of my earlier conversations with Satra.

**Kali:** Yeah?

**Caroline:** Probably more and more, as I grow older. Not as a dividing thing, or a categorising thing …

I can hear my own contradiction. How else can race be thought of other than either dividing or categorising?

**Kali:** Funny, when you said you’re Chinese-Indian yesterday, it never really occurred to me, never thought about it. I thought, ‘Oh, okay’. Mmm.

Hearing this propels me further into self-reflection.

**Caroline:** It worries me you know, seeing things, you know …
Kali: Compartmented.

I like that she interrupts me.

Caroline: Seeing yourself as this and that. I’m so used to identifying myself in that way probably, in public places.

Old habits die hard. Kali’s comments remind me of my conversations with other friends and educators of colour outside of the immediate research context, who have lived in places other than Australia and in other social, cultural, political and historical worlds. These friends have lived in Australia for a much shorter period of time than the women in this research. When they speak about their teaching experience here, and of working in the university, the issue of race/ethnicity has taken on other meanings in this new environment. Perhaps back home, as members of the dominant culture or a privileged class in another place, they might never be identified in terms of their skin colour or culture - until they arrive in Australia. This is the heart of critical whiteness theory, the assumption that if you are privileged you don’t have to think about your actual specificities. It is only if you’re dominated that your awareness is sharpened.

‘Oh, but you’re different because you are westernised’

I ask Kali about how her students position her.
**Kali:** It’s interesting. They always say, say for example if they say, ‘Oh, that woman is submissive,’ or something and … But then they will - if I say, ‘Well, what about me? Do you see me as a very submissive person?’ And they always say, ‘Oh, but you’re different because you are westernised’. And I have this problem with the westernised. I think, if that means modernisation or industrialisation, I think [Y (birth place)] is probably a million times more westernised than Australia is, in a way. But then they have this superiority, in a way, that, you know, western is superior.

Kali’s story sounds so familiar. Her reference to the western brings attention to the way in which the western/non-western binary evokes a predetermined notion of what each of the two halves refer to.

**Kali:** I think it’s actually in [Y] as well, like there’s still that sort of superiority of western society is quite strong in [Y]. So um, that’s a bit of sad thing …

Yeah, yeah because I think I’m very much … I don’t really need to you know define me as [Y] or something or other. But nothing, you know, ‘Oh, I’m [Y]’ and … nothing else! And the fact that I’ve lived in Australia doesn’t change that - I’m not [Y] anymore, or anything. So it’s different. Everyone’s different.

**Caroline:** Mmm. So do you find that [the students] bring it up somehow?
**Kali:** They sort of have expectation in a way, that you are, you must be such-and-such, in a way. They, in a way, they want to see you in certain characteristics.

I wonder how often a white educator is asked about their ethnicity or race. Kali’s story reminds me of occasions when I have been with a majority of white staff in the university, teaching theory and practice, or running a workshop. The issue of who has authority to speak about difference is ever present. While Kali is conscious of the ethical implications of the identification process, she enjoys playing with others’ expectations about her visible and less visible differences.

*‘They’re still so used to seeing Asian teachers as very willing volunteers’*

Kali does not self-identify as a person of colour or a black woman. Skin colour remains a silent undercurrent in our dialogue. Still, she recognises how the staff members of the dominant cultural group position her as *odd*. Kali tells me a story about other Asian teachers in her university and how the native Y language teachers started as volunteers before being employed as teachers. Where do the stories about her colleagues merge with her own?

**Kali:** I never, I never sort of refer to myself as a [Y] person.

**Caroline:** Mm, what about with staff at the university? What happens there in relation to you and them and how they see you, do you think?
Kali: They see me as different. They think I’m a bit odd. Like, it’s interesting in that our education department, I think that kind of ignorant, I mean like you know, like my very beginning question, like Asian teachers are …

Caroline: Yeah.

Kali: … not assertive. That came from our education department.

Caroline: Gosh. Yeah.

Kali: And then there’s still all this superior/inferior assumption. And um, it’s interesting that’s how they see us ‘Asian teacher’. They’re still so used to seeing Asian teachers as very willing volunteers. And they think you must be so grateful to have a job.

Caroline: Really?

Kali: Oh yeah. So I still have that kind of ‘You must be so grateful to have a job!’ I’m trying to think if I. No I haven’t … Well, not that I know of.

‘In a way they’re happy with you as long as you don’t have power’

The issue of language proficiency conjures up discourses of education, language teaching, literacy, cultural competency and the subordination of Languages Other
Than English (LOTE) in relation to Standard Australian English. Kali and I explore
the hidden assumptions underpinning these commonly used acronyms.

**Kali:** Just talking about this particular language education. It used to be, you
know, [Y] was at the beginning of [Y] education [in the university]. Most of the
teachers were volunteers.

**Caroline:** Oh.

**Kali:** And then, um, it’s all very willing, willing volunteers.

**Caroline:** Oh, the grateful…

**Kali:** Yeah. And then, I mean these people in the education department still
begin in that century. And then, they sort of see you as a willing volunteer. So
once you start to demand, you know, your equal position as a teacher, like any
other teachers they started to think, ‘Oh, that’s not what I need, to you know,
expect it’. So in a way they’re happy with you as long as you don’t have power.

**Caroline:** Yes.

Kali identifies gatekeeping practices employed by the white staff whose first language
is English in the university department where she works.
Kali: And then, I felt, I didn’t write this in my [doctoral] thesis but, but the problem with [Y] native speaking teachers was because their language is so much better than other teachers obviously, because they’re native speakers, so they’re very threatening. Including these people in education department, who became kind of executive without really knowing too much about the language. At those times, if you knew few words in [Y] that was something tremendous. Because you know, it was so unusual and exotic. And then …

Caroline: Mmmm.

Kali: … their language proficiency is a very, very low. I know that. So there’s all the more reason to accuse these native speaker teachers about their discipline ability. Otherwise if they’re not good at discipline as well they would be so much better than you. But as long as they keep their discipline or management ability low, or you accuse them, they’re not as good as you. So I think that is, that is what I thought when I was doing thesis.

Caroline: Mmm.

Kali: So there’s just a lot of power things there.

Caroline: Mmm.

The native Y language speakers to whom Kali refers had more knowledge and fluency in this language than the white educators who originally taught the language
course. This created a power imbalance between volunteer staff and staff employed by the university. Kali points out that the cultural and linguistic competency of the native English speakers teaching the Y language remained unquestioned. The competency of the non-native English speakers teaching in their first language was, however, evaluated on the basis of their ability to discipline and manage the behaviour of students - quite different grounds to their English speaking colleagues. According to Kali, the volunteer teachers were marked as different on a racialised basis and according to unspoken language and cultural competency criteria.

‘Be nice’

Kali tells me another story about power relations in the context of dimensions of race and ethnicity. Here, she talks about a male colleague; another Asian teacher.

**Kali:** One of the teachers, not to do with this English research but um, he was, he was assistant teacher, volunteer assistant teacher. I mean, he was popular with the teachers and students, but he decided to become *real* teacher. So he did a course. And then he went back to that school, to do teaching prac [practicum]. And he said that people’s attitudes are so different. He was asked ‘Why you want to take job from other people?’

**Caroline:** Eeeeeeexh?

**Kali:** He was seen as a threat, that he’s *taking* Australian people’s job by becoming a *real* teacher [with recognised qualifications]. But when he was a
volunteer everyone was praised. Like working for international understanding and da-da-da-da-da. But once he became the real teacher, he was seen as a threat. So just all these [things] happen.

**Caroline:** That’s interesting, because that story has triggered that thing about, at the university where I am … This is how I find myself positioned lately, you know, the fact that my topic of interest is interrogating these particular things which are not generally included in literature in education anyway. And they’re not *valued* other than peripheral to the course in an optional area or something on the margins. So, I found myself in conversation with academics who are in *positions* that offer power, who don’t *like* the fact that I will actually challenge what they have to do. Or challenge and say, why aren’t postgraduates getting this and that. I’m in the process of doing that in a focus group that they’ve started … And it makes me wonder about this, it is a power thing, but also in the case of your friend, it was also the issue of race?

**Kali:** Oh definitely, definitely.

Kali’s story suggests that the term *international* is commonly used in the university as a prefix to signify non-white subjects and social identities. This, in turn, constructs the *local* Australian resident or Australian-born student as *non-international* and therefore presumably white despite the fact that the demographic profile of tertiary student populations in the US, UK and Australia has grown increasingly diverse in the last decade.
Kali: I mean, I’m also, I don’t know if it’s what, how much to do with actually [being seen as a] [Y] person, ‘cause I must say there’s this stereotype of [Y] people so willing and polite, and never question anything. There is still, you know there’s a very prevailing stereotype about that. And then once he becomes actually teacher who, you know, who need to do his work, like he’s responsible so he need to be …

Caroline: It’s not enough just for him to have …

Kali: Just to be nice!

Caroline: The qualification!

Kali: Yeah.

Caroline: To get the legitimate status and title, but because of his race, I suppose, having to earn it in a different … There’s differential process, obviously. I don’t know what they [laughs] …what do they expect him to do in addition to getting that?

Kali: Be nice.

Discourses of race circulating in Australian society filter through to the university and the classroom. This resonates with Lo’s research on the notion of Asian-ness in Australia. Kali’s stories point to racialised stereotyping of Asian women in the
university where Asian-ness and niceness become synonymous, possessive properties which are frequently feminised, racialised and exoticised in the media, popular culture and in the public imaginary. In Australia, the gay Asian man is similarly exoticised, violated and subordinated on the basis of race/ethnicity and sexuality (Gopalkrishnan, 2000) so, at yet another level, the ideal masculine white man is celebrated, subordinating the Asian other man.

Kali: Be nice and be unofficial. I think.

Caroline: Don’t acquire any decision-making power.

Kali: You don’t acquire power. And you don’t have your voice. As long as you remain invisible and silent, you’re welcome. So like a guest.

Kali’s stories of Asian teachers remind me of how the language of difference, in an Australian multicultural context, constructs difference and cultural competency in terms of deficit. In this epistemological landscape, it is the other that needs topping up, fixing, improvement, not the systems or the epistemologies that accompany us and inform us on our life journeys as educators, scholars, practitioners, members of communities, neighbours and as friends.

Caroline: And that’s why a lot of international visitors or international tourists

… Or international students are constructed in a similar way?
Kali: Yeah. I guess. So um, as long as you, you know, you make us look welcoming other culture, but don’t come in actually into the society and try to change everything, because that’s not your role. But you, you’re kind of decoration, in a way ... So it’s come to, you know, this celebration of multi-colour and flavour as long as you’re a pretty decoration.

Kali’s stories highlight the power of hegemonic epistemologies in the Academy and the political nature of knowledge production. We need to examine points of departure and interruptions in the knowledge production process to understand where and how the hegemonic structure meets the other. Here, the negotiation of new memberships within the university is viewed as the responsibility of the individual. It is up to you, with the strange baggage, to acquire the rules of legitimate practice and the subtleties of Australian Standard English vernacular, leaving your strange peripheral practices at the door. This suggests Australian universities have yet to recognise the value of peripheral identities and knowledges. Without debate about difference and documentation of the experiences of disenfranchised groups, this is an impossible task.

‘Whenever you go to the conference or meeting, everything was very French and German’

Here, Kali talks about her experience at a multicultural conference. In the multicultural setting, Kali was positioned as the other. Her story reveals how boundaries around individual and group identity are constructed and policed. It also
affirms the importance of the relational dimension in meaning making and how social meaning is constructed in situation and in context.

**Kali:** *Multicultural Affairs*, the conference is called um…*Multiculturalism* [title of conference] or something like that. And I thought, oh well I’ll go. And then, it’s … presented, I think they’re all mainly um, like a lot of German people I think, in background. Very multicultural, very multicultural! But they’re all very European descendant?

Where is the heterogeneity? Give me the heterogeneity! The centrality of whiteness prevails even within multicultural communities. Kali’s story raises the questions of ‘Who is included and excluded in this generic, singular and unifying descriptor of a multicultural community?’ and ‘Whose voices are represented (and loudest) within organisations representing a range of ethnic communities?’ She goes on to explain her positioning in this context.

**Kali:** And then, I was feeling this very uneasy feeling. Then I thought, ‘Where did I feel this before?’ And then, as I remember, very early time when I started teaching [Y] in Melbourne [in the late 1980s], whenever you go to the conference or meeting, you feel, I feel very out of place because everything was very … French and German!

**Caroline:** Still? I think that’s terrible in today’s climate.
**Kali:** All the teachers of, it’s more than ten years ago, but um, all the Teachers Association and all these things, are very, very Eurocentric.

Kali’s stories here suggest there are many differences within difference itself, racialised and gendered hierarchies presently operate within *multicultural* communities, and Eurocentrism operates in knowledge production of the margins.

**Kali:** And then if you are, you know, Asian, that’s something new and exotic. And um, that felt like very much that, this conference. And then, this President of Multicultural Affairs, he was saying how he had a terrible problem with this photographer. Wanted to make this brochure of multiculture something-or-other. And he said, ‘Oh this photographer, he only took Australian faces’. And I thought, ‘What do you mean?’ You know, he was just saying, he means Anglo-Saxon? He didn’t take all these Asian faces? And I thought this person is supposed to be the leading multicultural person. I thought - I would have been more offended if the Asian faces just been used as a token multiculturalism face.

I am reminded of other conferences and public forums where I have searched the audiences and the stage only to find men mainly occupying senior decision-making positions. It seems that gender and race imbalances occur on the margins, even at a federal level, including the Federal Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, which is a peak lobbying and advocacy body representing the interests of ethnic groups living in Australia. For all these reasons, positioning and the self-identification process are particularly important for those who are on the margins of the university and society and who are not identified, or who choose not to affiliate or identify, with
a single race/ethnic group (e.g. the Croatian, Vietnamese or Sri Lankan community). That is, race/ethnic identity is not constructed solely in terms of individual attitudes, behaviours or through race/ethnic community memberships, but in combination with much wider social forces.

‘I’m creating myself’

Here we talk about the self in relation to community. Kali explains why she navigates multiple identities in Australia.

**Caroline:** In my, you know, earlier communications, I think what’s interested me is this whole notion of not belonging to one community.

**Kali:** Mm, mm, mm. Yeah, I think so. [pause] I think particularly the way I’ve been living it’s in a way, [intonation rising] in a way I have to create my own community because I’m not really bound to anywhere. I don’t have family. And that kind of freedom, it’s wonderful but at the same time, I just, I mean, it’s really challenging. And I suppose that’s one of the things that I really enjoy being here, away from my home country in a way.

**Caroline:** Mm.

**Kali:** That you actually get to create anything you want. So either work, or running, or whatever, you just … sort of make it, in a way. I made, in a way … I’m creating myself - being an environmentalist …
Caroline: Mmm.

Kali: Or runner, or teacher, or friend, whoever. But in a way sort of creating self in a way?

Caroline: [urgently] Mm, mm because you’re never just one thing.

Kali: And then, I guess that’s what everybody does wherever you are. But then I guess, that becomes more obvious outside of your, where you’re brought up in a way.

Caroline: But do you think you were doing sorts of inventions when you were living in [Y]?

Kali: I think probably in [Y] it seemed, that structure, the social structure [in Y] is so much more rigid. And there are, you know, a lot of precedent examples to follow and obligation. And then here, you know, I have nothing, in a way.

Caroline: So you selected Australia?

Kali: I didn’t know anything about Australia. I just happened to have a job.

Caroline: Oh. Okay.
Kali: But I think it happened to suit me in a way. This kind of real young country where there’s not much rule in a way …

Caroline: Compared to your previous experience?

Kali: Mmm.

Multicultural discourse positions both Kali and me in contradictory and subordinating ways. Yet we circumvent and question prevailing conceptions of difference in the university, re-positioning our multiple selves in the process. We are unable and unwilling to fit into predetermined acronyms such as NESB and CALD that have little relevance to our changing life circumstances and multiple identities.

Kali’s stories about Asian teachers are a reminder of the myth of the invading yellow peril in white settlement and white Australia policy days. In a contemporary multicultural context, the yellow hoards have evolved into a contemporary generic Asian category. This Asian may have been more easily identifiable as Chinese during colonial settlement times, but today is not necessarily so. She or he may be born in any South-East Asian country, or in Australia, or self-identify as multi-racial or none of the above just as Kali chooses not to construct herself in race/ethnic terms. Nationalistic narratives (Stanley, 1996) or majoritarian narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) of Australia’s colonial history are part of the social fabric of contemporary life. These include alternative histories, new and emerging ethnic identities and communities and old histories re-told through different storytellers’ eyes. Although many minority voices and histories remain unheard; they have been
excluded. Satra, Kali and my own narratives of location and positionality enable these hidden histories to be re-traced and grounded in the present and in the material.

**Barriers in the University: The Language of Epistemological Violence**

*‘It’s funny isn’t it, minority is such a strange word?’*

In this section, Kali highlights the importance of borders constructed around identities and knowledges and to what extent simplistic and reductionist discourses of difference and multiculturalism circulate in the university.

**Kali:** It’s funny isn’t it - minority is such a strange word?

**Caroline:** Yeah, what does it mean, minority?

**Kali:** Because everyone’s different.

**Caroline:** Boils down to numbers. You’re described by statistics and therefore your value or worth is if you’re a critical mass [laughs]. Then you count, on a census thing. Then they’ll consider implementing some service but otherwise … you know you’re kind of constructed just by that description?

**Kali:** And then, their level of multiculture is very much ‘Isn’t it wonderful, we have all these wonderful singing and music’.
**Caroline:** Yeah. Yeah. But that hasn’t changed?

**Kali:** Hasn’t changed.

**Caroline:** I find this is what worries me - it’s not just, you know, whites against non-whites kind of issues that piss me off. You know, it’s *within* the so-called multicultural groups, *within* the migrant groups themselves, or whatever, between people that there’s, they also share those kinds of assumptions and they don’t even question it!

**Kali:** Mm. Mm. And then, I think with, with multiculturalism or whatever, it’s always, the problem when you think it’s actually you who need to change. It’s never like that. It’s always *them*.

**Caroline:** *Us* and *them*.

**Kali:** Yeah. And then, I found that that’s very, very, yeah that’s the huge, huge barrier that, ‘Isn’t that wonderful we have all these skills, different colour, different food, different music?’ And as long as that something that we get to *enjoy*, to actually accommodate or to actually *live* equally, it’s actually *you* who have to change, or who must accommodate … And they’re the people who say, ‘Oh! It’s, it’s not what we have to do. You know, why should we do that?’

**Caroline:** They said that at the conference [multicultural conference]?
Kali: Well, well, that’s, that’s the attitude, I think.

Caroline: Yeah. Yeah.

Kali: So that’s, that’s I think that’s the reason why everything it stayed so superficial. As long as it’s them who need to change, and we are the ones who celebrate and enjoy multiculturalism ….

Caroline: Yeah?

Kali: I hate that word.

The invisibility of whiteness, the silence around the topics of race and ethnicity and the reluctance to name and talk about these issues in the university are like walking through the dark knowing there are potholes in the road. If you’re unable to see them clearly they take you by surprise. Kali and I keep coming back to the limitations of the language and the terminology to describe difference. The discourse of multiculturalism does not sit well with either of us. It evokes a neatly compartmentalised landscape of ethnicities that serves up cultural traditions as tasty morsels in a celebratory culinary parade. But who is the chef behind the theories of knowledge and ways of knowing that frame the menu? The idealised view - that there is a level playing field for all of us who live in Australia - is increasingly fraying at the edges.
Caroline: Yeah. So actually power is never in that equation or in that discussion.

Kali: Mmm.

Caroline: The power to actually construct … who decided what multiculturalism is and how it’s going to be? It isn’t questioned.

Multicultural discourse is premised on simplistic conceptions of difference, identity and community, yet it is an integral part of the educational landscape that shapes curriculum practice and models of higher education pedagogy. Official multiculturalism fails to acknowledge the plurality of social realities including the experiences of marginalised groups, which produces epistemological barriers of the racial kind for many in the wider Australian society and university.

The under-representation of women educators of colour at higher decision-making levels is also a reflection of wider social forces outside the university that construct women and people of colour as invisible in public and political arenas (Acker & Dillabough, 2002). In our conversation, Kali and I have identified racialising gatekeeping practices that operate in the university through discourses of difference, multiculturalism, discourses of cultural and linguistic competency and hierarchies of knowledge. From our experiential perspectives, it seems that Eurocentrism is alive and well in the Academy. It is evidenced in the tendency to privilege whiteness as the normative ontological and epistemological starting point in knowledge production. In this way, whiteness operates covertly and unquestioned. Furthermore, the discourse of
gender equity frames the concerns of women outside the context of race and ethnicity. Yet EEO and diversity legislation require evidence of discrimination on this basis as a pre-requisite for possible action in any claim addressing systemic and individual forms of discrimination in the university. If, as Hage posits, multiculturalism has evolved as a mechanism of the State merely to manage diversity and for policing power relations between groups on a racialised basis (Hage, 1998a, 1998b, 2003), then it would appear that higher education policies derived from this model of multiculturalism need to be examined further and challenged within this context.

**Stories about Practice**

Kali and I explore the boundaries constructed around knowledge in the university. We talk about what the commitment to working for social education means to us in the context of educative practice in the university.

‘*I’d rather not go back to teaching anymore, just the straight teaching of the [Y]*’

Kali tells me why she is leaving language teaching for another knowledge field: environmental politics.

**Kali:** I feel I’d rather not go back to [Y] teaching anymore, just the straight [Y] teaching.

**Caroline:** So how long have you been doing that?
Kali: Well …

Caroline: At this uni[versity]?

Kali: It’s nearly ten years. I guess I don’t really have opportunity to talk about personal things, because I’m teaching [Y], you know? But then, I think in teaching, say like involvement, that would be a very different kind because that’s more like sharing your beliefs and values. But I’m not doing that. I’m, you know, teaching [Y] and I don’t think I get to really …

I think, looking back, the reason I wanted to be in environment is really another sort of step. I wanted to have decent opinion. I think that’s why I think I have, I wanted to do environment, because that’s one area that you really need to have opinion. So I think I still have this lifelong quest in a way, that, to have opinion. I think that was the one of the very hardest of things when I first came to Australia, that I couldn’t say opinion. And I think earlier on, as I said I didn’t want to have opinion in a way. So there was this conflict of wanting opinion and didn’t want opinion … so I never ever thought I would be interested in politics. I’m really interested in environmental politics. And then that’s one way that I, I really enjoy now. I really do enjoy that constructing opinion, in a way. I think, yeah, environment, being in environment is, is a way of sort of educating me to have opinion - to say opinion. Really, that was one of the hardest things, I feel.

Knowledge disciplines in the university are recognised on the basis of their different areas of expertise. For Kali, environmental politics offers new possibilities for
exploring identity and community relationships. In comparison, teaching the Y language as a subject, with its narrow linguistic focus, has certain limitations. It has not enabled her to address broader social concerns and issues in the way she would like to in her work for social change.

**Kali:** It is empowering to, to have opinion. Yeah, so I think that’s the reason I’m in environment.

**Caroline:** The sense of power that comes with that?

**Kali:** I mean, as a discipline it is a very kind of political field. But then … Yeah, I think what really drives me when I do research or whatever. I think … I’m very interested in education. I love education. And I think that’s because you learn a lot, as you said, being teacher. You learn so much from your students.

Kali’s pursuit of knowledge and desire to construct a strong opinion is symbolic of women’s broader struggles in the historically male-dominated domain of the Academy. Although women’s presence in the Academy has grown steadily in recent decades, the positioning of women in different geographical, historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts is shaped by patriarchy (Morley, 2003). This makes the quest for knowledge a challenge for women like Kali.
Kali and I compare stories about educational experiences. My decision to become a teacher was not due to any lifelong burning ambition. It was one of the traditional professions for women. Having moved around during my childhood, I lost out in mathematics and science, excelling mainly in language. After failing my high school leaving certificate, entering night school and eventually hopping from university to university for a few years, I completed an undergraduate degree in literature followed by a graduate diploma in teaching. Kali’s story is different from mine in that she associates her desire to teach with an early desire to learn when she was a child.

**Kali:** I think I have a fascination about astrology, or, you know biology and um. I always, I guess I wanted like that kind of *universe.* Never thought about chemistry or anything like that. But I think, if I think about it, my fascination was like being in touch with *outside.* And I guess I had that sort of curiosity in a way, that. And then I never knew, because living in [Y] I guess, you don’t have that sort of opportunity to *explore* your ability to be outdoor. I’d never been bush walking. I’d never done any sports. And …

**Caroline:** Is that because of the curricula or?

**Kali:** Just your environment really.

**Caroline:** Yeah … yeah, the physical environment?
Kali: Yeah, it is. But then I remember, we used to live in the countryside when we were very small. And then I just loved being in the garden and just a walk in the field. And you know, climb the tree and pretend this is my castle, that sort of thing. And I guess that sort of, I had a sort of curiosity about nature or, or like the wonder of the world really. And I guess I interpreted that as, like I want to see the world. So I thought, therefore language must be a good thing to do. So that’s how I sort of ended up in the language [pause]. But then, yeah I think, just looking back, yeah that’s a kind of desire to be in touch with the world. Like you said. You’re being port, like harbour. You know, like being in touch with the rest of the world rather than being stuck somewhere in the middle of nowhere, that kind of thing? And I always, yes, I had that sort of desire that I want to be on water. I want to be. You know I love harbour. I loved airport. Like, you always have that kind of possibility to go and explore the world, in a way?

While Kali dreamt of exploring the world as a child, I actually did - but through no instigation of my own. My journey was linked to my parents’ diaspora. It was through their global movement that I learnt about the strategic value of different identities. In Kali’s case, it was perhaps her own desire to learn about and develop other identities that drove her to migrate to Australia as an adult.

‘Education is so important’

We talk about what education means to us. Both Kali’s and my experiences of higher education reflect the ways in which the Academy is structured around rigid divisions
of curricula. This is perhaps why it is all too easy to explain away the underachievement of women within certain divisions of the university as a fault of the individuals themselves and not because of the system of hierarchies of knowledge itself.

Kali: Mmm. I actually wanted to go to science.

Caroline: Yeah?

Kali: I wasn’t, it just wasn’t enough. I didn’t get enough mark for physics or something. I actually really, I’m a very science person. I really like science. But the other thing I was good at was language. So I thought, oh well, as a woman, you know, you become a teacher.

I laugh quietly in recognition of this process.

When looking at the structure and content of the academic curriculum, it seems that there has been little awareness that existing bodies of knowledge and whole knowledge disciplines have not developed neutrally but in the context of a western, white, male perspective. As a result, the science and arts knowledge binary is a gendered one that has played a significant role in both Kali’s and my educations.

Kali: And then that would be a safe choice in a way? I didn’t really think about it very carefully, what I really wanted to do.
Caroline: Yeah. Me neither [laughs].

Kali: I had no idea. Really had no idea.

Caroline: You knew you wanted to go to uni?

Kali: Oh yeah. There was no question about it. I think my mother, she didn’t go to uni but she always thought, you know, education is so important. And there was no question that I go to uni or not to go to uni. You just go. And my father, I think he didn’t encourage anything. But he is the kind of person who just does whatever he wants to do. So, I think there was no, I never heard, you know, never been told that girls shouldn’t study, or nothing like that. My father or my parents never said anything like that … Just looking back, that sort of art and science culture, how it sort of really influenced your personality and identity. But um, in a way, I think, I just didn’t think about too carefully what I really wanted to do. I had no idea really … art and language and then maybe become teacher or something like that.

Women’s current standing within the university reflects the continuing differential status of men in relation to women in terms of rank (Bentley & Blackburn, 1992). Although women occupy more positions within the university and have gained in publication output, women like Kali (and Satra) occupy fairly senior positions but neither of them have attained professorial status. Neither have they mentioned an explicit desire to do so.
Our stories about education overlap in that we both pursued higher education; however, my reasons for becoming an educator are different to Kali’s.

**Caroline:** I went into teaching for security. It seemed to fit. And, then it was only really when I started teaching, ‘cause I started in mainstream secondary high school, I realised that there’s certain things … I really didn’t like [laughs]. Ended up working in the youth sector. And I feel like that’s where I learnt so much more from the young people that I worked with. I was kind of working with young at risk people, and young offenders and I learnt so much. And, and then I found that in all my decisions, like I decided I wanted to teach ESL, that I wanted to be immersed with people from different backgrounds ... because for me that was a very strong drive. So I sort of started off in teaching not really because it was my life’s ambition. But finding that I questioned my own practice from the beginning but not really knowing I was. But then I realised, oh, if I want to do this, I want to do this and keep improving in some way.

**Kali:** Mm. Mm.

**Caroline:** And then, because you actually learn a lot when you teach. So then I, I sort of began to love doing that.

**Kali:** Mm. Mm. Yeah.
Caroline: Science was never an option for me, because of the aggregate [laughs]. Isn’t that interesting, yeah?

Kali’s and my stories reveal how women negotiate subordinating discourses of difference. Through the retelling of these stories we make sense of the past in the context of our teaching in the present, and challenge hidden assumptions about identity, knowledge and power in society.

‘The question is: Are you actually happy to challenge your own ignorance?’

Kali and I talk about our teaching experiences, how the positioning dance plays out in different situational contexts and how we make sense of the project of education for social change.

Kali: I want to be there. I want to really, because people make assumptions, because that people come and say, ‘Do you speak English?’ or ‘What do you do?’ in a very sort of sloooow English. Slow, you know, they speak really slowly?

Caroline: Yeah.

Kali: And then, it’s just, I just feel more determined that I’m here, to challenge that kind of assumption in a way? Even my students who learn [Y] they have this huge assumption about Asian women.
Caroline: I bet.

Kali: And then they would tell you ‘I understand why you want to live in Australia. It must be so terrible in [Y]’. And you know like, um, ‘All women are so, you know, submissive’. And ‘Oh I understand why you don’t want to go back to [Y]’.

And I thought, how can you go back to [Y]? I just don’t have opportunity just yet. That’s, that incredible stereotype. It just makes me want to be here, in a way. And I think, environment as well like, ‘Oh, [Y], so ignorant about the environment. Oh, they eat whales!’

Kali’s positioning in an Australian social context is made relevant in her teaching practice by her students and by her. Race and ethnicity are negotiated and renegotiated in situation and in relation to her students’ race and ethnicity. Her role as an educator is one of catalyst and partner in the exploration of the dissonance that arises in the classroom: dissonance between dominant and non-dominant worldviews, lived experiences and understandings of social identity and culture.

Kali: Oh. You know, savage people. That makes me want to be there. I just think … It’s not to defend [Y] or anything, but … I’m just um, yeah, I guess it comes down to that sort of *challenging* assumptions I think … That’s what I call ignorance. Because I think I don’t have problem with people being ignorant, in a
way. I think we are all ignorant to some degree. But, it’s, there must be, the question is ‘Are you actually happy to challenge your own ignorance?’

**Caroline:** Yes.

**Kali:** And I think as long as you *are* - yes, I think you’re forgiven, in a way. But then if you think, ‘I’m always right and, you know, there’s only one way of seeing things’, that’s where I have a problem. That’s, that’s what I see as my role, in a way. By being here, sort of. It’s not that … I hope it doesn’t sound arrogant, but to change people’s awareness in a way.

The catchphrase *lifelong learning* is commonly used in higher education and adult learning; however, the concept of learning seen solely in terms of measurement of intelligence, learning outcomes and standards obscures the act of construction itself. This masks the issue of who is using the concept and for what purpose. In Kali’s narratives, the notion of epistemological self-reflexivity in education for social change keeps coming up. The importance of challenging one’s own assumptions about learning is fundamental to teaching practice. Ignorance, as Kali points out, is more about unwillingness to learn about the world than lack of knowledge or unawareness about the world. Her stories about dispelling stereotypes surrounding her country of birth and its geopolitical standing in the world broaden my own understanding of how simplistic conceptions of identity and culture are important and inevitable parts of teaching/learning. The forward slash symbol between the teaching and learning is misleading as it could imply that the teacher is the authority and the student is the
empty vessel waiting for knowledge to be transmitted. But Kali’s construction of herself as educator tells me that we are all learners in life.

‘I want to be learning something for the rest of my life’

Kali and I talk more about what education and learning mean and the importance of knowing what kind of educator one is.

**Kali:** And um, education just appeals to me so much. I want to be learning something for the rest of my life I always think.

**Caroline:** But do you ever question what education actually means? Because I find I’m having to kind of teach it and at the same time I’m always rethinking this notion of what is it.

**Kali:** I think it’s really, um, what I want to do, what kind of teacher you want to be. I think I want to help my students. I think, what I want to do is, like I said there’s so much lies in environment, or so much false information, and I want, I want, if I teach my students, I want them to see, I want them to make their own decision. So that’s, for me, that’s the ultimate.

**Caroline:** So what’s your role in their decision-making then?

**Kali:** To make them aware, I think.
Caroline: I’ve asked myself this in anti-racism [education], kind of … But then, I’ve come across people who just are so diametrically opposed in their views that the fascist or conservative liberal views that come in … and how, how do you reconcile that?

Kali: So yeah, I think that how … I think whatever you do, I think just challenging your assumption. That’s the fundamental thing about learning I think. If you think you know everything you never learn anything. Either racism or anything, I think, if you educate your students, or if you, if help them, if you get them actually aware of their assumptions, or if they’re aware of what they don’t know, that’s, that’s what I want to do.

Caroline: But I don’t know about you, but in my experience I feel that it’s not usually part of your training. Or educators don’t generally question the assumptions that they bring.

Kali: That’s the irony isn’t it?

Self-reflexivity in teacher education is not a new concept. Simply asking oneself if one is a good teacher is not enough. Epistemic vigilance requires that we ask deeper questions about the purpose of education and the role of the educator, while also recognising that there are many different (and contradictory) answers to these questions.
‘I don’t deny it and I think I enjoy it’

Kali openly acknowledges her power as an educator in a practice context. We talk about the issue of power and the political nature of knowledge production, particularly in relation to students in the university.

**Kali:** I think that the best teaching is for me, that you make the students feel that they did it themselves without you being there.

**Caroline:** But are we, are we still manipulating them?

**Kali:** Yeah, in a way. But I think that’s in a positive way. That is the role of the educator, in a way.

**Caroline:** So you don’t deny your power?

**Kali:** No I don’t.

**Caroline:** Your ability to enact power?

I wonder if she’s getting annoyed with my way of talking and questioning.

**Kali:** I don’t deny it and I think I enjoy it [laughs].

**Caroline:** [laughing] Me too.
Kali: I do. I do.

Caroline: What do you like about it?

Kali: Um … It is, it’s a challenge that [pause] It’s challenge, and also it’s a process of your reflection as well. If someone changes or transforms according to your interests, you actually at the same time, you’re not just using your power, but then you’re actually re-assessing in a way what you do. So, it’s challenge but also in a way, I don’t know if it’s the right word, as I said, like a humbling experience, that give you opportunity to think about what you’re doing.

Caroline: Mm. Yeah, because if you’re doing things, and you don’t reflect on what you’re doing, then how do you know?

Kali: Mmm. Mmm. So I guess that comes back to my, you know, believing in my own reality and having my power. I guess in a way, I think that’s the only thing I can do in a way, in a very small way. But then, that can be very powerful.

Kali situates power outside of the individual psyche when she talks about enacting power over students and her acknowledgement of power relationships in the university, including the educator/student relationship. She, like Satra, acknowledges the potency of job titles and positions of Course Convenor, Lecturer and Tutor and the power one has to effect change over an individual student’s grades and life
opportunities. Interrogation of one’s own ethical stance is required in order to understand how you know what you know and why you are teaching it. For example, to assume that knowledge has no relationship with the concept of difference is to deny the saliency of dimensions of race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, disability and religion and how we come to know and understand the world and our place in it. If we think of knowledge as produced through a particular situated perspective and mediated by other social, political and historical forces, then the concept of difference has a fundamental role to play in the production of knowledge. These understandings of power place the source of oppression with the individual educator and in systems and institutional processes.

‘It’s so important you have faith in what you do’

Kali talks about the importance of an inner sense of power, but I am left a little confused as this conception of power is quite different to the social constructionist view of the world in our discussions. Kali talks about the importance of Buddhist teachings in her everyday life and in her educative practice.

**Kali:** There’s one thing, um, I really like about Buddhism. They um, say you create your reality. And I really, really like that. And it’s not, doesn’t mean you think up, make it up, something. But then, something is really important if you have faith in it.

**Caroline:** Mm.
**Kali:** And then I, I just really come to really believe in that, ‘cause um, what’s important is … inside yourself. And then, I’m a very much of the person who doesn’t go by, you know, sort of society, what society tells you. But then, that really helps me to really believe that, you know, it’s so important you have faith in what you do. And then, as long as you have faith in it … I mean, if you don’t have faith in [then] nothing is important.

As Kali speaks, I reflect on my own beliefs. Although I do not have any religious affiliations myself, I find Buddhist principles regarding acceptance of the impermanence of the self and life as a way of attaining freedom from the constraints of the material world a liberating notion. It affords agency to everyone to make sense of and act in the world as other than instruments of others’ power. In our dialogues, faith is linked to hope not religion.

**Caroline:** Yeah [softly], what’s the point of anything then?

**Kali:** Yeah. I just think … so you just create your own reality. I mean, that’s, that’s what comes up again and again and again, in everything. I mean yes. And then, it said … ‘You empower your act by putting faith in it’. Yeah, that gave me enormous power. And um, so yeah, that sort of really helped me, really, a lot. [pause] I just think that that’s really the best things I can do, is really having faith in what I do. That’s the only thing I can do.

**Caroline:** Do you ever lose faith in that?
**Kali:** [pause] I think I’m working on it. I think I always get to teach it all the time. And then you always question you know, ‘what am I, what am I doing?’ and …

**Caroline:** Who am I?

**Kali:** Yes, oh yes. But then I sort of come back. There’s no, there’s no answer for it. And um, that’s a way of putting it I guess. And then, you keep changing … I just think, I think it’s been like a series of transformation in a way … and then constantly creating yourself. I just feel, and then you’re not stuck with one, you know, personal, you know - *one* identity. And you just evolve. And I think that’s a very interesting thing about life.

**Caroline:** Yeah.

**Kali:** And um, that’s, that’s why, you said it’s your journey. And research, when you’re doing research, is one-way journey I think. And then, yeah, it’s just I find that very exciting to, in a way, evolve, because I don’t want to stop growing up in a way. I want to keep changing. Not really changing but I guess it’s just it’s almost like discovering the self that you didn’t *know*.

I ask Kali how all this relates to our teaching practice.

**Kali:** If you can’t relate the knowledge to different part of your life, [softly] what’s the use of it? That’s, that’s how I feel. The students are so trained to, you
know, give this answer if you ask this question. But there was … they were asked this question that they never heard of. They don’t know how to use their knowledge even if they know it’s. So just … yeah, I just think … It’s education. It’s so narrowing in a way.

Kali’s story about her students asking for answers and the right answers brings me back to my own teaching experiences. Having faith is not about providing the right answers but about the freedom to question. Perhaps faith is about articulating spiritual and religious beliefs and about hope. I hear how Kali’s faith in herself is plural so the self is never a unitary, stable or a core self. In its plurality, it offers a myriad of connections and possibilities for being. The individual never stands alone but exists in relationship with the other, so that the I is also the we. In this way, I am complicit in the subjugation of the other. That’s a hard one to admit to. It’s hardly a surprise that our students sometimes spit the dummy.

**Research Reflections on Kali’s Stories of Practice**

Kali and I share the basic assumptions that: identity and practice are intertwined; social identity is plural and marked by difference and an ongoing process; self-reflexivity allows us to question our ethical stance in higher education pedagogy; and whiteness is a powerful concept that has a significant impact on all people in the university. On the other hand, our conceptions of the project of education for social change differ in the way we talk about power and the nature of oppression - what it is and where it is located - and about how race/ethnicity, gender and class intersect.
In other words, we share the basic assumption that prevailing ways of thinking and talking about identity and culture obscure relations of power. We feel it, recognise and respond to this as difference inscribed on our bodies. We respond to these ascriptions by positioning the self in ways that interrupt stereotypic and essentialising conceptions of difference, community and culture. Self-reflexivity, in practice, is important for Kali, me and for those with whom we work (i.e. students and staff). When we place the self in the knowledge production process, we can exercise agency by challenging the values and assumptions that shape conceptions of what education is and what the common good is to try to arrive at new understandings of the arbitrariness of social location. Talking to Kali has affirmed for me that as educators we need to understand our epistemologies and the potential for harm of symbolic violence.

Kali’s stories suggest that religious and spiritual values play an important role as we navigate the contours of our own and others’ morality and ethics to try and make sense of injustices in the wider society. Presently, in Australian higher education studies on women, the moral and the spiritual dimension of pedagogy are rarely acknowledged or explored. Both Satra’s and Kali’s stories, however, tell us that these have important implications for debate about higher education pedagogy and the project of education for social change.

**Stories of Diaspora**

Here Kali shares stories of diaspora. These stories add further layers of meaning to our stories about work. Kali compares her life in South-East Asia compared to
Australia. I am interested to learn how her experiences of living in her country of birth influenced her positioning as a woman, compared with her experiences in Australia. To omit these personal stories of what it means to be a woman and a daughter in different social and historical contexts would be to overlook the same complex layers of self and the situatedness of lives interwoven through research conversation.

‘That’s the reason that I wanted to leave [Y]’

Kali: I think it took me a really long time to really understand why I came to Australia in a way. I mean it didn’t have to be Australia, any other country. It just happened to be in Australia … One thing I really feel like is I just needed to make my own decisions. It’s not the society … you know, at the age of twenty-four, you should be married. They’re just so many expectations from that society in a way. I was so … in a way I wanted to have my opinion and I wanted to have my decision. Now if I look back I think that’s the reason that I wanted to leave [Y] … Um. I think in [Y], it seemed that structure, the like social structure, is so much more rigid. And there are, you know, a lot of precedent and examples to follow and obligation. And then, but now here, you know, I have nothing in a way.

Caroline: Mmm.

Kali: And then, and I guess Australia is that kind of society that you know, you could be anything. And I think that’s probably what appealed to me. You get to create yourself as a way.
Caroline: So you selected Australia?

Kali: Um. I didn’t know anything about Australia. I just happened to have a job. But then, I think it happened to suit me in a way. This kind of real young country that, where’s there’s not much rules in a way …

I infer from her comment that, compared to her life in Y, she finds Australia is a relatively liberal country.

Caroline: Compared to your previous experience?

Kali: Mm.

‘I wanted someone else to be responsible’

In these stories, Kali compares her life in Y compared to Australia, showing how the local and woman take on very different meanings in varying historical and geographic contexts.

Kali: I think [Y], I think it’s such a very protective society in a way, particularly for younger people. And then they don’t expect you to make decisions in a way. And then, always you’re protected from something. It’s very comfortable if you are happy in that kind of framework. And then, once you wanted to make your own decision you almost have to rationalize everything. You have to. People keep asking you, ‘Well, why, why do you that? Why, why do you have to do
that?’ And then, I think I was just so tired in a way, just didn’t have to say why you’re doing this. Because I felt I wasn’t doing anything particular. You just wanted to think your own way. At that time I didn’t know. But I think that’s what it was.

**Caroline:** So, it’s almost like, wherever, whichever society we happen to live in, or country, there’s certain ways in the society constructs us. And at the same time it may fit or it might not fit.

**Kali:** Mmm.

**Caroline:** Or you might want to construct yourself differently. But in [Y], are you saying a child or young people, maybe don’t do the decision-making or the responsibility, is seen as being … What about being a woman in that society too? Is that any different to being a man do you think?

**Kali:** Oh very different. Mmm. I think that sort of protectiveness, I think, that is really for women particularly. And then, I think … it’s in a way, that the word *cute*. *Cute* sort of represents everything in a way. And *cute*, it’s very interesting.

Kali highlights the ways in which stereotypes of woman operate in her country of birth. Perhaps by leaving, she wanted to explore new places and other ways of being a woman. Ironically, it seems, being a woman in Australia is bound up with gendered and raced constructions of the Asian woman.
**Kali:** Having opinion, it’s, it’s not a good thing in [Y], particularly for women. So um, so it’s, it’s a funny contradiction as I said. Not wanting to have opinion but wanting to be independent. There’s a whole lot of conflict and …

**Caroline:** The reason why I’m nodding like mad is, ‘cause [laughs] I really think I went through a similar journey.

My butting in this time is to affirm the importance of her stories and my joy in hearing them.

**Kali:** Mmm. In a way I just had this huge reluctance, in a way, to actually develop myself and be independent in the real true sense.

**Caroline:** So what does independence mean to you then, when you’re saying that to be independent in a real true sense, what does that really mean?

**Kali:** [pause] I think it’s a responsibility. You sort of take responsibility to your, to what you do. And I think that’s, that’s what it was. In a way, as I said, like my sister’s culture, if you say you can’t do it someone will do it for you … My mother and my sister, they always made decision for me. And then if I said ‘I can’t do it’, in a way, it’s okay, if you’re the youngest and you don’t have to make decisions. So, I think, independence. It’s I guess, yeah, in a way not being able to do what you want, in a way, to take serious responsibility about yourself. And I think that’s where I had a real problem because I didn’t want to be responsible for myself. I wanted someone else to be responsible.
**Caroline:** So do you think that’s part of being a woman, or it’s being part of a particular culture?

**Kali:** I think it’s culture, everything … and also being the youngest member of the family, you’re [the] younger child. And also, my father spoiled me like crazy.

*‘And I think it’s now too late’*

The following exchange reveals how the institution of the family is a powerful site of reproduction. I share with Kali some of my thoughts and feelings about what it means to be a woman as an invitation for more disclosure from Kali.

**Caroline:** Mmm. I suppose the biggest commitment in my life has been having the children.

**Kali:** Children. Yes. Yes.

**Caroline:** So in some ways that kind of, that was the commitment I made that was the ultimate scary commitment. And I didn’t, I never really [laughing] committed myself to anything.

The challenge of combining parenthood with the demands of academic life is a complex task, cloaked in silence. We know little about the differences in women’s experiences and parenting responsibilities in the university.
**Kali:** Yeah. I just admire I think, that sort of commitment.

**Caroline:** But I don’t think everybody sort of makes that commitment on a conscious level. Or some people do. They plan ahead. But that’s not the same as making a commitment. You know what I mean?

**Kali:** Mmm.

**Caroline:** One day I’m going to have a nice house and two children, three cars and a swimming pool is not the same as saying, I don’t know if I’m able to give emotionally to another human being who will need me in particular ways that I don’t know if I’m capable of giving.

**Kali:** Mmmm. Mmm. I think I’ve been having the huge problem, that in a way that, you think that sort of commitment, the fear for commitment, it’s been the biggest sort of question I … always been asking myself, that I’m not brave enough to make that big commitment in a way. I’m always escaping.

**Caroline:** Do you mean that in friendships and relationships too? Or more …

**Kali:** Yeah. And the, like children I think. I think that was the question I always had. And I think it’s now too late [laughs] so, I don’t have to worry about this now.
I gently laugh with her. Motherhood, although initially a rude awakening, has become an enormously important identity for me. I look questioningly at Kali.

**Kali:** But then I think I always had kind of guilt, in a way, that you’re not able to make that *ultimate* commitment. I don’t know if commitment is …

**Caroline:** But it’s also very much part of being a ‘woman’, isn’t it?

**Kali:** Mm.

**Caroline:** From the moment you are born, you’re a little girl. As you become a teenager then you think I’m a woman now [laughs]. But it’s part of the expectation that *all* societies have of women?

**Kali:** Yeah, yeah. I think though, yeah, I just wanted children very much. And um, yeah, there’s always sense of [pause] sadness or … sense of, what’s the word, loss? Not loss. That you never had in a way. [pause] Just, yeah, it’s kind of *loss*, that you’re not able to make that commitment, in a way.

**Caroline:** Mmm [long pause].

In the Academy, women, as opposed to men, are more likely to not marry, report less stable relationships, have a higher incidence of divorce, and have fewer children, or see children as a source of detriment to their careers (Munn-Giddings, 1998). Kali could fit this profile, yet it is too simplistic. It does not capture the diversity and
richness of resources she brings to the meaning making and knowledge production processes.

**Researcher Reflections on Kali’s Narratives**

Through our storytelling, Kali’s and my lives overlap and also diverge. We both have Asian heritages, although mine is mixed-race and she is a member of the dominant group in her birth country. In the Australian university, we are positioned and choose to position ourselves as different but in very different ways. Where Satra and I spoke of our visible difference in terms of skin colour, Kali chooses not to. We have made different choices in our lives and careers. I am a mother and she is not. We are both daughters, and talk about the importance of our families and our relationship with our parents. We work in different areas in the university yet we both identify a common commitment to education for social change and believe in the importance of self-reflexivity in practice.

The issue of epistemological racism emerges from Satra and Kali’s stories about working in the university. Just as Satra referred to the language of multiculturalism, Kali also troubles official multiculturalism for its inability to address inequity in power relations. Kali’s teaching stories suggest that racialising practices and hierarchies of knowledge combine to produce boundaries around race and ethnic identities. Both women’s stories reveal that difference is constructed in the Australian university through a celebratory multicultural lens, which tends to reinforce hierarchies of oppression not only in knowledge disciplinary terms but also identities on the margins. Kali’s stories about practice highlight a very different politics
compared with Satra’s. Kali is not race-centred, preferring to distance herself from this concept. She does accept, however, the premise that the educator is complicit in the knowledge production process, thus foregrounding the importance of freedom to question and to critique racial and ethnic difference in the university through cross-boundary dialogue.

At the end of our conversations on the second day, Kali tells me that language teaching in the university is very limiting in its scope for integration with the project of education for social change. A year or so after the official research conversations end she has moved on; she still teaches a language subject but this is no longer her primary source of income or her passion. For Kali, her doctorate has enabled her to move sideways (rather than upwards) in the university to a new discipline and new research in environmental politics. I hear her excitement at these changes in her life three years later as she has realised many of her desires to research and teach around difference, to travel and to meet and work with different people and communities to develop political alliances. Many of her initiatives have led to the implementation of grassroots projects in Australia and internationally, bringing to bear questions of identity and culture in debate about global sustainability.
Chapter 6 - Manuela

Meeting Manuela

After months of trying to locate a third woman educator of colour to join me in the research journey, I finally located Manuela through word of mouth. Manuela is in her 50s. Born in South America, she has lived in the US and migrated to Australia in the 1980s. She completed her doctoral study here in the late 1990s. Her family members remain scattered throughout the US and only her adult daughter has lived with her in Australia. At the time of our conversations, Manuela worked in the area of history in one of the country’s elite universities. In the few years previous to our meeting, she had been unable to secure a position in this knowledge field and had worked in student services. In that role, she was responsible for teaching students various academic skills on a one-to-one and on a group basis. She also lectured and ran seminars with a cross-cultural focus. Manuela’s research interests have been connected to the themes of identity, difference and history. Manuela now works in another university teaching LOTE.
A cold and sunny Saturday morning sets the scene for my preliminary meeting with Manuela. I arrive early at the café, choosing an outdoor table. I have brought some work with me and begin to mark papers for a pre-service education subject, which has the ominous acronym of DIES (Diversity in Educational Settings). Immersed in the world of my students and wholly engaged in their struggles to think about difference, white race privilege and alternative histories about Australia’s past and its many peoples, I forget to look around for someone who might be Manuela.

We have arranged to meet to explore the possibility of future research conversations. I realise I have forgotten to ask her for a sign of recognition, although I remember telling her I am short and brown with short black hair. Although there are many places and spaces in Australia where such a brief and generic description would not suffice, on this occasion and in this particular setting I am the only person of that description sitting in the café. Manuela’s voice pulls me out of the world of the classroom.

**Manuela:** Caroline!

I look up. A suited woman with dark curls tied up is suddenly standing beside me. I look up to this stranger. We embrace. How strange, I think. Hugs can be very obligatory and stale. This is not. Manuela’s words bubble up like a water jet in a spa.

**Narratives of Identity**

‘Excuse me. I’ve got a problem with you. You’re white!’
After the initial meeting we decide to go ahead with the research conversations. For our first official research conversation (our second meeting), the tape recorder is on. We immediately start talking about our families, which is a comfortable and intimate place to start. It is some time later that we talk about the university with stories of the past and present interwoven. Through talking to Manuela, I realise that women educators of colour does not have the same resonance in Australia as it does in the US or UK. Her stories about race and ethnicity are very different from Satra’s, Kali’s and my own. I decide to tell Manuela about my thoughts from when I first met and saw her.

**Caroline:** And I was trying to think of what our last conversation [preliminary meeting at the café] meant. For me, I was thinking…

Cringe. Quit stalling. Just be honest with her.

**Caroline:** Actually I’ll tell you honestly, when I saw you ‘Oh you look so gorgeous but you’re not … you’re white!’

We both laugh loudly.

**Manuela:** Yes. Yes [laughs]. ‘Excuse me. I’ve got a problem with you. You’re white!’

**Caroline:** [laughing] No. It’s not a problem at all.
Manuela: No, no, no, I’m just joking. Caroline. I know exactly what you mean.

I know exactly what you mean.

I position Manuela as white. Manuela questions my use of the descriptor **women educators of colour** in a different way from Kali. Here we talk about how the language of difference positions her in particular ways and her thoughts and feelings about this.

Manuela: … I think that initial term that you had, of **women of colour**…

Caroline: Colours

Manuela: … **of colours**, disturbed me.

Oh no, I think, don’t tell me she’s going to tell me she disagrees and wants to withdraw from the project.

Caroline: Mmm?

Manuela: Because that’s the language of the oppressor.

Caroline: Yeah, I don’t know how to, other than … to show that to each woman it’s disturbing. That’s all I can think of … I can’t personally think of a new language [laughs]. It’s too hard.
**Manuela:** I don’t know. I mean, the thing is, you’ve got *women* in it. I like the idea of something to do with shades of colour, shades, something that wants to involve everybody, that doesn’t count, leave some out … and says well, I really don’t have anything to do with that.

**Caroline:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Manuela:** But we need *women*. Mmm.

I’m glad. Her use of the plural *we* is an invitation for dialogue. By including Manuela in the research journey, I make whiteness part of the many colours of diversity. My initial surprise at her appearance tells me I’ve fallen into the trap of constructing whiteness as invisible and therefore not a colour. It is so easy to internalise whiteness as the normative centre. Am I the colonised or the coloniser? I think that perhaps I’m both.

**Caroline:** Now that’s a very good point, because I think originally it was a comfortable term for me, because it was kind of a separatist way of saying *non-white*.

**Manuela:** Mmmmmm.

**Caroline:** But only because I was having conversations with the Anglo educators in the beginning, who had not considered their positions or their … any social markers in their life, compared with those who had.
Manuela: Mm.

Caroline: And I thought, gosh to include that would be so problematic. Because you’re kind of like having to convince some people that there is racism.

Racism is only one of the many -isms we make salient in our discussions. It is hardly a coincidence that none of the women, including Manuela, reject the assertion that racism exists and that it impacts on people’s lives in powerful ways.

Caroline: And with others it’s not just that, you know, you have to go through that whole thing?

Manuela: Mmm.

Caroline: So that was one of the reasons why I thought it was too problematic. But, you know, I think having a conversation with you has helped me to see that you can’t, um, only rely on that skin thing. But it is important.

Manuela’s questioning helps me to interrogate my own assumptions. In our efforts to forge alliances, every act of inclusion is accompanied by exclusion, hence the need to be explicit when we are in dialogue. I am reminded of the federal and state Ethnic Communities Council forums I have attended and the 2002 Symposium of Asian Knowledges in Canberra, where the voices of men are heard often and loudly, questioning the politics of difference. More recently, women’s voices speaking about reconciliation from Indigenous standpoints are increasing in volume (Perkins, 2004).
But where is the dialogue between these women and women like us? In the US and UK, the category *women educators of colour* has a politicised function. In Australia, our voices are struggling to surface within the university and in the wider social context.

I take the issue of positioning further and put to Manuela a hypothetical scenario of my own experience of teaching about difference to understand how Manuela’s race/ethnicity might be constructed differently in Australia to the US. I wonder if Manuela has been positioned as white and/or as *mulatta* (Anzaldua, 1990b) in the US.

**Caroline:** Sometimes I get tired of having to negotiate that altogether … And I’m wondering if you had, if you were teaching the same topics about American identity and Americans living in Australia and you were Afro-American or you were some other *other*, do you think that would come in? Is that something that would come in? Your notion of different is different to mine in that sense?

**Manuela:** Tell me, I just want to understand better, when you say how we’re teaching American, what do you mean?

**Caroline:** Well, I’m just thinking, like your positionality, that fluidity that you play …

**Manuela:** Mmm.
Caroline: Would that, do you think, would that change, if you were, if you had different skin colour? I dunno …

I want to know if she has thought about whiteness.

Manuela: [pause] … Oh boy, that is almost like …

Caroline: I know, it’s …

Manuela: No. No. No. The thing about it is that anyone who could, who would answer that question who … hasn’t felt it in their own skin, would be making up stories. It’s like hunger I think. It’s like death. It’s like losing somebody very close, I don’t think, if you haven’t been there, that you can even begin to imagine. I can’t begin to imagine.

I suppose the thing that really separates me from the rest of everyone in Australia is that I’ve marked myself as different, is the fact that I’m the only person that I know in the whole of this society who does not have one member of their family living with them.

Here Manuela has expressed her feelings of isolation from family, thereby stressing the importance of feeling as if we belong to other communities, including race/ethnic communities.
‘I’m an Australian historian, you know, not an Australian historian’

We interrogate our own and each other’s assumptions about identity, difference and what these mean for us in our work for social change. Like Satra and Kali, Manuela does not identify herself in terms of any particular job title. Early on, however, she tells me a story about herself in relation to the university and the knowledge discipline into which she was inducted originally.

Manuela: I’m an Australian historian, you know, not an Australian historian. I happen to do Australian history. And I get a lot of American students who come by chance to me. I’d like to think that they come because somebody referred them to me, but I get a lot of students who just come to me. And a lot of them tend to go for Australian History because they’ve only got one semester and they want to learn ‘everything about Australia’ [mimicking in an American accent]. The minute they get into that course I can predict what’s going to happen, absolutely what’s going to happen. They’re going to enter it thinking ‘This is a brave new world blah blah blah blah’. And within about two or three tutorials they’re wondering ‘what are these people on about’, you know - they have this cult of the loser. You know they’re only celebrating the loser.

Caroline: They’re recognising this Australian-ness? It takes an outside perspective to do that, doesn’t it?

It is only when we are dominated that we question the dominant culture. This is what produces double consciousness for many like Satra, Kali, Manuela and me. Manuela’s
stories describe the ways in which the outsider/insider and us/them binaries operate to produce the other in the research conversation and in the university at large. Manuela’s distinction between the *Australian historian* and someone who, as she describes it, ‘happens to do Australian history’ implies that there is a pre-determined canon of knowledge of a singular historical truth - the dominant/’majoritarian’ story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In the latter description, however, the role of the storyteller becomes important. History, in this context, becomes a narrative that is constructed by someone (an author/researcher) from a particular situated, social and cultural perspective. Historical and nationalistic narratives and discourses of difference infuse the imagination of a nation’s citizens through media, popular culture and social institutions, such as the university.

*‘They see me and they don’t see me as a member of the establishment’*

Manuela tells me another story about how she thinks her students position her in the university space.

**Manuela:** You know, I think with students, I think this goes back to this cultural differences that we’re talking about, the only place in Australia where my cultural difference is read by my students and taken as a plus … They see me and they don’t see me as a member of the establishment. They see me as somebody that they can be themselves with. That they can show some of their weaknesses to, that they can appeal to at levels that they wouldn’t think of appealing to … other members of, you know, the university - that they saw as central in the establishment.
Manuela’s cultural difference is a particular one. She is positioned by others in the university as an outsider or outside the establishment. This is both liberating and constraining. To counter her imposed invisibility, she positions herself with her students against the establishment. Here, I have interpreted the establishment as referring to those who occupy senior decision-making powers within the Australian university, who are predominantly white middle class men and women. Her teaching experiences with students in the university, in terms of her difference, have been mainly positive.

**Manuela:** Never, Caroline, not once … have I felt in all my years of teaching that my students resented my difference. They played with it. They used it. They lay on top of it. They wanted to. And now, what I do with my work, which isn’t content-based, I don’t know how it gets transferred to my students straight away, but it’s a sense that, I lack the arrogance of the *mainstreamer*.

Although we speak from very different situated perspectives, the common denominator that draws us together is our drawing on multiple subjectivities as a conscious political strategy. There are far more similarities than differences in our stories than I anticipated.

**Reflections on Manuela’s Positioning Stories**

In our conversations, we seem to share the perception that there is a prevailing political conservatism and nationalistic climate in the university and the broader society, in which Aboriginal and ethnic categories are constructed as the other. This is
established by our political leaders. The media elevate particular white race privilege and white supremacist positions through the genre of self-proclaimed social commentators or *shock jock* public radio figures such as Alan Jones and more infamous white supremacists such as Jack van Tongeren. Even the current Prime Minister, John Howard, evokes a nostalgic sense of nationalism in his call to arms in the name of democracy (and the American/Australian way). In our conversations, we use the insider/outsider binary employed by the majority in the university to realign ourselves in relation to one another (us) and to question the racialising practices used in the university to construct the other in deficit and racialised/gendered/class terms. *Them* is used as a conscious construct to question the ways in which difference is imposed on us in often subtle and covert ways. While we use the black/white and us/them binaries to counter white race privilege and certain extremist/neo-fascist positions and their claim of superiority over other race/ethnic groups, this can, however, have a homogenising effect that reifies whiteness, just as a neo-fascist position homogenises and reifies the non-white other. This can be seen as one of the weaknesses of an anti-racist/anti-oppression approach which seeks to establish dominance by flipping the white/black to black/white.

I have highlighted Manuela’s non-establishment identity and whiteness. In Australia, to be outside the establishment suggests we have a certain freedom to question and critique the establishment and Australian-ness. This is not necessarily the case, however, as women and children in Australian detention centres who seek political asylum do not have a public voice and can be detained indefinitely. It seems our leaders in the university have a blind-spot to past and present racist social policy and how it is produced through discourses of difference and relations of power that
operate in the university. In our research conversations, we explore these themes within the context of history by Manuela and from an educational perspective by me. Our stories raise questions about how difference is enacted in other knowledge disciplines.

Satra, Kali, Manuela and I appropriate concepts and language through our double consciousness; however, the double consciousness we acquire from our everyday experiences of being constructed as other produces a range of quite different positionings and epistemologies associated with these. The insider/outsider and us/them binaries that emerge in our conversation highlight the kinds of boundary construction practices that are used in the university and how we circumvent, take up and invert these dichotomies. The use of multiple subject identities enables a deeper questioning and exploration not only of our individual feelings and experiences of otherness but also to make sense of, resist and challenge the conditions that create social and material inequities. This is difficult to do without an empathic audience and without listeners who can and want to hear. In the university space, there are few safe places to go to engage in such dialogue.

**Manuela’s Stories about Barriers in the University**

*‘He used the tool to actually get me out of the contest’*

Manuela tells me a story about applying for a job within the university. Her story reveals how relations of power and multiple intersecting hierarchies of oppression operate in this space.
Manuela: I have seen so much. Personally I have really suffered.

Caroline: It’s a world of contestation.

Manuela: It is, and the power. You know, I had one particular case where I applied for a job, just a one-year lectureship, and it … that job should have been mine. It was a department where I had tutored for many years. I had been told that I had received the best teaching thing of all teachers of that department, including you know, the permanent members of it and so on … And I applied for this job, and the person that led me to believe that he was, you know, on my side, and helping me to draft the application and so on, had undermined that application. Among other things, he’d gone and done something which is one of these tools of you know double-edged swords. We do have at G university something called, when somebody who should be in a selection committee withdraws on grounds of personal involvement with that person, you know? There was a term. I can’t remember it now. Now, by doing that … there was no reason for this person to do that. By doing that he had already signalled that I, and he had something. This was a problem relationship. He, he used the tool to actually get me out of the contest. This was a married man and a divorced woman. And he was saying that there were issues why he couldn’t be in that …


Manuela: And um, awful things, awful things … He was, it was just … I fell for it. I fell for the whole thing. And somebody else was selected. I actually took
it to the deputy Vice-Chancellor. I felt so strongly maligned by the whole thing. But of course the system closed in on itself and I learned. I even went to the unions, and then the union just realised that one of the people on the selection committee was one of their office bearers. And from telling me I had an absolute case they just closed down in front of me as well. What I saw was so disgusting, Caroline, really. Yeah I … the university in that way died for me unfortunately.

In this situation, unofficial micro-politics enacted through multiple and interlocking structures of gender/sexuality/class and race/ethnicity within the university are rendered invisible. This raises questions about the difficulty of establishing grounds for discrimination in recruitment and promotion processes, particularly in light of the fact that the dimensions of race/ethnicity are often left outside of debates on gender equity in higher education in Australia.

As Morley (2003) explains, sexual politics are notoriously difficult to prove despite the fact that gender equity studies reveal the extent to which many women experience the university as a site of patriarchy, governed by principles of individualism, masculinity, meritocracy and competitiveness. Manuela’s missing out could be attributed to many factors; however, the process she underwent and the meaning she constructed around this, illustrate how easily some can use informal processes to influence the outcome of the recruitment process. Manuela’s story raises questions about what the unrecorded experiences of other women educators might be in relation to sexual politics. It also affirms the heterogeneity within the category of whiteness, which is often overlooked in traditional anti-racist discourse.
Her difference is both visible and invisible. Manuela is ascribed identities of difference on a non-white basis even though her skin colour is fair, because she does not look like or sound like an Anglo-Celtic person. Manuela’s understanding of Latin culture is important and a topic we return to throughout our conversations. Like Kali’s use of the east and west, she often marks the boundary between Anglo and Latin cultural values and subject positions as if these are unique and separate - an assumption that troubles me because of its tendency to construct difference as incommensurable.

‘We’re not prepared to confront who we are’

Here, Manuela troubles the epistemologies we draw on in the university, specifically in the context of Australian history.

Manuela: This is the problem about the way we teach Australian history, which I think goes much further out, has its tentacles much further out, into Australian society. We’re not prepared to confront who we are.

Caroline: So, what you’re saying is like, the discussion comes from people who are outside of this?

Manuela: Mmmm.

Caroline: But also what you were saying earlier about, within that core, it’s not just white Australia. What really worries me is, nowadays you get conferences
invoked around multiculturalism across the arts, across the whatever, and you get these migrants who have assumed leadership um, or they’ve assumed ownership over the migrant voice. And that really …

**Manuela:** This is a hierarchy of power amongst the powerless, no doubt about it.

**Caroline:** Unless you get that questioning within the core, within the so-called mainstream, then you’re only going to get these, you know, peripheral voices that will not break through. So it takes … yeah. There has to be some give.

Just as Satra and Kali have criticised multicultural discourse as a culprit that disguises systems of hierarchy, Manuela and I also talk of the ongoing struggle to define Australian-ness. She too points to the struggle for power not only between mainstream and the periphery but also within and between (ethnic) groups in the wider Australian society and in the university.

The mainstream/periphery binary is deeply embedded in educational discourse and taken up by different communities, including multicultural groups. By multicultural groups, I refer to groups that self-identify as separate from another on single unitary race/ethnic grounds or collectivities of these groups that make a conscious decision to unite to represent a harmonious, unproblematic and cohesive concept of multiculturalism. It is a conception that does not acknowledge the ‘hierarchy of power among the powerless’, as Manuela puts it, nor highlight the disparity between groups
who are positioned differently in terms of access to resources and treatment in the
wider community, primarily, but not solely, on the basis of race/ethnic difference.

In the university, those in governance who have the authority and access to privilege
epistemologies derived from a dominant white situated perspective are often those
who create the language that reifies difference as the ethnic other. There are, however,
also the few from the margins who occupy positions of governance, who
inadvertently and advertently take up simplistic discourses of difference or who have
vested interests in maintaining the mainstream/margin binary for their own ends.
Added to this, descriptors such as NESB or CALD highlight race/ethnicity as a
determinant of other in a very particular way. Thus, whiteness is rendered the
invisible, unspoken ethnic. Manuela, however, acknowledges the ethnicity of
whiteness. While Manuela can distance herself from whiteness to associate herself
with non-white, Satra and I cannot. In Australia, dark skin colour is a highly visible
marker of difference. Although we cannot choose to pass for white, we might use
class and intellectual capital to counter racialising practices in the university. Manuela
cannot change her accent. Nor does she wish to reject the histories she has brought
with her from other places to her work in the Australian university. These are
important resources for identification and knowledge production processes.

‘There is a mentality in Australian society that is very insidious, that is profoundly
fundamental to the way we think’

In our conversations, Manuela and I explore epistemological racism and how this
creates boundaries around subject identities and knowledges. We discuss the language
of difference as an indicator of particular epistemologies. Manuela has just used the term *mainstream* in our discussion. To understand what assumptions we bring to our research conversation and the kinds of assumptions that underpin our epistemologies I ask her for clarification.

**Manuela:** Mainstream to me, is the establishment, not the populace, which is the way in which the way the Pauline Hanson [former leader of the One Nation party] mainstream thing was defined. It’s not the average Australian. It’s the establishment, and it sets up systems that want to …

**Caroline:** So, the key decision-makers within institutions are primarily white male?

I interrupt to clarify Manuela’s positioning in the university (and the issue of her own whiteness).

**Manuela:** Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. And they …

**Caroline:** Do you know any educators or scholars of colour who have access to power at that level?

**Manuela:** Absolutely not. No, there’s, there’s one token one who’s an Aboriginal … But I really feel sorry for, um because … I can see the way he is used and allows himself to be used. He’s very clever. And he thinks it’s probably helping to turn the thing around. I think he’s helping to consolidate it.
Here she elaborates on multicultural discourse in a broad social context.

**Manuela:** There is a mentality in Australian society that is very insidious, that is profoundly fundamental to the way we think – ‘Be careful with anything that threatens the central core of who we think we are’. This is why we have probably the most infamous record of censorship in the whole of western society, in Australia. ‘Oh, that video, oh that book, oh that film, oh don’t’. We do actually. This problem with censorship goes back to the mid-1800s. We have a problem with anything that threatens. We don’t trust our society, our community, enough to be able to see these things for what they are and deal with them accordingly. And censorship, racism, you know, it is part of that same notion. We are a very peculiarly positioned community in a very alien region. We have to be very, very careful about who we allow in our national borders, who we allow in our minds, who we allow into our education system.

In Manuela’s critique of the climate of conservatism and fear in Australia, I hear her sense of alienation. Is the strength of her critique really warranted? Past social policy promoting the displacement of Aboriginal people and assimilation of migrants according to economic (rather than humanitarian) needs are now widely recognised by scholars as overtly racist. Australian immigration and foreign policy in recent years has focused on terrorism abroad, but what of racial vilification and heated public race debates within our borders? Through her tone, Manuela suggests that social policy has merely shifted from being overtly racist to covertly racist. While some might find Manuela’s oppositional stance very confronting, I am not offended. I share her concerns and enjoy the embellishments she uses to hammer her point home.
Although Aboriginal and ethnic categories are both designated as the outskirts of the university space, the black/white binary tends to construct difference in terms of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal. The non-Aboriginal component is frequently assumed to be white. In Australia, official coalition between Aboriginal and ethnic/non-Aboriginals remains unexplored. In response to racist social policy since white settlement, Aboriginal peoples have backed away from multiculturalism, many rightly positioning themselves as the first people of Australia. Manuela and I acknowledge these contradictions and their impact on the social realities of many living in Australia. It is not an interpretation of contemporary social life that is widely embraced; however, it is important for us to be able to talk about extremities and it is a huge relief to be able to vent these concerns, perceptions and thoughts with Manuela. Both Manuela and I express concerns about making explicit the epistemological forms of racism in the university that construct difference in these problematic ways and the difficulty in pinning these down. This, of course, does not exempt us from the dangers of invoking racialising discourses.

Reflections of Manuela’s Narratives about the University

Overall, Manuela and I share stories, experiences and views about the politics of the language of difference. Through our sharing and storytelling, we construct and reflect on this concept and how it plays out in the research and in our lives at the university. Manuela’s stories about teaching in history are reminders of how difference is a highly politicised and contested concept. In this context, the pre-service education courses I have taught, such as DIES, are no less value-free than Australian history or any other field of knowledge. Some fields of knowledge explicitly question
epistemologies used in the knowledge production process. Strands within the fields of history and education certainly apply this critical lens; however, discourses of positivism, universalism and rationalism tend to construct epistemological concerns as separate from issues of race, ethnicity and difference and are therefore irrelevant to the knowledge production process.

In other conversations, Manuela talks passionately about what the experience of exile means to her. The theme of diaspora filters across all the women’s stories. Over the course of our exchanges it becomes more apparent that, in telling our stories, we begin to jointly construct ourselves through language and discourses of difference. The research conversation is not a linear process but can be likened to an unpredictable assortment of musical instruments which begin by playing their own melody only to merge into a strange orchestral effort. Meaning is negotiated not through polite turntaking but in a flux through storytelling, flashbacks and spontaneous associations of the past and present. It happens through our interaction as we revise histories in relation to each other, the world at large, the many places and the multiple communities which we inhabit or have inhabited, including the university. It happens in contradictory ways and at other times by troubling our own assumptions about what oppression is.

In the university, the concepts of multiculturalism and Australian-ness are constructed in relation to a singular conception of community. This understanding of community does not enable us to recognise the complexity and multiplicity of the self-identification process that the women in the research use nor the importance of having simultaneous and multiple memberships with a range of different communities inside
and outside of the university. It also does not trouble the issue of power relations or the ethical implications and subtleties that emerge when we as women educators of colour become part of an institution. Again, I am struck by the positioning dance, or the identification process, and the potential it offers to reclaim agency and authority over what is experienced and perceived as oppressive or harmful to the self and others.

**Manuela’s Stories about Educative Practice**

In my conversations with the women in the research journey, it seems that the common threads that weave across our life stories are multiple identities and positionings. These are intricately linked to our stories about the university and social change practices. In this context, practice refers to ideas, concepts and the language that we use as much as the actual practices or actions that we see as salient in education for social change.

*‘Positioning myself at the margins, rather than at the centre’*

Manuela tells me a story about how and why she positions herself, and is positioned by students in the university, on the margins. In these stories she unravels the issue of whiteness.

**Manuela:** I was freed from the university tentacles to teach a course in Australian Studies where it might as well have been Australian History. And the first thing that I did instinctively was to try and bring aboard both the local
students and some of the international students, by positioning myself at the margins, rather than at the centre of what we were studying … And I am white but I have an accent, so already they knew this person didn’t quite belong. But she sort of looks okay, sort of …

Manuela’s lived experience in the US is an important resource from which she draws on in her teaching practice.

**Manuela:** For example, I remember one tutorial where we were doing the Americanization of Australia and I said from the beginning I said, ‘Guys, I’ve got a problem here. First of all, you can tell by my accent that I have been, living in the United States. I’m really a Latin American’. So I position myself outside, ‘and I want to learn a lot of stuff here. I’m learning with you because I’m doing a PhD’. And we were dealing with the black Americans in Australia during the war and some of the racial problems there. And …

**Caroline:** World War Two?

**Manuela:** Pardon? World War Two, yeah … and I said, ‘No, I’m not clear about this in the Australian language. We call it dating in the US. What do you call it here?’ And one Australian student, his voice had never been heard before, suddenly felt a space in which he could tell me that, ‘Well, dating in Australia – we don’t use that term very much’. And I said, ‘Escorting?’ And I was actually playing the different. I was actually playing the different … ‘Oh no, Escorting, that’s what my grandparents used to do’. ‘Courting?’ ‘No, we call it …’ You
know and I can’t even remember what he gave me. But the point of it was that for the local students I wanted them not to see me as other, posing as the teacher at the centre. I deliberately did that to bring them out. And as far as the international students were concerned, it was very much, ‘Well, I as a Z - blah blah blah blah - I as an American’.

Manuela tells me why the process of positioning in practice is important for her, as this becomes inclusionary, acknowledging difference and similarities in relational ways.

**Manuela:** So I was very much, you know, part of the learning process. And I let them know that. And we got into absolutely fascinating conversations about … always comparative. I really wanted to do the comparative. ‘In Australia,’ I said, ‘I’ve been a migrant twice, guys’. ‘Guys,’ I always liked the ‘guys’. I don’t know why. They like it too. It’s interesting. It’s kind of mi gente [Spanish for ‘my people’] almost.

Manuela and I have acknowledged, earlier, the cultural incongruence between educators of colour and other groups in the university. This is particularly the case when I speak with others who have not experienced the self through multiple and interlocking dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, class and age. There is often a moment of blankness, a lack of mutual recognition of the social reality of those who employ border-crossing practices in their everyday lives. Sometimes it is a look that says, ‘I cannot imagine what that is or feels like. Nor do I want to’. Yet with Manuela (and the other two women), I sense recognition, reciprocity and willingness to accept,
if only momentarily, the reality, knowledge and experience of the other. Manuela’s positioning dance highlights the importance of multiplicity and relationality. Similarly to Kali, Manuela’s stories suggest that difference does not reside in an alien other but within everyone; we are all different and are all global citizens.

‘We’ve got to deal with the racism of the other just as much as with the racism of the mainstream’

Like Satra, Manuela names racism in the university. Here I share a story about an incident that happened during a tutorial, when the student challenged my authority and credibility to teach. This exchange reveals the way in which whiteness figures very differently in Manuela’s and my own teaching experiences.

**Caroline:** I don’t mind if the majority of them [students] you know say, ‘we want you to position yourself. You’re the only person who’s bringing an alternative view, and we haven’t experienced that. So it’s okay’. And others will say straight to my face like, ‘You can’t call me white’. A student said, this bloke, ‘I take that offensively, unless I can call you black’.

**Manuela:** Mmm.

**Caroline:** And he said it to my face in front of everybody. So it’s that position of being constituted as other and teaching around the whole notion of otherness. It’s great at the end, if you have four or five people who say ‘Wow, this has made me look at my blah blah blah blah blah. And you know they bring
enthusiasm to their work as educators. That is worth it. But I get worn down.

But when you said something about there’s something about what you bring to your, to that place of learning or teaching. Tell me more about that?

Manuela does not answer my question. Instead she gives an analysis of what I have just shared.

Manuela: Well, I think what may be getting in the way of your ability to do that is the fact that you are actually teaching *difference*. You are sitting at the very centre of the problem. And because you’re not seen as one of *us*, already you’re setting up …

Hang on, I’m thinking. What is she implying here? Is she positioning me as the source of the problem?

Manuela: You’re setting up conflict there. I think in the minds of a lot of people who are carrying a lot of things they wish they could say, which in this free society of ours we can’t say, because racism is one of the taboo subjects. I wish they would allow Australians to get on and show and say everything, and get it out of their systems and then we can work it through.

I silently question Manuela’s suggestion that I am complicit in some kind of teaching/learning script.
**Caroline**: But I think that, that they do … there’s always some people who do [challenge a woman educator of colour].

I am referring to the many emotional and heated debates in tutorials that I have facilitated around the notion of Australian-ness through the discourse of nationalism.

**Manuela**: Not in academia. It’s very …

**Caroline**: Students! No, not the …

**Manuela**: The lecturers and the students. That is a taboo subject. A real taboo subject, I, I feel, very strongly, and, and I also feel very strongly when we’re dealing with racism we’ve got to deal with the racism of the other just as much as with the racism of the mainstream.

Hearing Manuela reminds me that both visible and less visible markers of difference come into play in the university in both a teaching and learning context. For me, the visible marker of difference is my skin colour. For Manuela, her difference is marked by the ways she sounds, moves and thinks. I agree with her that racism has an all-pervasive quality. In our conversation, we have acknowledged individual, systemic and epistemological forms of racism.
Stories about Social Change Practice

‘I brought to my teaching a lot of what I had been taught by being a mother’

Satra, Kali and Manuela have all referred to motherhood, making me reflect on the meaning of motherhood in my own practice. Manuela draws on the discourse of motherhood, linking this explicitly to her educative practice. Her story reminds me of Satra’s many stories about her daughter and how they linked to Satra’s desire to work for social change. I ask Manuela why she still works in the university after her negative experience in applying for the lecturing position. Her answer surprises me.

Manuela: I’m a natural teacher. In fact, that’s all I was ever going to do was to be a mother and a teacher … which is not bad.

Caroline: But you’re still working at the uni?

Manuela: Not out of choice really. It’s out of … I don’t, I … where else can I, where else do I teach?

Caroline: But you want to teach, like you said. You wanted to teach and you want to be a mother. You knew that?

Manuela: Well I decided that these are the two things that I can do in my sleep.
The ethic of care (O’Brien-Hallstein, 1999) is a familiar theme in the genre of teachers’ stories where woman and femininity are associated with certain professions, including teaching. The feminist movement has enabled women to challenge gender inequity and sexism in the workplace. Still, we know little about the diversity of experiences of women educators in the Australian university.

After our first research conversation, Manuela asks me for a copy of the research audiotapes. After listening to the tapes and some further reflection, we meet a second time. I ask her what her thoughts and feelings were when she listened to our recorded conversation.

**Caroline:** I think it’s so important. For me, I can’t speak for the other women. It’s added another dimension to my life, you know because my children are still very young. I want them to be critical of the world around them. I want them to have that kind of, I want them to inherit … Probably, I was thinking about this today, the kinds of baggage that I bring because of my experiences, my upbringing in Australia and Sweden, UK, I want them to have a different experience.

**Manuela:** And to see the strengths.

**Caroline:** Yes. So they don’t learn to be victims. I don’t want them to be victims.

**Manuela:** Oh my god. No. I want them to be predators.
Caroline: [laughs] Yes!

Manuela: In a world where there are no predators, I don’t want them to be predators. But if they will be predators in this world, let them be the ones that everyone runs away from them in a dark alley. Let my daughter be the one who they run away from. Not the one who goes away from them … I think that being a mother is probably the greatest education you could possibly have in, in leading a full life.

Caroline: Yeah.

Manuela: And I think that has helped me. Actually, I mean I was a mother before I was a teacher. And I think I brought to my teaching a lot of what I had been taught by being a mother. And I think I have run them concurrently ever since.

Although the experiences of parenting and motherhood have universal resonance, it is important to acknowledge that the category of woman does not necessarily represent all women and their experiences and realities. Motherhood is a cultural construct, as well as a biological reality. It is not necessarily the beast of our burden either, as Manuela explains.

Manuela: I just think, in other societies, the nurturing role of women, it is never downgraded as lesser than. You know, it makes us something less than men. In fact, it’s used as [a] strong armour sometimes to protect communities against a
lot of things. I think that’s one of the things that talking with you has really got
me to see here, how connected my motherhood is to my teaching vocation.

‘Conflict is the only way forward actually’

Manuela and I talk about the politics of social change practice and the difficulties of
developing cross-boundary dialogue in the university.

**Manuela:** There has to be some *give*. But I think that *give*, well it takes a lot of
conversation where both sides are listening. But I think [sighs], it’s a web of lies
here really. It’s a web of lies, both amongst those that are sitting in mainstream
and amongst who are sitting on the periphery of mainstream, trying to be heard,
not even necessarily become part of it. And I think this [is] confronting, just
simply confronting, not necessarily because we’re evil or because we’re evil or
because we’re good, because we’re this or that, just saying …

**Caroline:** Conflict is not bad.

**Manuela:** No. Conflict is the only way forward actually. I …

**Caroline:** But does that mean a relativism that says anybody, you know, like a,
a fascist can stand up and say you know, ‘I think, therefore I am and you can
just go fuck yourself’? [laughs]

**Manuela:** Yes. Yes. Yes.
Caroline: And that’s okay?

Manuela: Yes, definitely okay. Oh please, definitely okay. I want to know where they are. I want to know what they think. I’d like to believe that inside the minds of some of these fascists is like inside the mind of some of these … what’s the opposite of fascist? Well, I guess fascism is not a win thing. It’s about a closed mind thing. I’d like to believe that there are possibilities of getting through. But I also want to know where they are. I mean, I don’t want to live in a street where I know there are two potential rapists and three thieves but I haven’t been able to sort them out. Yes, I’d like to know where they are and I’d like to mind my steps.

I extend this debate to understand what kinds of values we see as important in education for social change.

Caroline: Like when I’m reading around anti-racism, and there’s lots of critiques in the UK of anti-racism as a movement and how … because there’s not that, there’s that kind of binary discourse going on there too?

Manuela: Mmm.

Caroline: So, we need to then open up and let their hair hang out?

Manuela: Absolutely. Well I mean we either really believe that we live in a society where there is free expression. And where there is democracy.
**Caroline:** What is that freedom of expression? This is my dilemma. What if that free expression causes harm and fear and closes off people further? They want to assimilate? Because otherwise it’s real harm for them to open up, you know? So there’s a fine balance between ‘Yeah, everybody come out and play. Play dirty if you want to because inevitably somebody will get killed [laughs softly] in the playground.

In official multiculturalism, democracy is a given; however, Manuela and I collectively question how the project of democracy is conceived and the kinds of assumptions underpinning multicultural discourse through an exploration of the notion of harm.

**Manuela:** Well, what’s wrong with somebody getting killed on the playground? You know, what’s the prize for somebody not getting killed on the playground? Is the prize keeping a lid on something that’s doing a lot more damage? I guess it’s short-term, versus long-term. Um, I come from a profoundly confrontational society, okay, where … and it’s not as if we hold the key to anything to do with political ways of doing things, my god, we certainly don’t but there is … value, I think, in allowing … room, insisting on room for the inconvenient to be heard and the inconvenient to be said.

And I, you know this goes back to Camilla Paglia’s um, wonderful brand of feminism, which is rare. And what Camilla Paglia is saying … she’s Italian and I think the Italian and the Latin here come together very well – ‘No. No. No. Don’t do that. Because what you’re doing is that you’re making the victims
victims forever. They’re forever expecting the system to keep them from becoming victims. Make us the predators in the dark alleys. Make us the ones that others fear. Put us in touch with those who are supposedly creating victims out of us and make us able through, through the hard, um, struggles that we have to do. Make us so tough that we can actually answer for ourselves. Don’t forever be protecting us’. Her whole argument is about, rather than protect us train us. You know? I mean this idea of the woman predator I love.

**Caroline:** But also the word *protection*, we have a history of protectionism that of course, is that … Yeah?

**Manuela:** Yeah, so we protect the Aboriginal discourse because we say whatever, say it’s not racist, don’t force them to confront the fact that a lot of what they’re saying is profoundly divisive, and should be, and should be [laughs]. And you know, get them into the fray. Get them into the fray. Train them so they can actually deal with us - the same thing with women.

It is very different speaking with someone who has knowledge of Australia’s alternative histories and protectionist policies compared to someone who does not know about past policies and their relevance to contemporary Australian life. When I speak with Manuela, I hear how peripheral knowledge perspectives and ways of knowing perform an important function of interrupting dominant narratives and racialised social and educational discourses. Like Satra and Kali’s stories, Manuela’s stories call attention to the need for further debate about who is responsible for effecting social change in the university.
I tell Manuela about my earlier conversations with Satra and Kali on the different ways in which they feel vulnerable in the university. I wonder what Manuela has to say about this topic.

**Manuela:** Yes, I’d love to. [laughs] I’d like to be much less vulnerable. But …

**Caroline:** Hey, I can really relate to that.

**Manuela:** You know, c’mon, it’d be a nice coat to put on when we want to?

**Caroline:** Yes.

**Manuela:** And then if you want to take it off with some people, take it off, to have that ability to take it on and put it off. I don’t have it.

I like the analogy of wearing a coat; it is protection from the elements and a disguise. But what lies underneath it? In many ways, our storytelling reveals vulnerability that resonates closely with women scholars in the US (previously explored in Chapter 2). When I was working with a group of scholars and postgraduates on an anti-racist project, one of the Aboriginal women on the committee literally told me to *back off* from the project. We had very different approaches and ways of working together. This incident had caused me enormous distress to the point where I stopped working on the thesis. I questioned if this study on cross-boundary alliance-building was worth nothing if I could not establish a constructive dialogue with other women of difference. I explain this to Manuela.
**Caroline:** This is the existential angst I had last year. When I thought, you know … does it mean to stick up for what you believe in, whatever that is, if it’s, you know, troubling the whole idea of justice or social justice, whatever. Not that that’s a fixed thing but it changes, that you’re basically wanting to open up dialogue on that … does that mean you have to be a … fucking bastard? And people were telling me, ‘You’re wearing your heart on your sleeve, you’ve got to hide, you’ve got to get thick skin’. I thought if it means, to do what you want to do, to effect change, means being a hard bastard – do I want to do that?

**Manuela:** No, you don’t have to be a hard bastard. You have to be seen as a hard bastard to get into a position where you can take off your coat. And I think that the privileged migrant, the privileged other is the one that has learnt to get inside the system. And then you have the freedom to take off that coat. But to get there you really require a very thick hide. And that’s, you know, I’ve learnt that. It’s too late for me. I should have packaged myself differently. Not that I could have done it, but I would have liked to have even been able to see the vision of it. You know, get myself to a permanent lectureship at [U] university and then re-cast that curriculum in my own terms. We can’t make a difference bleeding on the sidelines.

**Caroline:** No, and this is …

**Manuela:** And you know what happens with vultures and bleeding?

**Caroline:** Mmm.
Manuela: Yeah. Not a good idea.

Caroline: Now, to access or enact power within universities at that high decision-making level, you have to wear the coat.

Manuela: You have to wear that coat, yeah.

I wonder how we can begin to practice our politics for social change without becoming just another statistic, or by internalising racism and maintaining inequities. Manuela’s story, like Satra’s and Kali’s, confirms that the university is a white institutional space. For Manuela, this translates into everyday situations where challenging multiple, intersecting forces of oppression and hierarchies on an everyday basis leads to burnout, a sense of alienation and isolation for women of colour.

‘To actually see that plant growing, and understand what it means and understand the root system, is a long process’

Another important theme that emerges from the research conversation is how the situated imagination enables us to envisage and co-construct a vision of education for social change. Here, Manuela uses the metaphor of a growing plant to talk about social change practice.

Manuela: Yes, I think the seeds have been planted and the seeds have been growing. To actually see that plant growing and understand what it means and
understand the root system, is a long process. And I think that’s one of the privileges of getting older.

**Caroline:** Yeah.

**Manuela:** To see that process develop, and how it’s shaped you. And maybe understand better some of your own reactions to things that you couldn’t at the time locate any particular strong feeling about. We were always responding instinctively to it.

**Caroline:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Manuela:** And I wonder too whether the distances that are created by having to move to another culture don’t magnify those core values more?

**Caroline:** I think so.

**Manuela:** Because you really cling to them in place of the people who are there who stand for those values.

**Caroline:** Yes.

Finally, I hear an acknowledgement from Manuela of the impossibility of viewing culture in simplistic and reductionist terms.
Manuela: So, it’s an abstracted thing. Sometimes it’s not a very happy thing to have to do. But it does confront you, who you are, in a place that doesn’t recognise you for that.

Caroline: Yes. Exactly. I couldn’t put it any better [laughs].

While educators committed to working for social change might be bound by a common desire to dispel structures and relations of power which create and maintain inequities, there is no single solution or quick fix to effect social change. Models of higher education pedagogy are increasingly constructed through managerial discourses where quality, standards and outcomes take precedence, but for whom? Academics rarely know the long-term effects of their collective disciplinary practices or have time to question the assumptions underpinning our pedagogy. This raises questions about how the university can provide space for such reflection, given that recent changes in the higher education sector have created tensions which have impacted adversely on academic identities and are implemented through the use of hierarchical systems of thinking and structures.

More Reflections on Education for Social Change

Through our sharing of stories about identity, we begin to construct an individual and shared vision of what education for social change might sound, look, smell, taste and feel like. Manuela and I are able to trouble hegemonic assumptions about difference relating these to our own hidden assumptions about what is important knowledge. Through this oscillating and overlapping process, we are able to identify and make
sense of the kinds of barriers we encounter in our everyday lives in the Australian university. It also enables me to imagine work for social change in a broader and more complex way than I originally did. In our dialogue, our differently situated social realities, knowledge and ways of knowing intersect. The disjunctures which emerge from the power sensitive conversation help bring attention to key themes and concerns in the project of working for social change that it is important to accept the premise that racism and other multiple forms of oppression operate in the university simultaneously and at individual, institutional, societal and epistemological levels. We agree that covert forms of racism are the more insidious, with epistemological racism being one such form of racism that is difficult to identify, name and deal with. Where we differ is the ways in which markers of difference influence our lives. Our stories provide a partial glimpse into how hegemonic systems of thought are encoded and embodied.

It is affirming to share stories and freely explore the ethical implications of our commitment to education for social change, especially because of the absence of debate within Australian studies on higher education on how our epistemologies are racially-biased and which epistemologies are valued over others in the knowledge production process. Accepting and valuing each other’s realities and social change practices is a crucial part of cross-boundary dialogue and trust-building which precedes any political alliance-building.
Exploring Cultural Difference

‘We have our own sets of biases’

The following narratives illustrate the importance of our multiple histories, cultural experiences and linguistic resources and how these infuse our visions and moral discourses underpinning education for social change. Manuela and I construct ourselves and each other through a process of comparison and contrast. The depth and breadth of the resources we bring to our social change practice are brought to the fore.

Manuela: Caroline, you come from that similar world that I’m talking about as mine, in a way. I just, and that of course creates for me, and maybe for you too, because you’re saying you can’t understand that, maybe we have, of course we do, we have our own sets of biases.

Caroline: Yeah. Yeah.

Manuela: And we’re working on assumptions about what constitutes a full individual. And even the word individual in the tribal society kind of goes – uh-uh-uh [shaking her head]. We’re not talking individuals here. And that’s the other thing. The notion of the individual and the collective, we come from a collective world where everything has to be for the good.

Caroline: But do we create that collective, or is that collective already there? I mean this is what I’m battling with. If knowledge and power aren’t, like we’re
not born with it and we pour it into other places, but it happens through the interactions that we have, okay?

I am trying hard to reconcile theory with lived experience.

**Manuela:** Mm.

**Caroline:** That means we’re always creating meaning all the time.

**Manuela:** Hmm [pondering].

**Caroline:** So does that mean we’re creating our connection with things that don’t exist [laughs softly]. I don’t know if that makes sense?

**Manuela:** Yes it does.

**Caroline:** That collective thing, or a sense of my people. You know, when people speak to me, and particularly Indigenous people, speak about my people – I don’t have one singular one my people. My people are my immediate family, but my immediate family to me represents Indian, Chinese. I have an affinity for Sweden because I grew up there. And at the same I’ve experienced the otherness thing, you know in terms of what it means to be a gay and Asian, through people close to me. I’ve experienced it through them, what that means to be in a society where that is really abnormal and deviant.
Here, our differences emerge more clearly, as I try to explain to Manuela how the mixed-race experience has influenced my positioning and border crossing. Although she self-identifies in monocultural terms, she nods in recognition.

**Manuela:** Absolutely.

**Caroline:** So, it’s like all these, all these communities.

**Manuela:** This conglomeration.

**Caroline:** Yeah. But I could never go to the local Indian society and say, ‘Hey, I’ve come to join you’ because they’d look at me and I’m so westernised [laughs], like ‘What the fuck are you on about?’

**Manuela:** Yeah.

**Caroline:** You know what I mean? Like my relatives, it’s been a kind of interesting experience because they construct me as other. I’m from that mixed marriage, and I haven’t shared that kind of history. I don’t speak the language I don’t know the cultural norms of say the Singapore-Indian community or the Indian community in Australia. So I go to the men. Say **hi**, and contribute to the conversation. And they kind of look at me like, ‘Shouldn’t you be in the kitchen?’ [laughs]

**Manuela:** Yes. Excuse me. Have you lost your way or something?
Caroline: That’s a very simplistic notion because I don’t really know what they talk about in everyday you know conversation, amongst the women or amongst the men because I haven’t been part of those communities for long enough, other than … I construct them through what little I know and through my, my father, who’s the Indian in the family.

Manuela: Mmm.

Caroline: My mum is the Chinese one, so …

Manuela: Yes! So you were born already inside … concentric worlds, as it were?

I think to myself, how true. We are all inside concentric worlds.

Manuela’s Diaspora

‘You come to Australia, and rather than being adopted you’re fostered’

Compared to Satra’s and Kali’s stories about diaspora, Manuela talks about a very different migrant experience in America and Australia.

Manuela: You know I’ve been a migrant twice, and it’s been in two, what we may regard as very similarly constituted societies. You know, we both come from the British Empire, blah blah blah. And yet it was such a different
experience to be a migrant in the United States to here, you know? [referring to a teaching activity] And we drew a circle … of Australian society and American society, and how the migrant is seen inside – the new Australian or the new American is seen inside that. And I said, ‘You know, in the United States when you’re taken in as a migrant which they assume is going to be a potential citizen, who would want to live in the best country in the world (ironically)?’ And I would make that point, in that way. You are immediately adopted into the American family.

**Caroline:** Adopted, or assimilated?

**Manuela:** No, not assimilated. No. Americans have a great arrogance about their culture. They have a great security about the fact that they are best of the rest of the world. So, you are encouraged to say what that means, you know, the Americans in daily conversation make a big deal about it. But they are absolutely clear that at the end of your hyphenated self lies the American. Make no mistake about it. This was at a time when here in Australia, we were using multicultural as an excuse for not defining what we thought was Australian. You know, because Australia has got a lot of problems, white Australia policy, blah blah blah blah blah. So let’s colour it all multicultural.

**Caroline:** So it’s more a specific discourse in, in an American context, multiculturalism … but in Australia?

**Manuela:** The boundary’s inside here.
Caroline: Muddy.

Manuela: It’s muddy.

Caroline: Avoidance thing.

Manuela: An embarrassment about, sort of assuming that you want to come here and that you might think that you’ve done better than elsewhere. Because I think that at the heart of Australian national identity is a great sense of ‘we really aren’t very good’.

Caroline: Which is very much different to American sense of bigness.

Manuela: Absolutely. It’s wonderful. You, you are adopted into a highly confident, arrogant family that says ‘you’re one of us’. And yes of course, there are many ways that we’re going to demand that you show your loyalty to us. But don’t forget that what we think is great about you, is that you chose us. You’re so clever.

You come to Australia, you come to Australia and rather than being adopted you’re fostered. And this is where we got, in the sense of here the idea that it’s all contingent on whether you discover that we’re not very good, it’s all contingent on the fact that we actually don’t like difference. And we will foster you but we don’t have a home to offer you, because we don’t ever know what
that home looks like. And if you asked us to define and defend it we would be coming out as pretty racist people.

How different Manuela’s and my histories are. Yet I can relate to her migration experience and the yearning to belong, which places personal experience within a wider historical context so that experiences of oppression, the struggles and the injuries accumulated throughout the journey can heal. By talking about what’s not Australian, Manuela and I co-construct meaning around the notion of Australian-ness.

**Manuela:** Yes. In Spanish we say, no sorry, not in Spanish, in [Z (language)] we say *mi gente.*

I love the rhythm and texture of Manuela’s first language.

**Caroline:** Me hente?

**Manuela:** *Gente, mi gente.* And *mi gente* - already the boundaries of that are never clear. Never, never, never clear.

**Caroline:** Okay.

**Manuela:** Um, *mi gente* is my world, my type, my people. Um, and to calm down a conversation, a large conversation where people may be beginning to feel that they’re being left out or there are tensions there. Oh yeah *mi gente* is the first thing you would say. Like, you draw them all in. That expression kind
of says to them, ‘Hey, hey, hey we’re all part of the same thing’. [People from] [Z (country)] use it a lot. Sometimes even in the exile community, when they use the word *mi gente* is a highly subversive thing in exile politics because they are by definition taking in the people in [Z]. *Mi gente.*

I cannot think of an equivalent English expression.

**Manuela:** And maybe you and I, even though we share so much in common, are beginning to create different kind of needs and tensions there, because I was born of two parents from [Z]. So my roots are very, very clear even though I’ve been estranged from them, I learned the language of my parents’ islands and I was able to articulate and understand where I belonged in a very secure, one cultural world. And for me, *mi gente* - and I could use that - I would only ever only use that about [Z (citizens of that country)].

**Caroline:** Oh, okay.

I am not sure where Manuela is going with this.

**Manuela:** I could like, 500 years and I would never call Australian *mi gente*.

**Caroline:** Oh, I see what you mean.

I wait for her explanation of the criteria for inclusion and exclusion in that category *mi gente*. 
Manuela: That’s not *mi gente*. It’s people who would understand your silences, people who would understand your, what would say, people who would read your mind. People who ultimately …

Caroline: Accept?

Manuela: Belong to the same family of values.

Caroline: Oh okay.

I wonder if Manuela’s notion of *mi gente* also evokes a family of values as in the case of Hage’s white nation fantasy. He writes about a collective consciousness which recognises and protects that which is seen as sacred; a white Australia. This is not only applicable to white majority nations, however, and can be applied to any dominant cultural majority. It frightens me to think about the paranoia of nationalism where cultural values become enshrined and allegiances sworn in to terrorism - to any -isms. Hence, the power of collective values, whether religious or cultural, inevitably become politicised in a war of ideologies (e.g. fundamentalist Muslim versus fundamentalist Christian ideas). Although Manuela draws on nationalist discourse, I don’t think she is condoning nationalism as such. Perhaps, like Satra and me, she is expressing her frustration and tiredness and perhaps this is an inevitable part of social activism.
‘University was the Mecca of the Gods’

Here Manuela talks about her country of origin (Z), family and what a university education meant to her as she was growing up. During her childhood in Z, there was political, ideological and military upheaval, which led to the family’s exile to the US. Manuela tells me that, at that time, the university was seen as a haven.

Manuela: I knew I was lacking … a university degree. And that was my big, big, big hole. That was the world in which I was born in where university was Mecca. And I hadn’t been to Mecca.

Caroline: But wasn’t that in your whole … that was part of the class thing here?

Manuela: Not necessarily. It was from my parents. Because to them university was … there were no other university graduates in the whole of my family, my mother’s family. In the entire of my mother’s, no-one else had been to university.

Caroline: But it meant something in their world, yeah?

Reciprocating, I share with Manuela some of my own experiences and what education meant in my family. It has a different meaning in this context.

Caroline: Same with my parents, yeah.
Manuela: Yes, yeah, which was beyond class. Really, your parents are both university educated?

Caroline: No. My mother’s not, but my father is … She … is not an educated woman. And yet she is, in that informal sense. She’s such a wise wonderful woman.

Manuela: Oh you lucky, lucky person.

Caroline: [laughs] But it was drummed in my head that because, I suppose since I was a baby we moved out of Malaysia. So I grew up in Sweden … In UK, then Sweden and then in Australia. And so for me, it was always white worlds. And that meant that you’ve always got to be better, smarter, faster. You’ve got to because … Otherwise, you know you’re not going to get by. So that meant an education.

Manuela: Yes.

Caroline: And because of, they’re so, they’re very conscious of class, particularly from my dad’s side because of him being Brahmin.

Manuela: Ooh yeah.

Caroline: I can hear it even today, if I were to speak to Indian relatives [laughs]. The caste thing is … most people do not intermarry or cross marry with other
people outside their race or let alone their class. Most of these people, the children, are sent and they get education overseas in a white country. But the expectation is you get arranged, you marry your own kind.

**Manuela:** Right. Right.

**Caroline:** And they have very successful marriages whatever, you know, that means. They … it works! But that discourse is still very, very you know, big there. So, in my family there’s been that kind of Asian-ness if you like. Education is very important. Blah blah blah. But I never, you know … I always deliberately shot people off [disappointed them]. [laughs]

**Manuela:** Yes.

**Caroline:** Including my parents. And luckily we’ve been able to have conversations as I’ve become older so we can look at these things together and you know, especially now that I have children.

**Manuela:** Yes of course. We suddenly have a passport to hold a conversation that we didn’t have before.

Compared to Manuela’s stories about her family and values imbued from her parents about education, my stories about family are telling in a different way. Education was a passport to economic and social riches! This was implicitly conveyed by my
parents’ careful distinction between eastern/western values and white/non-white ways of knowing.

As I speak with Manuela, I am mindful of the relativity of privilege and how impossible it is to reduce privilege only to class.

**Caroline:** [laughs] That’s so true, but, so, the class thing, yeah. It’s … and I’m thinking even in the research context. You know, like when we, you and I, I mean even like the other two women Kali and Satra – in some ways we’re very privileged.

**Manuela:** Mm. Mm.

**Caroline:** Because there’s something about … um. Okay, we feel like our voices may be not being heard either collectively or individually and yet we’re in a position where we could effect change. We’re still doing stuff’ whatever that is.

**Manuela:** Yeah. And … we’ve been to a world that has done something to us, not only to our brains but hopefully to every part of us that has made us privileged just by the sheer fact of that. Whether we’re able to then do something with it, well that’s the advantage. That’s the external advantage of it.

**Caroline:** When you’ve been to worlds, do you mean like the worlds outside of Australia that we bring? You know the kind of trans-national?
Manuela: No, the world that the university brings to you.

Caroline: Ooh okay.

The accumulation of experiences, histories and geographies makes for a rich and colourful lexicon from which to draw in our everyday lives and higher education pedagogy. Through a comparison of our experiences and resources for meaning making, we continue our discussion about what the university as an institution signifies to each of us and what the teaching profession means. As we continue to talk about the university, another picture emerges of a university as symbolising social change. This does not reflect the contemporary Australian university we know today.

Manuela: So university becomes the Mecca of everything in their worlds.

Caroline: University is associated with social change!

Manuela: It’s social change.

Caroline: But I think today in the universities we … it’s not fucking social change.

Manuela: It’s about what you’re going to do with the rest of your life and how much money you’re going to earn. You know that sort of thing. But to my family, they didn’t see it as a way of advancing class-wise either. It’s hard for me to think if you said to me ‘what was the gallery of honourable professions in
[Z]? I would say to you probably, teaching would have been one. We valued education. Teaching was one thing that couldn’t easily be corrupted. Like being a lawyer.

Caroline: So teaching couldn’t be law? Law couldn’t be corrupted?

Manuela: Not corrupted in the sense of money. Not that you could get money under the table, okay? That was, we’re talking money. We’re talking able to get public monies. Public monies - that was the one big world of corruption in [Z]. And of course the political was the easiest one. If you managed to get yourself … either becoming the member of a family there that had access to it, or yourself had access to it … their worship of this world (the university) really wasn’t about how much money you could make out of it, or even whether you would rise in the class thing. It just didn’t matter. What mattered was that you … it’s like, you go to heaven. Going to heaven doesn’t have any kind of money value to it. It’s just you’re in heaven. University was the Mecca of the Gods.

Caroline: Goodness.

Manuela: Yeah. My father said to me, ‘This is where the gods play, Manuela. Make sure you get to that playground’.

Caroline: So it’s about power?

Manuela: University?
**Caroline:** If the gods have power … and I’m just thinking …

**Manuela:** No but here, the gods in the [Z] romantic sense was about the best that your mind can do for you. You know?

**Conclusion**

In contrast to Manuela, I am not positioned as migrant or other on the grounds of my accent, but more on my skin colour. In terms of less visible markers of difference, my voice sounds Australian-English whereas hers has an American lilt. Most people do not expect a dark-skinned Asian-looking person to speak fluent Swedish (in Australia, or even in Sweden). I have cultivated a certain Australian-ness to counter my Asian-ness over the years as a result of my bilingualness. I have a choice to invoke these, which Manuela does not as someone who has acquired English in a linguistically different way and at a different age to me.

Perhaps most importantly, Manuela’s stories are a testimony to the heterogeneity of whiteness. Her stories about identity tell us about different shades of whiteness. Unlike mine, her skin colour allows for mobility. The power that pigmentocracy has in Australian society is not so much because of skin colour itself but the construction of meaning and values afforded to it. These complex issues have a bearing on both Manuela and me in our voices, positionings, epistemologies and movements within the university, although in very different ways.
Manuela’s and my discussions pivot around the question ‘What is education?’ In her stories about education and the university, she looks to her birthplace and to her parents’ influences and values, which fuelled her early quest for knowledge at a higher education level. These have also played an important role in my own search for knowledge over the years. Yet the intellectual capital which Manuela talks about - the best your mind can do- and the freedom to question the world of the university itself seems far removed from the reality of working in the Australian university that Satra, Kali and Manuela collectively paint.
Chapter 7 - Lived Experience and Identity

Methodological Surprises

This chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological surprises and confirmations of the research. Conversations bring many dimensions into research, some surprising and some which confirm the existing literature. The flexible nature of the research method was important in my inquiry as it allowed for women’s experiences very different to my own to be made visible. The research conversation approach allowed for the unwieldy and unexpected nature of research to unfold, such as the way in which different conversations and topics were indeed messy, often incoherent, layered and flowing over and into one another (Johnson et al., 2004). It also enabled the women’s objections to the descriptor women educators of colour to be included. A structured questionnaire sent by mail would not have elicited the same richness and detail of exchange process that occurs in a research conversation. It would have been impossible to explore the seemingly inconsequential verbal meanderings that sometimes developed into important debates about identity and the meaning of higher education for social change.

As the multiple perspectives of the participants in the study began to intersect more and more, building momentum as a collection of experiences, I found that I needed to step back and raise my own awareness of the differences and similarities between our experiences. This was achieved by a process of applying both a macro- and micro-analysis to the stories. That is, I oscillated between the individual level of experience, different historical and geographic contexts, multiple disciplines and theoretical
traditions. I moved inside and outside of the group of women, while also engaging with other researchers and students and I reflected on the literature, theory and my own lived experience. This process directed me to understand that the knowledge I produced was influenced by the women’s critical feedback, and visa versa. Therefore, the study confirms the importance of relational and social constructionist theory in meaning making and knowledge production as a useful mechanism for understanding how theory, lived experience and practice are co-implicated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Gergen, 1995; Haney, 1995; Kanpol, 1997; Wenger, 1998; Preston, 1999; Haight, 2001).

In the research, it was important to create the conditions that allowed for the researcher and the researched to reflect together on our lived experience in a public educational institutional context. This required a willingness by people to have meaningful and frank dialogue closely bound up with identity and required a kind of shift in gears to bring the subconscious to a conscious level in the research conversation. It involved a reciprocity and a political willingness to confront others’ otherness in relation to the self. I had anticipated the possibility of disagreement between us. Fortunately, none of the women in the study were offended by the way in which I broached topics with them during our conversations. I also expected that the women might disclose a recent or past traumatic event that triggered painful memories. Although Satra spoke openly of feeling betrayed and injured by the experience of racism and sexism, it was with a sense of quiet conviction and anger. Kali expressed a distance in relation to past painful experiences with a certain measure of lightness. Manuela expressed deep sadness about past experiences as she reflected on her sense of humiliation and frustration in various situations. In speaking
with each of the women, I engaged in a similar level of self-disclosure, often sharing personal experiences and revealing emotions. Yet none of us cried or became visibly distraught. A dialogic method such as the one used in this inquiry is not as open to control by the researcher as a traditional interview is. It is therefore difficult to anticipate where it might lead. Conversations did not always flow. As is the case in most conversations, silence sometimes signals a familiarity and other times discomfort or other possible reasons. There were silences.

I did contact the women several times after the two official research conversations had ended to ensure that they were not disturbed or upset. My expectation of the potential of having to refer the women on to counselling services was never realised. This could be partly because we were older women and all of us had already reflected on these issues and experiences many times before in our lives and, as a consequence, the memories were not as raw. In the conversational moment, the women were reviewing the past from a distanced perspective. Had the interviews been conducted with younger women, or women who were in the early stages of processing hurt and pain resulting from subordination or oppression, very different kinds of research conversations may have eventuated.

Most notably, the body or corporeality, were not explored fully. In a conversation with Manuela (which I omitted), she talked about the experience of becoming an older woman in Australia in a Latin-American context. Satra’s story about how men treat her in the university conveyed a sense of discomfort and a recollection of being shamed. Kali’s stories about students positioning her, both within and also outside of
the demure Asian stereotype, hinted at the ways in which the body is marked as sexual.

I too did not disclose every incident of racist and sexist treatment I have experienced while living in Australia or working in the university. I believe such disclosures emerge in specific contexts and situations. As I did not establish these conversations as a therapeutic process but a research situation, such disclosures did not happen. Rather, events and feelings were explored in the context of the situation and in relation to the topics discussed. Apart from the fact that I am not qualified to address issues of harm in a counselling capacity, I chose not to pursue the issue of sexuality, out of respect for the women. In my view, they had the authority to narrate their own life stories and part of that involved their decision to maintain silence on some matters. Although I was unable to explore sexuality in detail, I have included brief references to this in the field stories as something worthy of further investigation in other research. It is too early to tell and too small a study to be able to offer detailed insights on how race and ethnicity are embodied by women in an Australian social context; however, the findings highlight the need for further exploration of and theorising around the topic of multiple identity and sexuality/bodies in the university.

The theme of the politics of sexuality in the university is notoriously difficult to capture (Morley, 2003). During preliminary discussions and before embarking on our research conversations, I privileged the dimension of race/ethnicity as a key interest and did not ask explicitly for clarification on the women’s sexual orientation. Dialogue with lesbian women may have yielded very different insights into the positionality of women in the university and the effects of different forms of
oppression. Although Satra and I acknowledge the exclusion of gay men and lesbian women’s experiences within anti-racism discourse, this remains outside of the scope of this study, inviting further inquiry. I would, at this point, like to acknowledge the silence around normalising discourses of heterosexuality in the study.

The study suggests that sexual politics in the university can operate in the form of sexual intimidation or harassment. This is revealed in Manuela’s narrative about a male colleague influencing the outcome of her application for a tenured position within Australian studies. Although not all the aspects of this experience were included in the field story, Manuela infers, in the telling of her story, that the male colleague in question had made false suggestions to the interviewing panel that the two of them had been engaged in a sexual relationship. I confirmed this after I transcribed our research conversations. This, according to Manuela, influenced the panel members in their final decision to offer the job to another candidate (placing it in the too-hard basket). Although she appealed this decision, no mediation occurred and Manuela was too upset to pursue it further. Satra’s narrative about being positioned as an object of desire and domination by a senior white male co-worker can also be seen as an example of sexual harassment and/or epistemic violence (at a gender race level). During a follow-up phone discussion with Kali, she told me that men often positioned her according to the passive Asian woman sexual stereotype and that she found this to be both useful and also constraining as she would inevitably dispels such myths because of her interests and her political views.

Further research into this topic would yield more insight into this dimension of women’s experience in the university. If any of the women in the study had
elaborated on incidents relating to sexual harassment and violence, this would have required a far more thorough analysis than the study has provided. The women’s stories tell us that oppression in the university is enacted not only on a sexualised basis, but that this is tied to race and ethnicity in complex ways. Overall, this research affirms that traditional divisions of status and gender have a constitutive effect on non-traditional groups in the university (Henry, 1994). The women’s stories contribute insights into the differential experiences of women in higher education and to the ways in which race/ethnicity simultaneously interlocks with gender and class.

Another issue that emerged during the research was the insider/outsider status of the researcher and whether this was a help or hindrance to the research. When I asked the women how they felt about me being a non-Anglo researcher and how this may or may not have influenced the research dialogue, all of the women responded that they saw me as an insider, somehow aligned with them from the beginning. Kali and Manuela’s response to this question epitomises the argument that the race/ethnic positioning of the researcher and personal experience in the research topic/s by the researcher can, in some instances, help to develop common ground with the participants.

**Kali:** As I said before, I never saw you as … non-Anglo, Asian etc and only realised when you told me about your background. But if you were an Anglo Australian person, male, etc, probably I (would) have put you in some kind of pigeon hole … So I guess I don’t believe in ‘research’ in which a researcher herself/himself does not have insider/outside, subjective/objective perspectives, as they will become lab experiment. Make sense?
Manuela: For me Caroline, your being non-Anglo was a crucial ingredient in shaping/flavouring our research dialogue … Your being non-Anglo was an open door to me. I may not have much of an idea what awaited me in the room beyond, but I felt this was a door I could trust. Trust in what sense? Not that I necessarily would feel a camaraderie of experience with you - the term non-Anglo is as wide-ranging as Anglo. But the fact that you chose to think of yourself as such was to me a very bright green light to go ahead and test the waters. Because that’s how I think too: one of my basic terms, being ‘non-Anglo’, at least begins the conversation in some solid ground. But all manner of things can spin from that - and that’s I guess the chance I was taking. I also appreciated your understanding of the terms as a starting point with all possible tours/detours ahead … As a non-Anglo Australian historian, this term and its implications have been at the core of my concerns for the way Australian studies has been shaped and taught at our universities.

The women’s responses to my positioning as a non-Anglo do not imply that the non-white researcher studying non-white subjects produces qualitatively better data but rather that the insider positioning can facilitate a very different kind of inquiry (compared to a white on non-white approach) and, consequently, very different or alternative insights (Rhodes, 1994). From our conversations, I could deduce that discussion and debate about race and ethnicity in a project such as this does not occur naturally or simply because of existing diversity and equity policies. It is a negotiated construct. As Manuela says in another email reflecting on the research process:
Manuela: To me it was an organic process: things grew from previous meetings we built on understandings and misunderstandings and created new spaces for holding our conversations. I went into the process expecting only good things - I have to confess. It never occurred to me that someone who would want to explore such a topic could be anything but a potential kindred spirit. As I look back on it now it surprises me really - because your basic concept - woman of colour - was never something with which I self-identified. But the meanings and possibilities you attached to it sucked me it. By the end I felt comfortably that I was a woman of colour and that that realisation had helped me to sort out a lot of baggage I’d been carrying around for too long.

These kinds of responses confirm that dialogue such as ours is strongly driven by joint action and a shared desire to work across boundaries of all kinds, beyond identity, knowledge and disciplinary boundaries in the university. Through the dialogic process itself, identification (in its various multiple forms) and the women’s diverse understandings of oppression in the university and society, developed and took on lives of their own. Although women educators of colour was initially contested, by the end of the research we had negotiated and produced a sense of belongingness through the descriptor. Kali and Manuela’s initial resistance and contestation of the descriptor and their eventual acceptance of this indicates that collective identity is always being produced in and through these kinds of actions or conversations (Hall, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1996; Mahtani, 2002).

We have continued to reflect on our conversations on the phone and via email, although contact with Satra became less frequent than contact with Kali and Manuela.
Satra, due to work and other commitments, distanced herself from the research about a year after the conversations ended. In retrospect, I would say that the research conversations with Kali and Manuela continued to evolve into friendships. Below are some of Kali and Manuela’s responses to questions related to the research that I emailed about a year after the official research conversations ended. Unfortunately, Satra’s responses to these questions were lost due to technical problems with equipment. During a follow-up phone conversation, Satra told me that, overall, the research had been an empowering process. It had made her more mindful of how she positioned herself as representing others in her advocacy and lobbying work for different communities. It had, however, been confronting for her to read the field stories; to read words uttered by her and interpreted by someone else. From the researcher’s point of view, I too found the consultation process and the close relationship between the researcher and the participants a little blurred and confusing at times. We tried to address these changing relationships throughout the long research process. There were no major objections to my presentation and analysis of our stories and no-one chose to withdraw their consent and participation.

Q1: Thinking back, what were your reasons for joining in the research project?

Kali: I really enjoy process of developing ideas collaboratively. It’s the best way of widening my perspectives and discovering yet another new dimension of the world, my friends and myself. But I took it on as, you are genuine and original, so I get to participate in your creative process of something we all feel worth
creating! If you are only doing this just to get a paper, I wouldn’t. I can tell you - this is genuinely one of the best things I’ve been involved!

Manuela: I think a combination of wanting to feel part of such a research project, one that recognised and validated the voices and experiences of women educators from the margins, which came across to me from the very beginning of our conversations. It wasn’t just an academic exercise. Herein lay something important to you as an individual working through your own issues/problems with Australian academic culture.

Q2: How did you feel about the process during the different stages (before, during and after the research conversations)?

Kali: As we get to know each other more, it gets better! That’s why we have to do a book to keep our conversation going!

Manuela: I felt, if anything, that what we’d touched on had uncovered the immense possibilities for many more research conversations. But that like research projects the key is drawing a line around what can be done within the set limits and letting the rest go until another time.

Before my research candidature and this project, I already knew that I was often the minority ethnic in the classroom and in the university. It was only after my conversations with the women, however, that I felt my own experiences in the past and present were truly affirmed and validated in a way that they had not been
previously in the university. The women also expressed this sentiment. Our dialogues deepened my understanding of how I and others are oppressed in society and in the university and how we/I use personal agency to resist conditions of oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Fernandez, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). I have become more consciously politicised in my educative practice (Rassool, 1997) and better equipped to articulate this in a range of ways. The research conversations have led me to a deeper understanding of how nationalistic and racist discourses are formed and have increased my mindfulness of the inevitable pitfalls involved in teaching for social change. From the formal and informal feedback received from the women, I can say that they too felt heard and empowered through this process.

**More Ethical Hiccups**

From a perspective of the ethics of research, my main concern was that our/my very beingness would be up for grabs in a public arena. I knew that disclosing the personal and private aspects of our experiences left us open to personal and professional harm. Interpretations of our lived experience could be misappropriated by me or others, causing injury. This made it all the more important for me to question my own interpretation of the research conversations and to keep a critical eye on the tendency to elevate our stories or to construct any one thing as the singular problem. For example, it made me question the way in which I framed either the university or the women as the problem. I have come to see the broad society and the university as playing a constitutive role in the lives of the women. The women were, however, by no means passive in this process. Our stories on identity and positioning demonstrate our agency and ability to return the gaze on the university.
The issue of maintaining the anonymity of the women in this project came up many times. Early on, Satra had said that she did not care if she was identifiable, but later changed her mind. Manuela chose her own pseudonym. Kali assumed that I would use a pseudonym for her and left it to me to make one up. Then something unexpected happened. During a conference at which I presented some of the women’s stories, an audience member asked me to verify the identity of one of the women as she sounded similar to a friend of hers. Needless to say, I did not disclose the women’s identity, but I was momentarily lost for words. The audience member happened to be acquainted with two out of the three women in the study. I spoke with the women about this problem at different times, asking them to engage with their particular field story with this concern in mind. It was after this incident that we agreed to remove specific references to their country of origin.

Given that there are relatively few women educators of colour in Australia who choose to highlight race and ethnicity in teaching, learning and research, keeping original references would have compromised the women’s identities. Some of the stories that named specific university settings, persons and sensitive political situations have been excluded from or modified in this research report for the same reasons. I have included only those stories which I was, or we were, able to justify as not transgressing this important ethical boundary, and that I, as the researcher and producer of the text (Richardson, 2000), chose to select on the basis of their degree of contribution to the research questions. This is an inevitable selection process of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of very specific criteria for coherency with the
research questions, which I have gone to great lengths to make as explicit as possible (Kohler Riessman, 1993; McCormack, 2000a, 2000b).

In retrospect, what would I have done differently? It would have been interesting to draw on Haug’s memory work method to create a situation where all the women were present at the same place and time in order to see how similarities and differences emerged and how we made sense of our experiences together in a group setting. It was not logistically possible to meet regularly for an intense period; however, the study does raise the issue of the importance of conversation and that more numbers and opportunities are needed for women educators of colour to return the gaze onto the university. If there were a larger pool of women it would be logistically easier to bring women of colour, NESB and Indigenous women together to talk. In spite of the unexpected challenges and surprises that arose during the research, I was able to assert the validity of my topic and my approach through an interrogation of the concepts and terms used. The aforementioned stories on the dilemmas that emerged during the research are also showing the inevitable surprises that arise from research situations, which cannot and should not be pre-empted. These are part of the discovery aspect of social science research.

This representation of the women is not a definitive one, which would essentialise them in the realm of public knowledge precisely as the other woman. The women have taught me that the self is always in the process of invention and re-invention. Therefore, my particular representation of the women’s lives can never be complete or whole. Since the research conversations ended, the women have moved on in their
lives and are now working in different locations and in new capacities. Their stories provide fleeting glimpses into aspects of our everyday lived experiences.

**Naming Whiteness in the University**

The university is a pivotal educational and social institution which has the ‘power to shape current political and cultural thought [and] public responses to cultural, political or social issues’ (Owens Patton, 2004: 62). It is an institution that is reflective of contemporary attitudes and responses to cultural and racial differences that operate in the wider society. The shifting geopolitical and economic climate and the impact of these conditions on individuals’ emotional and material lives present very specific challenges for research on race and ethnicity and for the researcher/ed. The storied experiences here of what identity and work for social change in the university mean contribute new insights into the ways in which the wider historical, social and political conditions come to matter in everyday life.

Although this is a small, in-depth qualitative study involving only four participants, the women’s narratives contribute new perspectives to higher education literature. By documenting four women’s experiences in the Australian university that have never been documented before, the study provides basic research for others to build on. Hearing the other three women’s stories enabled me to recognise our shared positioning as the other and to reverse the gaze so that whiteness can be questioned from a range of non-white perspectives (hooks, 1991, 1992b). It was because the women placed themselves outside of whiteness that they were able to reflect and recount experiences of it in a range of situated and discursive ways (Haggis *et al.*, 2010).
The women’s stories highlight the ways in which the university, through its policies, processes and structures, constructs difference in ways that privilege whiteness.

My inquiry illustrates the complexity of the struggle to make whiteness visible in the university and in a wider Australian social context. Although whiteness reconfigures differently in each of our stories, it is understood both explicitly and implicitly as the dominant referent through which other identities and knowledge are negotiated (Giroux, 1997b). When the women describe the location of whiteness, the discursive frame that maintains this as a master narrative and a dominant reference point from which to view others in relation to the self is disrupted, albeit momentarily (Hill Collins, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000). We name whiteness in a range of ways, as the establishment, whites, Anglos and western, thus rendering whiteness visible in the university. Manuela’s exploration of different kinds of white positionings is a reminder of the heterogeneity within whiteness (and difference). Due to the invisibility in the university and in the wider Australian society in naming whiteness, we invert the black/white binary by positioning ourselves in relation to whiteness as the other. This research shows that models of higher education pedagogy that do not trouble the hidden assumptions underpinning the concepts of identity, difference and the relationship between blackness and whiteness effectively lock out those who have multiple identity and group affiliations.

For Satra, Manuela and me it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain such dualistic thinking for several reasons. Manuela’s whiteness is physically embodied. Although she self-identifies and is identified by others as white, she questions her own
whiteness in the Australian university. Her stories about not belonging to the majority 
white establishment and of being different to her white feminist counterparts and our 
many other references to white friends, colleagues and acquaintances, both draw on 
and simultaneously disrupt the assumption of homogeneity of whiteness. Manuela’s 
explanation of how her white identity works in the university is a reminder that, 
although there is no automatic category women educators of colour, it need not refer 
only to the non-white subject. By also naming whiteness as a colour and including it 
within the descriptor women educators of colour, it is possible to recognise 
unquestioned discourses of race/ethnicity and how they work to construct difference.

Satra and I both have children from a mixed-race union. For us to maintain such 
dualistic thinking of whiteness as the other would have very disturbing implications. 
In the stories about our fair-skinned children, whiteness again is something that is 
embodied as a part of us and an intimate relation. To reject whiteness would be to 
reject our children. In this instance, the mixed-race subject symbolises the multiplicity 
and permeability of race/ethnic identities and the constructedness of these.

The women’s experiences are reflective of discursive practices currently enacted in 
the Australian university. With each meeting and conversation, I quickly learnt that 
we were simply not used to talking candidly about identity, race, ethnicity and colour 
in the university. Our conversations confirmed that in a white majority institutional 
setting the dimension of race/ethnicity presents particular conditions for the women. 
We reiterated in our stories that the identity of dominant majority members (in this 
context, white) is rarely questioned on a race/ethnic basis nor it is questioned in very 
different ways to those who are positioned as the non-white subject and as the other.
This is not to say that white women do not experience discrimination in the university. Rather, my discussions with white women educators and the literature indicate that dominant cultural majority members are less likely to experience the self and the world on a race/ethnic basis (Scheurich, 1997).

That the various markers of difference position us in subordinate ways in the university supports, at least in part, Scheurich and Young’s (Scheurich, 1997) work. The authors argue that the positioning of some groups on the margins in predominantly white English speaking countries has meant that many of these non-white groups have undergone a process of questioning on a racialised basis (Ladson-Billings, 1997, 2000; Scheurich, 1997; Alfred, 2001a, 2001b; Viernes-Turner, 2002). Because racism tends to structure social relations, people of colour are not only treated as a social group, they come to see themselves as defined by that group. Therefore, the authors argue, minority members have little or no choice about the status that is imposed upon them. In contrast to this, members of the white majority tend to experience the self as non-racialised individuals, not defined by their skin colour or another race’s actions and attitudes towards whites (Giroux, 1997b; Scheurich, 1997). It is because of its normative status and discursive influence that the recognition of whiteness becomes important.

Scheurich and Young’s (Scheurich, 1997) conception of whiteness as a homogenised subject position is, however, problematic. Their view of whiteness offers limited potential for discourses of multiplicity and agency to emerge. If we see the women’s narrative constructions of difference and identity as performed in relation to and through the concept of whiteness, rather than in binary oppositional terms, such an approach enables a more complex analysis. It also offers potential for discourses and
practices of agency to evolve as a means of countering overt forms of oppression typified, but by no means singularly defined by, white supremacist and white race privilege positions.

Perhaps what is more useful in the analysis of discourses of race is Scheurich and Young’s (Scheurich, 1997) conceptual framework for thinking about multiple forms of racisms. Their concept of epistemological racism offers a framework for understanding how institutional structures interact with systems of thinking about difference. I argue that if our epistemologies are based on essentialising ways of thinking about identity and difference, then this makes it very difficult to ‘reflect on our social interests and experiences and to examine our own looking positions’ (Pettman, 1994: 47). Without circumspection and introspection, the workings of difference and the subsequent immobilising of some individuals and groups continue to go unnoticed and unaddressed. This also has significant implications for our research and practice.

Importantly, the women’s different positioning practices suggest that whiteness is not always equated with white race privilege (Frankenberg, 1993). These are two separate and very different concepts. For the women in this study, it is not the individual subject position of white that is cause for concern, but rather the need for the university to acknowledge the salience and potency of the politics and desires associated with white race privilege and the interests that this position accrues in society. This is the issue that the women in the study critique. If, as Hage asserts, whiteness is a socially-constructed ideal and a mechanism for the distribution of hope (Hage, 2003), it means that whiteness can be understood as an ideal that anyone could
hope to aspire to - all people and not just whites. It is also an ideal that not everyone ‘can hope [for] with equal confidence’ (Hage, 2003: 50). The women in this study do not aspire to a state of whiteness as such. Collectively, our testimonies recognise the construction of whiteness as an ideal and the important role this plays in their everyday lives and in contemporary Australian society and politics.

This research highlights the importance of and interrelationship between the two halves of the black/white binary. When left unexamined, the interdependency between the two halves renders whiteness invisible. It is in this way that whiteness becomes part of the hegemonic epistemological order in the university (Singh, 1994; Scheurich, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Schick, 2002; Shore, 2003b). The study highlights the need to shift away from essentialising identity in terms of black and white social experience to look at the ways in which whiteness can also be internalised by the other (and by various disenfranchised groups in the university) as a dominant referent and as a normative social experience. In Australia, it is not that the internalisation of an essentialised singular self (with a stable core identity) is essentially good or bad, although there are potentially harmful consequences arising from any exclusionary practices, but rather the ways in which the dominant culture represents others as a problem has particular implications for those whose problem it is in terms of whose social responsibility it is to act on and decide what should be done.

This study provides only a glimmer of insight into the ways in which difference is discursively produced. This is illustrated through the women’s observations and critique of whiteness and multiculturalism in the university. Satra refers to the lack of
discussion about whiteness in the university when it is, concurrently, the *daily bread* or staple diet in the lives of women of colour. Both Kali and Manuela refer to whiteness within multicultural discourse and conference settings. This inquiry reveals that, if used in unproblematic and unquestioning ways, multicultural discourse constructs difference in unitary, singular and hierarchical ways. This has the effect of re-centring whiteness. Such compartmentalisation is not very helpful for alliance-building between different social groups, without which the project of transformational education is dampened if not smothered.

By drawing on CRT methodology, the women’s stories bring into question the *truthfulness* and *objectivity* of dominant narratives that are socially constructed from a normative white perspective, not only in Euro-American universities but also in Australian universities. The application of a critical whiteness framework makes transparent other kinds of racial discourses that circulate within our educational institutions, including multicultural discourse. This invites further exploration of multiculturalism as a dominant narrative in an Australian higher education context.

**Beyond Face Value**

For the women in the study, identity was negotiated in plural ways, confirming Hall’s (1996) argument that boundaries are not self-explanatory, but are permeable, relational, overlapping and continually re-drawn around the self and other. Rather than present a single unitary and fixed identity, all the women referred to the
importance of multiplicity. Multiple identities are shaped in a range of ways, through positioning slippages in language and meaning and through intersectionalities of the dimensions of race/ethnicity, generation, gender and cultural locations.

The study highlights the salience of skin colour and the many meanings associated with this in the Australian university. The significance of visible and less visible markers of difference in the constitution of identity was an emergent theme across the women’s stories. These interacted differently for the individual, depending on her positioning in the institution and the society. Satra’s and my stories about our experiences in the university were frequently structured around skin colour as a highly visible marker of difference. Manuela’s narratives about teaching in the university reveal how whiteness is also multiply marked and marked differently with accent and ethnicity. Kali’s positioning of herself outside of race/ethnic disclosure also complicated the narratives.

The study highlights how different interlocking forms of domination impact on individuals through the internalisation of visible and less visible markers of difference. The women’s stories suggest that some (including Satra and me) might internalise more visible markers of difference so that we become our skin (Jones, 2000), while others (like Kali and Manuela) might not. Therefore, we can assume that lightness and darkness of skin colour forms part of a highly contested repertoire or economy of racialised discourses already circulating in the university and in a wider contemporary Australian social landscape.
Kali and Manuela’s positions, of rejecting blackness as a platform from which to speak, can be seen as a strategic response to the polarity inherent in traditional anti-racist and multicultural discourses. Neither Manuela nor Kali saw themselves as black. This was why they found the descriptor *women educators of colour* problematic. It also highlights the difficulty in shifting discourses of race outside of the US, from the historical context of black, Hispanic and feminist movements there, to the Australian context. The women’s narratives reveal how the terms *black* and *women educators of colour* have an alienating effect for some, including Kali and Manuela, which leads to the creation and fortification of identity boundaries rather than to the troubling of these in any alliance-building efforts.

To assume that skin colour is the only and most important marker of difference, however, would be far too simplistic and was clearly not the case for Kali or Manuela. Also important are less visible markers of difference such as accent, cultural values, articulations of religious and spiritual beliefs and assumptions about what is real, good and true (Scheurich, 1997). Manuela talked about the moment when she opens her mouth to speak in an Australian university classroom situation as significant. This is when her accent gives her away as the other. She differentiates between key social values as learnt from her family and in a range of cultural contexts. For example, the notion of *machismo* was perceived as characteristic of Z culture and was described as a different kind of patriarchal culture than the *macho* culture in Australia.

Kali talked about it being easier to speak as a woman in an Australian context than in her country of birth (Y). She expressed that in Y, expectations of woman in that society were different from expectations in a western setting and that women are often
positioned in Y as *cute*, in a child-like way. This made it important for her to pursue education, to learn about and develop the politicised self. This is signified by Kali’s references to the importance of forming and articulating her *opinion* in her work in the university. Although Kali does not identify in skin terms, her stories about Asian teachers and her treatment as a *passive Asian woman* reveal that this phenotypical marker does impinge on identity and positioning choices. For both Satra and I, skin colour marks us as different before we have a chance to speak.

These stories illustrate how discourses of race, ethnicity gender and culture play a combined constitutive role in identity formation. Given that the diasporic experience involves a process of constant re-evaluation and re-imagining (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002) of identity and culture through the individual’s experiences in a new country (Ghosh & Wang, 2003), in the case of these women, the experience of being marked as other on a racialised basis invites further theorising and debate about why skin colour and race are perceived as unwelcome visitors in the university. I would argue that, in Australia, this is because of its association with racism. Here in the university, it is considered racist even to name colour and race. Clearly, visible and other less visible markers of difference are important not only in identity formation but also in the negotiation of power relations in the university. From the women’s stories we can assume that the naming of skin colour is a topic that is not well received within the Australian university or by all women educators of colour. This calls for further research which explores the many colours of diversity in the university and the wider society.
The Vicissitudes of Multiculturalism

Many different views and standpoints inform what is a considerable body of work on multicultural education. Rather than provide an extensive review of all the different multicultural perspectives or develop a new multicultural or anti-racism educational model, my inquiry focuses on an under-researched area - the connection between identity, positioning and meaning making about higher education pedagogy in an Australian context.

This inquiry presented a unique opportunity to develop cross-boundary dialogue, which has had a significant impact on me as the researcher and on the participants. It presented enormous challenges for all of us to try to understand if our experiences were unique or indicative of a broader shared experience that went beyond the individual’s experience. We talked about the lack of space in the university for exploring race/ethnic identity in relation to knowledge production and the lack of available options for the women to speak outside of a multicultural discourse. In particular, Kali’s statement ‘Multiculturalism, I hate that word’ highlights the gap between state-led multicultural policy, people’s lived realities and the social changes which have occurred since the inception of this policy in the mid-1970s. Here, I argue that multiculturalism has become a commonsense discourse that tends to construct difference in simplistic ways and does not reflect the complexity of people’s identities and social realities at this time.

An interesting recurrent feature that weaves across the narratives is the identification of hierarchical ranking and contestation that occurs between differently situated
race/ethnic identities and communities. There was a common acknowledgment that even within so-called *multicultural circles*, European identities and knowledge perspectives are more widely recognised compared to Asian, Latin American, African and Indigenous perspectives. For example, Kali and Manuela referred to multicultural conferences that effectively separate race/ethnic communities on the basis of incommensurable differences. Kali referred to the dominance of European perspectives at multicultural forums and to power struggles and censorship within multicultural studies scholarship circles and among staff in the faculty where she worked. Manuela talked about the dominance of white majority perspectives within the university and in the field of Australian studies.

Across the research conversations, the women also acknowledged the presence of the indigenous/non-indigenous binary in the university. Manuela elaborated on the history of social policy and management that has constructed the indigenous and multicultural in oppositional and even competing terms. In this study, the women’s discussion about multiculturalism in the Australian university tells us that multicultural discourse masks the way in which the notion of ethnicity is preferred over race, compounding the silence around race. Kali’s assertion that ‘we are all different’ highlights this point, resonating with Hall’s (1992a) argument that we are all ethnic. That is, the ethnic label applies to everyone, whites included. Overall, the women’s stories suggest that uncritical multicultural discourse does not enable us to see how and when identity is racialised or when the notion of authenticity slips in under the guise of ethnicity.

These women’s stories confirm that:
... current conceptualizations of multiculturalism are inadequate to address the new landscape of identities, relations, and power in a globalized, post-colonial, increasingly postmodern world dominated economically and culturally by transnational corporations (Arber, 2000: 898-9).

In Australia, the discourse of multiculturalism has a de-racialising effect. The fallout from this, as Kali points out in stories about her Asian colleagues, is that the way in which difference is currently practised in the university is often derived from a deficit model that assumed difference is a disadvantage. What is often overlooked is the question of who is included and excluded in the generic multicultural category. The women in the study tended not to use the widely accepted NESB and CALD acronyms in reference to the self, rejecting these labels because of their tendency to de-racialise and therefore at the same time reproduce identity in singular and fixed terms. The women perceived these existing labels as inadequate for signifying the complexity of diasporic identities, social realities and epistemologies. Instead they employed multiple race and ethnic identity navigations, including black woman, mixed, Asian woman, [Z]-woman, Latina and white woman. Satra and I frequently self-identified as black women whereas Kali and Manuela did not use this reference to their skin colour at all. Each of the women expressed interest in exploring and developing multiple group memberships with different communities, not all of them race/ethnic groups but other kinds of communities. The use of labels was not simply to define, but as a politicised process of constructing knowledge about the self, others and the world according to context and situation.
The underlying implication of my own, Kali and Manuela’s critiques of multicultural politics is that, when identity is reified in singular ethnic terms, this assumes straightforward social group memberships and a freedom of choice to identify in terms of traditional criteria such as country of birth, ancestry, language and cultural heritage (Gunew, 1994; Hage, 1998a, 1998b, 2003). Obviously, these are important to the women in the study, but because of their diasporic experiences, identity has evolved so that plurality and multiplicity have become more important than singularity (Ghosh & Wang, 2003). This leaves alternative identities and epistemologies that are influenced by multiple cultural influences in a vacuum.

A reading of identity in singular terms does not acknowledge the lack of positioning choices that are available to the women in the university, which the concepts of singularity and individualism actually help to create. Here I subscribe to that view that cultural practices are dynamic, fluid, socially and historically constructed and never static (Bhabha, 1990; Hall, 1992a, in Laubscher & Powell, 2003). This view enables us to recognise that people do not construct singular notions of identity and self from ethnicity alone but from multiple subject positions where insectionalities of class, gender, age, religion and a broader multicultural social mandate complicates identity to the extent that all of these forces impinge on identity construction, and that people code-switch depending on the context and demands of the situation at hand (Laubscher & Powell, 2003).

The study affirms the importance of diasporic experiences in meaning making and knowledge construction in the university. The women’s stories illustrate the ways in which multiple histories and migratory experiences resonate but are also very distinct.
Kali spoke about the enormous differences in her experience of being a woman in her country of birth (Y) compared to being a woman in Australia. Manuela’s stories about her country of birth (Z) and her experiences as a migrant and as a political exile take on very different historical undercurrents. Exile implies a lack of choice and of being ousted or fleeing from one’s country of birth, whereas migration usually implies a greater freedom of choice. Satra spoke about her mixed-race parents and her mixed-race parenting experiences and living in English speaking white majority countries. I too spoke about not belonging to a singular race/ethnic group and shared the mixed-race theme with Satra. My migratory experience differed in that I was the only one of us who migrated as a child. As the only woman who had not experienced motherhood and who had lived away from her family for a long time, Kali spoke about the importance of connection with multiple communities. We all made comparisons between our experiences in Australia, in the university and in other geographic locations around the world.

In summary, this inquiry identifies struggles for epistemic dominance within and between various marginalised groups in the university and suggests that race/ethnic identity does not belong to the individual’s realm of experience. It is a key tension within the university. This suggests that uncritical multicultural discourse has a constitutive and homogenising effect on identity and social relations. Yet, the multicultural narrative is deeply embedded in the fabric of the Academy itself within dominant research and teaching epistemologies and in the wider society (Arber, 1997, 2000; Obidah, 2000). The question arising from this finding is, ‘How can universities develop processes for recognising and valuing alternative epistemologies and
identities within the current global geopolitical climate and the new knowledge economy paradigm?'

Emotion in the Academy

While an in-depth analysis of emotion is outside the scope of this research, the women’s narratives demonstrate that emotions and feelings are not divorced from university practices. Values and ‘presumptions about the real, the true and the good’ (Scheurich, 1997: 6) are bound up with emotions. By including expressions, silences, pauses, the repetition and the tone of the women’s voices, I have tried to capture some of this dimension in the field stories.

In the broader society and in the university, not all groups and individuals are positioned equally within the institution. Consequently, we construct our selves as active (rather than passive) participants in the self-identification process (Alfred, 2001a, 2001b). Therefore, the concept of multiple identities has important ontological and epistemological significance. Because official socio-cultural demarcation does not acknowledge or affirm the lived realities of people who occupy multiple subject positions (Ifekwunigwe, 1997), the practice of multiple identity positioning becomes significant for a range of reasons. It is a strategy used to counter essentialising classification and categorisation of the ethnic other and a means of interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning current discourses, policies and practices relating to understandings of diversity and what education is in the university.
In sharing stories of our everyday experience in the university, the women’s comments confirm the very powerful impact of symbolic violence, multiple intersecting forms of oppression and the lack of institutional space and mechanisms for addressing this in the Australian university. For example, at an epistemic, ontological and axiological level, the naming of whiteness presented many tensions for us as each of us has to make everyday spur-of-the-moment decisions in various situations in the university on whether or not to name whiteness or challenge overt and covert forms of oppression in teaching and other contexts within the university. On the one hand, to remain silent would imply a complicity in maintaining forms of oppression. On the other hand, to speak out could also incur other kinds of personal and emotional injury. This is a double-edged sword which the women negotiate on an everyday basis, sometimes with playfulness and mirth, at other times with a sense of heaviness and exhaustion.

The issue of personal injury is strong in many of the research conversations. Both Satra and Manuela encapsulated a sense of tiredness in the telling of their stories through their register of disillusionment and outrage at the racism and sexism that happens in the university. In Satra’s narrative, efforts to surround herself with a small circle of non-white friends with whom she does not have to continually position and re-position herself as the other or not the other makes whiteness visible. Kali also talked about a Buddhist notion of self as important in her everyday life, giving her a sense of self worth and purpose when dealing with life’s invariable changes. Initially, however, Kali talked about not feeling threatened by others or vulnerable. When I asked her if she would raise the issues we talked about with others in the university, she acknowledged that she would exercise caution with peers. In doing so, she
conceded that perhaps she did feel the need to be cautious in particular contexts, particularly with staff, but not so much with her students. If anything, this illustrates the ambiguity and difficulty in capturing the subtle ways in which dominant systems of thought can structure relations of power in everyday life and even access to life opportunities.

At different times and in different conversations, Kali, Manuela and I also acknowledged the importance of having and living diversity in one’s relationships with people and communities outside of the university and being able to immerse ourselves in a space where multiplicity rather than monoculturalism and whiteness are the norm. Therefore, the women’s narratives suggest that, in the Australian university, homogenous and unitary categories of race and ethnicity have a silencing effect on the women in different contexts and at certain times. This has a bearing on their emotional and physical wellbeing as well as their conditions of everyday life and work.

The women all locate and create safe spaces as a form of resistance to objectification as the other (Alfred, 2001a, 2001b) and to distance the self from the damaging aspects of different forms of oppression and subordination (Viernes-Turner, 2002). Manuela’s use of the protective cloak metaphor and Satra’s telling of anguish and hurt experienced when speaking out in the university suggest an absence of and a need to create safe dialogic spaces for thinking about and challenging institutional and epistemological forms of domination, including racism and sexism. Kali explained that multiple and simultaneous community memberships and affiliations reduced her
loneliness and isolation, which was one of the reasons for her becoming a competitive athlete and for her frequent travel.

All of the women spoke about the need to belong to various communities in response to their feelings and experiences of marginalisation. Satra spoke of making a conscious effort to surround herself with other people of colour in her anti-racist training, in the workplace and particularly so in her private life. Like Kali, she has created similar networks in and outside the university, not just as a hobby, but as a strategy for articulating and developing identity and to feel validated. In subsequent conversations (outside the official research conversations), Manuela explained that it was important to her to surround herself with friends outside work who were accepting of diversity. Her cloak metaphor suggests a feeling of vulnerability when inside the university space. Kali’s story about other Asian colleagues and their experiences tell us that the de-racialising discourse of cultural competency enables the treatment of Asian teachers as second-class on the grounds that they up-graded their teaching qualifications on-the-job. Yet, in the Australian university, the acquisition of formal teaching qualifications is not a generic professional requirement for all tutors and academics.

Manuela’s story about missing out on a lecturing position tells us that the implementation of policy aimed at addressing sexism and racism is difficult to put into practice. In Manuela’s case, the university turned down her appeal to investigate possible bias and discrimination in the decision not to employ her as an academic in the department where she had worked as a casual tutor for many years. The male staff member’s influence in this decision was left unaddressed by her peers in the
university. Satra’s stories about the ways in which university recruitment processes favoured dominant ways of knowing also confirm that, despite equity and diversity policies, whiteness is embedded within managerial processes and structures (Wakeman et al., 2000; Shore, 2003a). Together, these narratives about identity and positioning confirm that while diversity and equity policies might be in place within the university, it is difficult to effect change in these areas.

Overall, the stories reveal the very real limitations to the women’s freedom of expression. This is reflected in the lack of recognition and attention paid to the experiences of diversely situated educators in Australian higher education. Despite these constraints, people, including the women in this study, have access to resources that enable them to resist and also subvert practices of silencing and othering in the university. That such a process is fraught with stumbling blocks simply affirms Arber’s (1997) assertion that, if discourses about race and racism are silenced and masked by euphemism, then the definition of who is actually described by multicultural policies no longer has solid ground and flounders completely.

In this research, multiple and mixed-race identities have an important ontological and axiological function. The articulation of race/ethnicity and multiple identities in the identification process is more than simply an expression of a lifestyle choice or taste (Dolby, 2000a, 2000b). For these women, the self-identification process, in plural rather than singular terms, can be seen as a form of agency, a form of political and personal empowerment and a means of transformation (Rassool, 1997; Stewart Brush, 2001; Hua, 2003). The study confirms that experiences of marginalisation do not always translate into a passive acceptance of exclusion, a presumed permanent status
of victimhood nor a conscious political act of speaking out in all public contexts in the university.

As the women experienced the university as a place where their multiple identities and ways of knowing were not valued, this created a sense of alienation at times. It was for this reason that the women actively developed multiple and simultaneous memberships and affiliations with communities outside the university for a sense of belonging. For example, Satra had been a member of a national committee for multiculturalism and a lobbyist for various race/ethnic collectives outside and within the university. Kali was involved in a range of sports and environmental activist groups. Manuela regularly visited friends and family overseas and in Australia. I have been involved in writing and acting in theatre and film to promote race/ethnic inclusion in the Arts and on Australian television. This was a positive outcome arising from our experiences of displacement and perhaps also arising from the diasporic experience itself.

Scott (2003) writes about agency and the problematic positioning of women of colour on the margins of the American university. Scott argues that many scholars of colour, in trying to articulate their previously silenced voices, are often so caught up in this task that it is difficult to pause and question the location of diversity and the effects of the speakers’ and listeners’ racialised positions. This impinges on the educators’ ability to engage in broader political struggles to effect social change in the university. The black faculty members thought that their scholarship was trivialised or overlooked by the majority of the audiences in the university. The author argues that it is this realisation which paradoxically enables many to exercise a self-perceived
privilege and freedom of expression as it has the effect of liberating the ‘Black faculty members to teach whatever and however they want, understanding that their methods … will never be accepted by the mainstream’ (Scott, 2003: 218). Similarly, the women in my study were able to resist their subordinated status by working within and from the margins and to explore and push boundaries around ways of thinking about difference.

I suspected that our stories would have a strong emotional content, which turned out to be the case. Autoethnographic writing was a useful mechanism for recognising the problematic world investigated by the researcher (Holt, 2003) and capturing the intimate aspects of research conversations, including the emotional dimensions of storytelling and working for social change in the university. An inquiry that focused on a purely statistical method of investigation, or a written structured questionnaire sent in the mail to the women, would not have yielded this kind of descriptive data.

The women’s stories suggest that emotions do play a pivotal role in the reproduction and transformation of relationships of power and, therefore, have direct application to university practices. Emotion was not always associated with hardship but also with the women’s enjoyment of personal achievements and efforts to enact their political and humanitarian beliefs in education for social change. It can be said that their beliefs acted as a guiding life philosophy and a framework for higher education practices.

In my study I have merely drawn attention to the emotional dimension of the research situation and social change pedagogy as one of many emergent and common themes across the women’s stories and as a topic worthy of further investigation. The focus of
my study was primarily race/ethnicity. To contextualise emotion in this instance, I refer to the work of social archaeologist Tarlow (2000). In critiquing cognitive, functional and biological explanations of emotion, Tarlow suggests that researchers need to move beyond the binary of biological versus cultural explanations of emotions and acknowledge the importance of emotions in archaeological research. She argues that if emotion is central to human experience and the way society works, then critical awareness of our assumptions about emotions is necessary for deeper analysis not only of the past but also of contemporary social relations. This is, of course, also applicable to educational research. This further affirms the importance of questioning the multiplicity of ways of framing difference.

This study supports Tarlow’s argument that emotional experiences give meaning and force to social contexts. In this light, we cannot presume that educative practice and reform-making are emotion-free, value-neutral, rational enterprises. Rather, universities and individual practitioners have much to gain from the concept of the situated imagination (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002) for its capacity to enable a deeper understanding and take seriously concepts such as emotion, spirituality, cultural difference and whiteness in higher education reform. Educational studies that focus on the individual outside of the prevailing socio-historical context are not able to address or challenge inequity in relations of power. The individual life is related to the wider social, civilisational, historical and political context in which he/she is situated. In particular, this inquiry highlights the relationality between emotion, values and axiology. These are embedded in university practices. More research on the political and ethical implications of university practices, including governance,
policy-making and pedagogical practices, would illuminate our understandings about emotion in educative professional practice.

**Discourses of Spirituality**

In listening to and reading the transcripts of the research conversations, I noticed yet another silence. Across the research conversations there were few references to religion. Kali’s brief reference to Buddhism and a post-research conversation with Manuela about Catholicism led me to explore literature on education and spirituality. Spiritual discourses emerged as an important resource from which the women construct meaning around the self, identity and pedagogy.

The notion of spirituality in higher education studies is an under-researched area. Rothberg (2000) explains how the terms *spirituality* and *religion* are rooted in western academic traditions, arguing that because they are used in very different ways historically and in contemporary discourses, these concepts and terms sometimes do not easily translate into other socio-cultural and historical contexts. In the *western and science tradition* of academia, these are seen as belonging to the subjective and outside of mainstream knowledge. This at least partly explained my difficulty in finding a way of thinking and writing about what struck me as a shared reverberation of optimism and hope across the women’s stories.

To first explain what I mean by spirituality, I refer to Dei’s discussion of knowledge construction. Using a discursive anti-colonial framework, he argues that spirituality is not about subscribing to ‘any particular high moral/religious order [or] proselytizing
on behalf of any religion’ (Dei, 2002: 3). Rather, there is an enormous diversity in views about spirituality within different communities. He also posits that the project of transformative education ‘involves a deep shift and understanding of the self and personhood’ (p. 3). This he sees as a collective engagement closely related to spirituality. For Dei, values, ideational beliefs and practices are evaluated in specific historical and community contexts for the purpose of societies to create ‘their own moral tone’ (p. 6). To illustrate this, he distinguishes between African knowledge systems and western knowledge systems and shows the relationship of social values within each and the ways in which values are prioritised differently. Dei writes that African knowledge systems can be seen as prioritising responsibilities over rights; community before the individual; and connection with land through coexistence rather than domination (Dei, 2002). Moreton-Robinson (2000b) also juxtaposes Australian Aboriginal and traditional western and scientific systems of thought. Both examples highlight the very different values underpinning these systems of thought. As Scheurich and Young (Scheurich, 1997) explain, however, within the Eurocentric Academy the western scientific is privileged over indigenous and other kinds of race/ethnic knowledge perspectives.

In my study, the notion of hope emerged as important in the project of envisioning education for social change. Rather than talking about individual career ambitions, the women spoke about the purpose of higher education in a holistic way. That is, education was not simply about getting ahead in the world or the women’s acquisition of wealth, status and power. Their stories revolved around the search for meaning of the self and work for social change. Satra reflected on how the search for meaning has become more important to her later in life. Kali spoke about her exploration of
Buddhist principles (excluded from the final version of the thesis due to editing constraints). Underpinning Kali’s philosophical, rather than religious, approach was the assumption that we all suffer from ignorance and are responsible for our own learning. Through the conversations, the women returned many times to the topic of life as education and education as an integral aspect of life or a lifelong learning process.

In the university, spirituality is a concept that is more often associated with theology as subject knowledge. It does not appear in university outcomes-based learning objectives or strategic mission statements. Although the spiritual theme was common to all the women’s stories, given its taboo status in academia as belonging to the new age and therefore unscientific realm of inquiry, my analysis of the discourse of spirituality in the study is as follows. I have assumed that the discourse of spirituality relates not so much to ideas and practices of the worship of any deity, but to the pursuit of philosophical, ideological and intellectual inquiry for individual and collective meaning making purposes. In this light, spiritual discourse can be seen as an epistemological tool and a consciousness-raising project, deriving in part from the women’s lived experience in different geographic locations, of various forms of oppression and of privilege and access to social and intellectual capital. Spirituality is therefore a deep philosophical questioning precipitated by lived experience. That is, spiritual discourse pertains to:

[O]ur self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative
approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (Dei, 2002: 1, citing Sullivan, 2001).

Further research exploring the significance of spirituality in a transnational context would offer more in-depth understandings of this topic than my inquiry. This study does, however, bring attention to normalised discursive framings of women in the majority of Australian higher education studies, which tend to construct women within neo-liberal humanistic and traditional Eurocentric frameworks. These do not recognise the spiritual and emotional dimensions as valid resources for meaning making in a higher education pedagogy context.

**Mum’s the Word**

In her analysis of gender equity in Commonwealth higher education, Morley (2003) draws attention to the need to redefine the cultural meanings and values of women’s work. Morley suggests that in the majority of gender-related studies on women in Commonwealth universities, women’s work and career ambitions are tied more to the domestic than to the worldly arenas.

This study offers particular insights that are not typically documented higher education literature from high-income Commonwealth countries, including Australia. The women in this study are related to both the worldly and the domestic spheres. These are not seen as separate but as interrelated. Unlike gender discourse, that constructs women’s work in terms of divisional labour, and rather than viewing family and caring responsibilities as detracting from work for social change, the
women in the study construct work as intricately related to family, parenting and motherhood. These are seen as complex, demanding, but also pleasurable and enriching experiences from which the women draw a broader sense of purpose and meaning about their place in the world and relationship to others. I have deliberately chosen not to pursue an analysis along the gender/caring lines. For a detailed analysis of the ethic of care, I refer the reader to O’Brien-Hallstein’s (1999) incisive discussion of how this plays out variably in communication and standpoint theory. Although I have assumed that the notion of care may be gendered, this does not necessarily have only negative connotations for the women in the study.

Across the research conversations there were few references to individual career ambitions. Satra spoke briefly about her desire to leave the university and explore new work opportunities. Kali and Manuela talked about their interest in exploring different work opportunities within universities. I spoke about the difficulties of securing a permanent position within universities. Overall, however, the women’s narratives of social change practice are articulated through discourses of social justice, motherhood and the concept of community building. Our stories indicate that identity formation is not only shaped through the institution of the family and the convergence of intergenerational histories (Ghosh & Wang, 2003), but also by the experience of geographic displacement.

A common theme across Satra, Manuela’s and my narratives is the experience of motherhood as transformative. Three out of the four women were, or had been, single parents. In my analysis of these stories, I assumed that when we referred to a common experience of birth and parenting, the child becomes a symbolic embodiment of time,
mortality and a connection with a much wider family than our biological one. In the research conversations, discussion about our families, children and education for social change overlapped. Kali spoke about her regret at not having undergone the experience of motherhood and the importance of her identity as a daughter. Satra talked about her relationship with her daughter and her daughter’s awareness of her own whiteness in relation to Satra’s darkness. My stories about parenting also raised the mixed-race issue. In talking about the importance of having frank and open discussion with our children about race and ethnicity, we drew parallels with our anti-racism praxis. During my conversation with Manuela, she became conscious for the first time of the link between her motherhood experience and her philosophy about higher education practice.

It could also be argued that these women’s experiences draw from traditional western feminist values. That is, we have benefited from the feminist movement to become materially self-supporting. Given the single parenting experience, financial and other kinds of independence were seen as important, as was the development and maintenance of informed politicised understandings of the self and the world. Clearly, all the women had access to a range of capital and privileges, providing them with the freedoms to act on and draw on these in their everyday public and private lives (and to critique the university). The values and the ways they prioritise these may resonate with others who are similarly positioned, whose position of privilege and material wealth affords similar (or greater) benefits (i.e. income, status, knowledge and access). In talking about themselves, however, these women acknowledged the wider implications of their individual circumstances and experiences.
Satra highlighted the struggles of Aboriginal women in Australian society. In her reference to the experience of her Asian colleagues, Kali acknowledged the impact of forces of oppression on others in the university and society. Manuela’s stories of the personal can be extrapolated to a political reading of socio-historical circumstances in Australia and in other countries where she has lived. In doing so, the women acknowledged that for those who have different experiences, or who are positioned differentially in less privileged positions and have no or more limited mobility, traditional feminist values and priorities may have little or very different meanings.

The practice of race/ethnic boundary-crossing is a theme that filters across the women’s stories. Each of the women expressed an acute awareness of when they were switching from an outsider to an insider position. This was used as a tool for challenging hidden assumptions about difference. Satra spoke about what she thought and felt when she challenged staff about racism. Kali referred to the power invested in her position as an educator (and an other) that enables her to negotiate ignorance; her own and her students. In Manuela’s telling of her switching from an outsider position (the establishment) to an insider position (a fellow other with her students), she reveals her observation and analysis of what she does and how relations of power work in the university.

Collectively, the stories indicate that the availability and choices of race/ethnic identities in the Australian social context, including the university, are inadequate and limiting for the women. Therefore, the self-identification process for these women has a subversive function. The insider/outsider identity switching and the women’s own embodied differences are important elements of their pedagogic practice. The self-
identification process for the women is complicated by the fact that official socio-cultural demarcation in the Census does not acknowledge or affirm the lived realities of people who occupy multiple subject positions.

**Debating Representation in the University**

My inquiry confirms the findings of international gender equity research that reveals a pattern of gendered vertical and horizontal segregation within the university (Blattel-Mink, 2001) and the disparity in representation of women across the university (horizontally), especially within certain caring vocations such as training to be teachers and nurses (Burton, 1997; Blattel-Mink, 2001; Morley, 2003). While the women in the study had managed to secure longer-term contracts, they identified recent changes in work practices and workplace conditions arising from restructuring in terms of the significant increase in the casualisation of staff. They acknowledged that this impacted disproportionately on women who make up the majority of the pool of part-time and casual staff in the university (Burton, 1997; Blattel-Mink, 2001; Morley, 2003). Overall, the findings of this study support the argument that forces of globalisation, which have driven rapid restructuring in the higher education sector, have a negative impact on women in higher education (Blattel-Mink, 2001; Morley, 2003).

This study indicates that vertical and horizontal segregation occurs not only in low-income but also in high-income Commonwealth countries including Australia. More importantly, this research highlights the need to re-configure race and ethnicity into Australian gender equity studies and in general higher education studies. The
women’s stories contribute new insights relating to the issue of access and equity in the university.

At the time of the research conversations, three of the four women were employed at senior lecturer levels and I was the only one employed at the junior and casual end of the scale. Satra spoke about her work with academic and general staff on higher education policy and her ability to effect change outside of the classroom. At the time of the study, she was undergoing some turmoil over whether or not to leave the university and work elsewhere, believing she had already contributed to changes within the university and was ready for new challenges in her work. Although Manuela is a historian by training, she was unable to access positions in this discipline and therefore felt she had yet to find an academic post which enabled her to critique the field of Australian studies from her particular perspective. She later changed jobs and moved to another university under the verbal understanding that she would initially be employed to teach LOTE with a view to creating her own course based on her research interests in the identity of politics. This did not eventuate and she now works in an administrative and teaching role.

Kali was teaching LOTE at the time of our research conversations and was able to broaden her research interests to environmental politics. During the last five years of writing my thesis, I have worked in three different universities, mostly in a casual tutoring capacity and, more recently, in a project management capacity on a short contract basis. While the women were able to access senior positions in the university, the fact that they moved sideways or out of the university is worthy of further inquiry. The study suggests that while it was important and possible for the women to gain
entry to the university, the relative lack of race/ethnic diversity among faculty placed them under a range of pressures and constraints, which may have contributed to their movement sideways within, and in mine and Satra’s case out of, the university. Therefore, the study suggests that the difficulties we experienced related to both inequity in access to higher education and inequity in treatment within the university (Brown, 2004).

The study reveals that the women are part of a comparatively small visible minority. The race/ethnic group affiliations articulated by the women are smaller in number than more established and larger groups in Australia such as migrants from Europe, including Italy, and various parts of South-East Asia, including Vietnam (Kalantzis & Cope, 1986; Hage, 1998b). Although the diversity and numbers of university students has increased enormously in the last decade, this is not reflected to the same extent in staff populations. This invites debate in the Australian university about the value of faculty diversity and possible strategies for addressing the imbalance between student and staff demographics.

The fact that all of us managed to enter the university and move within it is a positive sign, but it is too early to reach any conclusions on how far and where this access to the university will go. A longitudinal study would be able to chart the career movements of women educators of difference within and beyond the university to investigate the issue of access in greater depth than was possible in this study. This inquiry, however, does reveal that while women are able to enter and move around inside the university, the vertical and horizontal mobility of women of difference is complicated by intersecting social divisions of race and gender. This is illustrated by
Manuela’s difficulties in moving horizontally into her original field of study, Australian studies, by my own employment history as a casual tutor for the past seven years, and by Satra and Kali’s stories about the kinds of resistance they’ve encountered in their work in the university.

As a group, the women shared the perception that the conservative political climate in the Australian university places very peculiar demands on the educator/researcher of difference. Each of the women worked at a different site throughout the country; however, all of them noted that the further up the university hierarchy, the less likely one is to find women (especially women of difference). It is partly because of the lack of race/ethnic diversity of staff, in contrast to the diverse student population, that it was hard for the women to assume a colour-blind position or be unconscious of race/ethnicity (Arrington, 2004). Although they were able to access senior lecturing positions (with the exception of myself), the women found themselves to be visibly different or on show in the workplace. Because the women found themselves positioned as the other in many contexts in the university, race and ethnicity were unavoidable aspects of their everyday lives.

The research suggests that access to key gatekeeping positions and mobility within the university are important but also very difficult to attain for most women educators and particularly so for women of difference. This is exacerbated by recent restructuring in the higher education sector, which has seen a steady decrease in funding and job opportunities, and growing job insecurity where tenured employment opportunities for academics are fewer and far between (Nixon et al., 2001; Zipin & Brennan, 2003). The aforementioned findings confirm that not only is inequity in access a key issue
facing Australian universities today, but also the inequity in treatment of different groups in the university.

Underpinning all the women’s stories about immobility within the university is the issue of power. The study reveals that power operates at an individual and systemic level in the Australian university. The women identified power differentials between the dominant majority senior management and minority faculty who work in the university. While the women were able to attain fairly senior positions, these positions were not seen as accruing the same potential to enact power over and for others. For example, Manuela and Satra talked about power as located in job titles and positions, the use of race/ethnic language euphemisms and how these accrue currency in terms of what counts as legitimate and credible knowledge and ways of knowing. Satra’s stories about working with white and non-white co-workers illustrate the difficulties of working in a space where white privilege prevails. Manuela’s story about not being able to work in the field of Australian studies in the past decade is reflective of both power imbalances between men and women in the university and the impact of race and gender in her particular circumstances. Also, Manuela and Kali talked about whose knowledge counts in the university and the lack of recognition of different ways of thinking/knowing and producing knowledge.

The theme of power relations in the university is linked across the research conversations to epistemological racism. The study highlights the ways in which relations of power can also be enacted at an epistemological level in teaching, policymaking and the organisation of structures and processes in the university. In the Australian Academy, this kind of epistemic dominance is an example of a systemic
and racialised university practice, which frames what we can/cannot know, how we can/cannot know and therefore how we create knowledge. Discourses of whiteness and difference are part of this dominant epistemology. It is through the normalisation of white epistemologies that alternative epistemologies and knowledge perspectives are rendered invisible. In this way, relations of power were reported by the women as operating at a covert and informal level through discourses and epistemologies of whiteness.

This was reiterated by Manuela when she talked about power being located at key decision-making levels in the university with the (white) establishment and that these positions were occupied predominantly by white men and women. She also talked about systems of thinking within the field of Australian history and Australian studies that tend to homogenise the other. Kali talked about the ways in which systems of thinking about difference created a hierarchy of English native speakers above speakers of other languages in the university where she worked. Satra talked about the silence around whiteness within senior ranks of the university, which filtered through to recruitment and promotion processes so that alternative knowledges, skills, experience and epistemologies remain unrecognised and unrewarded. Manuela, Kali and I identified the discourse of multiculturalism as implicated in the enactment of Australian race politics within higher education institutions.

The study highlights the operation of epistemological racism through stories about the centrality of whiteness in the university. This positions alternate situated knowledge perspectives and identities at the periphery of the university. It is because of the lack of recognition of alternative knowledge perspectives and the diversity of cultural experiences and epistemologies, that it was important for the women to develop a
sense of empowerment through their personal identity and the identification process. From these insights, we can deduce that, if power is understood only in individualistic and cognitive terms as merely an expression of an individual’s personality and behaviour, then this tends to locate the source of oppression in the individual. Alternatively, power can be seen as located in structures and processes. Such an understanding of power assumes that structural oppression can be changed only through changing institutional structures and recruitment processes. This view assumes that power lies in legislation and enforcement.

It would seem, therefore, that power to effect social change can be enacted in multiple ways, through the individual and also through systems, so that it becomes a social force that gains momentum and currency through specific social, historical and political context and yet is difficult to pin down and capture. This research tells us that although women of difference are able to attain fairly senior positions, these positions do not accrue the same potential to enact power over, and for, others. Although the women are aware of the salary increases accompanying vertical mobility, the desire to attain executive positions was not a shared objective for these women, nor is it necessarily shared by all women educators of colour. For example, Kali and Manuela did not talk about aspiration for promotion upwards but about sideways movement into new knowledge areas. In contrast, Satra said she was not interested in academic pursuits, but expressed a desire to explore opportunities (vertical movement) outside the university.

Overall, the women identified a need to locate and create spaces in and beyond the university, to access a wider sphere of influence that was needed to challenge various
forms of oppression. The dimensions of emotions, spirituality and motherhood in the study were valuable resources for meaning, perhaps made more important because of the women’s marginalisation in the workplace. In other word, discourses of gender equity framed in relation to career progression, promotions and hierarchy are inadequate. The meaning of work for these women was drawn from resources outside of this context, not because of any deficit on their part but because these do not account for identity in all its complexities. The women’s full range of relations and identities do not fit into this economic rationalist paradigm.

**Race and Ethnicity**

My study confirms that race/ethnic identity is consistently bound up with meaning making around social change pedagogy. For these women, the purpose of higher education pedagogy was to question and challenge epistemic dominance. For example, Manuela’s social change practice was about living with and challenging symbolic violence. Kali spoke about ignorance and the importance of lifelong learning and referred to the way in which some students spoke to her very slowly and made stereotypic assumptions about her knowing less than them. She explained that this merely made her more determined to challenge that kind of assumption. Being marked as different in the classroom and her department was directly linked to her motivation and commitment to teaching for social change.

Drawing on her parenting experience, Satra pointed to the importance of normalising discussion as an important practice at home, work and in teaching and policy-making. Manuela also linked motherhood to her teaching practice, again linking personal
experience with pedagogy. Across the research conversations, the women shared the view that social change pedagogy was about reducing ignorance. They saw potential for the elimination of oppression and suffering not only through understanding and respecting others’ differences, but by addressing epistemological racism in the university. This involves rendering visible the ways in which difference is constructed relationally so blackness is always constructed through whiteness and vice versa. It also requires critical reflection on the hidden assumptions underpinning university practices.

Another recurrent theme across the research conversations was the experience of racism - another fissure produced by the silence around race and ethnicity. All the women talked about racism as a critical barrier in the everyday lives of many minority groups. The experience of racism is a recurrent theme in educational research in the US and the UK (Osler, 1997; Bariso, 2001, Viernes-Turner, 2002). In the study by Modood et al. (1994), racism in the attitude of white people was identified by all of the women as being an important deciding factor as to whether or not and how they would identity themselves in different teaching and learning situations in the university.

Across all the research conversations, the women talked about experiencing individual, institutional and epistemological forms of racism. Understandings of the nature of oppression were linked to multiple sources. This confirms that a narrow singular conceptual framework for understanding racism would shed a limited light on the effects of multiple and simultaneous forms of oppression and racism in the
women’s everyday lives, thereby lending itself to a more celebratory and individualistic analysis than a situated and historical one.

All the narratives refer to the presence of racialised institutional structures and procedures of the university, such as in the hiring and firing, promotion and (lack of) representation of people of colour at senior decision-making levels. These are seen as favouring whites and males. When talking about institutional forms of racism, the source of racism is partially located within the institutional structures and processes of the university. Satra’s narratives about being a member on interview panels and various committees within the university and a witness to the enactment of racialised recruitment and policy-making practices locate the source of racism within individuals and the structures of the university. In contrast, in my conversations with Kali and Manuela, we tended to talk more about epistemological forms of racism or prevailing ways of thinking about difference in essentialising terms.

If oppression is framed in individualistic and behavioural terms, then the nature and source of oppression is partly located within the individual. The conceptualisation of racism solely in individualistic terms is, however, inadequate. It does not account for the range of the women’s experiences in the university. The implication of assuming racism can be fixed by topping up individuals, particularly in a pedagogic context, is over-simplistic and potentially counter-productive. Such an approach tends to locate problems within individuals and groups (e.g. on a racialised or other kinds of discriminatory basis) rather than on understanding how power imbalances, within specific, situated, systemic, historical contexts and in epistemological terms, are created.
The inquiry brings attention to the presence of multiple forms of racism, with particular emphasis on epistemological racism in the university, through highlighting Australian multicultural discourse. This was seen as a convenient vehicle for epistemological racism through its promotion of a language of difference, which reinforces singularity in identity and separation of social groups by incommensurable differences. It was identified as one of the key barriers the women in the study encountered in their work in the university.

By bringing race and ethnicity into the research framework, this research tells us that every discourse makes available a number of identities and positionings. The study suggests that universities cannot afford to frame race/ethnic identity in singular terms. The women’s references to multicultural discourse as a dominant and de-racialising discourse suggest that this maintains rather than dispels the silence around race and ethnicity in the Australian university. While multiculturalism is an important platform from which marginalised knowledges have been given voice, when combined with dominant discourses of whiteness, this tends to frame identities and epistemologies in terms of hierarchies of difference. This, in turn, has limited the identity and positioning choices made available for people.

This research suggests that multiple racialised stratification systems operate in the Australian Academy, including systems of identification and the prevalence of de-racialised discourses of difference in the knowledge construction process where ethnic euphemisms privilege ethnicity over race. The women’s stories reveal how multiple oppressions operate at simultaneous and multiple levels as we refer to individual and
wider systemic and ideological forces at work which translate into multiple forms of racism. The study highlights the discursiveness of epistemological forms of oppression.

Applying this to a pedagogical context and to the women’s narratives, if we conceive of racism as the only important form of oppression operating in the university, this effectively ignores and trivialises the lived realities of others whose difference is enacted on other grounds (including gender, sexual preference or disability). Recognition of racism is a key theme in the women’s narratives, but it needs to be contextualised as one example of the ways in which oppression plays out in the university. Rather than rank forms of oppression, the narratives reveal how different forms of oppression intersect and overlap and race/gender/class impact on every facet of the women’s lives and not just their pedagogy. Depending on our various assumptions about the nature of oppression, we tend to locate the source of this quite differently. So we can assume that social change practices derived from different understandings of the nature of oppression might vary depending on the assumptions underpinning these.

The research conversations show how we can be adamantly anti-racist in thought and deed and still use a research epistemology that can be judged as racially-biased. If epistemological bias is so embedded in our research processes that we do not pause to question whether the methods themselves have hidden problems in them, then this can also be applied to pedagogy and practice. Shore’s (2003) research demonstrates how white privilege and entitlement tend to be constructed through liberal humanistic assumptions about empowerment, care of the other and teamwork. The women’s
narratives show that, individually and collectively, whether inadvertently or advertently, we draw on the same racially-biased epistemologies in our everyday teaching and learning practices.

The storied experiences here illustrate the salience of race and ethnicity in the Australian university and the ethical implications this has for practitioners, individually and collectively. The study highlights the importance of the argument that educators in the university tend to resist new knowledge that might interrupt prevailing belief systems and worldviews (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). That is, our unconscious desire is to learn only if knowledge affirms our own sense of self and what we already know. Through this kind of resistance to knowledge and repetition of harmful citational practices, interlocking forces of oppression remain intact at different levels of society. This occurs, for example, when people are continually required to identify themselves and act in accordance with the particular standards of others in ways that position them as exotic or deviant from the normalcy of whiteness. From the study, we can assume that if oppression plays out differently for different people in different contexts, then multiple and intersecting identities of educators (and students) make obsolete any educational (including anti-oppressive) initiative that revolves around a single identity or form of oppression (Kumashiro, 2000). Taylor Webb (2001), in writing about racist pedagogies, argues that it is important that we complicate the notion of self-reflexivity in pedagogy so we can try to understand and account for the beliefs and biases that shape our thinking in the first place.

This research, therefore, affirms the importance of the concept of multiplicity in its ability to recognise there is no single best practice that can be applied universally to
effect social and material inequity of all kinds. The project of social change needs to
account for and be responsive to differences in identities, positionings, histories and
privilege differentials. A multi race/ethnic dialogic framework employed in this study
can be seen as a useful mechanism whereby taken-for-granted assumptions
underpinning difference can be interrupted and questioned, not just for the sake of
pointing out obvious (and less obvious) disjunctures but also to recognise the
contradictory politics underpinning knowledge production in the Australian
university. It raises the issue of whether a collective politics is possible or achievable
in an Australian social and educational context and, if so, what such a pursuit might
actually engender.

The women’s stories highlight the complexity of the political project of education for
social change. Manuela’s and my conversation relating to the metaphor of killing in
the playground and the relativity of who is right or wrong raises the issue of the
inevitability of conflict in education for transformation. Rather than treating race and
ethnicity as sensitive topics that are too dangerous to explore, the women saw
universities as needing to recognise the inevitability of conflict and create supportive
environments for such dialogue to occur. Constructive debate around difference was
seen as important in creating fertile ground for new ways of thinking to develop. The
fact that this was not the case in many universities made it more important for the
women to develop informal support structures.

Moreover, the women talked about the university’s business approach to education
and how this impacts adversely on researchers’ and educators’ ability to think and act
outside of a conservative paradigm. A neo-liberal approach to higher education was
seen as valorising knowledge as a product rather than a process, hence the knowledge economy metaphor. The contradiction is that, in the university, not all knowledge perspectives are valued equally. The silence around race and ethnicity in Australian universities can be linked to the de-racialisation language of official multicultural rhetoric. It is in the taking up of neo-liberal and multicultural discourses that whiteness as a dominant system of thought becomes a hidden aspect of policy, curriculum and university practices. Added to this, the overlapping of de-racialising and racialising discourses make it difficult to recognise their constitute impact on social actors, ethno-racial relations in (and beyond) the university, and on the knowledge production process itself. At the same time, forces of globalisation have impinged on higher education in ways that place research on social justice further down the priority list. These complexities require Australian universities to rethink their global strategic positioning within a framework that is more encompassing and inclusive of the issues of race and cultural diversity.

According to Sinclair (2003), in North American, British and Australian higher education contexts, social justice is a dead-end. The author claims there is weak evidence of any beneficial changes in the target populations of the university in terms of their improved access to social justice, goods, services and opportunities in education. Sinclair sees social justice as a kind of self-serving not-for-profit market and advocates the abandonment of social justice-led initiatives and state capitalist modes of university provision in favour of a private-profit approach to education. According to Sinclair, and contrary to other reports on the impact of recent changes in the Australian higher education sector (Chesterman, 2000), the quality of Australian university education is in good shape and does not warrant the current federal and
state capital expenditure. In short, he paints a picture where universities are already in receipt of ample wealth, resources and funding, but will *luck out* in the global rush for competitive international degrees. In looking to economic rationalist principles, Sinclair attributes the source of inefficiency to self-interested stakeholders and the practices of academic teaching and research cultures. He argues that the power of broader economic and political pressures on the university is so great that it tends to protect a social justice agenda.

On one level, I agree with Sinclair’s criticism that there are many contradictory and self-serving interests operating at this level. For example, he makes a similar argument to the one I have presented in this study, that:

... *[t]he origins of inequality are seldom conceptualised in social justice discourse as inherent in the initiatives themselves or in the individual, social and cultural circumstances of those to whom social justice initiatives are targeted* (Sinclair, 2003: 163).

I do not agree, however, with his argument that a narrow economic rationalist approach would necessarily ‘better serve the public interests’ (p. 169) without further substantiation of his use of the notion of *public interest*. What is harder to dismiss is his suggestion that ‘university provision up until the present has completely failed to impact and improve the lives of those members of society most in need of what social justice initiatives promise’ (p. 169). For me, this issue far outweighs the fear of Australian universities *losing out* to international markets, confirming that more
research is needed to problematise social justice discourses in the field of higher education and in a wider Australian political context.

Drawing from Bourdieu’s work, Morley (2003) goes further to describe higher education debate on social justice as revolving around the inevitable question of, ‘What is the purpose of education?’ In her historical overview of policy in and across Commonwealth universities, Morley highlights the shifts in drivers and the current policy agenda. These include (Morley, 2003: 6):

- public sector reform
- commitment to transparency in governance
- human rights
- economic and social development
- poverty re-education
- social justice and inclusion
- human capital theory
- the learning society and lifelong learning
- new markets and the enterprise culture
- international competitiveness
- international development targets
- partnerships with civil society
- multilateral collaboration
- state welfarism
- democratisation program e.g. in South Africa
- macro-economic management
- new social movements.

For the women in the study and for others in the university, the issue of how the individual practitioner fits into this awesome equation remains clouded. The question of whether education is for the reproduction of power relations or for transformation and change remains as important and topical as ever.

If, as Shore (2003b) claims, racialised university management practices and adult learning principles are already entrenched in higher education, then this suggests that university leadership may need to rethink the nature of relationships that effect change in educational cultures (Gallego, Hollingsworth & Whitenack, 2001). Rather than unquestioningly reproduce oppression within the university, what we can do, individually and collectively, is to rethink knowledge creation in the context of internationalisation of the curriculum through the lenses of whiteness and critical studies, which question constructions of race, ethnicity and difference.

This inquiry suggests that universities’ approach to social justice is currently associated with human resource management, access and equity problems and individual grievance procedures. This does not ameliorate systemic, epistemic, symbolic, racial and gendered relations of power and representations of difference within the university. If anything, the research conversations illustrate the racialised nature of universities and the struggle ahead to broaden debate around the project of social justice in higher education.
In a post-9/11 climate of fear, it seems the project of higher education has narrowed its focus. The women in the study referred to an increased fear within the university, so that academics and students seemed more interested in securing a job for themselves than in effecting social equity for the broader good. Also implicit in these discussions was the recognition of the growing pressure on academics to publish and bring private industry investment dollars into the university. The women’s perceptions were that the discourse of individualism is problematic in the project of education for social change. Inherent in the economic rationalist approach to higher education is the assumption that meritocracy is the answer to alleviating individual inequity. The project of social justice, however, cannot be seen as applying only to staff and students in the university. It has to relate to the wider society and communities outside the university.

My response is that, rather than pitting social justice against quality and standards, we need to think about these as related and interdependent. For those who have less access to enact power to effect social change, self-reflective practice is a useful framework for managing this complex task. The study offers alternative insights and ideas for other practitioners to consider and respond to in their own practice. It might also be useful for practitioners not just in the field of education but also across disciplines and in other workplace contexts. It is a framework that can be used by anyone for the purpose of re-imagining social justice in relational as well as knowledge market terms.

Clearly, the dimensions of race, ethnicity and other markers of difference play an important role in knowledge production. Therefore, universities need to make clear
how they identify cultural and racial attitudes towards other groups in order to uphold an ethical stance. Ethical practice need not be about adhering to a system of behavioural codes or positive standards with which to make disapproving judgements of others. Rather than framing the ethical as a theoretical reflection of morality, ethical practice can describe an attitude towards the other through an understanding of the self (Cornell, 1995). This calls for a more encompassing debate, in the university, on the ethics of practice within the university.

**Recommendations**

Australian higher education and gender equity studies tell us little about what constitutes alternative, less formalised and collaborative practices or forms of knowledge creation and how these are important in the construction of knowledge and to whom they are important. Such practices might include the development, negotiation and fostering of inter-community dialogues and initiatives between the university and communities where research is conducted. One way to close the gap between diversity policy and the lived reality of marginalised groups might be for universities to support formal research on race/ethnicity through funded research policy reform as well as informal research through other kinds of support which can also be determined through this kind of research.

Universities need to acknowledge, in more tangible ways, that practitioners cannot and should not be expected to effectively undertake this task on an individual basis and in isolation, whether education for social change is being enacted from the top down or from the bottom up. This is one of the major contributing factors to activist
burnout syndrome and perhaps why the women in the study have moved into new arenas within and outside higher education since the research ended.

Rather than presenting a model for a single best practice, this study draws attention to the need for further research that:

- recognises the need for more complex identity work that reveals the working of power in the university and in everyday life
- interrogates the impact of multicultural discourse and whiteness on identity, higher education curriculum and university practices
- applies understandings of multiplicity of identity and epistemologies to curriculum development in different knowledge disciplines
- troubles the construction of race and cultural diversity in a human resource context in the university
- enables further exploration and an expansion of resources for identity and meaning making.

From these points of departure, discussion about difference can broaden our understanding about how language limits the ways we describe ourselves, our different epistemologies and the kinds of practices that this translates into. Therefore, the issues of representation and power for these women of colour was not simply about increasing numbers through Affirmative Action or Aboriginalisation policies, although these might be employed as one of many useful strategies for precipitating social change within university cultures that are predominantly middle class and
white. My point is, that without pro-active participation by those in positions of governance to engage in cross-boundary dialogue that critically reflects on the concepts and discourses of difference that underpin educational reform efforts, the progress and contribution of these kinds of initiatives remains unclear.

In the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee’s (AVCC) statement on university governance (2003), the dangers of treating the university as an ‘arm of government, or agencies of the state’ (p. 3) are duly emphasised, placing the question of ‘What is the purpose of higher education?’ at the centre of higher education debate. Presently, the issue of difference remains outside general debate about university governance in spite of public commentary that reflects a growing social divisiveness on these issues. The AVCC has, however, left a space open for further exploration of the ethics of university practices.

Competing deracialising and racialising discourses within the university exemplify the ways in which interlocking systems of domination work. The women in the study were privileged in their ability and freedom to critique the university and had found ways of working against racism and sexism through the articulation of multiple identities. Their stories reveal the ways in which the university tends to privilege some groups over others on the basis of gender, race and other axes. Therefore, the inquiry highlights the need to problematise the category of woman in relation to the dimensions of race and ethnicity.

An individualistic approach to social justice does not challenge or address the impact of symbolic violence that institutional and epistemological representations of
difference can have on the individual and social groups. Without acknowledgement of the multiplicity of identity, positioning and also multiple forms of oppression (including racism), representational change will continue to ‘be inscribed with relations of power and control’ (Patton, 2004: 64). The issue of power relations ‘has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way’ (Patton, 2004: 64).

This calls for further exploration of inequity in treatment of various groups in the university and of other women’s experiences within the university. Such research is particularly important in light of the lack of official recognition of those who do not identify in singular race/ethnic (and other) terms, who are not official or active members of high profile national political groups such the Federal Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA) and/or who do not have the same access to power and high cultural and social capital to effect social change in their everyday work as do the women in my study.

Conclusion

This inquiry provides new insights into how power relations in the Australian Academy work to legitimise some knowledge perspectives over others. By focusing on the relationship between the more powerful (central) and less powerful (marginalised) identities and positionings in the women’s stories about teaching for social change, the study documents the kind of practices that keep some discourses at
the centre and others at the periphery. Given the silence around race and ethnicity in the Australian university, it is difficult to recognise the link between race/ethnic identity and epistemology as having direct relevance to university practices. The study confirms the importance of multiplicity for its capacity to recognise the relationship between lived experience and educative practice and different ways of imagining the project of social change in education.

Due to the nature of the study and the small number of participants involved, my findings cannot be generalised; however, by integrating a diverse range of situated perspectives and experiences into a small but growing area of scholarship on race and ethnicity in higher education, the study contributes new insights into experiences of women in the Australian university. The women’s stories suggest that not only is there a lack of diversity at senior levels of the university, but this has particular implications for both students and staff in the university in terms of the women’s mobility within the university and how knowledge is framed. Therefore, the study strongly supports the argument that universities play a constitutive role in the construction of identities and that there are significant historical differences between women positioned as belonging to the dominant white majority and other groups. The constitutive powers of wider global, social and political forces and educational discourses in Australian universities have enormous pull within the university. To keep abreast with the emerging trends arising from the internationalisation of higher education curriculum, Australian universities need to address de-racialisation practices that construct identity in singular terms as this diverts attention away from the relationship between identity and epistemology in knowledge production.
This inquiry demonstrates the need for universities to consider the existence of epistemological racism in knowledge production. The research is an indicator of the inadequacy of current equity and diversity policy in its capacity to ameliorate racism and other forms of oppression. To address this, and to harness new opportunities for creating knowledge (and wealth), cultural diversity needs to be re-imagined as a potential resource and for its social and economic value. Presently, formal legislated grievance procedures attribute discrimination and oppression to individuals, individual ignorance and to personality traits. If the individual is seen as the source of blame or inadequacy, this tends to mask the ways in which systems of thinking create inequities between different social groups. A piecemeal or additive approach to race and cultural diversity is unable to recognise and value the women’s experiences in this study. This calls for further debate and research about the salience of race, ethnicity and difference in internationalised higher education curriculum.
Conclusion: Race Politics in Australia

ssh … it’s academic!

like a fricken court room
shit, must straighten my spine
so the crackle of bones
cuts through
the academic silence
this is
an Inaugural Critical Whiteness moment
thank you very much
snap to attention
strike your best
somber scholar pose
if you please
let me entertain you
quick roll of eyeballs
at black sisters
and then some
not so damn black
afterall
lotsa colours
lotsa women
lotsa others
but mainly white
still better than a kick in the teeth
can’t wait, can’t wait
please please
been waiting to hear myself
in these other stories
sick to death
of this Livin’ in-Harmony
bullshit
holy guacamole
black woman stands up
and another, and me
and some other
not so damn black
afterall lotsa colours
lotsa red
in particular
no no
look at me
look at me
my ass
if I’d known it was about who bleeds more
I woulda stayed home’n’ picked me nose.
The issue of cultural difference is an ambiguous one fraught with multiple and often conflicting meanings. This is because race, ethnicity and skin colour are prime markers of identity and, consequently, of inclusion/exclusion and grounds for constructing people as other. This research reveals that in the university, as in the broader Australian social context, cultural difference is often associated unproblematically with the concept of the other. Although the women educators of colour in this study were located at different universities and states across the country, their narratives show that, as a group, they have experienced the Australian university as a space where whiteness remains taken for granted and unquestioned. This is hardly surprising given the insights that writers such as Anzaldúa (1990a), Sleeter (1993, 1995), Giroux (1997), Osler (1997), Scheurich (1997), Bariso (2001) and Shore (2003a, 2003b) have provided on the implications of whiteness in the Academy in the US, UK, Canada and Australia. It is because whiteness is inferred as a normative position that many other identities and situated knowledge perspectives, including those derived from multiple identities and mixed-race perspectives, are rendered invisible or constructed as other.

In this study, the problems that arose involved not only the task of documenting and identifying the difficulties that women educators of colour experience in Australian universities, but also the showing of how the othering process occurs in the university. At the same time, the inquiry had to make allowances for the possibility that the other does not always easily translate into distinctly separate or singular identities, communities or knowledges. I therefore endeavoured to untangle and examine
perceived differences and similarities between myself and each of the women and within the group as a whole in order to relate these to the university setting and the broader socio-historical circumstances. This required a methodological framework that would help to identify some of the sources which the women drew from to create meaning about their identities and work for social change. In short, the research process was one of making visible and also defining that which is intangible and indefinite. To this end, the study affirms the value of a multiple race/ethnic dialogic framework and its appropriateness to the research.

Drawing on research from a range of theoretical traditions, including critical race, standpoint, narrative, critical whiteness and higher education studies, this inquiry adds basic strategic research to a category that is not officially acknowledged in equity data in Australian universities. The study provides new insights into the qualitative experiences of a small but diverse group of women educators of colour from their variously situated and experiential perspectives. It also builds on and extends existing theory on multiple and mixed-race identities, applying these to an Australian higher education context. Not only were the women’s stories of self and working for social change important to my own journey of self-discovery and to other participants, but the resulting inquiry has enabled varying standpoints to emerge, allowing for a more encompassing reading of the broader discourses and positionings offered in contemporary Australian universities. It has provided basic research that reveals how issues of equity impact differentially on various groups in the higher education sector.

In light of research demonstrating that women’s experiences of racialisation are structured differently in relation to class (Mahtani, 2002) and given the small number
of participants in the study, it is important to acknowledge that the women in this study are not representative of all women of colour in the university nor can our stories cannot be generalised as reflective of the experiences of all women educators of colour in the university. The women have, however, had access to a university education and, through a diverse range of culturally-situated experiences, have acquired capital, resources and the language to define the self outside of stereotypic and denigrating labels (Mahtani, 2002). If, however, as I have argued, this privileged and highly articulate group experienced multiple forms of oppression from policy-maker and senior lecturer to tutor levels, then these are surely and deeply embedded in the institution and society. At the very least, one can assume that the women’s narratives have far-reaching implications beyond the immediate research context, some of which I have already highlighted in this chapter.

The research reveals that international students and Indigenous students are recognised as unique groups that have yet to achieve equity in the university. Within the Academy, there are forums such as conferences that seek to problematise identity, whiteness and the politics of knowledge production. Debates within these pockets of academia have, however, yet to filter through to the level of university governance. This can be seen as partly attributable to the politics of compartmentalisation of singular identities, groups and knowledge perspectives which accompany multicultural discourse. Debate about race and ethnicity in Australian higher education flounders because multicultural discourse tends to reproduce competitive and divisive politics. It is no wonder that it is difficult for cross-boundary dialogue to develop within the university and between different groups who are trying to effect social change. Such dialogues have yet to build momentum and filter through and
across different sectors of the university. Furthermore, the study suggests that the lack
of cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary dialogue in the Australian university on
race/ethnicity makes it even more difficult for those who are othered to substantiate
arguments about the presence of racialising practices in the university. This adds to
the silence around whiteness.

This study confirms that race and ethnicity are relevant to university practices, to the
women educators themselves and, therefore, also to the new knowledge creation
mandate. An underlying subtext of the study is that there is little current evidence that
Australian universities are capitalising on and applying opportunities provided by
research on race, ethnicity and difference to higher education debate and reform.
Further inquiry into the issue of gender and race/ethnic representation of students in
relation to staff in Australian universities - a worthy study in itself - would provide a
much clearer picture than this study is able to offer due to its small number of
participants and the nature of the inquiry. The women’s stories indicate that the issue
of under-representation of women of colour is not unique to the university, but is
reflective of the powerful and constitutive impact of discourses of race and difference
in Australian society. By highlighting the issues of who has the power and authority
in the university to determine what counts as a valid identity and how identity and
knowledge boundaries are policed within the Australian university, this research
raises questions about the wider implications of epistemological racism in the
university and in practices relating to governance, curriculum, policy, teaching and
learning.
This suggests that universities tend to represent others as a problem and that single category conceptualisations of difference and simplistic higher education policy solutions based on these are inadequate. If, as the study indicates, current higher education conceptions of multicultural education are unable to keep up with the shifting grounds of difference, then we need to reconfigure difference and think about the ways in which difference is conceived and enacted in policy, curriculum and practice. The social responsibility to act and decide what should be done cannot be seen as the sole responsibility of individual actors. Universities need to initiate such processes to create and maintain institutional mechanisms that foster cross-boundary collaboration and exploration in the name of innovation, knowledge creation and knowledge economies. This requires a new politics of difference which integrates race and cultural difference as part of the core business of universities. This raises questions about the new knowledge economy ethos, the values and assumptions underpinning such a paradigm and, again, the issue of whose knowledge is included and excluded.

One of my concerns throughout this research journey has been the potential danger of assuming that anti-oppression education is only about the struggle of white/black social relations. The women in the study do not neatly fall into these dual categories. They allow for the possibility of multiple marginalised knowledges. The study brings attention to the implicit assumption that all others will naturally come together under the one banner and in the name of a unified project for social change. As this research shows, this is not necessarily the case. The qualitative experience of the women illustrates the enormous range of political interests within this and any other special interest group in the university and the heterogeneity of speaking positions on the
margins. The paradox is that while individuals and groups might meet at conferences for the purpose of networking, developing alliances and to acknowledge their different theoretical perspectives, there remains a potential danger of glossing over and not recognising the conflicts and struggles for power within any group or social movement. Often these consuming internal struggles shift attention away from state, institutional and the university’s complicity in maintaining hierarchical relationships and divisions.

Although the women’s stories tell us that the other is not fixed, but a changing construct, it seems that there are limited positionings available from which women in the university can choose. One of the contributing reasons for this is that difference is constructed within the confines of the black/white or indigenous/non-indigenous binaries. In Australia, the black/white binary has the power to shape the way people can be, and are allowed to be, within each of these categories. Some are able to move from one category to another without detection, while others cannot. In some cases, boundaries are produced and policed by the marginalised communities themselves. That is, those on the margins have agency to police the boundaries and criteria to determine membership of either of the indigenous or non-indigenous categories.

This can lead to further problems and inequities. The notion of indigenous and non-indigenous ways of knowing (and knowledges) is helpful for recognising that the way in which we privilege some values over others varies in different historical and cultural contexts. In trying to recognise identities, ways of knowing and knowledge in either/or terms, there is a tendency to re-inscribe these in essentialist ways. The problem with this, as Gergen (1995) explains in his critique of identity politics, is that
if we conflate individual identity with group identity and merely replace individual interests with group interests, the discourse of individuality remains intact. This is illustrated in the assertion that the descriptor *women educators of colour* could be representative of all women or people of colour in all places and circumstances. This kind of conflation allows us to treat the group in essentialising ways as special, disadvantaged, inherently problematic and, therefore, deemed worthy or unworthy of rights. Therein lies the danger of re-inscribing existing boundaries around identities, race and ethnicity. The study illustrates that the reification of the black/white (and other) binaries does not actually help us to avoid the essentialising trap where identities are viewed as discrete and unique and therefore separated by incommensurable differences. It is this incommensurability that I find the most disturbing.

The presumption of incommensurable differences is one of the main reasons that I have been unable to engage in dialogue with Indigenous women in this research, some of whom I was already acquainted with. The absence of such dialogue in this research could be seen as a weakness of the study, but rather than reinforce the notion of incommensurability, this study can hopefully be seen as an important preliminary step in a process that has yet to unfold, lending itself to future research projects and conversations.

For me, the problem of the black/white binary, and dualistic thinking in general, is that it does not create fertile ground for frank and productive cross-boundary dialogues to develop. The potential to exert pressure to change existing power structures might be better served through stronger coalition among and between
disenfranchised groups, and universities can lend themselves to creating institutional mechanisms for interacting and engagement across boundaries for this purpose. Perhaps, as Anzaldua and other activists and scholars in the US have already experienced and written on, internalised racism has prevented and prevents us from taking action together, demonstrating that dialogue is not a simple matter of polite turntaking, but often involves conflict. Rather than avoid conflict or enter into conflict for the sake of establishing dominance over the other, the notion of mutually beneficial conflict (which Manuela raised and Satra implied) might be a more useful framework for developing productive dialogue. Another way to put it is that:

_We need to be prepared to deal with and learn from conflict ... Alternate perspectives on issues, lack of trust, varying levels of power on campus, and different values make conflict inevitable. While higher education theoretically is rooted in the notion of debate, it is not clear that institutions actually know how to deal with conflict. The challenge is to accept that conflict will occur, that we will learn from the debate, and that vehicles will be needed to assist in the resolution of conflict_ (Smith, 1996: 134).

More than this, though, we need to continue to think and learn about the kinds of conditions that are needed for such relationships and alliance-building to occur. We need to pursue research that helps to differentiate formal from informal knowledge construction practices and the kinds of practices that lend themselves to coalition-building. In my view, more institutional mechanisms and more good will are needed to assist in this process and to provide opportunities for working across identity, knowledge disciplinary and epistemological boundaries.
The study demonstrates that there is a divide between advocacy, activism and scholarship that is to the detriment of both. It has led to advocacy/activism being theoretically weak and to scholarship being insufficiently grounded in the reality of those who are actively pursuing the goal of education for social change. It is all too easy for activists and scholars to view each other with at least lack of understanding, if not suspicion.

A multi-theoretical approach that includes relational theory can allow us to conceive of knowledge as more than property. The study emphasises the complexities of the knowledge construction process itself and the ways in which difference is created and can be accounted for. If knowledge is seen as situated, relational, contextual and continually evolving in and through social relationships, there is potential for multiple understandings of what constitutes different truth(s), histories, rationality and the social (Arber, 1997). Further research, not only involving a larger number of respondents but more systemic research that does not privilege any one particular theoretical perspective, would shed more light on the ways in which race and ethnicity matters in the university and on women’s differentiated experiences. This would also allow for self-examination from within and across different fields of knowledge, including the potential for further reflexivity within the field of education.

In particular, the study reveals how relational theory allows us to see identity as something that is contingent on political and social circumstances. In such light, the self is always in the process of re-negotiation and is dialogically constituted. In this
way, the individual is seen as inseparable from ongoing social processes (Gergen, 1995). In a higher education context, such a framework can offer:

... resources and structures to establish critical relationships, which enable educators to learn about themselves as they learn with others, thereby creating opportunity for different understanding and development of different perspectives (Gallego et al., 2001: 2).

The author’s point is that it is not so much that relational theory and relational ways of knowing should be seen as prescriptive for education for social change, but that these might stimulate new understandings and insights which can lead to more productive and lasting educational and social reform.

In this research, what began as a process of working together on the basis of our racialised, gendered and classed identities has transformed into one of conversation and exploration of our politics around our identities and in terms of what we want to achieve (Yuval-Davis, 1994), both individually and collectively. If women’s narrative experiences are situated within a broader historical and power-relations framework, this enables us to see them as more than trivial, incidental and one-off occurrences. In this way, individuals who might be unsure of the validity of their readings of a particular situation or incident are able to see these as legitimate experiences which are part of a systemic process (Morley, 2003). For all of these reasons, we need to treat the category of woman carefully so as to not render the diversity, heterogeneity and particularity of their experiences invisible. The dialogic nature of this research enabled a more intimate exploration of not only the multiple meanings attributed to
race/ethnic identity and work in university, but also the imagined possibilities for education for social change in the university to emerge.

This research illustrates the possibilities of multiple understandings of how individuals and groups resist and also challenge complex forces that restrict how we think and can act (Schutz, 2000). Some identification practices are enabling, while others have a more contradictory and even disabling effect, demonstrating that the questioning of language and power involves ‘a diversity of practices, a resistance to change, and even contrary will to transform practices in different directions’ (Fairclough, 1989: 221). The practices of articulating difference using mixed-race (in Satra’s and my stories) and multiple identities (in Kali and Manuela’s stories) in ambiguous and contradictory ways were part of a deliberate and self-conscious political practice which filters through to our everyday lives and to the knowledge production process. It is within this overarching context that we construct meaning around the purpose of education and social change practice. This inquiry highlights and draws from the women’s alternative ways of thinking about social change pedagogy to contribute new ways of thinking about the salience of difference, race and ethnicity in a higher education pedagogy context. It also calls for future research on social activism, race and ethnicity in higher education to forward debate on the project of transformative education in a higher education context.

These women’s stories confirm the need for more complex identity work in order to learn more about the currency of multiple identities, ways of knowing and knowledge perspectives in the international higher education market. The current paradigm of career advancement, meritocracy, individualism and commercialisation is clearly not
advancing the position of the Australian university in the global marketplace. For this to occur, we need to allow for more robust identities, to recognise and value their complexity and draw from these to infuse faculties and curricula that ultimately can extend and enrich higher education debate.

Through its contribution of new knowledge about the lived experience of a group of women educators of colour in the Australian university, this study sheds light on how relations of power operate in the university and how race/ethnic positioning impact on people’s lives. The study offers glimpses, albeit momentary, into the specificities of the local while simultaneously troubling the criteria by which we draw the parameters and boundaries that delineate the local from the global (Ifekwunigwe, 1997). It also indicates that identity and self-identification in all forms and for all people involve conscious and unconscious acts of inclusion and exclusion (Ellsworth, 1997). It is when whiteness is left out of the picture, or when dualistic thinking obscures multiplicity and ambiguity, that difference becomes a way of re-inscribing and maintaining hegemony, or the ‘white supremacist patriarchal order’ of things (Patton, 2004: 80). If, as Hall (1997) suggests, there is a regime of representation, then research on identity and multiplicity can enrich our understanding of the knowledge construction process in the project of education for social change in the university.

While the road ahead may be long, bumpy and uncomfortable, a critical cultural diversity policy direction offers promising future prospects for innovation and discovery. Re-positioning race and ethnicity in Australian higher education debate would enable the university to better recognise and value diverse identities and epistemologies. Furthermore, recognition of epistemological racism would help to
provide the essential tools needed for an international market and for those who benefit from the university; that is, students, staff, industry and communities outside the university. These practices can be embedded into knowledge creation at a macro- and micro-level in the university in teaching and learning practices, curriculum and policy-making and in an internationalised context.

In this light, social justice and cultural diversity policy can be seen as working in partnership. To maximise the benefits of this partnership, universities, as a first step, need to audit or examine how race and ethnicity currently translate into actual university practices. The findings of this would provide invaluable information about how social justice, as a core organisational principle, can add monetary and social value to the university. A critical race approach to cultural diversity would provide a vital ethical and moral framework for this process. If diverse race/ethnicity knowledge perspectives were more widely recognised as valuable resources in knowledge production, this could enrich our understandings of social justice so we could recognise and apply alternative ways of thinking about diversity in higher education and different ways of seeing and knowing to ask new questions. Their importance might extend beyond the university’s human resource department, student population and marginalised faculty to a much broader context beyond the university. The responsibility of implementing such a policy shift cannot rest solely with the individual practitioner as this implies it is up to minorities to champion their causes. Rather, this responsibility rests primarily on the shoulders of those in governance and the university’s various stakeholders.
Common to all the women’s stories was the importance of context. It determined the ways in which the women chose to speak out or stay silent on issues related to race and ethnicity, and with whom and how they chose to articulate identities and issues in a politicised way. The study suggests that the taking up of positions and discourses is not simply a matter of individual choice. Epistemic dominance and dominant discourses of race that circulate in the wider society also filter through to the university. The limited choices of identities and positionings available to women of difference make the university a very difficult terrain to navigate.

The assumptions of homogeneity within categories and incommensurable differences between identities and communities are central to and reify white race privilege and separatist anti-racist positions. The interruption of these assumptions enables the questioning of the university’s positioning of ethnic or Indigenous experts and how people are afforded more or less access, authority and legitimacy to speak and act on issues relating to race and cultural diversity policy and practice in the university. The study highlights power imbalances experienced by the women in Australian universities, which are related to the ways in which markers of difference are embodied and inhabited in various ways through the intersectionality of race/gender/class/sexual orientation/disability. What arises perhaps the most strongly from across these women’s research conversations is their willingness to enter into such challenging and even confronting self-reflective processes, the latter of which matters as much as the questioning itself. The women’s narratives of social change are all premised on a sense of hope. To live without hope would render the self obsolete. The struggle for meaning and identity is more than a lifestyle choice - it is fundamental for survival, agency, change and, ultimately, reinvention.
Appendix

a. Educators in Australian Educational Research

The following is a discussion of race and ethnicity in a schooling and teacher education context. I have included studies on the school system and teachers because of their acknowledgement of the salience of race and ethnic difference in knowledge production. This is an area of discussion that has yet to resonate beyond access and equity debates in Australian higher education.

In Australian studies on educators in pre-service and teacher education, there is a growing acknowledgement that some educators are missing from the education literature landscape. Pettman writes about the ‘silences and exclusions of difference and of those labelled as different in terms of their race or ethnic origin or identity’ (Pettman, 1994: 92). According to Pettman, their absence is ‘so normalised that it usually causes no concern or even notice, or alternatively representations of them may reinforce the problem-victim image’ (p. 42). She notes that:

*Aboriginal Studies and Multicultural Studies are largely taught as separate units or study areas, and are often ungendered, while Women’s Studies remain predominantly white. This segregation especially affects minority women who are subsumed or rendered invisible* (Pettman, 1994: 43).
In other words, an important theme emerging from educational studies in this area is the issue of representation. It is within this overarching context that I begin my discussion of key studies on pre-service and educators in Australia.

Recent Australian studies on the experiences of pre-service educators and educators have revealed the demographic profile of teacher populations, including higher education staff, to be overwhelmingly monocultural and white (Pettman, 1994; Grundy & Hatton, 1998; Haggis et al., 1999; Kamler et al., 1999; Malin, 1999). This is also reflected in the findings of critical whiteness studies in the US and Canada that suggest that teacher populations are comprised of a majority of white dominant cultural members (Sleeter, 1993, 1995; Lawrence, 1997; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Schick, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Johnson, 2002). Most interesting is the fact that this demographic pattern is rarely made explicit, or linked to, Australian studies on women in higher education in the specific context of knowledge production.

Kamler et al. (1999) suggest that overseas-born and educated non-native speakers of English or NESB educators may be positioned within racist discourses in Australian schools. They posit that these teachers are an invisible part of the teaching population. Grundy and Hatton (1998), in their study on the influence of biography on a group of pre-service educators and teacher educators, found that the majority of participants in their study did not view their own whiteness as a form of ethnicity. According to the authors:
Most teacher educators simply had no grasp on the fact that they belonged to the dominant ethnic group in Australia and that this fact was undoubtedly crucial in their biographies and their teaching ... (Grundy & Hatton, 1998: 127);

and

At a general level, it is possible to say that both the teacher educators and the student teachers are limited in their capacity to recognise or comment upon the way in which their lives and work are being influenced by their class, gender and ethnicity (Grundy & Hatton, 1998: 133).

Grundy and Hatton’s study implies that the majority of the participants were of Anglo-Celtic background and they note both the teachers’ and students’ general lack of awareness of race and ethnic identity. Some articulated an awareness of the impact of gender and class on their educative practice, but, overall, it could be said that the dimensions of class and gender were privileged over race and ethnicity. The participants were generally silent about the latter. Race and ethnicity were seen as not having direct relevance to the ways in which the educators might enact their understanding of difference in their educative practice in general. These findings are consistent with Schick’s (2000b) research on whiteness in the university and amongst pre-service educators and Razack’s (1998, 2000) work on institutional whiteness. Such a lack of awareness is disconcerting, to say the least. Although Grundy and Hatton’s study highlights the importance of gender, class and ethnicity in educative practice, their emphasis is not on the construct of race and its impact.
One of the few studies offering alternative insights into teacher education is that of Singh (1997), who writes about the autobiographical dimension of her own experience as an Asian-Australian educator undergoing pre-service training in an Australian university. In this article, Singh tells us of her positioning as ‘one of the few ethnic minority women’ (Singh 1997: 54) in her undergraduate teacher training course. In this way, she theorises difference in an educational context, not just in abstracted theoretical terms but also through her *lived experience*. In doing so, she provides alternative insights into the ways in which the university organises and structures knowledge, and how the institution plays an important role in constructing difference as a form of deviance (Aziz, 1992) from the norm:

*I recall the uneasiness and discomfort I experienced when lectures presented research findings, which depicted the parenting of immigrant and working class mothers as deficient, and the home backgrounds of migrants as culturally different. These research studies constructed me, my mother, and my home and cultural background as negatively ‘different’ from ‘normal’ Australian students … research findings concluded that migrant students experienced the traditional values of their homes and the modern, progressive values of the school* (Singh, 1997: 54).

The focus of Singh’s work here is on her experience as an undergraduate educator. It would have been interesting to extend this discussion to her current experiences working in the Academy and how the issues she highlights in a pre-service education context compare to her experiences in a particular field within the university or in the broader context of the Academy.
b. Discourses of Individualism and Development in Educational Research

Amongst the more prominent discourses emerging from Australian educational studies concerning curriculum are individualism and development discourses. To illustrate this, I begin with a critique of one of Malin’s (1999) articles on an anti-racism teacher education program devised and taught by her to pre-service educators. Using the Phillips-Derman-Sparks psychological model for understanding racial identity development, Malin critiques this developmental model. She also uses this to prescribe anti-racist curriculum.

The gist of the Phillips-Derman-Sparks framework is that it is assumed people move through three stages in anti-racism development: the first is seen as one of denial and resistance; the second stage involves a state of uncertainty and disquiet; and the third stage refers to a person’s understanding as somehow transformed. This final stage of *enlightenment* is seen as a springboard for developing new understandings and strategies for working against discrimination and prejudice. Malin (1999) concludes that the Phillips-Derman-Sparks model, like other developmental models, is limited in that it presumes that learning about racism is a stable and linear process. Malin’s findings on the pre-service educators in her course reveal that this is not always the case.

Similarly, in the US, Lawrence (1997) uses the concept of racial identity development. The focus of her study is on understanding how racial awareness in a multicultural education course is negotiated and enacted in practice by a group of white pre-service educators. According to the author, this occurs in all individuals and
is characterised by different stages of self-awareness from least developmentally mature to most developmentally mature (Lawrence, 1997, citing Helms, 1995). Lawrence (1997) argues that the educators in her study were able to move through to the third stage of racial identity awareness in one semester. She posits that this development can translate into successful attempts at multicultural teaching during a practicum. While it may be the case that the educators in the study were able to apply this knowledge effectively in their teaching practice, a longitudinal study would be able to affirm more conclusively whether racial identity awareness necessarily translates into action. For me, the assumption that racial awareness automatically translates into action and social transformation is problematic. Having awareness of and empathy for how individuals think, feel and treat one another is important and possibly helpful, but this does not necessarily ‘disrupt the process that differentiates the Other from the Normal’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 7) nor does it necessarily lead to a politicised practice.

Although I find Malin and Lawrence’s examples of what happens in learning and teaching situations around social issues of race and ethnicity interesting and reflective of my own experiences, I find their conception of racism, and therefore anti-racism, overly simplistic. For example, on the one hand, Malin acknowledges that ‘racism has different forms - individual, institutional, cultural or ideological’ (Malin, 1999: 2). On the other hand, the emphasis of her anti-racism program appears to be primarily on the individual form of racism. This implies that the responsibility for addressing racism as a form of discrimination and oppression lies mainly on the individual practitioner’s shoulders.
While I acknowledge that individual forms of racism of the overt kind, such as obvious discriminatory acts and blatant racial violence, harassment and name-calling, are real and injurious, my concern is that, in the majority of Australian educational studies, the call for social justice in educational curriculum terms is met through multicultural and anti-racism education responses. These have evolved without extensive debate about the kinds of discourses of difference underpinning these educational responses. If we view oppression as having multiple forms, this enables a deeper exploration of the contradictory language, positionings and discourses that we take up in our everyday lives and in a higher education practice context, enabling us to problematise the assumptions which we bring to knowledge construction (Arber, 1997; Dolby, 2000a, 2000b).

A developmental perspective tends to locate the cause of racism in the individual, thereby overlooking the complexity of social relations and how structures of power impact on social and ethnoracial relations. Racism, then, is a phenomena which extends beyond the individual to the society itself. This was one of the main reasons I looked to other theoretical resources and placed the issue of power relations at the centre of my inquiry. In my study, I have assumed that distribution of access to power operates through relationships and in different situated contexts in the university (Gergen, 1995; Haraway, 1988; Wenger, 1998). Our positioning enables and also disables peoples access to cultural ebbs and flows and mobility and immobility in the society and the university.

The aforementioned developmental educational approaches tend to assume that knowledge is something that resides inside the individual’s head and simply re-
programming individual teachers can fix any inherent flaws, including racist attitudes. Knowledge, however, is both a product and a process and racism is complex, multiple and only partially, rather than solely, located within and expressed by the individual. My interests lay in exploring what could happen if knowledge was taken outside of the head and placed in a social context. I wondered how other forms of oppression (besides the overt and individual expression of resentment towards Aboriginal and other ethnic social groups) might reveal themselves in this light.

c. Discourses and Debates in Multicultural and Anti-Racist Education Research

Neal (1998) describes anti-racism research as emerging in response to and to challenge stereotypical portrayals of minority communities. This was a concern for me in the study as I did not want to reinforce any *ethnic* stereotyping of the women; however, over the course of my research conversations with each woman, it became obvious that my understanding of social justice and oppression differed from some of the women’s conceptions. I realised my conception of anti-racism was extremely narrow. In particular, my understanding of racism as located solely within structures was problematic. It was for these reason that I looked to studies on multicultural and anti-racist education. The following is a discussion of key studies that provide alternative resources for thinking about and analysing the nature of oppression and social change practice in the study. Here I refer to selective studies by Kumashiro (2000, 2001, 2002) and Rattansi (1992), drawing on key arguments which helped me to clarify my own position in relation to the women in my study and on the issue of representation in this research.
Kumashiro (2000, 2001, 2002) writes about anti-oppression education in a Canadian schooling context. The author points out that scholars across feminist, critical, multicultural, queer and other knowledge disciplines appear in agreement on one key issue: that oppression is a ‘situation or dynamic in which certain ways of being (e.g., having certain identities) are privileged in society while others are marginalised’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 1). He also highlights the conundrum that, ‘there is little consensus on the specific nature of oppression, and how curriculum, pedagogy, and educational policy can bring about change’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 1).

According to Kumashiro, anti-oppression education refers to work ‘against various forms of oppression’ (2000: 1). Overall, I find his concept of anti-oppression education very useful. It opened up possibilities, within my own study, for thinking about multiple forms of oppression. Rather than focusing on a particular form of oppression, such as racism, sexism or heterosexism, such a framework could be used for a broader range of purposes. It helped me to recognise how different forms of oppression intersect and overlap. More importantly, it helped draw attention to the different and contradictory ways in which the nature of oppression is conceived in multicultural and anti-racist educational contexts.

Clearly, there are many different interpretations of what being an educator working for social change means (Kumashiro, 2002). These vary according to how we understand and locate the nature and source of oppression. Through a critique of various approaches to education, ranging from an individualistic to a critical approach, the author highlights the weaknesses and strengths of various approaches. In doing so, Kumashiro makes a strong case for why a broader conceptual framework
for thinking about education for social change is needed. The author suggests that, rather than assuming that the nature and source of oppression is only located inside people’s heads or only in our structures and institutions, we need to think about oppression as situated. Such a framework acknowledges the multiplicity and situatedness of people’s circumstances.

I found the concept of situated oppression particularly helpful given that, in my own experience, the conception of social identity in singular terms has always been problematic. It is for this reason that I have drawn on studies by scholars such as Hall (1981, 1990, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1996), Root (1996, 1999), Ahmed (1997), Anthias (2002) and Mahtani (2002), who write about multiple and intersecting identities. A situated approach acknowledges that ‘oppression plays out differently for different people in different contexts’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 28). If we think of identity in a singular and unitary sense and as the only form of oppression, then those ‘whose identities and boundaries are difficult to define because they are fluid, contested, and constantly shifting’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 3) are left out of the picture. Consistent with Massey’s concept of power geometries, where one group’s mobility is enabled through another’s stasis, the process of labelling and categorising social groups can lock out some group identities. This is the basis of a social problem approach, which highlights NESB or Aboriginal groups and locks out the white majority and other groups. The main problem I identify with this approach is that group identities can be treated as natural and immutable, rather than as social constructs.

I wished to trouble the identification process, rather than reify it, and to examine the implications of different conceptions of the nature of oppression in social change.
practice. Kumashiro’s anti-oppression framework helped to dispel my anxiety about the seeming disparity between my own understandings of what oppression is and the women’s understandings. I realised that I did not have to privilege one person’s conception of social justice over another. By applying a multiple and situated understanding of oppression, I was able to identify and examine my own conceptions in relation to the women’s conceptions. Given the multiplicity of our understandings and discourses, which emerged from my research conversations with each woman, I was able to delve deeper into the contradictoriness of social change practice.

As an alternative to the social problem approach, Kumashiro suggests that we amalgamate various educational approaches and conceptions of oppression. Compared to developmental approaches to education, a situated conceptual framework certainly recognises the multiplicity and situatedness of oppression more effectively. In this way, the margins and those who are traditionally excluded can be included and counted. Documenting peripheral practices and ways of knowing can help to interrupt the hidden assumptions underpinning different approaches to social justice in education. So, rather than look for a single strategy that works for all people in all instances, a conception of oppression as situated enables us to interrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about difference and about practices based on these. Although Kumashiro applies his research to a schooling context, it is clearly applicable in a higher education pedagogy and practice context. From this perspective, higher education curriculum can be seen as a politicised process. Viewed as an ongoing process, it is continually up for grabs, contested and redefined.
The last thing I wanted to do in the study was to represent the women in ways that reinforce the ‘social, cultural, and even intellectual space/division between the norm and the Other’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 6). I agree with Kumashiro (2000) that if we privilege empathy as the definitive goal of anti-oppressive education, then we locate the cause of oppression solely within the individual’s head. Also, if we place emphasis only on the negative experiences and treatment of the other and ignore other ways in which oppression operates, this implies that the other is the problem (Kumashiro, 2000).

Taking us out of an individual and developmental trajectory, Kumashiro asserts that conceptions of oppression originate in discourse or in the evocation of discourses. In this way, discourses frame ‘how people think, feel, act, and interact’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 10). If we conceptualise oppression as discursively produced, it can enable us to see ‘how oppression plays out differently in different contexts’ (Kumashiro, 2000: 11). It also allows us to recognise educational discourses as both globally and locally produced and not just an expression of the individual’s fancy or psychological projection.

Kumashiro’s model of anti-oppression acknowledges the contradictory nature of power in social change practice and his research pertains to schooling and higher education pedagogical practices. In my study, I have assumed that the role of the educator means different things to different people. These understandings are contingent on the ways we conceive knowledge and learning. For example, Kumashiro suggests that if we see the role of educator as the expert, then the educator’s role is to maintain control over how students should behave and what and
how they should learn (Kumashiro, 2000: 10, citing Lather, 1998). As I argued earlier, the discourse of behaviour management implies that knowledge is innate and resides inside the head. The learner (student) is viewed as the receptor; an empty vessel that is topped up with knowledge. The educator is seen as the authority or knowledge expert who simply pours this knowledge into the heads of others and or manages knowledge and people.

According to Kumashiro, however, if we accept that knowledge is both a product and a process and that it is situated, then teaching becomes an unpredictable and even unknowable process. Rather than simply assuming what the educator’s role is, Kumashiro’s view creates opportunities for educators to question and rethink what it means to teach. In my view, this is the foundation and one of the key aims of this research: to create an opportunity and a power sensitive space for exploring and reflecting on the aforementioned contradictions. For Kumashiro, this is an ongoing process of always looking ‘beyond what the teacher is teaching and what the student is learning’ (2002: 10) to leave space for the unsaid and unthinkable to emerge. With regard to this particular view, however, I have some reservations. While I find Kumashiro’s invitation to leave space for the unsaid and unthinkable exciting in its endless possibilities, it also sounds very ambiguous. It allows for the creation of new ways of thinking and new knowledge to surface, but it is also a space where the familiar, repetitive and constraining ways of thinking can emerge. The suggestion of *letting it all hang out* can be read as somewhat idealistic or naïve. He does not address the potential dilemmas that arise in teaching and learning situations when conflict, supremacist views and epistemological violence emerge unexpectedly in the classroom and in the knowledge production process itself.
What Kumashiro does not make explicit is how to deal with the notion of harm. For example, it would be highly unethical for an educator to merely encourage critical questioning and then stand back from any conflict that ensues and watch from the sidelines. I think we need to counter this by placing the notion of ethics as central to debates about social justice in higher education pedagogy. We also need to acknowledge power differentials as an educator might be afforded gatekeeper status and, with this, access to certain forms of power (over student evaluation and assessment). Although this is not necessarily a given, it sometimes helps to tip the balance of power in specific situations. The matter remains, however, as to whether or not all educators (including a diverse range of women) are in a position to enact power beyond the formal classroom.

Kumashiro’s argument that ‘[p]eople often desire repetition and resist anti-oppression change’ (Kumashiro, 2002: 74) poses some interesting questions about how models of social change practice and, indeed, higher education pedagogy are constructed. That is, we tend to hang on for dear life to certain ideas of what educational work is supposed to be for our comfort and reassurance. This correlates with my research dilemma. I originally presumed that anti-racism was equated with education for social change and that the women in the study would share this view. As Kumashiro points out, however, the consequences of this narrow conception might be to overlook alternative ideas and ways of thinking and knowing. The author’s anti-oppression model has close parallels with critical anti-racist frameworks (Dei, 1996, 2000; Kumashiro, 2000, 2001), which also seek to challenge the desire for repetition through the disruption of ‘hegemonic texts and curricular and instructional practices … as well as their roles and functions in stabilizing knowledge’ (Dei, 1999: 406). In
my study, by selecting respondents who positioned themselves in diverse ways, I hoped that such harmful repetition and resistance to new knowledge would be more difficult to overlook or more noticeable. A narrative approach opened up possibilities for interrogation and critical self-reflection (Ah Nee-Benham & Dudley, 1997; Brooks, 1997; Felski, 2000; Rains, 1999).

While Kumashiro’s notion of oppression and his discussion of educative practice have helped me to problematise conceptions of the nature and source of oppression, he does not focus specifically on multicultural discourse. This is a widely accepted concept in an Australian educational context and I, therefore, needed to look further to other studies that would help me to distinguish more clearly between multicultural and anti-racist education. It is in this context that I refer to Rattansi’s work in order to examine some of the assumptions underpinning these educational movements.

Rattansi’s (1992) analysis of the theoretical, pedagogic and policy foundations of multiculturalism and anti-racism education is revealing. She highlights the differences between multicultural and anti-racist approaches. Although her analysis is set in a British historical and schooling context, I have drawn upon her work because of its broader application to my own research. Like Kumashiro, Rattansi takes up the issue of identities and knowledges as discursively produced. She suggests that this approach has received very little attention within educational research:

There has been a relative neglect of the general institutional and discursive form of the liberal-democratic, capitalist nation-state and its effects in the production of contradictory discourses around ‘race’. That is, racist,
ethnocentric and nationalist ideas which attempt to create strict symbolic and institutional barriers between collectivities, have also to coexist and continually articulate with a variety of discourses and practices around meritocracy, equal opportunities and citizenship rights. This creates a multiplicity of axes for the production of possibly conflicting subject positions and potential practices and interactions (Rattansi 1992: 37).

In Rattansi’s view, racialised discourses are already in wide circulation. This resonates with Dimitriades and Kamberelis’ (1997) assertion that globalisation forces have produced a range of dominant global educational discourses (and ideologies). Rather than trying to register the women in my study as fixed subjects or victims, I have tried to interrupt essentialising tendencies, including my own. For this reason, I wanted to allow for the production of conflicting subject positions, practices and interactions by looking to the discourses that we invoked in our stories about the self and work for social change in the university. If I had used a different research methodology and methods it might have been more difficult to pick up on my own inconsistencies and contradictory assumptions in the research process. A primary issue for me, then, was to disentangle the various discourses that we drew upon in our research conversations and to analyse these in a way that would highlight not only how oppression plays out, but also the kinds of resources that empowered the women.

Through my reading of Rattansi’s work, I was able to question my own conception of anti-racism as synonymous with education for social change. The author explains that, while multiculturalism has been presented as a broadly liberal program, anti-racism has been invoked in opposition to the former. While these two approaches are often
seen to be in radical opposition to one another, she argues that ‘at a deeper level there are fundamental similarities in conceptualization and prescription between multiculturalism and anti-racism which are flawed’ (Rattansi, 1992: 24).

Here I draw attention to one of her key criticisms that, although these approaches are underpinned by very different assumptions, such as the way they locate and explain the nature of oppression, both approaches tend to reify oppression. The author draws attention to the tendency in multicultural education to pathologise the individual. From a pathological view, racism is conceived in terms of a prejudiced attitude held by an individual. Therein lies the assumption that individuals hold prejudiced views in consistent and rational ways and articulate and enact these views in a supposedly logical, systematic and straightforward way. Also consistent with my earlier critique of critical whiteness studies and studies on educators in pre-service education studies, Rattansi argues that one of the main weaknesses inherent in the project of multicultural education is the conception of the prejudiced individual.

Extending her critique to anti-racism education, she suggests that while multiculturalists have tried to deconstruct the concept of prejudice by providing positive images, anti-racists have responded by ‘presenting black histories as narratives of resistance and struggle against racism’ (Rattansi, 1992: 33). Both approaches, however, are based on the same misleading assumption that it is possible to give ‘a singular, uncontestable, objective and accurate representation of the reality external to the literary or photographic or any other texts’ (p. 34). What emerges strongly from this line of argument is that both multicultural and anti-racist approaches overlook the more democratic objectives of striving to find ways to give
voice to a diverse range of representations and to encourage critical dialogue and questioning of all intellectual and political frameworks (Rattansi, 1992). In my study, I have used a narrative approach precisely because of its potential to acknowledge multiple truths and realities for this purpose.

For Rattansi, the thread of similarity that binds multicultural and anti-racist educational movements together is the project of rationalism. The common failure of both approaches is their apparent inability to confront the limitations of a rationalist approach to education. She suggests that in multicultural education, the discourse of prejudice is itself a form of rationalism. Here, racism is read ‘as a form of displacement and objectification deriving from unhealthy neuroses and personality traits’ (p. 30). In anti-racist analyses, working class racism and the working class racist subject are treated in equally reductive terms.

According to Rattansi, the weakness of anti-racism lies in its conception of the individual subject. In this context, rationalism produces the racist subject in a particular way. She argues that in anti-racist analyses, institutional racism is often used in a reductive way ‘to imply that racist processes are the only or primary cause of all the unequal outcomes and exclusions’ (p. 35). It is suggested that when this reductive aspect remains unexamined, the intersectionality of forms of oppression such as sexism, racism and classism remain obscured. That is:

... [t]he rationalism of their educational project is contingent on the supposed irrationalism of the racist subject – often conceptualised as a collective, class subject ... Like the multiculturalist project of reducing prejudice by teaching
about other cultures, the antiracist project of providing superior explanations for unemployment, housing shortages, and so forth, has so far, and for similar reasons, produced only patchy evidence of success (Rattansi, 1992: 33).

Here, Rattansi’s critique of both educational approaches and her argument that the project of rationalism underpins both of these helped me to recognise my own essentialising tendencies - as old habits die hard - and to try to counter essentialist and dualistic tendencies. Every time I found myself either elevating my own conception of anti-racism above some of the women’s conceptions or thinking in dualistic or essentialising black or white terms, I would come back to the notion of multiplicity and situatedness to pause, stand back and interrogate my assumptions.

**d. The Myth of Objectivity and Rationality in Education**

In the Academy, emotions and feelings are viewed with great uncertainty, scepticism and even doubt (Neumann & Peterson, 1997; Tarlow, 2000). This was an important theme that emerged from the literature on women in higher education. Studies on women of colour point to the profound emotional as well as material impact that multiple forms of oppression have on women’s lives (Viernes-Turner, 2002). For example, some studies have acknowledged that black women feel isolated and not respected in the university (Smith, 1996). In particular, Viernes-Turner’s study recognises that women (educators) of colour experience the dilemma of being either underemployed or called upon as the minority experts by departments and institutions, and/or being torn between multiple affiliations to family, community and career (Viernes-Turner, 2002). Bell et al. argue that undergraduate students are more likely
to challenge the authority of faculty of colour on the basis of their race/ethnicity. These are cited as some of the contributing reasons for why some scholars of colour experience a sense of alienation. Viernes-Turner states that:

... [a]lthough faculty women of colour have obtained academic positions, even when tenured they often confront situations that limit their authority and, as they address these situations, drain their energy (Viernes-Turner, 2002: 74, drawing from Chase, 1995).

Similarly, Johnson-Bailey et al. write that:

... teachers’ positionality affected their experiences in the classroom by a) producing a teaching philosophy based on a history of marginalization 2) raising issues of credibility because of their race and gender, and c) directly affecting classroom interactions and teaching strategies (1996: 278).

Many of the educators in Osler’s research did not want to speak out against oppression in different situational and teaching context on the grounds that:

... [a] challenging position is a potentially controversial one. While this type of approach might be difficult for any teacher, it is likely to be more difficult for a black teacher working in isolation, given that anything a black teacher may do may be perceived as controversial by the very fact of the teacher’s blackness (Osler, 1997: 196).
Obidah (2000: 1036), in writing about her experiences as a professor teaching multicultural education in the US, notes that ‘for some of us who teach multicultural education, we approach our classrooms far more confident about what we want to teach, than about how we will teach it’. According to Weinstein and Obear ‘traditional modes of teaching distance us from the core issues and conflicts that are central to social justice education [and this] can often result in simply skimming the surface’ (Weinstein & Obear, 1992, cited by Bell et al., 1997: 306). As Bell et al. state:

> For most faculty, our professional training has not prepared us to address emotionally and socially charged issues in the classroom. Social justice education is not simply new content but often a radical change in process as well ... [i]n most traditional classrooms, our particular social and cultural identities as teachers usually remain in the background, but in the social justice classroom where social identity is central to the content, the significance of who we are often takes center stage (Bell et al., 1997: 299).

In their study involving 25 university faculty staff working across different disciplines in an American university, Bell et al. (1997) suggest that our membership with privileged or minority groups influences how educators and students respond to the material under discussion. Following on from this premise, the participants in Weinstein and Obear’s study explained that when they explored the issue of racism in their classroom, what made them nervous about raising this was their own reluctance to make such memberships explicit (Bell, et al., 1997). As one of the participants in the study explained:
Barbara: African American students often express difficulty in seeing themselves in the role of dominant or agent of oppression. They are so closely identified with the role of target or victim that they fail to see how they benefit from agent aspects of their identity. I grew up with a keen awareness of myself as a black person, but with no understanding at all of the ways I benefit from my status as a Christian. I gathered lots of information about disability oppression, but gained a much deeper understanding of systemic exclusion of people with disabilities when I suffered an injury that left me temporarily disabled (Bell et al., 1997: 300).

The aforementioned studies affirm that the social identity of the educator matters in anti-racism and multicultural teaching. Given the many kinds of difference, however, we cannot assume that the experiences of all black educators, or any other race/ethnic group for that matter, is the same. The aforementioned study amply illustrates this. It also suggests that there is great heterogeneity within the experiences of black educators in the US and presumably in other places such as Australia. Being a member of a target group does not make one an expert on oppression. The issue of privilege plays an important role. For these reasons, in my study, I have assumed that self-reflection on our own positioning is important. Self-reflexivity enables us to think about the concepts of privilege and oppression in our own educative practice so we can more fully appreciate that there are multiple social realities and disparities between these.

The experiential account given by Barbara, the participant in Weinstein and Obear’s study (Bell et al., 1997) demonstrates that there are many ways in which
race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and other dimensions of identity interact and intersect in our lives. While skin colour is by no means the most important or universal signifier of difference for all educators, to discount its significance altogether may have dire consequences for some. To illustrate this, I refer back to the same study where the participant goes on to explain that:

*Barbara:* Being Black means different things to different African heritage people. A light-skinned middle-or upper-class African heritage person growing up in the Northeast in the 1990s will describe the experience of being Black very differently from a dark-skinned working class person raised in the South in the 1950s. Neither experience is any more or less authentically black. While different, both experiences interact with a system of racism that extends through time, geographic region, and particular individual/family locations (Weinstein & Obear, 1992, in Bell, 1997: 300).

Her observation suggests that if we do not acknowledge privilege, including white race privilege and the privilege afforded us through access to various forms of capital (Bourdieu & Accardo, 1993) and global flows (Appadurai, 1990), then we maintain rather than interrupt hierarchical systems of thinking and acting. This supports the notion that difference is not exclusively a black or white issue, but is contested within and between various collectivities.

When we, as educators, are asked to shift our paradigms, it can be a difficult task and the source of some anxiety and even fear (Bell *et al.*, 1997). We find ourselves often having to deal with conflict between individuals and with biased and racist comments.
from dominant members in the presence of members from other groups, from students and from colleagues (Bell et al., 1997). We might worry about whether we are inadvertently reifying or condoning racism and other forms of oppression in our practice or whether we should expose our own struggles or uncertainty with issues. How do we deal with our mistakes? Facilitating engagement and discussion around issues of social change is hardly a straightforward or linear process. The aforementioned study acknowledges that emotions such as anger, joy, compassion, resentment, embarrassment, pain, sorrow, fear, guilt and shame make teaching for social change a challenging and also confronting process (hooks, 1992a, 1992b; Bell et al., 1997; Obidah, 2000). These studies also suggest that we need more space for discussion about feelings, ethics and the emotional aspects of education for social change in the university.

Malin affirms the powerful impact that whiteness, positionality and hierarchies have in the Australian university classroom:

*Often Aboriginal students would be present when non-Indigenous students expressed anger at such issues as ‘government handouts’, ‘light-skinned’ Aboriginal people identifying as Aboriginal, the visible presence of unemployed Aboriginal people ... For some older Indigenous students these issues offer the chance to explain their point of view, but for younger students it can be humiliating. Many are tired of constantly having to justify their existence* (Malin, 1999: 3).
Malin offers alternative insights into how teaching and learning about social identity elicits a range of responses from white participants and educators alike in an anti-racism educational context. She acknowledges that the biggest professional challenge has been her experience in teaching about social justice and cultural diversity subjects. In particular, her findings reveal that pre-service educators do not want to be ‘considered racist, or sexist, or to be accused of discriminatory behaviours or prejudiced attitudes’ (Malin, 1999). It is suggested that teachers tend to ‘inadvertently act in ways that marginalise minority group members simply because our society is configured to the needs of the majority’ (Malin, 1999: 1).

Malin’s study highlight some of the concerns expressed in pre-service education studies and offers valuable and important food for thought. Her experiences and observations about the kinds of tensions that arise in multicultural and anti-racism classrooms resonate closely with my own teaching experiences:

... students embrace the concept of a multicultural, egalitarian Australia and an abhorrence of racism. On the other hand, [pre-service teachers] express resentments towards immigrants who maintain their native language and customs in public, and Aboriginal recipients of targeted government education and other programs (Malin, 1999: 2).

In Australia, we know little about women educators of colour or about the significance of the concept of difference in higher education pedagogy. I looked further to studies in the US and UK to locate women of colour. By broadening the
literature search I was able to identify a whole new set of concerns that are not usually addressed in higher education studies in Australia.
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