

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE FAMILY INFLUENCES, EDUCATIONAL  
EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS OF A GROUP OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN  
FEMALE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE

by

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*Dedicated to my parents  
Anand and Mina Singh*

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## INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to explore some of the influences of the family and the school on the life chances and aspirations of a group of South African Indian female students at the University of Durban-Westville. This qualitative, feminist investigation focuses primarily on their past experiences, meanings and interpretations, demonstrating how they have served to influence and define these students' lives. An attempt is made to illustrate how the category of gender, mediated by other variables such as race, class and ethnicity, shapes the beliefs, actions and values which ultimately account for the position of women in society. An examination of the social agencies, such as the school and the family and the practices and processes involved in the production, reproduction and contestation of gender statuses, provides a conspective view of the lives of these students. Such an approach offers scope for a better understanding of cultural and racial stereotyping, oppression and subordination in society.

This study points to the need to examine more closely the relationship between individual action and social structure. To analyze what women do as an unproblematic outcome of social structure is simply inadequate. This approach fails to recognise that women change and think and move and struggle. It misrepresents individual consciousness as merely an internalization of the dominant ideology. Women are located in more complex ways than any simple correspondence theory. Their ways of determining how to act are full of contradictory pressures and understandings. This is accomplished by an attempt to bridge the central

aspects of reproduction theory, with its focus on how wider social forms reproduce the gender-specific dimension of inequality, and aspects of feminist theory that focus on the importance of consciousness, the subjective side of human relations and the authenticity of human experience. The study stresses the process in which dominant social forms are contested, resisted and at times, overcome.

In this study an attempt is made to demonstrate these developments by firstly drawing on women's own experiences and life history accounts. One of the features of the feminist use of life accounts as a research method and technique is that it gives a voice to those who would have traditionally remained silent. Secondly, this study tries to provide a range of theoretical explanations for gender and difference. Emerging out of this examination of the various perspectives on the construction of social identities, is the way in which difference coalesces into gender, race and class identities.

The fact that this study deals with women from a particular ethnic group, also makes ethnicity and cultural differences important considerations. The patriarchal relations within this group and the racial hierarchy of the South African society, are some aspects which feature in an analysis of the students' aspirations. A relational, structural and interpretive analysis of this kind makes it possible to look at the impact of ethnicity and gender relations on the students' perceptions of their future roles.

This qualitative study attempts to investigate the ways in which these women's "definitions of situations" (i.e their perceptions and interpretations of reality and how it relates to their behaviour), help to determine social arrangements. For example, how their perceptions of achievement, can not only define achievement, but also identify those who achieve.

Whilst most of the studies mentioned in Chapter One and Two have focused on the primary and secondary stages of schooling, the tertiary level has been an area of apparent neglect:

"It is above all at the tertiary stage that the warp and woof of inequality and discrimination are interwoven to the greatest disadvantage of women - and of particular groups of women."

(Byrne 1978:179)

The tertiary level of education represents the crystallization of women's experiences in the home and at school. Very few researchers have attempted to analyze the distribution of women in the various tertiary level vocational fields of study and provide explanations as to why they are well represented in certain fields of study such as education and the arts but not in other fields such as science and engineering. Also lacking, is an understanding of the **processes** which women have undergone that dictate and define their ultimate choices and preferences. Hence, the tertiary level of education provides an opportunity for researchers to trace the paths taken by women as well as analyze their final destinations; thus, formulating some kind of theory about how gender differences are constructed through the processes of schooling and the interaction in the family.

This neglect motivated the study of a sample of female students from four different faculties at the University of Durban-Westville. The emphasis was on the processes underlying the students' constructions of their aspirations (that is, educational ambitions, careers preferred and social statuses desired). This was done by focusing on the meanings and interpretations which these students placed upon their actions. The source of these meanings and



interpretations was traced to the family and their previous educational experiences.

By highlighting the experiences of the sample in the family, secondary education and their subsequent entry to tertiary education, this study endeavours to shed some light on personal decision-making, as well as the influences of sex role stereotyping.

The analysis and findings of this study should contribute to an understanding of the following aspects of the experiences of women:

- i. the role models present in the family;
- ii. the structure and processing of knowledge at school, and the roles of teachers which influence the aspirations of female students;
- iii. the macro-social, structural and cultural forces which shape these students' aspirations.

#### **THE USE OF THE QUALITATIVE, FEMINIST RESEARCH PARADIGM**

This study argues strongly for the grounding of research of the social world in the researcher's own subjective oppression. This particular argument has been expressed in many different ways by researchers and theorists. However, a rejection of positivism and an interest in phenomenological or social interactionist approaches, discussions about the personal being political and a new definition of the relationship between the researcher and subject, are all central concerns of these arguments.

Qualitative, feminist research methodology cuts across different theoretical stances and provides a valuable means for researchers to begin to address the relationship between structural oppression and the lived realities of individuals under study.

### **THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

The design of this study is explained in greater detail in Chapter Three; however, a brief mention is made at this stage to contextualise the issues that have been raised.

A pilot study of the distribution of female students across the various faculties was conducted. The findings of this pilot study indicated that female students were concentrated around the areas of the Arts and Humanities, whilst being least represented in the areas of Science and Engineering.

A sample of forty first year Indian female students was selected at random from four different faculties, viz: Arts, Commerce, Education and Science, as these best represented the various vocational fields of study at this university. In addition, the principles of theoretical and selective sampling, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967: 45-60), Denzin (1970:82), Bogdan and Taylor (1975:27-28) and Burgess (1982 : 76-98), were used to include students from different sub-cultural groups in the Indian community. These processes occurred in two phases; the first being the sampling of faculties and courses within the faculties, the second being the sampling of the respondents. At the time of the sampling process, the female students in the various faculties were predominantly of Indian origin, thus providing the research with a truly representative sample from this group.

The principles of theoretical and selective sampling were applied to the selection of the faculties and courses. The faculties viz. arts, commerce, education and science, were selected on the basis that they were the most popular, having a high student intake; as well as the fact that they best represented the distinctly different vocational areas of study.

Similarly, the motivating factors behind the selection of the courses viz. education, English, mathematics and business economics, were firstly that they appeared to be amongst the most popular first year courses selected, and secondly they indicated a relatively high number of female student enrolments.

The fieldwork which **initially** consisted of forty home visits and interviews with parents, eighty personal interviews with the students and five group discussions, (further interviews had to be set up where insufficient data had been collated), was conducted in various phases. It commenced with a preliminary, structured interview with the respondents which was aimed at capturing personal particulars, as well as to explain the nature and form of the research to them. This was followed up by a series of personal interviews conducted with the students, until sufficient data had been obtained to establish personal profiles of each of the students in the sample.

This phase preceded the home visits and interviews with their parents, as sufficient personal knowledge of the students and their home-backgrounds had to be obtained in order to have more meaningful discussions with the parents during the home visits.

The homes of all the students were visited and discussions and interviews were conducted with parents and other influential members of the family. This also provided an ideal opportunity to determine the social and material background of the students, as well as to triangulate and thereby verify and validate the data already obtained from the interviews with the students.

In addition to the regular individual interviews and discussions with the students, group discussions were also held. The observations, discussions and interviews were all


conducted in an open-ended way.

The data collected through the use of audio-tapes and observational field notes, included vast amounts of information about the personalities of the students, their experiences in the home and at school, their aspirations and fears, as well as descriptions of their everyday lives.

There were generally two basic approaches that could be used to analyze the qualitative data from this study; that is, the structured approach and the intuitive approach. Structured analysis uses content analysis, coding frameworks, and statistical analysis to analyze data, whilst intuitive analysis uses progressive focusing, emerging issues, auditing, and data exclusion to analyze data (Adams, 1982). The structured approach has been found to be too restrictive for most studies on social reality. The ideal solution was to merge the flexibility of intuitive analysis with the systematic nature of structured analysis. Transcripts of these audio-taped interviews and discussions, were analyzed according to broad categories of content, and along the lines suggested by Eckhardt and Ermann (1977 : 298 - 300), Sanders and Pinkey (1983 : 188 - 190) and Cohen and Manion (1986 : 62).

The content categories are those that have emerged from the qualitative data, and have not in any way been imposed. An attempt is made to indicate how these various categories are interrelated to give as comprehensive a picture as possible of the students' interpretations of their experiences and aspirations.

#### **GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

 This dissertation is divided into five chapters. It begins with an introduction that presents the background to this study. It also highlights the main problem by examining the aims, assumptions and limitations of the investigation.

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Chapter One presents a critique of a few social science theories relevant to this study, attempting to lend clarity to the philosophical and sociological underpinnings of this study. Its ultimate purpose is to place the present study in a paradigmatic context and present an argument for the concepts and theories that have formed the framework of this research. It explores the concept of gender, examining general theories and concepts associated with the family influences, the educational system and the life chances and aspirations of women. It is against such a background that the issues concerning and affecting South African Indian women can be best analyzed and understood.

The review of literature in Chapter Two attempts to document some of the major trends in social science research with the explicit purpose of locating this study within a wider theoretical matrix.

A detailed account of the research methodology and design of the study is given in Chapter Three. It examines the procedures and methods employed and presents all the relevant statistical data, together with some of the underlying reasoning that shaped and influenced the design of this study.

An analysis of the data and the main findings pertaining to the influences of the family and the school, on the life chances of women, are presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five attempts to provide some tentative explanations for a better understanding of the South African Indian females' experience of stereotyping, oppression and subordination. A number of recommendations for future research, together with theoretical implications, are also suggested, bearing in mind the exploratory nature of this study.

### **SOME LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

Whilst women's issues represent a vast and complex field of study, the very nature of qualitative inquiry itself unearths copious amounts of exciting and interesting data. The quest for answers only served to raise more pertinent questions, which is to be expected with the nature of this type of constructivist inquiry. This resulted in the research having to be "contained" and indirect issues such as sexual harassment, physical/sexual abuse, psychological abuse and labour-related problems of parents, had to be deliberately excluded as it shifted the focus beyond the realms of the present investigation.

It was also not possible to do a cross-cultural survey i.e. to contrast the findings of this study against the experiences and perceptions of other groups of females at the University of Durban-Westville. At the time of the sampling procedure, the majority of the women in the various faculties were of Indian origin. The recommendation that flows from this is the possibility of similar studies being conducted with female students of other ethnic affiliations at the University of Durban-Westville, as it was beyond the scope of the present study to embark on such an ambitious task.

Some of the findings of this study have been treated with more concern and care than others. Mies (1982) makes reference to this "conscious partiality" when she questions the role of the feminist researcher in the research process. She contests the argument that this "double consciousness" presents an obstacle to the research process, but maintains that it should instead be used as a methodological opportunity that recognises the subjective experiences of the researcher as a starting point for the research process. Acknowledgement of this factor demonstrates a desire to move away from the conventional, objective, neutral, alienated and disinterested approach to the research process. However,

these "conscious partialities" are recognised and discussed fully in the design of the study and the analysis of the data.

For example, the findings focus on the experiences and aspirations of these students relating to the field of science, in particular. This is attributed to the fact that even though Indian women now outnumber the Indian men entering this university, they still tend to enter into gender appropriate fields of study.

Another limitation of this study, with its focus on the experiences and perceptions of females, is the indirect implication that males receive a better education, and better opportunities. Although males do have better life chances, they are also socialised into accepting "the male role model" and are pressurised, especially when they might not possess the qualities that are expected of them, i.e. the characteristics that define "maleness". It would make for most interesting research, to grasp the intricacies of the perceptions of South African males of Indian origin and the impact that the family and the school have on their aspirations.

Although the data was triangulated wherever possible, it must be remembered that these are the perceptions of the students and hence, the possibility does exist that there could be a small measure of distortion in the manner in which the data might have been perceived, interpreted and analyzed. It is anticipated that this is negligible and that the core issues which are raised and debated, present a clear and as accurate a picture as is possible, of the experiences and aspirations of these students.

**CONCLUSION**

Women's decisions direct their lives in both the public and the private spheres. The aim of this study is to gain some clarity on the social construction of women's realities by examining the influences exerted within the educational system as well as the impact of the family on the formulation of female aspirations. It proposes that specific attitudes and behaviours in the family and the school, are effective in modifying or neutralizing gender inequality. Equality of opportunity, education and schooling, socialisation and the role of parents and teachers, all act as instruments of social control in a patriarchal, capitalist society.

Whilst an attempt is made in this study to capture some aspects of the "life-worlds" of these students, it serves primarily to deepen our understanding of the meanings, values and beliefs underlying the actions of women. It also serves to question the white, western, middle-class interpretation of women's oppression that is predominant in most literature, whilst at the same time, making a strong plea for the development of perspectives that address some of the ramifications of race, class, ethnicity and other affiliations on gender oppression.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 1.1 Background

The pivotal issue in this study is the tension between structure and agency in society. This investigation was influenced by a desire to emphasize the role of human agency within the context of structural analysis and to understand gender as integral to social structure. This required the probing of macro and micro perspectives simultaneously, allowing for freedom and determination, choice and constraint, reproduction and resistance; which makes it a far more complex undertaking. Its broader focus comes from institutional and historical analysis, which places the choices that these Indian female students make, within a social context.

The question of choice goes beyond simply assessing which approaches can best be applied in particular cases. It has to involve theoretical issues concerning the relationship between individual agency and social structure. This study tries to reconceptualise the issue of choice in such a way that it incorporates both the orientation of these women, that is, individual consciousness, and the organisation of the school and family, that is, social structure.

However, to analyse choices and views only in terms of the individuals concerned, is in itself too limiting. It becomes essential to make reference to a repertoire of concepts and frameworks to make sense of what is happening to these students. Particularly lacking are ethnographic and qualitative studies that investigate the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of women from particular ethnic groups in society. Given that the emphasis in sociological literature on education has been on white, western, male

choices and experiences, an attempt to document the process, is in itself a challenge.

There are many competing frameworks and perspectives in the social sciences, to a point where it cannot be argued that one pet theory is correct. All frameworks are temporary constructions of a historical time and therefore should not be given pride of place. Data do not speak for themselves; therefore research findings are open to a variety of alternative interpretations. This need to develop a more sensitive appreciation of where interpretations come from, why some are favoured over others, or whether analysis from a different location might produce different priorities is pivotal to understanding the nature of this study. It therefore becomes imperative to move beyond simply reporting the views of the women but to try to locate these views in some explanatory framework. Part of the research endeavour is to search for a construct, an explanation that carries conviction.

The most commonly found theories about social inequalities vary mainly at the level of the way society is analyzed. On this basis, these theories can be characterized as falling into two main categories: the structural and the social action perspectives. Structural or the macro-perspective examines the way society fits together. Despite their differences, functionalism and Marxism use a similar model of how society works as a whole. The main differences between functionalist and Marxist perspectives is the way in which they characterize the social structure. Whilst functionalists stress the extent to which the different elements of the social structure fit together harmoniously, Marxists stress the lack of fit between the different parts, particularly social classes, and therefore emphasize the potential for social conflict.

The social action approaches (interpretive sociology or micro-sociology), base their analysis on perceiving human behaviour as being largely determined by society. Society is seen to be largely the product of human activity, thus denying that human behaviour is determined by the structure of society. This approach stresses the meaningfulness of human behaviour. In modern sociology, there are two main varieties of this type of sociology; symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology.

Symbolic interactionism attempts to explain human behaviour and human society by examining the ways that people interpret the actions of others, develop a self-concept or self-image, and act in terms of meanings. They believe that the social structure is fluid and constantly changing in response to interaction. This study uses this perspective as its starting point. The respondents' interpretations of their experiences in the home and the educational system were pivotal to the way in which they defined themselves and their aspirations. However, having laid this foundation, symbolic interactionism falls short in that it fails to explain human behaviour in relation to gender.

Ethnomethodology moves very much further away from the structural approach by denying the existence of a social structure altogether. The beliefs are rooted in the fact that the social world consists of the definitions and characterizations of members of society. These subjective meanings thus constitute social reality.

The liberal, Marxist/socialist and the radical feminist theories, as well as those feminist theories, underpinned by post-modernism and post-structuralism, all address the existence of gender-based asymmetries. Most feminist theories differ from classical sociological explanations of women's oppression in society, yet still do not go far enough to explain gender differences in terms of other

affiliations such as race, ethnicity, class and the cultural-political context.

There are many approaches that do not fit neatly into these broad categories as structural or social action perspectives. It is therefore, simply not possible to provide clear dividing lines between sociological perspectives. This also serves to strengthen the argument against compartmentalised thinking in research.

A small degree of synthesis was necessary to develop a cogent framework for the present study. The use of one specific perspective proved to be ineffective in attempting to shed some light on the fundamental problems in their own terms. It is for this reason that this study is not located in one specific perspective or paradigm but has been informed by work from different perspectives. Whilst it is interpretive in that it involves a micro-level of investigation involving face-to-face interactions with a small sample of respondents; it is also feminist in that it recognises the fact that responses to the home environment and to education, are gendered. However, it also recognises the fact that gender identities do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by race and ethnicity, as well as other affiliations.

This study is concerned with these overlapping identities that highlight the differing experiences of women as well as the power relations within systems, and is therefore best explained by drawing on the theoretical approaches of production and reproduction with the view that social structures and knowledge are socially constructed and therefore open to contestation.

The study moves between the level of the individual to the institutional level, exploring factors in the school and home environment that form the context and culture in which

curricular, vocational and other choices are made. The study and data collection also spans a period of time of historical significance in South Africa. The context being one of transition and social transformation from a racially segregated system to a democratic state.

## **1.2 Educational Influences**

At the university level, the small number of women enrolled in engineering and science has frequently been noted. Women are much more likely than men to be enrolled in the fields of education, fine arts and the humanities. In high schools, young women are more often in domestic science and history than in mathematics, physical science and computer science courses. The patterns are identifiable but the social processes that produce such consistent relationships need to be understood if teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and students are to ascertain what might bring about change.

The processes involved in course enrolment are not well understood. In the academic literature, terms such as 'chose', 'channelled into', 'placed in', 'end up in' can all be found describing the process whereby students are enrolled in different courses. The confusion in terms reflects the confusion about what actually happens. Do students choose or do teachers place? Ability grouping by the teacher is equated with curriculum differentiation, which ought to be more freely chosen. Little attention has been paid to how the process is envisaged by the school or by the students and parents.

Sociologists have explored the criteria the school uses to sort students (Heyns, 1974; Davies and Haller, 1981) and the role school records and counsellors play in placing students in different tracks (Clark, 1960; Cicourel and Kitsuse, 1963; Rosenbaum, 1976). Cicourel and Kitsuse's (1963) study of the way guidance counsellors classify and place students

using knowledge of their social class backgrounds has become a classic in the literature.

Literature on school classrooms has pointed out the ways teachers' constructions of gender influence what goes on in class (Levy, 1972; Stanworth, 1983). All these are ways of seeing how the school has an impact on student's choices.

Much of the discussions of course enrolments, has taken place in relation to class and racial inequalities ( Oakes, 1985; Page and Valli, 1990), rather than gender and racial or ethnic inequalities. There is a very strong link between curricular and vocational choices and academic performance. Many statistical profiles of women's enrolment in educational programmes shows dramatic differences between the kinds of courses taken by men and by women. Academic performance is a poor predictor of gender differences in course enrolments. Gender itself matters and this study explores how it does.

### **1.3 Family Influences**

When women's experiences are studied and analyzed, they always include extensive discussion on domestic issues (Rubin, 1979; Gerson, 1985). Women are constantly aware of their domestic responsibilities, hence their planning around career issues is strongly linked to their roles as mothers and wives. The analysis of the organization of the family in this study, and the role it plays in locating these female students, is crucial to an understanding of the position of women in society. The way these women anticipate the future serves to give shape to what the future offers them. Their assumptions about domestic responsibilities serve mainly to reproduce patterns of work in society. Most analyses that account for the reproduction of family life are structural and argue that women's subordination in the family is necessary but fail to demonstrate how they are produced (Gaskell, 1992).

Research has emphasised the process involved in the transmission of images of women's domesticity. While such research has made visible sexist practices, the assumption is that socialisation is a simple, unproblematic matter of internalisation, where young women emerge to recreate the traditional patterns of behaviour (Anyon, 1981). This study analyses the internalisation of norms and values in society but goes further by stressing that socialisation is mediated through the categories of race and ethnicity. Gender-specific experiences and life conditions are selectively assimilated.

This study emphasises the ways structures of dominant ideologies of gender infringe on the experiences of the young Indian women sampled, as well as the ways in which they construct domestic responsibilities in their lives. These women are not passive recipients of cultural imperatives, but are active, creative participants in the social process, trying to make sense of their lives. Although they do make choices that reflect planning for domesticity, which invariably perpetuates women's subordination in the family, they are not entirely vulnerable to the process. They are able to see through some of the inequities and thus some aspects of the socialisation process are resisted. By examining their domestic responsibilities and how they organise them, and for what reasons, reveals the structural and ideological factors that become critical in reproducing patterns.

#### **1.4 The Concept of Resistance**

Reproduction theory is used as an approach in this study, to accentuate the ways in which existing gender identities are reproduced in the school and the home. Much of the writings on reproduction theory has focused on ideological functions of for example, text and classroom practice and the role this plays in reinforcing patriarchal hegemony. It can effectively be used to analyse the relationships between

schooling and women's work. Although this theory has attempted to explain women's experiences in the home, school and the workplace, its limitation lies in its neglect to conceptualise women as **active agents** in the reproductive process.

It is argued here that the process of socialisation does not simply reproduce patterns of behaviour in the home, school and workplace. Much of the women's experiences are contested and redefined by them.

The concept of resistance has generally been used in descriptions of public counter-school or anti-social behaviour. Whilst this has produced some interesting insights, the work has looked largely at the male experience. Connell (1982), Davies (1983) and Kessler et al (1985) argue that resistance has different meanings for males and females. These theorists among others, state that males and females tend to negotiate social forces to meet their own needs whilst simultaneously resisting domination and oppression.

However, the various forms of resistance are also influenced by the categories of class, race, ethnicity, region, colonial history and other affiliations. Women's experiences will therefore be expected to be different and dependent on their local context. These experiences are also shaped by what is seen as "gender appropriate" for their particular contexts, which further reveals the diversity and complexity of women's experiences in the home and school and the effect this has on their aspirations.

Research on youth subcultures has revealed this to be a site for resistance to the dominant ideology. Much of the work in this area has focused on antisocial behaviour of females and has been influenced by the work of Willis (1981). In his study, Willis focuses on working class boys and male



subcultures. McRobbie (1980) and Acker (1981) were among the many theorists who criticised his work for failing to recognise the sexism inherent in male subcultures. Weiler (1988) describes this omission as significant in that it reinforces the whole notion that girls in working-class subcultures are oppressed and subordinate. This failure to acknowledge the sexism of male subcultures is said to result in a weak and incomplete understanding of working-class culture and life experiences.

There are very few studies on women's subcultures. Some of the more relevant contributions have come from McRobbie (1978), Fuller (1980;1983) and Thomas (1980). Their contributions have served to highlight the intricacies of race, class and gender in the lives of working-class girls.

McRobbie (1978) and Thomas (1980) studied white working-class girls. Both their studies acknowledged that the experiences and actions of the girls could not be explained exclusively in terms of class. Only an analysis of the private, domestic worlds and the family as well as the school, would explain their oppression and resistance. McRobbie and Thomas use the concept of resistance to explain the complexity of class and gender experiences of working-class girls.

This concept is also useful in any examination of gender and its relations to race and ethnicity. Fuller (1980; 1983) focused on Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Pakistani and white British girls in a London comprehensive school. She highlighted the category of race as pivotal to her work, bringing the realities of racism and racial identity to the fore. Thus the concept of resistance becomes more complicated because it is mediated by other social forces besides gender.

Fuller (1983) analyzed the strategies that these girls employed to gain control over their lives. She identified

three main areas of control. The girls were being controlled by others in and outside of school; they all aspired to some form of control over their own lives; and lastly, their need to exercise self-control in their present situations in order to achieve independence later on in life. Fuller's position is that the black girls viewed academic qualifications as a statement of their own sense of competence. She argues further that the conjunction of the different forms of oppression together with their definitions of their roles, contributes to their determination to use education as an avenue for upward social mobility and independence.

Fuller also raises important questions about the role of subcultures in general but does not address the issue of ethnic gender identities.

Gaskell (1985) and Kessler, Ashenden, Connell, and Dowsett (1985) have also analyzed the intersection of the family and the school and the power relations in those sites. They argue that to ignore racial differences in any study of gender, is to distort the realities of the experiences of the women. Gaskell, in her study of working-class girls argues that choices of women are made in relation to their own understanding of their worlds. She stresses the importance of hearing the girls' own stories and perceptions about their worlds.

This brief review has important theoretical implications for this study. All of these studies highlight the importance of understanding the oppression and subordination of women in their own particular historical situations. They also caution theorists by pointing to the dangers of trivialising these experiences if contradictions and resistance are ignored as integral components of the process.

The major themes that emerge from all the above-mentioned studies and have particular relevance for this study are:

- i. the claim that everyone has the capacity to make meaning of their lives and to resist oppression;
- ii. that this capacity to make meaning is influenced by class, race, ethnicity and gender;
- iii. that people immersed in classist, sexist and racist societies may actually end up reinforcing oppression and hegemony in their bid to find solutions to the problems.

The concept of resistance is crucial to an understanding of the experiences and aspirations of the women in this study because it highlights their ability as human agents to make meaning and to act in social situations as well as to be acted upon.

### **1.5 Gender and Difference**

A significant development in feminist theory more recently, has been the recognition of the issues of diversity and difference. The category of gender is intertwined with other socially constructed categories such as race, ethnicity and class. Race, class and gender form synergistic systems of domination and oppression. Ransford and Miller (1983) refer to the concept of "ethgender" to demonstrate how racism and sexism combine to create a distinct social location rather than the "double disadvantage" often mentioned by researchers.

The experiences of white, mainly middle-class women has been generally portrayed in research as the experience of all women. This often leads to a distorted understanding of women's oppression and subordination in different societies. This false universalization has served only to strengthen

the hegemonic forces by establishing the white women as the norm against which all women are judged.

This realisation compels a re-evaluation of feminist research to avoid false universalization of the dominant culture. hooks (1984) for example, analyses explanatory frameworks to identify how they would alter if the perspective of black women are considered. The critique of difference reveals that gender identity is constructed through the codes and relations of the dominant culture in society.

To quote Lorde (1983:99):

"As women we have been taught to either ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as a force for change. Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist."

The difference debate was introduced to the international feminist discourse by black feminists who insisted that structures of oppression be acknowledged in terms not only of class and gender but also of race and ethnicity. One important aspect of this debate is the link between difference and power. Feminist analysis today, is aimed more towards the local and specific causes of oppression rather than the general.

Although ethnicity is being considered within the context of difference internationally, it has not, as yet, been raised much in South Africa (Agenda 19; 1993). Within the South African society and historical context, identity and

difference occupies a highly contentious position. The apartheid regime's concern through its policy of separate development, with ethnic and racial divisions, has resulted in a very specific negative influence on the discourses of difference in this country. The present political climate, coupled with the history of state imposed ethnic divisions, has left many feminists hesitant to explore the question of difference.

Ethnicity and race have often been used interchangeably, resulting in the meaning of both concepts being diluted. Ethnicity refers to members of a group within a larger community, who are set apart, or who set themselves apart on the basis of language type or variation, religion, customs, and cultural features such as music, diet, art and technology (Vos & Brits 1987: 52-55). An important feature of ethnicity is group identification. The ethnic group often distinguishes itself from other groups in the broader society and this culminates in the establishment of group image and a sense of identity (Arthur 1992: 51). The boundaries of ethnicity can be reinforced from within the group, by socialization and a group's desire to be different; or from outside the group by virtue of intergroup relations and perceptions. Ethnicity is, to a greater degree than the concept of race, closely linked to a particular society's 'culture'.

It is not appropriate to nonchalantly refer to ethnicity without considering its ramifications. Ethnicity and culture both involve a group's sense of identity and its desire to pass on its heritage of assumptions and beliefs. Ethnicity often involves elements of a culture and an ethnic group is usually characterized by specific cultural features. However, a culture may not necessarily be ethnocentric and can often involve more than one ethnic group.

Black women in South Africa do not constitute a homogeneous category. Their lives are also affected by the type of gender relations that exist amongst the particular ethnic groups to which they belong. They are also identifiable by religion, sect within a religion, linguistic group, cultural group, the country from which their families originate. Each of these factors results in the women having unique and distinctive experiences. However, this is often neglected and perceptions, assumptions and understandings tend to be resolutely embedded in racial, cultural and ethnic stereotypes. Such endeavours shift the concern away from a need to understand the complexities of black women's experiences, by instead, offering simplistic, monolithic appraisals.

The experiences of South African Indian women in particular, are influenced by their being female in a historically, racially segregated society. They are subject to the social stratifications prevailing in South Africa, but unlike white women, their experience of this oppression is through the filter of the categories of race and ethnicity.

Their lives are also affected by the type of gender relations which exist amongst the particular ethnic groups to which they belong. They are identifiable by religion, sect within a religion, linguistic group, caste and by the country from which their families originate. Although each of these factors makes for a unique and distinctive experience, the category of racial stereotypes that abound, shift attention away from the need to understand the complexities of this experience.

The important issue for this sociological study, is the **value** that is frequently attached to these characteristics, either by the women within the group or by women outside the group.

It is a dangerous practice to try to pigeon-hole women in terms of ethnicity, or as being representative of a particular cultural group. Group culture is acquired through socialization (Tsajiw in Arthur 1992: 51), which gives women a sense of identity within the group. However, once subjective value judgements are allowed to obscure considerations of ethnicity, negative stereotyping occurs. This often leads to women denying their individual uniqueness, which forms the basis of their essential humanity.

The cardinal source of Indian women's problems in all spheres of life, including education, is often stereotypically identified as the family. Contrary to these popular stereotypes the majority of Indian girls have strong, positive and mutually supportive relationships with their parents.

There is strong indication that very little attempt is made to acquire any intimate knowledge about the private sphere of the Indian family life and its dynamic and vibrant female cultures. But strong evidence exists of the compulsion to speak through Western, Eurocentric perspectives that define women in **their** own terms and interests. The subtle message that emerges from the texts is that, for example, the Eastern dress codes are necessarily burdensome and confining, whilst the Western way of dressing is progressive.

Contrary to the popular stereotype, which suggest that all Indian parents are opposed to further education, there is tremendous parental support for higher education even in non-conventional careers such as the sciences and engineering.

It is extremely rare to find examples or extracts which illustrate and highlight the struggles of Indian women

against colonialism or struggles against state racism. The selection of examples are generally negative and contemptuous. The continual focus on 'arranged marriages' and the 'brutality of Islamic laws', reinforce the prevailing myths of Indian families.

Such explanations dismiss the reality of racism, sexism and class inequality in shaping the life chances of Indian women. The family is instead, constructed as the source of all problems. This disguises the fact that the South African society encompasses a variety of class, regional and national cultures which complement and/or confront each other, all within a broader framework of the power structures.

The study, motivated and written out of personal experiences as an Indian women in South Africa, serves to challenge the pervasive notions of Indian women in the South African society. This study maintains that any discussion on Indian women in the South African education system must be understood within the context of the complex social and historical processes which account for the subordination of all black groups in society. It underscores the idea that social relations in the South African society, be understood against a background of colonialism and imperialism.

It also asserts that it is inaccurate to believe that schools are politically neutral institutions and that the professional codes of conduct stop for example, teachers' personal beliefs from affecting their pedagogical practices and their daily interactions with pupils.

The chapter argues that any understanding of the position of Indian females will remain limited and distorted, unless an attempt is made to begin to identify how, why and in what ways racism, gender and class inequalities are produced and reproduced within the education system and in society at



large. It must be reiterated that this does not imply that there is a simple one-to-one relationship between these dimensions of Indian women's subordination with each oppression superimposed one on top of the other. The study does however, like Fuller (1983), argue against such an "additive model". The structures which reproduce racism, gender and class relations have both complementary and contradictory effects.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

The gist of the major problem in social theory, is that structural theories and correspondence theories have for too long regarded individual action as an unproblematic reflection of social structure. These theories construct students as if they internalize the beliefs of the parents, teachers and the school. Young women are quite capable of thinking for themselves, questioning authority and trying to make sense of their own worlds. They do all this by borrowing the language and the ideology in which they have grown up, and within social locations that they did not opt for, but this does not make them passive recipients. This study captures aspects of this process, illustrating how the process goes beyond any simplistic notion about structures acting on people.

As a solution to this theoretical impasse, this study argues in a post-modernist way for a move away from the "grand narrative" framework to an acknowledgement of the complex, varying nature of subjective identity and hence experience. This shift to conceptualising women's oppression at the level of specific context, location and position is also reflected in a range of feminist scholarship across various disciplines. This study theorises and fragments the concepts of gender and ethnicity by denouncing the grand view of overarching theories. Walby (1992), however, has argued that this fragmentation has gone too far, in that it

trivialises the significance of the structuring of power.

It is argued in this study, that young women are active participants in the process of socialisation that results in differential course enrolments, perceptions and aspirations. But in emphasizing women's choices, the study tries to avoid an approach that reifies and decontextualises their perceptions, attitudes and aspirations.

Strategies to combat racism and sexism constitute a complex issue and is not straight forward. It is important that practice is informed by an understanding of the broader social context within which racism and sexism are embedded. There is a need to make connections between what goes on in society as a whole, the home and schools. The ethos sustained in the schools and the home needs to be examined but equally important is to challenge the inherent racism and sexism itself.

There is a dire need to break away from a narrow Eurocentric mode of thinking and teaching which contributes to the devaluation of black cultures and experiences. It is only by recognising the value of cultures and experiences other than their own and by working together to develop and refine anti-racist and anti-sexist practice that society can genuinely begin to think about education and equality as compatible notions.

The chapter that follows will review some of the more pertinent studies and literature on the themes already outlined in the present chapter with a view to exposing the gaps that exist in educational research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an outline and critique of some of the studies within social science frameworks in educational research that are relevant to this study. Whilst the review is mainly on the salient issues that are directly related to an analysis of the influences of the family and the school on the life chances and aspirations of the young Indian women, it also reveals aspects of the subtleties and complexities of some sociological theories in relation to this study. However, the main purpose of this literature review is to **expose** some of the theoretical gaps that exist in educational research and locate the present study within a wider research framework.

Demaine (1981) argues that any mode of review is always dogmatic because it supposes a privileged level of discourse against which the theories or issues to be criticised are compared and examined and does actually end up being dogmatic. This is not necessarily true. Any mode of review can expose differences and shortcomings without adopting a dogmatic stance. It is for this reason that the study is approached from the perspective of "appropriateness" of theories, concepts and perspectives.

#### 2.2 Background

Mainstream sociology in the 1960s and 1970s, being relatively conservative, was mainly concerned with order in society. It was strongly influenced by a functionalist and human capital perspective that regarded social arrangements to be a consequence of society's survival needs. Education was viewed as relatively unproblematic by sociologists of

that period. The dominant paradigm that was used to analyse education and the economy, was the status attainment approach which sought to measure the relative inputs of family background, socio-economic status, educational attainments and other variables on occupational attainment.

The quantitative, statistical and 'scientific' approaches were highly favoured. Status attainment research focused exclusively on individual differences, assuming that these characteristics differentiated between those who were successful and those who were unsuccessful. The adherence to such a framework, failed entirely to address the lack of congruence between **women's educational and occupational achievements.**

Sociology of education in Britain, at around that time, was caught up in a wave of innovative thinking. This gathered momentum and later came to be known as the 'new sociology of education'. The collection of essays edited by Young (1971) in *Knowledge and Control*, exemplified this new direction. The thrust in these writings was to render the curriculum as problematic, arguing that people, as well as knowledge, were processed in schools. Some of the key questions looked at **why some forms of knowledge were considered of more worth than other forms of knowledge and who set the agendas and shaped the curriculum.**

Neo-Marxism was influenced by the 'new sociology' and by certain works from the United States, especially Bowles and Gintis, (1976). The ethnographers built a British version of Chicago-style symbolic interactionism and drew upon it to explore processes in schools and the classrooms (Woods, 1979; Burgess, 1983; Delamont, 1984; Ball and Goodson, 1985). Both these traditions changed over time: the neo-Marxists being influenced by Willis (1977) and Apple (1979) **to move away from rigid reproduction models towards those which incorporated resistance and respected the perspectives**

**of the people;** the ethnographers raising thorny theoretical issues as well as producing descriptive monographs.

In North America, a series of works in the 1980s sought, like Willis's study, to add resistance to reproduction and develop what has sometimes been called critical education theory. The studies represent a move away from the determinism of correspondence theories such as those outlined by Bowles and Gintis (1976). Influenced by Paulo Freire, they try to retrieve the liberating potential of education and **emphasize individual agency as well as structures.** Weiler (1988) explains how neo-Marxist insights are often retained but production rather than reproduction of cultures becomes central, thus establishing some links with phenomenological or other interpretive perspectives. Critical education theory, and its counterpart, critical pedagogy, claim to be different from other approaches because they offer an explicit moral commitment to empowerment and emancipation (McLaren, 1989). The claims of critical pedagogy have been rather sweeping and some criticisms of its pretensions and assumptions have been launched (Ellsworth, 1989). British sociology of education, in more recent times, has moved away from theory and strongly into educational policy analysis and research.

The dominant theme in the sociology of education since the early 1950s, in Britain in particular, has been that of equality of educational opportunity (Swift, 1969; Banks, 1976; Tyler, 1977; Musgrave, 1979; Flanagan and Rayner, 1988; Haralambos and Holborn, 1990). The vast amount of literature on this theme focuses mainly on social class and educational opportunity (Floud, Halsey and Martin, 1956; Little and Westergaard, 1964; Swift, 1967; Althusser, 1971; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Brennan, 1993).

However, in recent years, increasing attention has also been given to ethnicity, education and inequality (Mullard, 1983; Troyna and Williams, 1985; Cambridge and Feuchtwang, 1990; Booth, 1992; Serandour and Gilroy, 1993; ).

But the question of inequality of educational opportunity between the sexes had not been sufficiently widely acknowledged as an obstacle to the structures of opportunity and privilege, social mobility and life chances of women, until fairly recently.

Prior to the 1970s, research studies on the social aspects of educational systems, systematically excluded the experiences of women. Even the highly acclaimed studies of Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) on family, class and education; and the study of Willis (1977) on the transition from school to work, do not include an analysis of female culture.

It was only in the last decade or so, with the increase in feminist consciousness, that a demand was created for women's studies programmes. This resulted in the realisation that very little was documented about women, and it created difficulty in finding sufficient information to use in these programmes. This gave rise to the creation of a demand for research that added to the stock of knowledge of the female experience.

These traditions were challenged by feminism, for as with most sociology of education before 1980, there was little attention paid to gender. Reproduction and resistance theorists had to try to understand the sexual as well as social division of labour (David, 1980); the ethnographers had to consider whether the experiences of girls might be different from those of boys (Davies, 1984).

Modern collections of empirical work, such as Craft, Raynor

and Cohen (1980), frequently ignore gender roles and women's employment. Feminist theorists such as David (1980) and MacDonald have explored the "family-education couple" and looked at the implications of reproduction theory for understanding women's education. Their work is tentative because of the shortage of relevant empirical studies.

Since the 1980s, gender has found its way into the mainstream. The sex-roles approach characteristic of North America, has declined. In Britain liberal feminist views dominate official rhetoric but sociological scholarship is more likely to draw from socialist or radical feminism. Postmodern challenges to the categories used in feminist theory and research have set off vigorous debates in North America. Although there is British writing from this perspective it tends to be associated with literary rather than sociological studies and British feminist sociology of education has not yet engaged with this debate to any great degree. Lovell (1990) provides excellent observations on the impact of different academic traditions on feminist criticism.

There are different understandings of what the criteria are for research to be regarded as authentically feminist. Among these are usually the centrality of gender to the analysis, an appreciation of the 'personal as political' and a commitment to improving the situation of women in some way.

There is now a considerable body of work on socialisation in early childhood and a number of studies of gender roles in school (Clarricoates, 1980; Delamont, 1981; Llewellyn, 1980; McRobbie, 1978; Sharpe, 1976; Wolpe, 1977). Yet gender socialisation at home and the school remain unexplored. As Arnot (1981) points out, in these studies an "unexamined assumption is that the family and the school transmit the

same definition of gender and that no conflict occurs between these two social institutions". With a few exceptions, gender socialisation is seen as a continuous process at home and school with little variation by class or race and few contradictions for the children involved.

Analysis of female culture have come under some scrutiny, especially by feminist researchers such as Byrne (1978), Deem (1978,1980), Delamont (1980), MacDonald (1980,1981), Arnot(1982,1986), Kessler et. al. (1985), Walkerdine (1989) and Blackman and Holland (1989). These researchers together with others such as Furlong (1976), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Kelly (1981,1985,1986), Fuller (1983) and Measor (1984), all argue that the experiences of young women within the family and educational system are largely responsible for maintaining the subordinate status of women in society and the existing sexual division of labour.

All these studies point to the differential sex-role typing of boys and girls, not only in the family, but also in school. Educational systems and the culture of the home, generate or influence values, beliefs and normative attitudes which contribute to the general stock of assumptions or knowledge about the role of women in society (Byrne, 1978 : 179).

A more recent trend in the sociology of education, is the recognition of the diversities of women's experiences, as well as the patriarchal oppression that they share. This recognition of differences by researchers, has raised serious questions around the vast amounts of literature and research that presents women's experiences as monolithic and homogeneous; and responses to their oppression as universal (Afshar and Maynard, 1994). The inter-relationships between race, ethnicity and gender and the consequences of racism for women of different backgrounds, has received scant attention by researchers.



The classical sociological theories regarding social inequalities in education such as the structural perspectives which examines society as a whole; for example functionalism (or the consensual perspective), the Marxist and Neo-Marxist (or conflict perspectives) and social action or interpretative perspectives such as symbolic interactionism and phenomenology; have produced the most commonly found theories about social inequalities. The following review of the various sociological theories assesses their merits and demerits within the context of the issues that have been raised in the previous chapter. Some of these approaches are examined to expose their limitations in dealing with gender inequalities. This is followed by a review of a few feminist theories such as the liberal, Marxist/socialist and the radical feminist theory, as well as those feminist theories, underpinned by post-modernism and post-structuralism, that address the existence of gender-based asymmetries. The general arguments developed show how most feminist theories differ from classical sociological explanations of women's oppression in society, yet still do not go far enough to explain gender differences in terms of race, ethnicity, class and the cultural-political context.

## **2.3 Classical Sociological Approaches**

### **2.3.1 Structuralism**

The early source of structuralist ideas was Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). This perspective has been strongly influenced by the writings of Durkheim. The main impetus to his work lies in linguistics. These views were incorporated into the social sciences and humanities (Giddens; 1990). He argues that the meaning of words derives from the structures of language and not the objects to which the words refer. Meanings are created internally within language, not by the objects in the world which we refer to by means of them. To this analysis, he states that objects that we can systematically distinguish can be used

to make meaning. The term referred to is **semiotics**.

The structuralist approach was used widely in the United States and was made popular by Levi-Strauss, Althusser, Poulantzas, Foucault and Lacan (Alexander, 1987). Although they differ on the exact nature of structuralism, there is consensus on the idea of society and culture being viewed as a whole, the idea of transformation and the concept of self-regulation. Structuralist concepts have been applied to the study of the media, ideology and culture in general.

Structuralist thought has weaknesses which limit its appeal as a theoretical framework for this study. Its useful in exploring communication and culture but has less application to more practical concerns of social life such as economics or socio-political activity.

In sociology of education, various attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon of educational inequalities (Davis and Moore, 1967; Young, 1961; Goldthorpe, 1980). Whilst the focus of these discussions has been on the function of the educational system in serving the various social classes, these theories have not engaged specifically with issues such as access to education, drop-out rates and the number of years of education attained. They do, however, offer formulations that can be extended to these kinds of outcomes.

Bernstein's view on educational inequalities have an impact on educational outcomes. He asserts that pupils bring to school conceptual patterns acquired through socialisation in their families. These language and cognitive differences include limited vocabularies and syntactic structures and poor analytical abilities on the part of pupils of lower social class and more elaborated, abstract language and thinking abilities on the part of pupils from more privileged social classes (1974).

His more recent contributions refer explicitly to gender, but maintains that gender, ethnicity and religious categories "speak through class regulated modes" (1982: 336)

Similar observations about differential abilities of social classes were made by Elder (1965) and Hess & Shipman (1965); although they did not concentrate on language competencies but on cognitive ability. They felt that children's thought patterns and exploration are stimulated in varying degrees by their family socialisation practices, particularly by maternal behaviours.

Bourdieu's theory of the reproduction of cultural capital complements the above rationales introducing the notion that schools select certain types of speech, taste and knowledge as legitimate and in doing so they reproduce the power of certain social classes (Halsey 1980). As a group, these theorists identify the more 'capable' children as belonging to the upper or middle-income families and the less 'capable' as living in low-income families but they do not address the question of why schools would tend to promote patterns of speech and cognitive development that favour one class over another.

Expanding their arguments to account for social inequalities in education, it could be said that children of lower socio-economic origins are likely to experience difficulties adjusting to the more formal and complex setting of the school and often respond by leaving school without completing their studies.

**Both Bernstein and Bourdieu, whilst ignoring the school as a site of cultural reproduction, also dismiss the possibilities of contestation and resistance by students.**

These theories cannot be used in this study to account for gender differences because they contain nothing in their arguments to explain gender differences within social classes.

### 2.3.2 Functionalism

Functionalism and Marxism are characterised by the claim of objectivity of social structure. Societies are viewed as structures consisting of components that have meaning only in relation to the whole. Functionalism stresses co-operation and stability. Social integration is achieved essentially through value consensus and shared cognitive orientations. This is achieved through a pervasive set of principles that legitimize the existing social, economic and political structure. Traced as far back as 1798 to 1857 in the work of Comte and Spencer (1820-1903), further development and refinement was done by Durkheim and Parsons (Haralambos and Holborn, 1990).

Society is viewed as a system that is made up of inter-related parts that form a whole. Each part, performing a specific function within the system, has meaning only in terms of its relations with the whole. It is often compared to the parts of the body; the analogy extending to the survival of the body being dependant on the way in which all parts relate to each other. Durkheim (1938), argued that any human interaction produces an emergent level of reality which is distinct from that of the individuals but although external to the individuals, it controls their actions. Reality is expressed as two forms: phenomena at the level of social organisation and the second; phenomena as social currents. Thus the world of reality is described as a world of social facts.

Any functionalist analysis usually addresses the question of how social systems are maintained. The focus is on functions rather than dysfunctions. Central to

functionalism, is the belief that human behaviour is shaped by the system and are hence creations of the system. This deterministic view has been criticised by many who advocate that human beings construct their own social worlds. Central to the work of Durkheim and Parsons, is the argument that schooling is meritocratic and that success in it depends on the motivation and intellectual ability of the individual. Schools sort children out and in the process stratify society but according to merit. Durkheim makes no reference to the manifestations that schooling would take in urban /rural areas, ethnicity and gender. His logic explains unequal outcomes as a function of individual motivational and/or cognitive differences; the notion of a systematic injustice generated by formal educational systems or by society at large are not discussed.

Parsons considered the likely asymmetry between men and women's education, but proposed that such differences were necessary for the good functioning of society, which required a specialized division of labour, with men aggressive , instrumental roles and women in nurturing, 'expressive' roles in the home. **This complementary function is rejected by women, who perceive this to be an "oppressive distinction that forces women into domestic arenas" (Giddens, 1990).**

Parsons (1959), a major contributor to functional theory, called attention to the links between the organisation of schooling and the organisation of society, particularly the economy. Schools serve two functions for the economy. They teach or socialize them, developing their skills and capacities to participate productively in the economy. They allocate them to occupational roles by evaluating their skills and capacities to do well, ensuring that those who perform most ably in school will get the best job. This view puts in sociological form many of the common-sense, meritocratic beliefs of democratic, industrialised

societies. Schools teach what you need to know to do well in society. Thus education is critically important for one's opportunities in life. This functional framework was used in Canada by Porter (1965) to analyse Canadian schooling. There has been a good deal of empirical research that uses the functional framework to look at the worlds of school and work. Studies of people moving from school to work show how education mediates the transition. In terms of socialization, studies of curriculum show ways in which the skills and values learned at school are similar to those rewarded at work (Dreeben, 1968).

A particularly important tradition that arose out of the assumptions of functional theory was 'status attainment research'. This research explores the allocation of school leavers to the labour (Jencks et al., 1979; Porter et al., 1982; Kerckhoff, 1990). It looks at the factors eg. educational achievement, IQ, socio-economic status, etc. that have an effect on attainment at school and in the labour market.

This kind of research focuses only on individual differences, assuming that these characteristics are what will differentiate those who are successful from those who are unsuccessful. This has close links to the 'human capital theory' that if one person can get ahead as a result of education, it follows that an entire economy also can.

All of this theorising and research is based on an optimistic and meritocratic version of education and the work-place. The harmony of individual and collective interests of all is taken for granted.

This complacent vision of school and work stemmed from the prevailing liberal ideology of the 1950s and 1960s. It championed individuals' responsibility for their own success or failure. It viewed social progress as intimately linked

to increasing levels of education. It believed in the potential of education and work to bring social progress and economic prosperity. This view informed most government documents discussing education and most educational policy in the US, Canada and Britain.

By the 1970s the persistence of social inequality in increasingly affluent societies was reaching the political agenda. It was still assumed that the problems were located in the students. If the school system taught and rewarded those things that were necessary for the work-place, and if poor students were not performing well in school, one needed to give them extra help to catch up, to make up for the advantages wealthier children enjoyed because of their home backgrounds. The problems were with the students and their families, not the structure and organisation of schooling.

The political movements of the late 1960s and 1970s did ultimately challenge the assumption of a harmonious education for all. Some important new theoretical approaches and a vibrant new scholarship arose. The emphasis shifted from an assumption that schooling served everyone, to an assumption that schooling served some better than others. The question became who was served by the existing organisation of schooling, and how those with less power could be better served. Marxist theory provides the clearest example of this, and it challenged much previous work on the relationship between school and work. They assume a fundamental conflict between capital and labour - a conflict which capital dominates. Schooling then becomes the agent of capital, producing workers who accept their alienation from their work and fit into an exploitative work-place. Schooling becomes the social agency that reproduces class divisions from one generation to the next, making the process appear fair and competitive. The most influential statement of this position was Bowles and Gintis (1976). The educational process of socialisation and

allocation are as central to Bowles and Gintis's theory as they are to Parsons's. But here they are treated quite differently. Gone is the harmony of interest, meritocratic judgement of skills and competence. In their place is a class segregated institution, a class based version of successful performance that is stacked against working class people and a meritocratic ideology that conceals the class basis of the whole system. The form that schooling takes does not reflect the needs of a productive economy but the needs of the ruling class for control, for cheap labour and for the selection of their own children into good jobs. The school system cries out for reform, but as it is controlled by those who benefit from it, little can be done without major economic change.

Various kinds of empirical studies provided support for this general thesis. There were studies that moved inside the school to explore the educational processes more critically. Revisionist studies of historical roots of schooling provided new insights into the ways schooling was used for social control of the poor and of immigrants (Katz, 1968; Lazerson, 1971; Spring, 1972). Studies of schools showed that working class children are segregated from wealthy children, and are taught different things (Anyon, 1981; Oakes, 1982). Studies of classrooms pointed out how teachers reward docility rather than creativity, and social conformity and intellectual compliance as much as independence and intellectual competence (Sharp and Green, 1975; Whitty, 1985).

Studies of social mobility showed that parents social status is an excellent predictor of childrens' success in school and of their jobs, even if mediated through education (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Halsey et al., 1980).



### 2.3.3 Marxism

Although all Marxists trace their views back to Karl Marx, there are a number of variations in the interpretations of the dominant ideas. In the field of sociology, Marxism has emerged in three forms of theoretical traditions. Whilst some have adopted a functionalist approach to historical materialism others have been influenced by structuralism, Althusser is an example. Both these interpretations differ from those that stress the active, creative character of human behaviour. However, very few have been influenced by symbolic interactionism but have adopted a perspective close to it. Marxism is, however, frequently viewed as a package of sociological analysis and reform, with the emphasis on class divisions, conflict, power and ideology. Giddens (1990) argues that Marxism should not be seen as an approach in sociology but as a body of writing existing alongside sociology, each overlapping and being influenced by the other. Non-Marxist sociology and Marxism have always existed in a relationship of mutual influence and opposition.

Neo-Marxist analysis has generated explanations by identifying social classes more explicitly and asserting that schools reflect the dominant economic structure in society.

One of the best known Marxist critiques of education is Bowles and Gintis (1976:132-133). They focus on the question of differential socialisation by the school system into dominant and dominated social classes, contending that schools teach the children of the wealthy to be managerial and autonomous while the low-class students are taught to be subservient and obedient workers.

While these authors concentrate on the socialisation role of school, an extension of their assertions can lead to questions of participation and attainment, such as, the extent to which the educational system emphasizes the

transmission of proper worker attitudes. For example, students from the lower position in the hierarchy, in the process of production, or, students from lower classes will not be motivated to pursuing higher levels of education and the school will not be especially concerned with making sure that these students complete their education or achieve greater levels of cognitive skills.

Bowles and Gintis do address the phenomenon of school expansion and explain it in terms of a capitalist response to the need to produce the workers that the economy demands. Thus making the claim that expansion did not take place with the objective of improving social mobility but rather to facilitate the rapid reproduction of the working class.

Bowles and Gintis' main argument that the school gives differential messages to students from different social classes, receives some refinement in the work of Baudelot and Establet (1971) who maintain that the school is not a unitary system but comprises two distinct networks corresponding to the two main social classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The network serving the proletariat not only transmits knowledge that trains students for manual occupations but also consists of schools of poor quality and concomitant poor learning.

The neo-Marxist theories have given much attention to social class as a key determinant in providing important insights about the macro-level functioning of schooling, but they provide explanations that do not acknowledge the existence of gender differentiation within the social classes. As a group these theories would predict that individuals from low social classes would tend to attain different types of schooling and fewer years of schooling than their better off counterparts.

**As is the case for functionalist theories, the neo-Marxist**

**explanations of school behaviour are gender blind and unable to explain why inequalities occur within social classes.**

What neo-Marxist theories do contribute to the understanding of gender inequalities is that determinants of school failure are located not within motivations and abilities of individuals but within process and objectives of institutions in society. The role of structure appears as a force of significance.

Neo-Marxist theory has also identified the State to be a significant force in generating, regulating and maintaining social relations. Offe (1985) sees the State as intimately linked to the educational processes and objectives. At the same time he sees the States policies as the reconciliation of 'licensed' demands or recognised needs with the perceived 'exigencies' or tolerance of the capitalist economy for 'unproductive' social expenditure. This predicts that the State will respond to requests for additional education or even different types of education presented by the subordinate classes without making substantial changes in the way education is perceived or rewarded.

Archer (1982) found that the existence of multiple and competing interest groups accounts for the expansion of schooling much better than the notion of a strong social class with a clear and dominant objective. Meyer (1979) maintains that educational expansion is best explained by the diffusion of global system of citizenship values espoused by the modern state. The values include respect for equality, due process and political freedom. Archer's explanations do not address gender differences. Meyer does hold that these will disappear over time as the citizenship rights become more and more accepted.

Marx's view is at odds with this. Gender differences in power between men and women mainly reflect other divisions

i.e class divisions. In the earliest forms of society neither gender nor class divisions are present. Power of men over women only came about when class divisions appeared. Women came to be a form of private property owned by men through the institution of marriage. Women will be free from their bondage when class divisions are overcome. Few accept this analysis today but it can be made more plausible by generalising it further.

Class is not the only factor shaping social divisions which affect the behaviour of men and women. Other factors such as **ethnicity** and cultural background have recently emerged as important categories for an analysis of society. It has been argued that women in minority groups, have more in common with men in that minority group than they do with women in the majority, for example, white women in the United States of America. It has also been demonstrated that women from a particular culture share more common characteristics with males of that culture than they do with women from, for example, industrialised societies. It is clear that women have not participated in the decision making process dealing with the expansion and content of schooling. Their progress has been primarily a side effect of the existence of more schools and the school's claim to be a meritocratic system.

Traditional Marxists must address theoretical developments to rejuvenate their gender-blind Marxism. It is important for Marxism to address the dialectic of self and other in a post marxist context. This redevelopment should incorporate flexibility so that it moves back and forth between the concerns of public and personal politics as well as political economy and ideological critique.

#### **2.3.4 Symbolic interactionism**

This perspective attempts to understand and explain the social world from the point of view of the actors who are

directly involved in the social process. It examines individual actions as well as the actions of small social groups.

The micro-sociological approaches developed as a reaction to the lack of relevance and unacceptable assumptions of the 'macro' approaches.

This approach attempts to understand education, by examining 'everyday activity', since every aspect of society is built on how people act in everyday life. It is the day to day activities of parents, teachers, pupils that form the focal point, as any changes in these components will bring about changes in education and society.

The term 'meaning' in interpretive theory includes such notions as aims, intentions, aspirations. Actors construct meanings from society, culture, history and family. To understand everyday activity requires the ability to grasp the meanings that people give to their behaviour.

Most of our everyday activity involves interaction with other people, and we give meaning or interpret the behaviour of the people with whom we interact. We have typifications of people which we use to interpret their behaviour.

Another element which affects interpretation of actions are 'categories' of activities. This is a set of assumptions according to which we categorize what constitutes 'hard-working' 'lazy', 'intelligent', etc. These are not generally examined because it is often regarded as common sense and is therefore taken-for-granted. But it is essential to our understanding of how a person comes to act in the way that s/he does. In order to investigate the common-sense assumptions which are being used, the "Trojan

horse" (Fog;1992) approach is used; i.e. to "talk your way into the universe of the respondent".

The actors' meanings and interpretations are not constant and unchanging. They often modify their views. Over a period of time and through the process of negotiation of meaning, actors come to have shared understandings and meanings.

The interpretive approach demands that we adopt the subjectivist method in order to understand how an actor defines the situation. The danger is that our own preconceived ideas might affect what we observe. Thus the possibility exists that certain behaviours might be misinterpreted.

The interpretive approach argues that we must 'bracket out' our own assumptions and typifications in order to solicit the actor's views and be true to the meanings and understandings of the respondents. But, research is a human endeavour and this occurs inside the framework of being a woman, a mother, a member of society. Brock (1989) illustrates this point in her research on schools and hospitals, implying that researchers are human beings and are shaped by their feelings and emotions. There is always a personal element implied in research, such as interest, involvement and enthusiasm (Taylor,1985; Madmen, 1986; Tchudi, 1989). The researcher's task is to give meaning to the actor's meanings by locating them within the wider context of society. The observer does not merely describe activity but structures the data presented.

This perspective explains human behaviour in terms of meanings and self-concepts. It is therefore more suited to the active , creative individual than the other two approaches. Mead claims that language allows us to become self-conscious beings aware of our own individuality.

Hence, symbolic thought frees us from being limited in our experience to what we actually see, hear or feel. Symbolic interactionists argue that almost all interaction between individuals involves an exchange of symbols. It directs our attention to the detail of interpersonal interaction used to make sense of what others say or do. Sociologists working within this tradition, usually focus on face-to-face interaction in the contexts of everyday life.

The major weakness of this approach is that it focuses too much on the small-scale. This makes it difficult to deal with large scale structures and processes - the very phenomena which the other two traditions most strongly emphasize. It also examines human behaviour in a vacuum because of its tendency to focus on small-scale face-to-face interaction with little concern for its historical or social setting. **It focuses on particular situations and encounters with little reference to the historical events which led up to them or the wider social framework in which they occur.** "They are merely episodes, interactions, encounters and situations" (Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1975 : 97).

Whilst it does provide a corrective to the excesses of societal determinism, many critics have argued that it has gone too far in this direction. A claim often made is that action is not determined by structural norms alone. The interactionists do admit the presence of such norms, but these norms are taken as given rather than explained in terms of their origins. In stressing the flexibility and freedom of human action the interactionist tends to downplay the constraints on action. They fail to adequately explain how standardized normative behaviour comes about and why members of society are motivated to act in terms of social norms. On the positive side, some of the most riveting sociology is grounded in the symbolic interactionist tradition.

## **2.4 Feminist Theory**

Although feminist theories differed initially over factors responsible for the subordination of women in society, there has been a convergence of ideas more recently. The three commonly occurring categories of feminism are the liberal, radical and socialist perspectives. There has recently been a further process of merging, resulting in two categories : the liberal or egalitarian and the feminist approaches (a combination of the radical and the socialist/Marxist feminism) (Weiler,1988). These three perspectives are discussed and analyzed to account for educational inequalities between males and females.

### **2.4.1 Liberal Feminism**

This approach is the least integrated and least clear cut of the three major positions because it presents no clearly developed theories about gender inequalities. Its aims and views are more moderate, posing less of a challenge to existing values; hence its greater popular support than other perspectives. It is underpinned by the 'sex-role socialisation' explanations, asserting that socialization into gender roles has the consequence of producing rigid, inflexible expectations of men and women. Whilst it does not seek revolutionary change in society, its emphasis is on reforming existing social structures. Liberal feminists aim for gradual change in the political, economic and social systems of Western societies. The social system is seen as an essentially just system; explanations lie not so much with the structures and institutions of society, but in its culture and the attitudes of individuals. All deviations from desirable conditions, including educational inequality, are attributed to a lack of information about the problems facing women and the lack of adequate legislation to ensure women's equal access to education and other social and economic arenas. This discrimination prevents women from having equal opportunities.



The creation of equal opportunities in education and work, is the main aim of liberal feminists. They pursue this aim through the introduction of legislation and also by attempting to change attitudes in a bid to eradicate sexism and stereotypical views of women and men from for example, curricular materials, school practices and the mass media (Deckard; 1983). This tradition has led to the emergence of classroom ethnographies and analyses of textbooks.

It is further argued that women have been socialized to have low levels of educational aspirations; and that the available literacy programs have not been designed to take into account the interests of women or of their time constraints. It is the lower levels of educational attainment attributed to traditional socialization messages and sexual discrimination practices in the schools (for example, sexual stereotypes in textbooks, course and career counselling, higher teacher expectations towards boys, etc) that the State has not yet been able to combat successfully.

**The lower participation of women in university education and their concentrated presence in only a few fields would be seen as the cumulative result of discrimination and socialization of women that trains them to "fear success" (Horner, 1969) and discourages them from seeking challenging careers.**

In reply to why women are gaining more access to education over time, liberal feminism responds by stating that this is a manifestation of the State's ideology of citizenry, which applies equally to both men and women. These answers however, do not treat the underlying causes of female discrimination. Why is it that men and women are given different socialization messages in the first place? Why do socialization practices persistently discriminate against women rather than men? If discrimination continues to

exist why does the State tolerate it? Ramirez and Weiss (1979) see the state evolving into a benign and progressive macro-institution that is promoting increasingly wider and fairer definitions of citizenry throughout the world. This definition is said to encompass women as individuals entitled to fullrights. According to this benign interpretation of the state one would see the gradual incorporation of women as the product of modern state ideologies that seek to integrate new categories of individuals into its polity. Ramirez and Weiss (1979) conducted an investigation covering between 38 and 61 countries and using multiple regression analysis, and concluded that higher levels of State authority resulted in greater participation of women in secondary education , but the standardized regression coefficients for these effects were weak (the highest value being .10) and no effects could be found regarding the participation of women in tertiary education (pp 244-246; primary education enrolment was not examined).

The interpretation of the state as a benevolent actor cannot for a variety of reasons be taken very far because:

a) It does not distinguish between symbolic and substantial acts by the State (eg. not every constitutional right or government policy is in fact implemented). A report on the education of women in Asia and the Pacific notes that the constitutions of all countries in the region "enshrine" the principle of equal educational opportunities and that the national development plans have even reflected concern regarding the disadvantaged status of girls but that with the exception of China, no policy has directly attempted to counter socio-cultural barriers by conscientizing and mobilizing the community on a sufficiently large scale to make a tangible impact on community attendance and participation. (APEID, 1986, p.26). Analysis of legislation to promote gender equality and equity in education in the

United States shows the modest actual improvement of women in the educational arena and the enormous symbolic gains associated with such legislation (Stromquist, 1989c). Similar studies of legislative policies in England and Australia also indicate mild success via State measures (Deem, 1981; Yates, 1989; Porter, 1983).

b) It ignores material causes that might be leading the State and other institutions in society to discriminate against women; i.e. why are some States more progressive than others or conversely why have some States achieved so little for women?

c) Most damaging of all, it explains some changes in the gender-role definitions as a product of State actions rather than the consequence of mobilisation and demands of feminist groups. Even the liberation of women is paternalistically interpreted: it is the result of something given to them and not the fruit of their own efforts.

Explanations that say that the State is now doing its best to improve the conditions of women are suspect because they are overly optimistic and underestimate the fact that serious changes in the condition of women cannot derive easily from the institution that has traditionally permitted the subordination and oppression of women.

Since the starting points for liberal feminists are from the liberal principles, they assume that all people are created equal and that there should be equal opportunity for all. They acknowledge that these principles have not been applied to women and demand that they should be. But many questions about the origins of women's lower status are not addressed because of the narrow focus on texts and institutional structures. The view that sexism exists within the domain of ideas, and that if these ideas are transformed, social relationships will automatically be transformed. This

conception does not acknowledge the constraints of the material world, power relations and privilege that constitute social reality. It fails to acknowledge the existence of ideology and culture and does not reveal the complexity of consciousness.

Liberal feminism therefore, has very limited analytic value when attempting to study the intricacies of the social construction of gender within the realms of the family and the school.

#### **2.4.2 Radical Feminism**

Radical feminists view the main cause of women's subordination as originating from the power relations based on sexual or biological differences, i.e. the women's ability to conceive and give birth. The exploitation of women is attributed solely to men on the basis that only men have benefitted from the subordination of women. This exploitation takes the form of providing free labour for men by carrying out childcare and housework and effectively denying women access to positions of power. This theory is underpinned by the notion of patriarchy - that society is dominated and ruled by men.

Men are viewed as the ruling class and women the subject class. The family is seen as the key institution producing women's oppression in modern society. The main difference between radical feminism and liberal feminism is that the former accepts that only revolutionary change can offer liberation. Men are seen as the enemies ; and hence reject any assistance from them in their struggle to achieve the rights they seek. Like the liberal feminists, they seek equality between sexes rather than dominance by either. On the basis of women's biological reproduction features that set women apart as mothers, an ideological system is constructed around the notion of sexuality and motherhood. This system known as patriarchy, defines men as superior to

women and is defended and maintained through an intricate web of values, norms, laws and institutions.

The state is seen as the key agent in the perpetuation of women's subordination via its strong defence of the family as concurrently defined, acts as the main locus for the production of sexual division of labour. The defence of the family by the state, is associated with the identification of women as mothers and housekeepers, creating an artificial but overwhelming "private" realm for women and a "public" world for men. To the extent that the state needs the family to play a specific mission and given that women have a particular role in the family, it would follow that it would be very unlikely for the state to initiate a process in which women's conditions could change substantially.

Expanding this theory to education, the higher levels of illiteracy among women are explained as resulting from the state's reliance on women for biological reproductive tasks which require only a minimum of skills and knowledge, transmitted through informal and non-formal education. In countries with low levels of industrial development, motherhood is construed (socially) as not even requiring literacy. Household tasks require knowledge and organisational skills; they are not dumb tasks, yet they can be acquired through oral, informal methods.

In countries that have almost exclusive motherhood roles for women eg. Pakistan. The result is that there are high rates of illiteracy among women and a high dropout rate after primary schooling. Women attain fewer years of education than men and do not receive priority from the State because it is believed that the state concentrates on improving the education for men first.

**The concentration of women in a few "traditionally female" fields at the university level would be explained in terms**

of the influence of the patriarchal system that inculcates in women the value of domestic responsibilities, with the consequence that they choose careers that tend to be extensions of domestic roles or that will not conflict with them. This perspective does not offer a clear explanation for the higher presence of wealthier as opposed to low-income groups at the university level.

The weakness of this perspective is that it downplays material conditions while defining the gender problem solely on the basis of ideological determinants. It cannot offer a clear explanation of why women are improving their levels of education over time; it does not identify the conditions under which patriarchy would tend to relax its reins. In more recent versions, greater attention is given to material conditions that support the exploitation of women.

#### **2.4.3 Marxist/Socialist Feminism**

This perspective explains women's oppression in terms of economic factors. The socialist feminists do not attribute women's oppression solely to men. The oppression of women is traced to the institution of private property and the first division of society into classes. They focus on the influence of capitalism rather than patriarchy, as the principle source of oppression, as the capitalists are the main beneficiaries of this oppression. Deckard (1983) maintains that the extent to which reproduction is voluntary, the extent to which the socialization of children is considered primarily the women's task, and the extent of sexual freedom all affect the position of women. A similar position to radical feminism is held, in that they see unpaid work as housewives and mothers, as one of the main ways in which women are exploited. They also stress the interconnections between ideological and economic forces, in which patriarchy and capitalism reinforce each other. Sexist ideology and structures such as the family, which maintain women's inferior status, persist because they are

integral part of, and perform important functions for the capitalist system. The family is seen as the source of all oppression which is constantly reinforced by conditions in the labour market. The State is seen as ultimately linked to the mode of production and thus:

- (a) unlikely to alter the position of classes or other groups in the economic sphere
- (b) likely to favour capitalists over workers regardless of gender.

Women represent both part of the reserve labour force and an inexpensive way to reproduce the labour force, with the state acting jointly and closely with economic interests to keep women in a subordinate position. As a result changes in the role of women, independent of changes in both the mode of production and patriarchal structures, would appear to be insignificant.

Marxists and socialist feminists relate oppression to the production of wealth while radical feminism attributes greater importance to the reproduction of the species in the family. It is believed that only revolutionary change and the establishment of a communist society, will gender inequalities disappear. Whilst radical feminists believe that women's oppression has many different origins and causes, they maintain that the school is the main site for the reproduction of women's oppression as workers and as women. As workers they are needed for the maintenance of an inexpensive labour force; as women they are indoctrinated to accept the sexual division of labour that assigns women motherhood and domestic roles.

Wolpe (1978) presents a strong argument against 'stratification' theories which explains women's position in terms of innate psychological differences such as the absence of aggression, excessive anxiety, or orientation

towards nurturing roles. She maintains that such interpretations underplay the powerful influence of the capitalist economy which survives on unpaid domestic work and requires a reserve pool of labour. Wolpe's analysis of the Norwood (1943), Crowther (1959), Newsom (1963) and Conservative Green and Black papers (1977), discloses the ideological assumptions about the role of women in society. She argues that these reports have played a major ideological role in reproducing the oppression and subordination of women in the economy, by influencing school policies. How these assumptions are mediated by teachers and students or put into practice in schools, still remains unclear. But the analysis is valuable in that it demonstrates the linkages between hegemonic ideological views and educational policy and practices implemented in the schools.

Deem's research (1981) documents how State educational policies clearly reflect gender ideologies while welcoming the incorporation of women to meet the needs of capitalist production.

The critical role of the State is most convincingly underscored by Connell (1987: 152), who states that:

"The state is itself a reorganization of gender relations, particularly the structure of gender power. The sexual division of labour is implicated in the production processes that generate the surplus of goods and services which makes urban populations possible. It is important to know to what extent the surplus is appropriated through sexual politics and on gender lines, and to what extent the increased specialization of workers is a gendered one".

The socialist feminist perspective attempts to account for the existence and persistence of gender inequalities in access to and attainment in schooling. The following



explanations can be derived:

Illiteracy can be attributed to women's double role as reproducers of children and guardians of family, and as workers in a segregated labour force. This absorbs many women in the informal sector of the economy, which requires little formal education. The time of low-income women is generally taken by domestic and poorly remunerated work; these women are not available for schooling, especially in societies where the economy relies on subsistence production. Women's education levels are understood in terms of women's devalued role as workers, which concentrates women in only a few occupational positions and places many poor women in the informal sector of the economy which requires either no education or low levels of education.

**Women's presence in sex-segregated fields at the university would be attributed to**

(1) the social definition of women as primarily mothers and hence responsible first and foremost for the welfare of the families and

(2) the labour market conditions that in fact offer women fewer and weaker rewards than those offered to men and thus make it more profitable for parents to invest in sons than in daughters.

In reply to why more women are gaining access to education all over the world, the socialist feminist perspective would argue that as countries become more industrially advanced, labour becomes less predicated on physical strength and thus education is needed by employers to discriminate among workers and by the workers themselves to become more competitive than other workers. However, it must be noted that the new technologies emphasizing the segmented

production of consumer goods such as televisions, computers and garments, need intensive labour in the manufacturing of these products. To produce these "global-assembly line" goods, employers need obedient and unassuming workers- which makes women a prime target. Here the new technologies are serving to recreate a gender-based division of labour by invoking sexual stereotypes such as "manual dexterity" and "patience" to hire women to work in assembly work. For women of lower social classes, educational prospects would not be very good because modest levels of education would be sufficient to find jobs in industrial production. But for women of all classes, the new technologies open new possibilities. As women can fill more positions in the labour force, this creates in turn a greater female demand for education.

From the socialist feminist perspective, there is a basic contradiction between patriarchy and the level of technology. Patriarchy would tend to keep women in the home; technology would tend to incorporate women in new capacities, especially if their labour tends to be inexpensive. At the professional level, occupations based on sophisticated technologies being new, would be less subject to gender stereotypes and this would make it easier for female university students to enter emerging fields. Therefore through new technologies, a new space of social change becomes available for women, albeit limited to those in middle and upper-social classes. Yet it is by no means clear that technology will contribute to an eventual equality of women's schooling; industrialization may develop new spacial arrangements which make large urban centres especially oppressive to low-income women (Harman, 1983).

**Access and attainment may even out for men and women over time, but inequalities in field of study selection will probably continue to preserve man's advantage in economic and social arenas.**

Deem (1978), writing from a social reproduction perspective argues that schools play a pivotal role in maintaining and reproducing the existing sexual division of labour. Her analysis of the nature of the curriculum reveals the underlying assumption that women will ultimately enter into unpaid labour in the home. She notes the small number of women in mathematics and science, demonstrating how this eventually excludes them from certain university courses and careers. Deem maintains that these divisions are not created by the schools but merely reinforce the current arrangement in society by accepting the status quo. Schools are said to transmit different cultures to males and females resulting in their choices reproducing the existing sexual division of labour.

Deem speaks of a continuum between the nurturing and socialization of children in the family, done primarily by the mother and the early years of socialization at school by the female teachers. She rejects the view that women have a natural nurturing role and states that it is the structural organization of capitalist society that perpetuates this division of labour together with the traits associated with it.

A shortcoming of Deem's work is the failure to deal with ideology and the way women exist within a framework that is influenced by hegemonic forces. She makes no reference to the contestations and struggles of women to these hegemonic forces. Although her work reveals significant patterns of discrimination, she fails to examine the way in which these meanings and forms of power are negotiated and mediated in women's daily lives.

Various analysts (Yates, 1986; Weiner, 1986) have observed that gender inequalities in education are not a function of merely lacking attributes and resources needed for educational success but primarily the expression of

conflicting economic interests in society .

Others have brought to the fore the importance of the State in determining gender conditions, even though the evidence derives mostly from industrialised countries . David (1980), who has examined the articulation among the State, education and the family, argues that the school has replaced the church as the institution that links with the family in the maintenance of domestic and social relations. She asserts that the system of universal and compulsory education is accompanied by the State's attribution of responsibility to parents, particularly mothers, for the conditions of their children's education and health.

MacDonald (1980) also observes that the sexual division of labour is largely reproduced by the school curriculum and the large number of primary school teachers in motherly roles.

She conceptualizes the schools as settings that transmit gender codes with strong boundaries for 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. In her view, these codes are tied to the production process and therefore the role of the State in regulating them, is quite salient.

Kelly and Nihlen (1982) provide a similar analysis of women's education to Wolpe and Deem. They argue that domestic, unpaid labour is devalued by the strong, continual emphasis on paid labour. The ideological assumption that this work is the natural responsibility of women is said to have a strong influence on how women's work is defined and internalised by society. Women therefore tend to choose careers that "create space" and enable them to accommodate their domestic responsibilities within their jobs. This effectively cuts women off from certain careers and not others. Working from the perspective of reproduction theory, they analyse the reproductive role of schools in creating a sexual division of labour and begin to question

the appropriateness of this perspective for an understanding of the experiences of women in education.

Kelly and Nihlen focus on the formal curriculum by examining texts for stereo-typing. They also look at the distribution of knowledge in the classroom and in the social relationships of schooling, claiming that this area is not well researched. Studies that have been conducted recognise the categories of race, ethnicity and class as a basis for discrimination sex-role stereotyping. Such studies have shown that working-class girls of colour receive the least attention and have the lowest expectations from teachers.

Their discussion on the possible resistance of women to the ideological messages of the school, the home and society, has particular significance for this study. They acknowledge that women do continue to higher education despite their roles being defined in terms of domestic work. This illustrates the point that women do not simply internalise the ideological messages bombarding them but mediate these messages in terms of their own emotional, intellectual and material needs.

While Kelly and Nihlen expose the shortcomings of the reproduction theory, they suggest the need to examine the ways in which women appropriate or reject the messages about the role of women in paid and domestic labour.

Arnot (1984) maintains that social relationships are dynamic and constructed by individuals within a matrix of power and material constraints. Her work, whilst being influenced by reproduction theory, is highly critical of feminist reproduction theory for its failure to come to terms with the issue of resistance and the fact that the construction of gender identities is contested. She rejects the mechanistic interpretation of the effects of education on

women which ignores the humanity and consciousness of individuals and proposes that the concept of reproduction be replaced with the concept of hegemony. Arnot states that gendered identities are constructed and negotiated through a dynamic process that embraces the various definitions of the role of women that emerge from the family, the school and society. These constructions are challenged and countered by the women. She maintains that the shift to the concept of hegemony, the emphasis on competing codes of meaning and the process of social relationships, will assist in teasing out the intricacies of the impact of capitalism and patriarchy on women's lives.

Arnot, Kelly and Nihlen emphasize the need to acknowledge agency and the production of meaning on the part of women and support the argument that gender constructions be understood within specific historical contexts and locations. This challenge has been taken up and the lived experiences of women in the family and the school, has been the focus of some studies. These studies have utilised the **concept of resistance** to investigate the everyday lives of women in the home and school.

#### **2.4.4 Feminism and Poststructuralism**

Whilst the relationship between feminism and poststructuralism has been addressed by theorists such as Balsamo (1987) and Weedon (1987), Agger's (1989) discussion focuses on the convergence of critical theory, feminist theory and poststructuralism in terms of analysis of the domination of reproduction.

Feminist poststructuralism tends to utilise a number of conceptions from Derrida and Lacan (Felman, 1987). Derrida's critique of the philosophy of presence is often used by theorist as an attempt to resist the male appropriation of language. They argue that the masculine conceptions of reason and reasonable language in discourse, in effect,

actually serve to exclude women and women's writing (Harding, 1986).

Irigaray (1985), Cixous (1986) and Kristeva (1980) hold similar positions to Derrida. They all highlight the ways in which they understand the 'aporetic nature' of language and writing. They view texts as having many levels of often contradictory meaning. These meanings are said to be typified by the hierarchy of text over subtext. Their use of literary method to focus on the hidden assumptions and contradictions of male texts that profess to speak for women or about them, exposes the reality of how "men usurp the dialogue chances of women and thus reinforce their own political and social power" (Agger, 1992).

Lacan (1977) on the other hand, distinguishes between "the realm of the Imaginary and the realm of the Symbolic" to suggest expressive differences between men and women writers. Whilst building on Freud's psychoanalytic theory by appending the poststructuralist notion of language to it, he argues that women have more access than men to the "realm of non-linear, evocative discourse". Men are described as inhabiting the realm of symbolism and language, which includes all the activities of science and philosophy. This realm of expression is said to be governed by "linear notions of logic and discourse". He attempts to generate a complex account of how men and women vacillate between these phases of development. He makes a number of suggestions for new ways of viewing the unconscious, which he believes to be structured like language.

Poststructural feminist criticism has at its locus, the issue of the voices in which culture is expressed, or as Richardson (1990a, 1990c) describes as the standpoints from which knowledge is claimed. This involves all sorts of issues from gender to class and race. Male standpoint is deconstructed as the partial standpoint of people with a

particular interest in the ongoing hegemony of men over women. Thus truth becomes defined as specific truths of those who hold power and therefore are the creators of official knowledge.

One of the central themes of poststructural feminism (Irigaray, 1985) focuses on how the typifications of women, in reality, are actually constructions of men and male culture. Agger (1992) states that "there is a sense in which women are a text on which is inscribed the sentiments and interests of men. Women are thus defined in relation to men and male culture. But this relational definition of women is in terms of the male dominance over women. Any attempts to reject or counter these definitions of women and their roles in society, are portrayed in a highly negative fashion. Women who defy these definitions and attempt to exercise autonomy, are viewed as "man-haters", "frigid" or "anti-family" (Agger, 1992).

Poststructural feminism rejects the notion that feminism should aim to give women maximal freedom of choice. They recognise instead, that choice is not unfettered in society. It is constrained by structures of discourse and power that impose 'choices' on people and not the other way around. It is claimed to be naive to assume that women simply choose their lives independently of the way women's lives are represented. Such a view is often misleading in that it makes individual women believe that choices are available to them.

## **2.5 Family Influences and Educational Experiences**

There is a wide variety of descriptive studies on women's educational access and attainment. Most of these studies distinguish two main sets of obstacles to women's educational parity; namely, those identified as being "school-related" and those classified as "home-related". Sociologists of education have focused their attention on



the links between children's home experiences and school experiences and the impact this has had on their performances. This has provided the grounding for many theoretical contestations such as the nature /nurture debate (women are the products of biology or society) and the deficit /difference argument. More recently, discussion has continued in terms of cultural capital and cultural reproduction.

Although there is much interest in the gender divisions in education, much of the work in this area is tentative because of the shortage of relevant empirical studies. Empirical work, such as Craft, Raynor and Cohen (1980), still frequently ignores gender roles and women's employment. Feminist theorists such as David (1980) and MacDonald (1980) have explored the 'family-education couple' and examined the implications of reproduction theory for understanding women's education.

Within the home-related obstacles such variables as parents' attitudes towards aspirations for their daughters, their socio-economic level, their years in education, the cultural and religious values of their society and the number of younger siblings in the household have been identified as consistently associated with decisions to enrol females in schools and to allow them to continue schooling.

Within the set of school related obstacles, the variables identified are distance to school, presence of female teachers in the classroom, relevant curriculum, presence of counselling facilities and gender-segregated curricula in schools.

These descriptive studies separate school from family related variables and offer an implicit vision of society in which the school and the family operate independently of

each other. They also gloss over the role the State plays in its monopoly over formal education as well as regulating activities within both the school and the family.

Few schools have made any systematic effort to discover the parent's views. This study considers the contradictory messages about gender roles which females may be receiving from their homes, and the different expectations which parents may hold for their daughters and sons.

Science educators, feminists and science-based industry in Britain, had expressed a concern for the under-achievement of girls in the scientific and technological fields. The Association for Science Education undertook the task of ensuring that the issue of women and science became a regular discussion point (Harding, 1986). Clearly, there was a need to understand why girls were being alienated from science. Thus an examination of the curriculum, materials and teaching and learning approaches was conducted to identify areas of bias for girls.

## **2.6 Gender Identity and the Difference debate**

It is not possible for gender identities to exist independently of racial, class, ethnic, regional and other affiliations. Out of this thesis, emerges a discourse of difference which is multilayered and dialectical, or as Walby (1986) more aptly describes as "fluid, shifting and multiple". This critique of difference reveals that gender identity is constructed through the codes and relations of the dominant culture in society.

The research of a number of contemporary black feminists, reflects a deep concern with developing a theory of difference. It is their belief that the dynamics of domination be located in the centre rather than on the margins of power. Their position is that complex modes of inequality are structured through racial, class, and gender

divisions. These divisions are said to underpin the dominant culture and thus shape its basic institutional and ideological constructs. Walby (1986) expresses the need to authenticate the fact that racial identities are also white and should therefore be seen as distinctive historical and social constructions. Such endeavours are critical to expose how the conceptions of whiteness serve as a norm to privilege its own definitions of power. By doing this, it tends to mask the political and social peculiarities located in its general constructions of difference through the categories of race, class and gender.

Mohanty (1991a:53) argues that:

...assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality, inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West, characterise a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world...It is in the process of discursive homogenisation and systematisation of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised..., and this power needs to be defined and named.

Within this perspective, difference must be understood as the process in which subordinate women are silenced, and conceptualised and defined as inferior or dependent by women who create and shape the dominant ideology. Walby (1986) refers to this process as the "dynamics of silencing, subjugation and infantilization".

White ethnicity exercises power by designating "Otherness in terms that degrade and cheapen human life, and hides its own partiality in narratives of universality and common sense". Black feminists are attempting to redefine what it means for women of colour to have exposure and to speak in their own

terms. They have rejected a "politics of the centre in which the Other is reduced to an object whose experiences and traditions are either deemed alien by whites or whose identity has to bear historical weight of Otherness and racialisation" (Walby, 1986).

This is part of a broader endeavour to repudiate popular notions of ethnic identity being associated exclusively with people of colour. Many whites are said to be oblivious to the mechanisms of cultural apartheid and power relations that are central to defining and interpreting the dominant Eurocentric culture. This absence is particularly evident in research and debates that fail to locate white ethnicity in historical and social contexts. Many black researchers are challenging the construction of boundaries of difference through dominant Eurocentric codes. They argue that the discussion of difference be changed from a concern with the margins to an analysis of how the white function to actively and systematically conceal its own historical and cultural identity while devaluing the identity of other ethnic groups. Such an analysis serves to develop an understanding of the construction of white ethnicity and how it attempts to position others. It elucidates oppression in terms of its multiple social relations.

Many whites have tended to ignore differences because of the serious implications this would have for their cultural, political and affective investments. An acknowledgement of differences would immediately expose the asymmetrical relations of power that structure the lives of white and black women differently.

The last decade has seen an emergence from different locations where women no longer feel compelled to speak through western, Eurocentric perspectives that define them

in their own terms and interests.

Lorde criticizes feminist perspectives that ignore or refuse to examine differences as they are constructed outside the worlds of white, western, middle-class women. She argues that in this practice lies the "seeds of racism and homophobia". This refusal is said to evoke guilt which results in white women "allowing" black women to step out of stereotypes:

"The failure of academic feminists to recognise difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower".

In South Africa, many of the concepts from deconstruction theory are utilized to explore theoretical and political trends (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994). Deconstruction theory critiques the hierarchisation of identity and meaning in Western thought. Theorists such as Foucault (1980), Derrida (1982), Spelman (1990) and Barrett (1992) have challenged traditional totalising systems of knowledge. The concept of "difference" (Derrida, 1982) which incorporates hierarchical differences as well as the relational nature of identities, is central to their critique. They argue that meaning is deferred because it is derived from a discursive process where identities are evaluated against each other, such as males and females. This argument is extended to include a critique of hierarchies **within** the category of women, such as white and black women, first world and third world women and middle-class and working-class women.

The conception of "knowledge as power" is often employed by practitioners to explain how the dominant groups in society interpret their subjectivity by portraying subordinate groups as inferior and peripheral. Deconstruction also exposes and highlights the power relations that exists in

most interpretations or representations of issues. The autonomy of the issues that are presented is compromised by the power of the interpretation of the individual. Knowledge can thus be redefined as practices which formulate reality. This runs counter to the emphasis on class and economics that is derived from Marx and Althusser's concept of hegemony whilst ignoring the role of culture, consciousness and knowledge (Hendricks and Lewis, 1994).

## **2.7 Postcolonial Theory**

Feminists such as Minh-ha (1987), Mohanty (1991), Ong (1987) and Spivak (1985), whilst expanding on the theories of deconstructionists, focus on the interactions between gender on the one hand, and racialism and western-centricism on the other. They stress the need to explore third world / black women's experiences with the view to deconstruct hegemonic systems in society.

The category of black women itself, is not monolithic and universal. Within this category, other differences such as ethnicity, region and class also come to the fore. To ignore these distinctions would be counter-productive. As Hendricks and Lewis (1994) state:

"The question is not 'who should write about whom' but 'how we write about others' "

Many theorists are experimenting with alternative styles, forms and subject matter and producing work that may from the perspective of dominant, mainstream academic conventions and styles, appear superfluous and self-conscious. Some feminists have also identified evidence of continued condescension, tokenism or self-gratification. Whilst none of these approaches can be regarded as ideal models for future feminist research, they do present leads for developing self-reflexivity and breadth.

Mohanty (1991:4) defines this as:

...women with divergent social and historical locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic.

She goes further to pose some challenging questions to researchers concerning the third world/black ethnic experiences of women.

- ...how do different communities of women define feminism?
- ...whose history do we draw on to chart women's engagement with feminism?
- ...how do questions of gender, race, nation and other identities intersect in determining feminisms?
- ...how do we produce knowledge about ourselves and others and with what assumptions?
- ...what methods so we use to identify and describe different women's subjectivity and self-interests?
- ...what are the politics of the production of these knowledges?
- ...which conventions limit our production of this knowledge?

The decanonization process with respect to gender, must involve the decentering of male claims to speak for everyone. Although these claims are not overtly expressed, they are often implied, making them far more difficult to deconstruct. The canonization of women must essentially involve highlighting questions about the subtle androcentrism that pervades society. The fact that males do not make these claims but only imply them, provides feminists with the necessary critical ammunition. It can also be argued that language for example, which purports to be gender-free or gender-neutral does in actual fact have gender attached to it. The overt and covert male-centredness of society has to be exposed by interrogating

the ways in which men speak for women by claiming to speak for all of humanity.

Similarly, this study argues that the process of decanonization must also decentre white, western women's claims to speak for all women. There is an urgent need to contest the hegemonic forces that shape society, if the canonization of women of colour and third-world women is to occur. A few areas that counter-hegemonic strategies would need to interrogate are language, text and culture to mention but a few.

Deconstructive interpretations have to concentrate on the question of marginality in order to understand the restraints which inhabit the space between the centre and the margin. Such interpretations will ensure that a great deal is learnt about the centre by understanding its margins. Much can be learnt about men and male culture by understanding their representations of women. Likewise, much can be learnt about white, western-centrism by examining the ways in which it portrays women.

## **2.8 Gender and Ethnicity**

Women's experiences in the school and the home is made more complex when the category of race is added to that of gender. Most of the important studies analyzing the experiences of women have been conducted by feminist sociologists of education. They have focused on the class resistance to the hegemonic ideology of capitalism.

The call for more research around ethnicity and gender, has been strongly echoed by a number of feminist researchers such as Bagley and Verma (1983); Davies (1990); Eade (1989); Guru (1993); Hall (1981); Hull, Scott and Smith (1982); Kahle (1982); Lewis (1985); Marrett (1982); Rex (1988) and Tomlinson (1983). Masson (1989) "Asians in the Americas" discusses historical conflicts among cultures within Canada,



particularly within the East Indian community. Discusses the multicultural policy recently adopted through alterations in Canada's immigration laws. Explores the historical development of politics in India's Punjab, and the consequences of this development on East Indians living in Canada.

An issue that is dealt with inadequately by most of the writers is the significance of ethnic inequality for the analysis of gender relations. There are two main points which emerge in writings about this:

a) that gender inequality takes different forms among different ethnic group and thus that generalisations about its nature should not be made on the basis of the experience of white western women alone;

b) that racism and more broadly ethnic inequality itself; that is, it is not merely that forms of inequality are different, but that their intersection creates further issues of relevance.

The first issue taken up by writers such as Carby (1982), Davis (1981), Hooks (1982), Joseph (1981), Moraga and Anzaldua (1981), Parmar (1982) and Amos and Parmar (1984), who argue strongly that white feminists have not produced an adequate analysis of gender inequality because they have not taken ethnic inequality into account. They argue that the major sites of oppression are not the same for black and white women. The family is seen to have a different place in gender relations among whites than among peoples of Afro-Caribbean origin, since in the latter case the notion of dependent housewife, which was sometimes considered pivotal in analysis of gender inequality, has little purchase in the face of the high proportion of single-parent households headed by women and the high rate of labour force participation by such women. The family has been important

as a site of resistance to racist oppression that it is inappropriate to see it as a major site of oppression of black women.

These writers have argued further that in so far as the specificity of the position of women of colour has been taken into account it has been done inadequately. For example, the focus of western feminists on arranged marriages etc, is seen as merely sensationalism, detracting from attention being paid to much more serious issues, and indeed as encouraging of racist attitudes through the representation of such practices as barbaric. These latter problems are sometimes the result of a misplaced and unsubstantiated notion of " progress" in which western civilisation is taken to be the most advanced society in terms of gender relations.

There certainly are differences in the form of the household and family by ethnic group (although variations within the group are also important); the most extreme sexual division of labour and regulation of marriage partner is often thought to be found among Asian, especially Pakistani and Bangladeshi families; among people of Afro-Caribbean descent one-parent households headed by women appear more often than in the other major ethnic groups (Brown, 1984:37).

The white family and household pattern has varied over time and by class, with the middle-class whites having a pattern more like the Asian families of today and that the one-parent female headed household more often found among people of Afro-Caribbean descent is becoming increasingly common among the white population today.

Writers on ethnic inequality and gender have also discussed the importance of properly analyzing the intersection between these two forms of inequality. The relationship between the two is especially important when issues

concerning migration of workers are considered (Phizacklea, 1983).

These writers have demonstrated the importance of paying serious consideration to ethnic relations in order adequately to understand the full dynamics of gender inequality.

Examples of international writers who acknowledge positionality and try to foreground their own location as the object of their investigation include the following:

De Lauretis (1986), who has positioned her theorisation as a white non-American feminist based in the United States - alert to the politics of various feminist discourses. Haraway (1987:119) situates her reading of a Nigerian woman novelist as a 'non-innocent reading of...a Euro-American, middle-class, university based feminist. Rich (1986) offers guidelines for exploring differences among women and feminisms. Pratt (1984) describes the way her politics have been challenged through her interaction with black women and concentrates on how her identity as a white Southern women has shaped her own understanding of race, class and gender. Spelman (1990) has worked with different groups of feminists and has developed a comprehensive critique of mainstream feminism.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

An analysis of the studies and writings of those who established the framework of modern sociology, reveals that gender issues are scarcely central to their deliberations. When questions on gender are raised, it is usually within the framework of a fundamental theoretical dilemma, often providing very little direction on how to resolve it.

Classical theories are unable to explain gender differences, instead they ignore them and concentrate exclusively on

social class differences. The focus has generally been on the determining influences affecting the origins and nature of modern societies, locating much of their critique on the differences between the Marxist and non-Marxist perspectives. Much of this debate has centred around essentially two issues; whether the mechanisms of capitalist economic enterprise have shaped the modern world (economic factors) or whether societies have been shaped by social, political or cultural factors which in turn, have shaped social development in the modern era.

For example, Giddens (1990) discusses the themes from Durkheim's writings and Marx. Durkheim in his discussion of suicides states that "man is almost entirely the product of society" while women "is to a greater extent the product of nature". Expanding on this he states that "his tastes, aspirations and humour have in large part a collective origin, while his companion's are more directly influenced by her organism. His needs therefore are quite different from hers" (Durkheim, 1952 :385). The implication is that men and women have different identities, tastes and inclinations because women are less socialised and are closer to nature than men.

Such a view is inadmissible today. Female identity is shaped by socialisation as is that of males. What Durkheim does represent, is a view of the formation and nature of gender, i.e. that gender differences rest fundamentally on biological differences between men and women. This again, does not imply that gender differences are mostly inborn. It states the assumption that women's social position and identity is mainly shaped by their involvement in reproduction and child-rearing. Such a notion would imply that gender differences are deeply embedded in all societies. The fact that women bear children and are mainly responsible for rearing them, while men are active in the public spheres of politics, work and war, has resulted in

discrepancies in power between men and women.

In contrast, all feminist theories are able to provide explanations accounting for women's different rates of educational access and attainment. The weakness of these theories lies in the universalisation of women's oppression. The intersections between categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, colonial history, and region is ignored in the analyses of subordination.

Allen (1994), Skeggs (1994), Brah (1994), Phizacklea (1994), Lutz (1994), Sexwale (1994) and Moghissi (1994), represent some of the voices that underscore the point that diversity among women should not be seen as a static phenomenon.

Though racism and sexism are distinct phenomena with different histories, they should not be viewed as binaries (Taylor, 1984). When issues of sexism only are addressed as problematic, the experience of black women is rendered 'invisible'. The implication that the experience of white women is similar to that of black women, ignores the fact that white women stand in a power relation as oppressors of black women. The experience of black women can only be adequately understood from a perspective which recognises that black women are subject to the simultaneous oppression of race, sex and class.

This study aims to contribute to the debate and understanding of how the different groups of women in society, experience and respond to their subordination. It aims to strengthen existing knowledge by addressing those issues that have been largely marginalised in educational research.

This literature review serves to illustrate the dearth of studies that explore the influences of the family and the education system, on the aspirations of young women, within

specific contexts. There are very few studies that analyse the impact of race, ethnicity, class, region and other affiliations on the category of gender. This makes the task of documenting research that much more difficult. The study questions the 'universal' approach used by many researchers on gender and therefore draws only on the broad theoretical framework of reproduction and resistance from all the studies cited.

The position of women in production, reproduction and resistance, the material and ideological components that contribute to the construction and maintenance of gender divisions and hierarchy in production and reproduction in a patriarchal, capitalist society, are some of the lessons drawn directly from this review for this study. All of the material reviewed from feminist scholarship in this chapter, contributes to this description and to the refinement of the analysis of gender divisions.

Hall (1978) contends that when individuals construct interpretations, they envisage that they are doing so free from ideological and societal constraints. The following chapter describes the research methodology employed in this study, which acknowledges that all explications are the product of ideologies, especially dominant ideologies, forged over a period of time. Such a view is apt for this study which serves to highlight the role of reproduction and resistance in the lives of these young Indian women.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The research methodology employed in this study is rooted in a qualitative, feminist research tradition, which has been developed across several disciplines over the past few years. The theoretical underpinnings of this qualitative, feminist research methodology can be traced to the socialist-feminist tradition, which only just begins to acknowledge the effects of race and ethnicity on gender oppression.

Whilst this chapter builds upon the work of feminist theorists in the social sciences who are developing a feminist methodology, it shares the central insight of deBeauvoir (1961), that women must begin by defining themselves. This view recognises the relationship of power and knowledge and serves to call into question the tradition of positivism as well as white, western, value systems.

Western theorists and researchers in the social sciences have repeatedly taken the male experience to be the norm. Likewise, feminist research has been characterised by white, western, middle-class experiences of women, as establishing the norm in society.

In rejecting the possibility of value-free research, this study asserts that feminist research should focus on the lived experience and significance of the everyday life of women. An emphasis on the everyday experiences of women and the need for the researcher to locate himself/herself in terms of his/her own subjectivity in a male dominated society is fundamental to qualitative, feminist methodology. The process goes beyond an examination of sexist assumptions

and practices in a dominant male society, to instead examine women's own consciousness.

The need to examine women's own consciousness has been articulated by feminists such as Smith (1982, 1983), who argue for the "rupture" of the experiences of women. She emphasizes the need to recognise the authenticity of women's subjective experiences and knowledge.

The central emphasis on subjective experience lends itself to another important characteristic of this study: the significance of the lived experiences and everyday life of the women. This research methodology argues that women must create a new language based on actual lived experiences in order to understand the full nature of human experience. The present abstract language of male theory presents a distorted version of society. The consciousness of women is not created solely by male hegemony; it is also grounded in their actual material life which includes their obligations, duties and responsibilities which are often rendered invisible.

By focusing on the everyday lives of these students, this study reveals the connection between the public and the private, between production and reproduction and resistance. The everyday world is an integral part of the broader social whole and is shaped by wider social, cultural and economic forces.

The emphasis on everyday life can be traced to the phenomenological and interactionist approaches which focus on the subjective nature of knowledge and the role of the researcher in the research process. This is very different from the male, positivistic approach to research which rejects emotion and feelings as unscientific and biased, premised as it is, on the view that research is value-free and emotionless.



This research methodology, with its emphasis on grounded subjects and the ways in which both material life and consciousness reflect the gender arrangements within society, also exposes the realities when gender is intersected by ethnicity. A large number of studies of gender oppression ignore the effects of race and ethnicity. Women are often depicted as a single group, experiencing identical oppression. This study argues that this "colour-blindness" leads to a distorted vision of social reality just as "gender-blindness" does.

The past few years have seen women of colour criticize feminist research for its failure to address the influence of racism in the lives of black women (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981; Russell, 1983; hooks, 1984; Hull, Scott and Smith, 1982).

Whilst many white, western feminist researchers argue that the research process must begin with the subjective experiences of the researcher, they fail to address their own dominant position as whites in relation to women of colour. This failure to address their own positions again, leads to a distorted picture of social reality by failing to recognise the humanity of all women.

### **3.2 The Use of the Qualitative Research Paradigm**

The personal and structural issues which this study aims to capture through an analysis of interpretations of these women's meanings against the background of their culture, can be best undertaken through a qualitative, feminist research methodology. Through the use of such strategies as participant observation, and structured and unstructured interviewing, this research style allows for a first-hand knowledge about the life worlds of the persons being studied (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Cohen and Manion, 1989). In this way it is possible to develop theoretically relevant concepts from an in-depth qualitative

analysis of a fairly small sample by continuously comparing cases and thus elaborating categories and their dimensions.

The first step in aggregating the qualitative data was to establish parameters for analysis. The establishing of parameters included the building of a relevant conceptual framework, the definition of units of analysis, the development of core issues, and finally, the establishment of guidelines for handling any unique features of the research.

Qualitative methodology makes it possible to get close to the data, thus allowing the data themselves to produce certain levels of explanation, instead of the researcher imposing his/her own categories of meanings on what is observed as is generally the case with the positivist tradition of research. The implication of this is that the researcher has the opportunity to interact with the respondents by engaging in a dialogue without any preconceived notions of what the problem areas might be. Such research is an ongoing, never complete process in which the researcher keeps moving between material and conceptualization, validating and revising.

This method seems particularly adequate for shifting the perspective of women from gender-related traits to exploring what women actually do, and in which terms **they** perceive it.

As is the case with this study, the issues that are analyzed arose out of the interviews with the students. Aspects such as the dominant maternal role model, the absence of proper careers counselling at school, the obsession with mathematics and science in general, the search for an identity and the inherent contradictions revealed in the parents' and students' aspirations, have all emerged from the interviews themselves and were not predetermined

categories to be explored by the research.

Qualitative, feminist methodology is best suited to a constructivist type of inquiry; being flexible it allows for the fact that the research process does not always proceed in a highly structured manner but may also need to be redefined as it progresses. For example, the unstructured interviews with the students' parents during home visits, were audio-taped at first. This was found to have a debilitating effect on the responses, as the parents demonstrated a sense of nervousness towards the tape-recorder. As a result, this method of capturing data had to be abandoned in favour of note-taking during these interviews, thus illustrating how the research process itself was being refined as obstacles were encountered.

This sheds some light on the conception of qualitative research as being a dynamic methodology, in contrast to the static nature of the conventional, quantitative research, which, once defined, offers very little scope for redefining.

For example, the use of questionnaires can be examined to explain the static nature of the quantitative research methodology. Once the questionnaires have been devised, and administered, there is no way in which they can be revised if for instance, problems relating to the way questions were interpreted or formulated arise out of the research process. This should not be construed as an outright rejection of this research technique, but must rather be seen as raising important questions about the "appropriateness" of research techniques.

It must be emphasized that this methodology goes beyond the prevailing conceptions of the research process, which is usually synonymous with the positivistic mode of inquiry that advocates neutral, value-free, objective, rigid

research. It requires a totally different approach to research in order to be fully appreciated and understood.

Some of the major debates in research methodology have centred around the way researchers define , for example, "scientific research", the role of the researcher in the research process and the structure and format of the research report, to mention but a few.

This study does not attempt to profile the full complexity of the influences of the family and the educational system on the life chances and aspirations of these young women. Instead, it uses unstructured interviews and the analysis of discourse to interpret the realities of these students and to explore the themes that structure them.

This study should be viewed as an exploration of issues. Its purpose is to raise questions and themes that can be pursued in further research. It has deliberately employed "conscious partiality" in its attempts to understand the realities of these women.

### **3.3 The Design of the Study**

A pilot study was conducted to examine the distribution of female students across the various faculties. The findings of this pilot study indicated that female students were concentrated around the areas of the arts and humanities, whilst being least represented in the areas of science and engineering.

The sample of forty, first year Indian female students was selected at random from four different faculties, viz: arts, commerce, education and science, as these best represented the various vocational fields of study at this university. In addition, the principles of theoretical and selective sampling, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967: 45-60), Denzin (1970:82), Bogdan and Taylor (1975:27-28) and

Burgess (1982 : 76-98), were used to include female students from different linguistic groups in the Indian community. At the time of the sampling process, the female students in the various faculties were predominantly of Indian origin, thus enabling the researcher to obtain a truly representative sample from this group.

The fieldwork was conducted in various phases, commencing with a preliminary, structured interview with the respondents which was aimed at capturing personal particulars, and used to explain the nature and form of the research to them. This was followed up by a series of personal interviews conducted with the students, until sufficient data had been obtained to establish personal profiles of each of the students in the sample.

This phase preceded the home visits and interviews with their parents; thus allowing for the accumulation of sufficient personal knowledge of the students and their home-backgrounds, in order to have more meaningful discussions with the parents during the home visits.

Discussions and interviews were conducted with all parents, with the exception of two. The two students were reluctant to have their homes visited because both were having problems with alcoholic fathers. In the case of one, the parents were in the process of a divorce. Telephonic interviews were conducted with the mothers of these students, in these two instances. The home visits also provided an opportunity to ascertain the social and material background of the students, as well as to verify and validate the data already obtained from the interviews with the students.

Group discussions were also held, in addition to the regular individual interviews and discussions with the young women. All these discussions focused on exploring the influences of

the family and their experiences in the education system. The observations, discussions and interviews were all conducted in an open-ended way.

The data collected was recorded through the use of audio-tapes and observational field notes, and included vast amounts of information about the personalities of the students, their experiences in the home and at school, their aspirations, as well as general descriptions of their everyday lives.

There are generally two basic approaches to analyzing qualitative data; these are : the structured and the intuitive approach. Structured analysis uses content analysis, coding frameworks, and statistical analysis to analyze data, whilst intuitive analysis uses progressive focusing, emerging issues, auditing, and data exclusion to analyze data (Adams, 1982). The structured approach is too restrictive for most studies. The ideal is to merge the flexibility of intuitive analysis with the systematic nature of structured analysis. Transcripts of these audio-taped interviews and discussions, were analyzed according to broad categories of content, and along the lines suggested by Eckhardt and Ermann (1977 : 298 - 300), Sanders and Pinkey (1983 : 188 - 190) and Cohen and Manion (1986 : 62).

The data was organised around questions and general themes, rather than presenting individual case studies or biographies. The content categories are those that have emerged from the qualitative data, and have not in any way been imposed. An attempt is made to indicate how these various categories are interrelated to give as comprehensive a picture as possible of the students' interpretations of their experiences and aspirations.

### **3.4 The Sampling Procedure**

The sampling procedure adopted included the principles of theoretical and selective sampling as expounded by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This process occurred in two phases; the first being the sampling of faculties and courses within the faculties, the second being the sampling of the respondents.

#### **3.4.1 Sampling of faculties and courses**

The principles of theoretical and selective sampling were applied to the selection of the faculties and courses. The faculties of arts, education, commerce and science were selected on the basis that they were the most popular, having a high student intake; as well as the fact that they best represented the distinctly different vocational areas of study

Similarly, the motivating factors behind the selection of the courses were; firstly that they appeared to be amongst the most popular first year courses selected, and secondly they indicated a relatively high number of female student enrolments.

The proportionate representation of the female students of all races in relation to males showed that 60 percent of the arts faculty, 57 percent of the education faculty, 38 percent of the commerce faculty and 35 percent of the science faculty, were made up of female students. It might be argued that the selection of the science and commerce faculties cannot be similarly justified, on the grounds that these faculties have a relatively low percentage of female enrolments. But these two faculties represent distinctly important vocational areas and therefore could not be excluded from the sampling framework.

A problem emerged at this point concerning terminal courses. A terminal course is one that is generally taken as an

ancillary to certain courses and cannot be offered as a major. An example of such a course is Mathematics 1B, which is a one year course in the Science faculty but does not lead to Mathematics 11.

Since a terminal course does not give a definite indication of the choice of careers that students are pursuing, it was decided to omit these courses from the sampling frame. Thus, English 1 was selected in preference to the terminal course, English 1T. English 1T would also not provide an accurate sampling frame as it is generally selected as an ancillary subject by students in faculties other than arts.

Mathematics 1A was selected in preference to Mathematics 1B which is a terminal course and is generally selected by students in the science and health science faculties, as a prerequisite for entrance into the medical and para-medical fields. Mathematics 1A is generally taken together with Applied mathematics.

Business Economics 1 was chosen from the commerce faculty as it was a popular course taken by students and best approximates the field of commerce.

Education 1 was selected from the education faculty. It is a compulsory course in this faculty and thus most representative of this vocational area.

Once the faculties and courses had been selected, permission had to be obtained from the administration of the University of Durban-Westville to obtain statistics about general student enrolment as well as information about specific first enrolments for Mathematics 1A, Education 1, Business Economics 1 and English 1. These student lists were a vital and necessary part of the research process, as contained the target population from which the sample was drawn.



A computer generated list of students taking each of the subjects was obtained and a specific computer search was conducted, whereby all the Indian female students registered for the specified courses were identified. This information was obtained from the statistical division of the Administration Section at the University of Durban-Westville.

Due to the confidential nature of student registration, only the names were disclosed by the university authorities. The respondents sampled, would then have the option to decide whether to participate in the study or not. The onus to provide further personal details such as home addresses and telephone numbers, would rest with them.

Statistics regarding patterns of student enrolment over the years was also requested to obtain a broader picture of male and female enrolment at the university.

The lists that were obtained provided the sampling frame for the second phase of the sampling procedure i.e. the sampling of the respondents.

#### **3.4.2 Sampling of respondents**

The sample was selected from the sampling frame provided by the class lists, through a process of simple random sampling. Determining the size of the sample was an important criterion that had to be considered at this point. This had to be consistent with the requirements and procedures necessary for interview-based, qualitative research. It was important to choose a small, manageable sample, but also one that was representative and valid, so that in-depth individual interviews could be conducted, that lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour.

Furlong (1984) in her research on interaction sets in the classroom, justifies her choice of a small sample by

referring to the research techniques employed. Her research which consisted of interviews, was conducted in an open-ended way, according to the tenets of the interpretive, interactionist and qualitative research methods.

A sample of forty was decided upon. Ten students were chosen from each of the four courses.

Another major problem emerged at this stage. Some names appeared on more than one class list. This was due to the students being registered for more than one of the courses sampled. For example, a student registered for the Bachelor of Paedagogics (B.Paed) degree, could major in Education and English; or Education and Business Economics; or Education and Mathematics.

Names of those that appeared on more than one class list were identified, to ensure that a valid sample was selected. This was particularly so with the students enrolled in the Faculty of Education. The problem of recurring names affected mainly the Education 1 class list. Whilst names appearing in the Education class list were left to remain there, these names were identified and eliminated from other class lists that they appeared on. This was considered necessary as their vocation choice was clearly in the field of education.

Once these names that appeared on more than one list were identified, they were removed from the class list of courses that least represented their vocation area. For example, all the names that appeared on the Education 1 list as well as the English 1 list, were removed from the English 1 sampling frame. A large number of students were registered for Education 1 as well as English 1. A smaller number was registered for Education 1 and Business Economics 1; and Education 1 and Mathematics 1A. Once again, the recurring names were eliminated from the Business Economics 1 and the

Mathematics 1A sampling frames, according to the criteria outlined previously. This procedure ensured that the sample was selected in a manner that did not include the duplication of names from the different lists.

### **3.5 Contacting the Sample**

Once the sample had been selected, the next step was to establish contact with the students. Lists were compiled, indicating the sample selected from the English, Mathematics and Business Economics departments. The purpose of the research and the nature of the data to be gathered, was explained to the lecturers in the above-mentioned courses. The students from these course groupings were then contacted in their tutorial groups, as well as in the large lecture groups. During these initial meetings, arrangements were made for future meetings. At the same time the purpose of the study was outlined to these students.

However, it was not possible to locate and contact the entire sample at this stage. Repeated visits had to be made to the English 1 and Mathematics 1A tutorial groups in particular, before all the students in the sample could be contacted. Repeated calls were made at the Education 1 lectures. The large Business Economics 1 class had to be addressed on four occasions. This procedure was adopted until the entire sample had been contacted and informed; a process that occupied a greater proportion of the time than initially anticipated.

The initial meetings with the students were on an individual basis as well as in groups of two or three. It was outlined at this point that home visits would form an integral component of the field research. The students were assured of the confidential nature of the study. Many of them were initially apprehensive about the home visits and interviews. However, once they learnt about the purpose of the research and the confidentiality, they agreed to participate. A

questionnaire requiring some personal details was completed by each of the members of the sample.

As these students were minors, consent had to be obtained from their parents for their participation in the research. A modified, university volunteer consent form was sent to all parents together with an accompanying letter indicating the intention of the study. The volunteer consent form was completed by the respondents and counter-signed by the parents in order to satisfy the requirements of the University of Durban-Westville Ethics Committee.

### **3.6 The Interviews**

The interview was the main technique used to gather the original data. This was supplemented by participant observation in the homes of all students and the collection of relevant information such as statistics related to subjects taken at school, pass rates and student enrolments at the university.

The first phase of individual interviews with the students was conducted at the University of Durban-Westville over a period of twelve months. The second phase of interviews were with the parents of the students and was undertaken during the home visits.

Organising procedures for carrying out this study proved to be one of the major drawbacks of the use of qualitative methodology. For example, the scheduling and rescheduling of cancelled appointments.

Although these interviews were of an unstructured nature, some general controls were built into them. The unstructured interview allowed for the categories of contents expressed by the students to emerge from the interview itself. Qualitative researchers often describe this process as "allowing the interview to alter its own

ongoing course".

Although the interviews might have appeared to be unstructured, they occurred within a particular conceptual framework. To this extent, the interview situation was to be flexible but nonetheless controlled. It was therefore not totally non-directive. The broad frame of reference being the family influences, educational experiences and the young women's aspirations for their future.

The field work was not without its problems. There were many instances where the students did not keep to their appointments. Much time had to be spent rescheduling appointments. This was especially the case during the first phase of the individual interviewing.

Another problem area was the continual updating of personal data. Records had to be changed as the students moved from first year into the second year of study. New details about courses and time-tables had to be collected to schedule appointments.

Follow up interviews with the students proceeded more smoothly. By this stage they appeared to be more relaxed and less apprehensive about being audio-taped. Their responses were more spontaneous, unlike the guarded responses of the first phase of interviewing.

### **3.7 The Home Visits**

The home visits began once an adequate profile of each member of the sample had been obtained. These visits provided an insight into the material and social conditions of the families of the young women. The visits lasted for approximately 90 minutes and unstructured interviews and conversations were held with parents. The issues that were explored were extensions of issues raised by the students themselves in the individual interviews held with them at

the university. Thus, every conversation with the parents was highly personalised. For example :

" Renu tells me that her brothers are allowed to do nothing around the house; what is your response to that? "

" Why did you encourage Mira to take all science subjects at school?"

"How did you react when Aysha refused to cover her head in the traditional Muslim way?"

" Shireen mentioned a serious domestic problem that you are facing at the moment. I was wondering how she has reacted to this. Has it in any way changed her hopes for the future?"

After the first few home visits, it became clear that the presence of the tape-recorder appeared to affect the responses of the parents. Parents were unable to express themselves freely and openly. They were extremely nervous and tended to be cautious and guarded in their responses. The use of the tape-recorder was eventually abandoned in favour of note-taking which proved to be less intimidating.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This study's claim to be a qualitative, feminist study is based on the fact that it uses conscious partiality and analyses the everyday lives of the students. This kind of research into the individual lives of people, reveals the ways in which individuals are both shaped by social forces and also act to transform the future through their conscious struggle against what they see as oppressive in their lives.

The outline of procedures adopted in this study allows for the fieldwork to be open and transparent; thus further

highlighting the issue of responsibility and accountability of the researcher.

The next chapter presents some of the major findings that emerged from this type of fieldwork. The findings are interpreted and analyzed with the intention of gaining more clarity on the family influences, educational experiences and aspirations of young female students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

Whilst chapter three describes the research methodology employed, arguing strongly for the use of the everyday life experience as a research tool, the material presented in this chapter tries to incorporate the richness of interviews and observations within a framework that queries the way power relations shape women's experiences and aspirations, particularly the relations within the family and the educational system.

This feminist research selects a particular point of view from which to pose questions and a particular lens through which the responses are interpreted. Chapter one depicts this point of view in its arguments for the conceptual and theoretical choices that frame this research. Placed within a feminist agenda, this study inquires into who is served by the structures of the relations between the education system and the family, and how these structures are recreated and resisted.

These interviews were transcribed, read and analyzed many times. The themes that emerged out of this process were then subsequently explored. As the interpretations developed, the original interviews were repeatedly checked to examine the meanings in context and to also add material that was relevant.

The analytical structure throughout this chapter focuses firstly on a summary of the main findings, followed by a number of illustrative quotations supporting those findings and a brief interpretation of the findings. The data is organised around general themes rather than individual



biographies. These discussions try to retain what is significant in terms of the structural constraints facing these young Indian women and the ways in which they resist and attempt to build counter-hegemonic strategies.

## **4.2 Interviews with the Women**

### **4.2.1 Perceptions of self**

#### **4.2.1.1 Personalities**

The common responses varied from extremely shy, to shy or reserved. Most of the students felt very comfortable and had no inhibitions in known company such as being with friends and family. However, they often felt uneasy in any other context and expressed anxiety about conflict or confrontational situations, often opting to walk away or withdraw from a problem. They objected very strongly to being labelled "passive" or "docile", indicating quite clearly that being quiet or shy did not necessarily imply docility.

Amina: I get very angry with people...they don't know that there is a difference between being passive and being shy or quiet. I know I'm quiet and a little shy, but by no means passive. I am not stupid...I can think for myself...I just don't have to make a big song and dance about everything...

Saloshna: I know everybody describes me as shy...but I don't know...I don't think so...I'm not an extrovert...but that doesn't mean that I don't have a brain or anything. But so many people think that because you keep quiet then you don't know what is happening.

Anita : I am very shy...but I try not to be...but I suppose that's the way I am...I wish I could stand up to people...stand up for my rights...but I don't like trouble...I'd rather just keep quiet.

Mashie : I'm an okay sort of person...it takes a lot to get me angry...but I'd love to make friends more easily. I never make the first move...I'm too nervous...afraid of what people might think of me.

Nirupa : I am generally a shy person inside...but people tell me that I come across as being confident...but I am not. I need to work on that...it's hard for me to tell people where to get off...I generally withdraw into my shell...

Elaine : Sometimes I am very quiet and conservative...other times I am outgoing...depends on the company I got and the people around me. I prefer to avoid people who tramp on my toes...

Nalini : I can be very shy...when I am around a lot of people...but I get on well with people... I don't have any problems with communication and stuff...but I don't like to get involved in arguments and like...I rather walk away...

Rani: I like to keep to myself. Everyone thinks I'm proud but I'm not...I am friendly but prefer my own company. I think a lot of people don't know the difference between shy and proud. You can mix and socialise with everyone but still be proud and haughty even in a group. It doesn't mean that you are only proud if you keep to yourself.

Only one of the women mentioned that she was certainly not a shy person.

Jessica : I am outspoken...generally I am not a person that takes nonsense from anybody...not my parents, not my boyfriends or anybody...they must know who they are dealing with...if you want to move in this world its the law of the jungle... kill or be killed...I know I talk a lot...but that's just the way it is...if people don't like it...that's

their problem.

Although the young women vehemently denounced the claim that they were stereotypically docile or passive, their actions and behaviour in most situations, truly reinforced and reproduced this stereotyping. Yamada (quoted in Minh-ha; 1989:87) describes herself as " An Asian American women thriving under the smug illusion that I was not the stereotypic image of the Asian women because I had a career teaching English in a community college. I did not think anything assertive was necessary to make my point... it was so much my expected role that it ultimately rendered me invisible... contrary to what I thought, I had actually been contributing to my own stereotyping..."

Likewise, the Indian women in this study could not recognise how their actual behaviour contributed to reproducing the stereotypical 'docile' Indian women.

#### **4.2.1.2 Relationships with males**

All the students spoke mainly about the males on campus. Although they related well to them, the common problem was the way the males treated them. They often felt that they were not taken seriously and were treated as imbeciles. They were not expected to be able to engage in any discussion on cars, sport, current affairs and matters of a technical nature. All the women felt that the males had a problem with what they describe as the male ego. This was said to often manifest itself in the way that they behaved wanting to be in charge and in control of any situation all the time, as though this was their natural role. They also felt that the males were not really interested in their views and feelings but focused instead on aspects such as beauty and build.

Priya: I get on very well with boys. They are very easy going...not like girls. But deep down they want to be in control all the time. They feel that it is their duty to take care of us and somehow this makes them feel good about themselves. It's good for their ego. Girls are very sharp...they know how boys like to feel important...so they play up to them...you know...thrill them and all.

Interviewer: Why?

Priya: ...so the boys will like them.

Nazia: We are discouraged from associating with the men...it is part of our culture. In this way we stay pure for marriage. We also have to respect men and look up to them.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Nazia: Look, I know that I am as good as any man...but when we assert ourself...we know that the men don't like that and you earn a reputation of having a big mouth or that you want to control the men. This is not good, especially at this age when most of us are looking for marriage partners. If word gets around that so and so is like this or like that then your chances are ruined for life. Even here on campus...the boys, they fool around with lots of girls but then they talk about them later...they never marry those type of girls.

Anna: I have lots of friends that are boys. My parents are strict but they allow me to mix with boys as long as I know where to draw the line. I mean it's not so bad these days to talk to boys but before people would say that you are a fast girl if you spoke to boys. Boys are very strange also...they always say that they are not attracted to a girl because of her beauty but her personality and brains, etc. But they always go after the pretty ones and feel proud...they like to show them off to their friends. It makes you think...because they are not really accepting you for who you are.

Christine: Boys are easier to get on with than girls. They are not complicated like girls. But they always try to play big. You know...act like they are in charge, that they have to protect the girls.

Renu: It's normal to expect the boys to pamper you and treat you special. It makes me feel important and happy. It's what they are supposed to do. I know with women's lib and all that stuff they must not open doors and things but some things don't change.

Farah: Most of the boys treat us like playthings. They don't take us seriously. It's hard to have a serious conversation with them. As long as we just joke and laugh and talk it's okay with them. Most of the girls like this kind of thing but I get tired after a while.

Beena: Sometimes when I try to talk about sport with them they always tell me that I don't know what I am talking about. They think they are the experts. But slowly things are changing.

Salma: Here on campus it's not so bad, we talk to the males and mix up to a point with them. But by tradition we are not supposed to. All important things are discussed only by the men and they tell the ladies what they decided. Even in the more modern families this still happens but we are led to believe that this is for our own good.

Sagrie: Even now I notice that my boyfriend doesn't talk to me about things like sport and current affairs. Yet when he is with his friends he will talk about all this, even though he knows that I am interested in sport and I know what is happening in the world.

Sharmilla: I get on well with all the boys but they treat me like some kind of child. Sometimes I enjoy it but

sometimes I sit and think...why can't they talk to me about cars and music systems and stuff like that.

Komla: The boys are always telling us that we only worry about clothes and our hair but this is not true. I mean I do like to look good but I also have other interests in life. I'm not so stupid that I can't talk about other things.

These illustrations reveal more about the way males are gendered and how they construct masculinity. This is equally problematic, in that it sends out a strong message about what constitutes masculine behaviour. Any deviation from this 'norm' becomes problematic for males. The women's views of males is important in that it contributes to shaping their own conceptions of what it means to be a female. The power relations are reproduced and further entrenched by their experience of men desiring and being in control at all times; thus leaving the status quo unchanged.

The women, however, although declaring at times to enjoy the attention and playing the helpless female, display signs of beginning a process of introspection. This introspection reveals the beginnings of resistance in some instances, but it also reveals some of the tensions of cultural constraints. For some of them this power relation between males and females is further reinforced and reproduced within the family and community.

#### **4.2.1.3 Relations with different cultural groups**

When questioned about their relationships and interactions with other cultural groups in society, many responded by raising the issue of growing up in an apartheid society and its related problems. They defined cultural groups simply along the lines of racial categories created by the Population Registration Act in South Africa. They were

unable to perceive for example, that whites did not constitute a monolithic group but were also made up of cultural groups such as the Afrikaners, Jews, English, French, etc. There was general consensus that not enough was known about Africans, coloureds and whites because of racial segregation and that it was difficult to comment on how they would interact with them. The majority, however, expressed feelings of inadequacy especially in the company of whites, arguing that it was due to the policies of the country. They admitted that it was strange for them to feel this way because deep down they knew that they were not inferior to whites.

Their anger and frustration was not turned against themselves or translated into a dislike for whites. Instead, their understandings and perceptions strengthened their resolve to achieve through the acquisition of educational qualifications.

The general feeling was that it was easier to relate to the Africans and coloureds as they have all shared a more or less common history of resistance, struggle and oppression in this country and all had a common enemy in the whites of this country. Many felt that the whites still saw themselves as an elite group, making little attempt to bridge the racial divides in this country.

Nelendrie: I have grown up only knowing Indians, Coloureds and Africans...we used to stay nearby and use the same roads and all. I feel very comfortable with them, but then again I don't really know Whites at all... they may be just like us...but until I mix with them I won't know. I know in my heart I'm not inferior to them but somehow it's going to take time before that uneasy feeling goes away when I talk to them.

Sagrie: You know...no matter how confident you are but you

know that the Whites are not talking to you as equals. I don't know how to say this but I feel that at the back of their minds they still look down on us. There are very few white people that I meet and talk to, it's mainly Africans and Coloureds...and that too, we met on campus.

Suraya: You see all along we were all (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) united in the liberation struggle. The White was seen as the enemy but so many of our parents also made us believe that they were superior to us. Now we are trying to break out of that upbringing and say to the world that we are not inferior. I know that because of this, I am very abrupt when I talk to whites. I just keep thinking all the time, that they think I'm not up to their standard.

Beverly: To be honest, when I speak to Africans, I feel that I'm more advanced than them...it's not that I look down upon them...It's just that we always knew in this society that we were better than them and that the Whites were better than us...you know...but that was how society was...we didn't know that was wrong...only now that we are studying here (university) we realise that we must stop thinking along those lines...but it's so hard to remove those thoughts from our mind. Sometimes my friends will talk and tell me that they can mix with Whites and they don't feel inferior...but I see them talking to White students...they are not relaxed like how they are around Indians...sometimes they try to become like the Whites to be accepted by them.

Komla: It's going to take a long time before I can honestly relate to others as equals in our society. I think some of the damage is so deep...you know...psychological...that has to be healed before everyone can talk freely and mix freely.

Beena: I try my best to be myself but somehow they (whites) make you feel stupid. I don't know why but I feel a little



uneasy, not like when I'm with Indian and African people. Like we always try to be like them (whites) because if you are more like an Indian they won't accept you in their circle.

Nitha: You know, we always want to share our culture and things with the others but they don't do the same...maybe the African and Coloured students...but very seldom the whites will invite you to their house and things. It's always what they can get out of you. Maybe I'm wrong but lots of other Indians feel the same way. We always invite them to our weddings but how many call us to theirs.

Zohra: On campus was the first time that we really came into close contact with others but like the language is sometimes the problem, but when everyone is speaking English then it's not a problem. But you will still find all the Indian, Coloured and African students mixing and all the whites bunched in one corner of the campus. With apartheid it will take time before we can honestly say that we are relating as equals, for now I still have a problem because I feel that the whites cut you off, they don't really treat you as one of them...they see you as a outsider.

Shoba: I think the whites don't like us. Come to think of it the Coloureds and Africans too! But more the whites...they can't understand how we came to this country after them, worked as slaves and yet today we are just as good as them. We just get on quietly with our work, we are not troublesome but we fight for our rights. Most people look down on the Indians because they are non-violent...people think that we are just scared but that is not true. I know that I am equal to anybody today but it hurts me very much when I try to talk to people as equals and they make me feel inferior.

Elaine: Wherever we Indians go people hate us...just

because we work hard and we try to educate ourselves to the highest level possible. Today everyone looks at our cars and houses and become envious but it took a lot of sweat and tears for our forefathers to build our community. They call us cowards because we are non-violent. I have no sympathy for the whites in this country ...they have no decent values yet they say the Africans are raw. They must learn from the Indians to be dignified and have respect.

Anita: I wish everyone could just get on well with each other. I try my best but it's not easy after all that we went through. But the whites...only some of them try to put the past behind them...most of them have this kind attitude towards us because they think they are doing charity. How many whites really talk to us as friends...always in the relationship the white is treated with more respect and is taken more seriously. It's like we have to stand and accept handouts even when it comes to friendship. When they feel generous then they reach out to us. They also get on better with the Indians who are Christians...I suppose because they are similar to them. That is why I don't blame the blacks for getting angry and violent because no matter what, the whites in the end stick up for themselves.

Vanessa: I try to get on well with everyone. On campus it's easy to mix with the African students and Coloured students but the whites keep to themselves. Even when I try to have a conversation with the white students I feel they don't take me seriously. They share lots of jokes which they only understand and sometimes I feel invisible with them.

These illustrations demonstrate some of the complexities of growing up in a racially segregated society and the impact this has had on interpersonal relationships. In attempting to challenge the commonly held assumptions about society and the groups in society, the young women came into conflict

with their own consciousness which itself is embedded in socially and historically created hegemony. Their relationships and interactions in society are not simply gendered but raced (and classed) as well and they respond according to their own subjectivities. The young women often fall into a semantic trap that has its roots in the ideology of separatism.

#### 4.2.1.4 Hobbies

These women had to clearly prioritise their activities in their daily lives. Household chores and study time was pivotal to their activities, leaving sports and hobbies to be accommodated around this.

With the exception of Anita who spent much of her time training and instructing karate, the other women were involved in stereotypically feminine sports and hobbies, which included cooking, baking, knitting, reading, drawing, collecting dolls, listening to music, watching television, taking care of pets and strangely enough, doing **household chores**. In thirty-five cases, reference was made to household chores in the discussion on hobbies. There were also references to their studies and how their time had to be juggled to cope. The lack of proper sports facilities in their communities and the expenses involved in pursuing particular sporting activities, also featured in most of the interviews.

Anita : My dad wanted me to do Indian classical dancing...he had dreams of me being a famous Indian dancer...but I was a bit of a tomboy...so I insisted on learning karate. By the time I reached matric, there were just four girls left in our gym...lots of the parents are very conventional...karate was just for boys only...so they stopped their daughters from attending gym. My mum and granny also felt it was too dangerous...girls should not be fighting... they must not have cuts and bruises...they must be dainty...but I enjoyed

it... I am going for my black belt now and my parents joke and tell me that no-one will marry me.

Jessica : I like drawing...reading... I got a dog... so that takes most of my time...you know...taking care of him.

Vanessa : I like listening to music...black music, watching television...I love animals...I enjoy looking after them.

Beverly : I'm very dedicated to studying, so I don't have much time for sport or hobbies. I have to divide my time. If I am not studying then I have to cook or wash the dishes or clean the house.

Renila : I like sport...I love water sport and studies. I couldn't take my sport seriously at school because I had to study. In between studying and taking care of my younger brother... and helping to do the housework...I had no time to concentrate on any water sport. Now it's even worse at varsity. There's no time at all to even think about a hobby or sport...it's just study, study, study. And then I must still help at home.

Ela : I love animals...I would do anything for animals. I am crazy about sport but can't fit it into my normal day, so I end up helping my mother in the vegetable garden. It's basically digging your hands into the soil and all that...I don't mind but it's dirty work...I don't like getting my hands all muddy...but if I don't help, my poor mother has to do everything herself.

Nalini : I love to read a lot, I like music, I love playing sport...I try to make good use of UDW's facilities because you know, we don't have these facilities in our townships. Even if we wanted to swim, there was no pool...then they built one small pool for 500 000 people. All the other sport are so expensive you know, like equipment and

things... it's hard then to seriously take up any sport even if you good at it or like to. I like music, it helps to pass the time when I'm washing dishes or cleaning the house,...I can even listen while I work part-time in this clothing store in Grey Street.

Mashie : ...tennis...I started playing when I was small. I went for classes...it was very expensive but I started to play very well...from there I developed...I used to watch all the matches on TV just to learn and see the experts...how they play. I played inter-school and won but couldn't take it further because I had to choose between studies and that.

Nirupa : I love to sing, act and dance. At home, while I clean up the house you always find me singing...reciting famous lines from plays and movies...

These illustrations point to the ways that structures of patriarchy and dominant ideologies of gender encroach on the experiences of women and especially on the ways in which they envision the organisation of domestic responsibilities in their own lives.

#### **4.2.1.5 Household chores**

Ironically, house-hold chores were constantly referred to during the discussion on hobbies and sport. For most of the respondents there was an overlap, with house-hold chores either being directly referred to as a hobby or being mentioned as the major obstacle to pursuing any sport or hobby.

Saloshna: I do most of the work... because my brother is not a homely person. He feels that a ladies place is in the kitchen and he just wants to be served all the time.

Interviewer: Why do you think he has this attitude?

Saloshna: My grandfather...he feels a women's place is in

the home even if she has a career and a man is not supposed to pick up his plate after supper. So my brother feels he's a young man...young men don't do these things. My grandfather has a strong hold over my mother. She was brought up in the environment where she always listens to what my grandfather has to say. When he dictates to her it comes naturally to her to respond... but with me I always question him.

Colleen: When I go home there is always something to do...not so much now because my younger brother and sister, they do most of the chores now...they have more time. My mummy says that we have homework to do and the load is much greater. But during the weekends I help with the housework...general cleaning, vacuuming, dusting and washing. On a usual weekday I normally wash supper dishes and sometimes I sweep up. On weekends I do the ironing. My brother helps but not so much...only on weekends he tidies his room, washes the car and sometimes helps with the gardening.

Jaya: Well...I cook and have to take care of my room. My brothers do nothing. Whenever I told them (the brothers) to make their beds, she (the mother) would always say that they are boys and not supposed to do that. She believes that men shouldn't work in the house.

Jaya went on to explain that her brothers were now married to professional women and they have been forced to change.

Jaya: If he (the brother) throws his clothes on the floor, she (his wife) doesn't pick it up and at the end of the week if he asks for a clean shirt...well he can go and find it himself. Now I see that he puts his clothes in the washing.

These illustrations present these young women as creative, active participants in the social process, trying to make

sense of their everyday experiences and making choices within that context. They do not, at times display signs of being passive recipients of cultural and economic imperatives. Although their assumptions at this stage offer an insight into the first steps that determine how the allocation of domestic responsibilities occurs, they are important indicators in producing and reproducing family life in which domestic labour depends largely on women.

#### **4.2.1.6 Religion**

Much of their leisure time was also taken up by their involvement in prayer and rituals of religious significance. There was no significant difference in the emphasis that the Muslim, Hindu and Christian students placed on religion.

Aysha : we must pray five times a day...the evening prayer is important and longer. Friday is a very holy day for us and the prayer is longer. I feel like something is missing if I don't pray...I guess it's because I've always done it.

Beverly : I attend church regularly...plus I'm involved in the church activities...so not only Sundays but during the week too, I have to attend meetings and so on...

Sharla : I have to light the lamp every day...then we observe all the special prayer days...we have to fast on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays...we don't eat meat on those days. Most of the time we go for bhajans to the ashram...at least once a week...

Nirupa : we read the Gita and we do havan, but my brothers say they don't understand what we are doing so they don't get involved...

Mashie : I just do the bare minimum. Like...I eat all the halaal stuff... My mother used to make it a habit that we should read a part of the Koran every morning...but when she

leaves for work, that's it...we stop. She doesn't know what we get up to. But during Ramadaan I fast and read the Koran and cover my legs. Its like from a small age we learn about religion, you know, and as the years go by all the fears are building up inside you...of what is going to happen here and after you die...

Colleen: We don't speak Telegu, our mother tongue. My dad's great-grandfather came from India as a Christian and he adopted English and all. Everything that comes with Christianity...so we don't know anything about the Indian culture...we don't know the Indian language or "our language". We are very religious. My dad is an elder in the church, my brother plays the guitar and I teach Sunday school. My mum goes to the women's fellowship and my small brother and sister go to Sunday school and youth meetings.

Colleen presents some very interesting conceptions about religion, culture and language, which have clearly been shaped by her experience of being a Christian South African of South Indian, Telegu origin. Her confusion revealed itself in her attempts to flesh out those categories for herself. She constantly grappled with the concepts of language, culture, religion and ethnicity, trying to reconcile being a Christian with being an Indian. For her these were mutually exclusive identities.

Colleen: I find it difficult to think of myself as an Indian...I know I only look like one...but our family...we don't like Indian music...we don't like to eat curries...it becomes confusing...to know where you belong...

Although literature places much of the blame for low enrolment and achievement on cultural factors including religion, this view had no strong basis for this study. No religion, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism, was found to be



a major hurdle in narrowing the gender gap in education

#### **4.2.2 Perceptions of home background and family life**

This part explored the ways these women, who had just completed their schooling and had entered tertiary education, constructed their family lives in relation to their own realities and aspirations. It reveals the production, reproduction and contestation that occurred within the family life, alongside that of society and the labour market. The quandary at this point was how these young women came to expect and plan family lives characterised by the women taking the primary responsibility for domestic work and child rearing and where the husband is expected to "help out". The expectations and decisions at this stage of their lives may not necessarily be binding. The various ways in which these young women contemplate and prepare for domestic life may not necessarily persist. Perhaps all the contingencies that will eventually construct and shape their behaviour, perceptions and aspirations over the years could result in a changed identity, with different needs and desires, but the underlying reality is that the way they anticipate the future affects what the future will bring them. They are seen to eventually collude in their own subordination.

##### **4.2.2.1 Religion**

This emerged as a central issue in all the interviews. Contradictions abounded in the actual practices of the women when contrasted with what they had to say about religion.

Mashie's statements for instance, are in conflict with her earlier views about religion. Whilst being flippant about religion and criticising her parents for enforcing certain practices, she ultimately succumbs to her own fears and the subconscious way of life that has been defined for her, by her family.

Mashie: My family is divided, my mother and first sister would like to think they are religious...conscious about what they eat and how they dress, blah, blah, blah. But really me and my two sisters...and my father...we don't even read namaz...we don't even read it once a day. But at the end of the day I know I am doing something wrong and I feel guilty about this. So many of my Muslim friends are the same...we try not to take religion seriously but at the end of the day we end up doing most of the things that we rebelled against.

Farah: From an early age my parents told us what it meant to be a Muslim women in society. If we want men to respect us then we must wear pants and cover our heads. For my brother it meant going to mosque but there was no strict dress code for him. Now, even if I wanted to stop wearing the scarf, I am under so much pressure from others that I couldn't. But these days more and more Muslim girls are dressing in western clothes on campus. What I don't like is the that most people judge you by your clothes. For instance if you wear eastern clothes then they think that you are old-fashioned or can't think for yourself.

Amina: I will never give up being a Muslim because I don't know how else to live my life. It's a way of life for me. My parents have taught us to live in a certain way from small.

Tanya: Religion has played a big role in the way I was brought up. Like going out... my parents only allow me to go for church functions. Like the time we had the matric deb's ball...my father didn't send me. The only place we go to is church and that to you go as a family. My father is very strict with me because he says I'm a girl and it is easy for girls to bring disgrace to the family.

Colleen: I have a strong root in Christianity...I know what I believe in is real and I wouldn't let anything else sway me. From my experience in my family I know it is the only way. There are some Christian children... their parents haven't been such an influence to them like mine and although they come to church their family life is not based on Christianity.

Shoba: My parents don't force me to take part in the prayers and all that but as I started growing up I automatically became involved...like helping to prepare pershad. It is well like...you just do it because everyone else is doing it and also you are afraid that if you don't then something bad will happen to you. All of us go to the temple for the different prayers but I don't take it seriously...just something I have to do because I am a Hindu.

Komla: You will be surprised. So many of our Indian students pretend to be so westernised...the way they dress and talk and the things they do...but deep down they still believe strongly in their religion. See all these religious occasions...there are so many young people involved, some take it more seriously than their parents. But I don't know why they are ashamed to be open about it...most are so embarrassed to admit that they pray. For me, I feel that it is our religion that keeps us respectable. Our parents have always said that we must be God-fearing...then only will we live in harmony with others and have respect for others.

Diloshnee: I went through so many stages. While I was growing up I used to rebel against religion...I refused to take part in any prayer at home. My parents used to get angry but used to say that it doesn't matter while I'm small. But now things have changed...I feel I want to have some security and prayer gives me security. I am grateful to my parents for being so understanding...they never forced

me...but they always tried to make me understand how important religion is.

Jaya: My family is not very religious...but we don't eat meat on Tuesdays...it's always been like that in our home. We all observe the holy days in the calendar and of course Diwali.

Niresshni: As the years are going by I see our family and friends getting more and more religious. I mean we observe all the prayers and the younger people are taking it even more seriously than the older people. I thought being a South African you know, the Hindu religion would fade away. I know so many have converted to Christianity but I feel that they are sell-outs...they only converted because they want to be like the whites here. But no matter how much they try, they can't change how they look. I am not ashamed of my religion because at the end of the day at least I am not a confused person...I know who I am...

Niresshni displayed great emotion when discussing Christianity. Her feelings that Indians were "selling out" revealed some of the tensions around social identities. For her, conversion to Christianity resulted from Indians feeling ashamed of their practices and beliefs and reflected their poor self image. She felt that growing up in the South African context forced Indians to view their religious practices as inferior or meaningless.

Although there were contradictions in terms of what was practised and what they espoused, it in no way played a confining role in their lives.

#### **4.2.2.2 Relationships and choice of marriage partner**

Although the students spoke at length about seeing people as equals in society, that people should be judged for who they are, this argument did not follow through to its logical

conclusion. None of the women was entirely comfortable with the idea of marrying out of their religious or ethnic group.

For instance, throughout the interviews, Mashie maintained passionately that she was a liberated individual, free to pursue her own destiny and free from all forms of bigotry. Yet in a rather intimate discussion, she revealed quite the opposite.

Mashie: At the moment I am seeing someone that is not Muslim

Interviewer: How do you feel about this?

Mashie: Religion is not important to me because...like there are lots of questions...but there just doesn't seem to be any logical answers...so I don't defend or judge people by religion.

Interviewer: How do your parents feel?

Mashie: Oh! they will have a fit...they will have a fit...they would!...and then...I suppose...I will have to listen to them...they have done so much for me...I don't want to do anything to hurt them...I could never live happily.

Nalini: I mean everybody is supposed to be equal right? But it's hard to find someone truly compatible. I think the children suffer in the end in a mixed marriage. They don't have an identity. I mean you have to really love the person to marry out of your religion or race? It's a bigger risk.

Sharmilla: Oh...you know our Indians. They will check the guys teeth if they can help it. It's hard to marry a Tamil or Muslim...you are not easily accepted by society. But some of the Indians don't mind whites! They think you married god or something. But bring an African husband...they'll die.

Suraya: I would prefer to marry a Muslim because of my religious beliefs. I would be too scared to marry out of my group...the adjustment would be a problem. You see most of our men that marry white girls...I think they do it to prove a point. All these years you were not allowed to mix...now forbidden fruit tastes sweeter...but they are not like us...homely...they don't hesitate to leave you...

Interviewer: What if you decided to marry a white who converted to Islam?

Suraya: That would be no problem, as long as he became a Muslim.

Interviewer: A man of African origin?

Suraya: I'll be very honest...if I know the person well...know that he is decent...I don't mind. But my parents would never allow it...because our society still hasn't learnt to accept the African as an equal. I would not feel to comfortable with the idea...I don't think I...or our society can deal with that at this stage in our country.

Nelendrie: Me and relationships just don't work. I usually end up liking people out of my religion...but my parents are very religious and they won't allow it. If my father says "don't do that Nelendrie", and you do...you will have the most horrible time of your life. Honestly, I've learnt now, no matter how much I want someone, I will never go for it. My father has got this terrible mouth...if he is not happy then neither am I.

Sagrie: I know of a few Indian girls that have married whites, but you know they are the one's that have always thought of themselves as whites. They see whites as superior and it doesn't matter if the guy is stupid, so long as he is white, he is right. It is so difficult here with us having apartheid and all. No matter what happens a white husband is always seen as superior even if he is sweeping the streets. But I still prefer to marry someone with a similar religious background, just for the sake of the

children. I think its very rare that mixed marriages work. If it does work, then one of the partners is compromising more than the other...and it is usually the wife.

#### 4.2.2.3 Code of dress

Very few instances of strict dress code were found. Most of the students made statements concerning self-respect and decent attire. Although the Muslim women did express the need to cover their heads and legs, especially after marriage, all maintained that there was a general loosening up of the dress code for them in the South African society.

Anita: My dad is very fussy...he doesn't like us wearing jeans. He prefers us wearing Indian clothes and dresses. He doesn't allow us to wear shorts and tight jeans and short skirts.

Interviewer: Why do you think he doesn't allow it?

Anita: Because he is old fashioned

Interviewer: Would you...if left to decide on your own?

Anita: No.

Interviewer: Why wouldn't you?

Anita: I prefer long skirts...I prefer dressing oriental way...it suits me...I like it...wearing Punjabis and things...saries...

Mashie: I am not a staunch Muslim, but you will never find me wearing mini's or stuff that clings to me. On Friday's I must wear a dress and pants. I don't really wear jeans. My parents are not very strict about the way I dress but they won't like me to wear tight, revealing things. I think a lot depends on what type of clothes you wear. As a women you must not flaunt your body...I'm not just saying this because I'm a Muslim. Girls must maintain some respect. Boys may admire revealing clothes but I don't think they will have any respect for you. You won't have any respect for yourself.

Rekha: We are living in changing times. My parents accept that I wear jeans and shorts...but for religious occasions and family functions they prefer that I wear traditional outfits. Like for weddings I must wear a sarie or Punjabi, never a western outfit.

Renilla: I have noticed that people are going back to their roots. The Punjabi is so popular these days, even to campus. It is not looked upon as old fashioned any more. I am free to choose what I want to wear. My parents are not so fussy...as long as I am decently dressed.

Ela: My parents allow me to wear shorts and jeans but when it comes to functions I usually end up wearing a sarie or eastern outfit. I think now with all the fashion from India, more and more girls are wearing Punjabi's. All these functions become eastern fashion parades!

Aysha: I wear western clothes mainly to campus but it's usually a long shirt over a pair of jeans. In that way you still look modern. I don't wear see-through clothes... my parents won't let me out of the house if I did...

#### **4.2.2.4 Parents and education**

The maternal influence on the sample was evident throughout the interviews. There was a firm belief that education was the most important avenue to upward social mobility; albeit an apartheid system.

Nirupa: My mother is a broken person. My father...because of the problems, never worried much about my education but my mother worries a lot. She always told me to study further so that I can get a good job and be independent. She is worried that I must not end up with an alcoholic husband. Even in the family...everyone sort of looks down on us because of my father, but my mother...she comes from a very well known family...she tries her best to give us



everything... a good, strong education...to be somebody in society.

Suraya: Usually in our community the women don't study and have careers...we just need to marry the right guy. My mother is very old fashioned but when it comes to education she wants the best for me. She always says that education is the greatest gift to give any child.

Elaine: My mother felt that since she was deprived of education...she felt that we must go to school. She always talks about our granny and how she stopped her from going to school. She always says if she went to school, she would have been this or she would have been that... I wanted to leave in standard eight...I left for a week. She called all the family members and got me to go back. I am grateful now...otherwise I would have been doing some menial job I guess.

Jessica: My parents kind of...put pressure on me because...like the time I was in high school...I didn't have a choice. My mother says "you going to do the S-course and that's it". My mother is a very strong-willed person...she doesn't take any nonsense from my father. She was at home initially, then she made my father take her around to look for a job so she could save money to send me to varsity.

Beverly: My mother, she was a dedicated student. She had lots of awards in school. She had to leave school because her brother died and she had to take care of the family. So she always pushes me...she keeps telling me her life story...boring sometimes...and why I have to get a sound education.

Vanessa: My parents are always motivating me. Even though when I was doing matric, I was not staying at home, there

would be constant calls...am I studying?...am I coping with the subjects?...do I need tuition in anything?...everyday they worried about how I was performing in school.

Renilla: They are always pushing me...always telling me that I have to work harder...they are very strict. If I don't have them around, I don't think I would work very hard...they are very supportive.

Anna: My mother is always worried about my education. She tells me how hard it was for her because she was uneducated. She made a promise that no matter what, I must go to varsity.

Rani: My parents always encouraged me to study. There is a lot of competition amongst the Indians to see who can be the best. My mother always talks about life in the factories and how you get pushed around. She says it's not a good life for a women. If we study and make something of ourselves then we can earn good money and people will look up to us.

Priya: Before it used to be a bad thing to send girls to varsity. Only bad girls came here. Now so much has changed. My parents have always spoken about the university...although they had no idea what it was all about...all they knew was that it was important to further my studies.

Zohra: My parents always told me not to be satisfied with just passing matric. I had to make something of myself if I wanted to survive in our country. They always spoke about the hardship they suffered in this country and vowed that I must not go through the same.

This strong emphasis on their future security and social mobility, was also echoed in their perceptions about science

and science-related fields. Although the majority of the women felt that the field of science and science-related careers were **not suited** to women, they all acknowledged the empowering nature of scientific knowledge and science-related careers. Access into this field, especially at the secondary level of education, was emphasised as a priority, the ultimate in life, but always with the sense of despondency; as though already anticipating that this would be an impossibility.

Jessica: ...I was expected to do a science course at school  
Interviewer: why ?

Jessica: ...my parents, they knew that science is good  
.....you have better job opportunities.... so they sort of  
pushed me to take science in Std. 8 .... My father said  
try it ... if you don't do well then you can do something  
else. I don't know...

it made them proud to tell everybody I was doing science.

Munira: My parents were always telling me to take science.  
I don't know how they knew it was important...they just knew  
that I had to take it if I wanted a high status in life.

Chantal: My mother and father used to only worry about my  
science subjects...you never heard them talk about English  
or History and things like that...only science...but they  
told me to try and if science was hard then I should switch  
to something easier.

Ela: I was forced to do science subjects at school by my  
parents, even though I wasn't good at it. It meant so much  
to them. They felt that it had a higher status in life than  
the other subjects...but they knew nothing about it at all.

Sharla: My parents put it straight to me..."you want to get  
a good job and earn good money...then don't waste your time  
doing any other course but a science course"...they were not

going to send me to varsity and waste their money...

Mishal: At home we always knew that science was important. I don't know how my parents knew this but they told me to try science first and if I couldn't manage then try something else. But I think most of the Indian parents push their children to do science because they know the children can get into medicine and dentistry and now even engineering is becoming important to them.

Sharmilla: You know this craze with Indian parents all wanting their children to become doctors, that is why they force us to do science. It's like you have to try for the sky and you might reach the treetop but if you try for the treetop then you will only reach the ground. I think that sums up our parents...always wanting the best for us.

Diloshnee: All those that did well in school did science...so my parents used to tell me I must do science. I think they wanted the status. It is a status thing. At weddings and functions all the grown-ups get together and discuss their children and how well they are doing. So if you say your child is doing science then you are really tops in society.

Aysha: Sometimes you do the science course just to please your parents even though you might hate every minute of it. But rather than to try and do something else and straight away people act as though you don't exist.

#### **4.2.3 Perceptions and experiences of the educational system**

Although the questions posed were of a general nature, there was a high degree of consensus around the issue of subject choices at secondary schools. The students were very keen to discuss their experiences and perceptions of science (which referred specifically to physical science,

mathematics and computer science)

Irrespective of their aspirations and expectations, the majority of the women stated that they had worked very hard at school, if not harder than the males in comparable positions, in order to try to keep up. In keeping with this attitude towards their schooling, they felt that despite the preferential treatment that the boys had received at school, they viewed their years at school as being important and beneficial to them.

Not only did these students see themselves as equally academically competent as their male counterparts, they sincerely believed that they would be able to succeed in any occupation. But it was strongly felt that their teachers had expected them to enter into semi-skilled or unskilled work, as well as the traditionally female occupational areas such as teaching, nursing and secretarial positions.

These women did not reject the values and legitimacy of the school even though they felt at times that they had not benefitted as much from the educational system as the boys.

It was felt that teachers tended to be more critical of the boys than the girls when it came to issues of discipline. The teachers tended to rate girls more favourably than the boys in areas of character, work and sociability.

Nearly all the girls mentioned the role played by school counsellors.

#### **4.2.3.1 Curriculum**

##### **a) Physical science and mathematics**

A commonly found perception, as illustrated by Mishal's argument, was that only **intelligent** people are able to access scientific knowledge. However, this view is negated

in the final analysis of the study where it clearly emerges that even those women who generally had an above-average achievement level at school, were still failing mathematics and physical science, especially.

Physics and mathematics were widely perceived to be strongly masculine, not because they were mostly male-dominated but rather because it was widely believed that these subjects could only be successfully pursued by males.

This raises pertinent questions about the way in which science is presented to pupils at school. Delamont (1983) argues that schools present pupils with a "conservative, and indeed out-of-date, view of male and female roles". This is an indication that something is happening in the classroom, that sends out these strong messages that science is not for women. The feelings expressed by Mishal and Aysha, were one of many that pointed very strongly to the attitudes and roles of teachers in shaping the beliefs, actions and responses of the women, to science. The two subjects, maths and physical science, were inter-related at most stages of the discussion. The women's acceptance into the field of science, was always dependent on their performance in maths.

A greater proportion of the sample expressed extremely negative feelings and experiences related to maths; even those that had selected mathematics at the tertiary level. Most of the dissention could be traced to negative experiences at the primary level of schooling. A number of responses highlighted the teachers attitudes towards the women, as well as the reactions of the males in their class, towards them.

Mishal: I was pretty good in school but I wasn't interested in getting into the scientific field. When I was choosing my courses in school, everyone pushed me to do the S7...

it's more prestigious... I mean they really pushed me...teachers, my friends and my parents. I suppose science was only for the bright. Physics turned out to be my worst subject

Interviewer: why ?

Mishal: I don't know....it's hard to tell. I thoroughly enjoyed it at first...we had a very good teacher...I tried my best to please her and did very well. But in Std.9, we had a change of teachers,...I don't know, it all became so confusing,... he was always on study leave... he made me feel very stupid and favoured the boys. I just felt so confused all the time... unsettled

Aysha : I hated science in school... all the girls that used to do it were failing... it was difficult...but the boys always enjoyed it...they didn't seem to have any problems...they were not scared of the subject like us...

Nitha: I didn't do science because the teachers always compared my brother and I ... my brother used to get A's. All the boys and the teachers looked down on me ... I decided... I said no... I felt that I was bad, so I never took science

Vanessa: ...boys tend to be more intelligent...the trend is usually like the boys go in for the science courses...girls do home economics, cookery...things like that...

Interviewer: Why do you think this happens?

Vanessa: Maybe they feel incompetent...or something...it just comes naturally to boys...but we girls have to try very hard.

Beverly: I had friends that used to do physical science...they used to be constantly failing. That gave me the notion that it was difficult. Only if you were good in maths then you could do physics. Our students were obsessed with medicine...they mainly took the science course.

Everyone treated you with respect when you did maths and physics...but they didn't think much of the other subjects.

Beena: ...for lots of people, following science, .....like you are regarded, as you know, very intelligent. If you just do a general course ... people don't respect you. I wasn't a good science student... I was hopeless... the boys and teachers always made fun of me .... telling me I was fit only to be a house-wife. My dad was very supportive ... he liked me to do science but he never forced me... it was my decision... science was more cut out for boys.

Sharmilla: Generally when you are in school...you know sciences are harder than normal courses...so everybody wants to do science. Not "do I have the ability or not", it's "can you just pass"

Encapsulated in the above transcripts are perceptions of the status science commands in society, juxtaposed with the negative image of being labelled a "house-wife" as well as a strong sense that "boys" have a natural ability for science. Having access to scientific knowledge was seen as empowering, as opposed to being a house-wife which was clearly perceived as a subordinate role, having little or no status in society.

Chantal touches on a number of issues in her conversation, such as science being accessed only by those who are extremely intelligent, that entering a science-related career earns one respect and status, but most importantly for this study, that a love for a subject does not automatically infer that one will perform well in it. Conversely, one could also state that schools are presenting science in such a manner that even those women who have a love for the subject, are eventually forced out of this field.



Chantal: ...and our physics teacher ...he knew too much... I guess he had a very high level of education....he couldn't put his points across. I did very bad in science in matric, I came down in maths

Interviewer: You said earlier that you loved science, what happened?

Chantal: I don't know ... it got harder and harder... but you have to be very intelligent, ...like for science ... then you can get into good jobs ... lots of money... people will respect you...

Birke (1992) presents similar findings in her study on women's responses to science when she states that "they also expressed a sense that science was important to know about", reinforcing the view that simply obtaining scientific knowledge filled them with confidence. Also of interest is the low self-esteem of these women. Most felt they were "not intelligent enough" to enter the field of science. However, on analyzing their contexts, the covert or hidden curriculum messages tended to have played a tremendous role in shaping their self-esteem. Certain traits such as self-confidence, being competitive, aggressive and arrogant, were typically defined by these women as masculine.

#### **b) Computers and computer studies**

Both parents and students believed that there was a hierarchy in the area of knowledge. Scientific knowledge was clearly located at the top of this hierarchy, with computer science ranking as one of the most important fields of study. This was extended further in the discussion on choice of careers. Careers in the field of science were viewed as having the highest status with medicine, dentistry and "computers" topping the list. Computer science in particular, was viewed as very important, mystical and prestigious but meant only for those who are very intelligent.

The following transcripts encapsulate some of the feelings, perceptions and experiences of the women concerning computer science, computers in general and careers in computer-related fields that have already been outlined.

Chantal: I wanted to do computer science in school...but I wasn't good in maths... I was frightened... it would be too difficult...like maths...I knew I would only fail computer science... so I left it out.

Jessica: ...at school the teachers only allowed those with high marks in maths to take "computers".....all the very intelligent one's took the course. They used to act very proud towards us....teachers always treated them with respect...but because we were doing ordinary courses, no-one bothered about us. They were the pride and joy of the principal.

Mishal : ...computer science?...I didn't give it much thought. The counsellors never mentioned it to us (the girls).... it was mainly the boys that took it (computer science). We were told about teaching, nursing .....you know,....the usual for girls.

Aysha:....I enjoyed the computer literacy programme the best. We could just play around... play games... we didn't have to use maths or physics....I learnt so much like... not to be afraid of computers....

Sharla:...I wanted to do computer science at school....my parents said that I could always find a good job with it....but so few schools offered it... I didn't want to leave my school and go somewhere else.....so I just did the general courses like the others.

The feelings expressed in these transcripts were some of many that pointed to the attitudes and roles of teachers,

parents and schools, in shaping the beliefs, actions and responses of the women to computers.

The perception, as illustrated by Jessica's argument, that only **intelligent** people are able to have access to computers and computer science came through very strongly again in the analysis of the data. Together with this finding, the sample also clearly perceived a powerful link between the way intelligence was defined, performance in maths and computer competency. The general interpretation was that "a weakness in the field of maths was a sign of low intelligence".

Being competent with computers was seen as unfeminine, thus further reproducing and reinforcing the gender stereotypes prevalent in society.

The women who had experienced some form of computer literacy programme at school, all agreed that it was less intimidating and a very useful way of being introduced to the world of computers, thus removing the fears that many had about computers. It was quite clear that once mathematical competencies tended to feature less prominently, a psychological block appeared to have been removed.

Interestingly enough, the role of mathematics was again highlighted by computer science teachers as being difficult for females because it was perceived to be a male-oriented subject. Women were not expected to perform well in this subject and hence the argument was further extrapolated to conclude that women would not be expected to perform well in computer science. In the minds of the teachers, computer science enjoyed the same status as mathematics; an elitist one! This raises the whole question of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" whereby these women actually "rose to the level of the expectations of their teachers and schools" thereby

further reinforcing the premise upon which the argument was based.

There was the general feeling that boys are naturally more competent in handling apparatus and machines while girls are competent in areas requiring a capacity to care and nurture.

This was felt to be the main reason why boys were supposed to be performing better than girls in areas such as physics, maths and computer science.

Sharla's statement highlights the biggest problem facing Black South African scholars; one of physical access. Whilst computers are commonplace in the historically White schools, very few Black schools have the resources to provide the necessary foundation for a computer-related career. The Indian schools were relatively better off than the majority of African schools that did not even have electricity! This effectively cut them off from the entire field of computers as well as the broader field of science and channelled them into the popular subject areas of History, Zulu or Xhosa, and Biblical Studies. Whilst computer centres have been established at some schools in the Indian areas, it requires that one transfer to such a school should that be a subject preference ( which most pupils resent doing). The alternative was to study computer science as an additional subject after normal school hours.

This created all sorts of problems especially for female pupils who may not be given permission by their parents to stay till late at schools. Secondly, the majority of the female pupils had domestic responsibilities such as taking care of siblings or having to cook the meals or generally assist with household chores. These factors were described as featuring prominently in shaping the girls' aspirations and their decisions about studying computer science.

Access to computers within the classroom itself was also described as problematic. The male pupils were generally more assertive and were always found to be dominating the use of computers, thus creating the impression of competency in the subject area. This type of behaviour serves only to send out strong messages that computers are embraced by boys and rejected by girls.

There is a need to address the pertinent questions around the way in which computer science is presented to pupils at school. Olson (1987) states that boys dominate the use of the school computers because they are more likely to have expertise gained from their access to computers at home. He goes further to say that " their use of computers is mainly for playing games which are sexist, racist and competitive in form... the confidence or expertise gained does not necessarily illustrate competence or success". Elkjaer (1992) notes; "It is important that girls in computer science do not perceive boys primarily as dominating in terms of subject content, but simply as persons who need to show off or pose in the public sphere of learning". Such an awareness will ensure that boys do not set the pace or the agenda.

Women are thus involved in fewer contradictions when they choose the biological sciences as opposed to physics, maths and computer science. They also receive more encouragement and support in their decision to steer clear of the masculine areas of study.

### **c) Careers**

Their attitudes to careers were generally set in stereotyped ways, although there was general consensus that women could have any career that they desired.

Many of the women expressed clear views about what they saw as " women's work" or "women's subjects", thus reproducing

the gender stereotypes prevalent in society.

Anitha: I know the whole world is open to me but sometimes you have to be realistic as well. It is hard to find a top job that leaves you with time to see to the home.

Mashie: I'm good in a number of fields but I like a nine to five job where I can go home and relax and see to a family if I decided to have one.

Nirupa: I am going to reach for the stars. Nothing is going to stop me. I don't care where I have to go and what I have to do. I want to carve a name for myself. People must remember me when I'm dead and gone.

Beverly: I always wanted to become an air hostess. They are so elegant and graceful. In the past we were not allowed to, so I went to South African Airways and got an application form and found out all the details. I still think that they are prejudiced because they only took white girls, so I decided to come to varsity. I couldn't get into science so I decided to do a B.A degree because I wasn't sure what else to do.

Vanessa: I applied for teaching. I was influenced by my mother...I am doing it because of my mother. It's better for girls...they can finish early...because girls make better teachers...they understand how to work with children. Girls are natural teachers.

It is also interesting to note the stereotypical response to the question of engineering as a career for women.

Chantal: With science you can do medicine, dentistry... people will look up to you in society...

Interviewer: what about engineering ?

Chantal: for us ? ... that is better for the boys, ... I

mean you hardly find us there ... you have to be strong...

The data clearly supports the view that gender differentiation is an important factor in understanding the way females respond to the curriculum. Certain subjects tend to play a role in the formation and establishing of gender identity, especially at the adolescent stage. Learning theory has often tended to assume a gender neutral approach, but the findings indicate that the category of gender must feature in an analysis of curriculum.

#### **d) Careers counselling**

The general feeling about this could be summed up thus:

Jessica: Our guidance counsellor was actually our phys. ed. teacher...so he didn't know a damn thing about careers. We could never get an appointment to see him...he was kind of non-existent.

Sharmilla: They ( the school) always went into science...when they brought people. They never brought like social workers or nurses for us...people that do normal work. They always brought these high-tech people. You never found people come and say to you "become a bloody factory worker, it's rewarding"...it was always science oriented for the boys.

Shoba: Our guidance counsellor needed counselling herself. She was having an affair with another married teacher on the staff...all the students knew about this. So like we never listened to her...never went to her.

These accounts highlight aspects of school and work and gender relations. Their representations were interpretations that underplayed some issues and emphasized others. Their description of teachers, subjects and careers were based on specific experiences and ideological

assumptions. These women highlighted the importance of job opportunities in course selections. They repeatedly stressed the role of domestic responsibilities in career planning. For these young women, change would have meant dramatic shifts in their perception of reality. It would require fresh notions of job opportunities, masculinity and domestic ideology. These constructs were shaped by their daily experiences which gave them a good understanding of what the world was like. Their experiences functioned as lenses through which messages from around them were confirmed, rejected, challenged and reinterpreted. To transform their thinking would mean transforming the world that they experienced and not simply persuading them about the desirability of equality of opportunity.

These young women believed that they were making creative choices, designed to resolve the dilemmas that arose out of the structure of schooling, femininity and work. To understand why they took certain courses therefore involves understanding their reasoning, rather than trying to understand the power and interests of their parents, teachers and guidance counsellors. Although they felt that the teachers and counsellors could have played a more significant role in their decision-making, they tended not to blame or hold them responsible for their eventual choices. They assumed total responsibility for their choices which led them to accept the consequences of their choices and blame themselves for the limited options they faced after secondary education. In this way, the young women's consciousness is seen to draw on the existing structures and serve as part of the process of reproducing those structures.

#### **4.2.3.2 Aspirations**

These young women had planned to work outside the home. However, working for a salary was still seen as an option at times rather than an economic necessity. They tended not to



assume that someone else would take care of their children while they would go to work, but constantly worried about issues of paid employment as well as domestic labour. There was the constant need to justify the right to work outside the home and this was never seen as "taken for granted". Their planning about where, when and how they would work, was intensely connected to their ideas about domestic responsibility.

**a) Marriage, children and careers**

All the women in the study had plans to work outside the home. Most of them contradicted their earlier statements about their independence by making reference to marriage and children as an eventual reality. Although they expressed a determination to map out some sort of career for themselves, they were constantly trying to accommodate the notion of raising a family and domestic responsibilities with their careers. All the women assumed that they would be primarily responsible for child-care, housekeeping and all other domestic responsibilities. They felt that it was their responsibility to make alternate domestic arrangements if they wanted to create space for other activities that included careers and leisure time activities. They constantly betrayed their earlier comments about freedom and independence by slipping back into old familiar habits.

Of the sample of forty, thirty-eight of the women mentioned marriage as well as a career, as integral components of their aspirations. Shoba and Nirupa were the only individuals that were firmly against the idea of marriage and viewed having a career as the most important aspiration for them.

Shoba: ...I'm determined to make a name for myself...at all costs. People must know that I am somebody...they must look at me and respect me. Without a job...we are nothing. Everyone will push you around...want to control your

life...if you don't earn your own money. Marriage will only be an obstacle...you see...sooner or later I'll be expected to take care of my husband...maybe his family...you know how Indian men are...

Nirupa: I don't know...it is not a simple issue for me. It's like a trap...you will be responsible and blamed for everything. First everything will be all lovey-dovey... then...you have to juggle...your life. Our men (Indian) are basically lazy. They will sit and you must do everything for them. Then what happens to your career? I don't want to end up like all these women...helpless, trapped...With a good profession, I can call the shots. I want to make so much money...so I won't need anyone...a husband...

The perceptions of the other thirty-eight women are best encapsulated by the following responses.

Jessica: I hope to find someone...suitable... and settle down one day. But I also want to go as far as I can with my studies. I must try to finish my studies first...it's very hard to study once you get married...once the children start coming...you have to see to them first. Everyone will say you are a bad mother if you doing two things at the same time.

Sagrie: I know I chose science because you get more jobs available. But I know eventually I will have to find one that will suit me...one where I can still have time to cook and see to my home...my children...my husband.

Aysha: My parents are already worrying me to get married. It's not healthy for a girl my age to be single. They think I will meet the wrong guy...then they had it...But I told them it's my choice. I want someone who must allow me to work... not expect me to stay at home and look after his children...what about all my studies?...it mustn't go to

waste. But I must get a job...where you can go home early and see to your home. At least then the marriage will survive.

Renu: No matter how much you study...how good your job is...you must get married. You are not complete...even if you have a successful career...if you don't marry. You know how society is...people have so much to talk if you are not married...they think something is wrong with you.

Saloshna: I know I said having a career is very important to me...but I also think often...about meeting the right person and settling down. But I must know that if I don't, I always have my career to fall back on.

Ela: I would like to work even after marriage. It would be such a help to my husband.

Munira: I think it's important for women to work. I would do anything just to avoid doing housework

Jaya: It's fulfilling to have children and all but life at home can get very boring if all you do is housework and cooking. You must do something or even have some qualification so you always know that you are not stuck in a rut.

Niresshni: Studying and getting a degree is like an insurance policy. You can feel secure that you are not going to be trapped because you are not qualified to do anything. If I want I could stay at home and have my children and when they've grown I can try to do something then.

Tanya: I would be afraid to take on a job that is very demanding. I think it would mean sacrificing my marriage and family eventually.

Amritha: You have to be so careful in life. I know of so many marriages that broke down because the wife wanted to concentrate on her career. Our society is always quick to blame the wife for everything even if the husband is at fault. I mean...just look at most of the successful women... they are either divorced or have no children...or into their second or third marriage. People will say that you are unstable and can't keep a home. It's so scary because we don't know what lies in our future.

**b) Social and domestic responsibilities**

With the exception of two of the women, the importance of starting a family and raising children featured prominently in the discussion on social and domestic responsibilities of women.

Shoba and Nirupa were determined not to have any children. This was consistent with their responses at all stages of the interviews. There was a very strong element of bitterness and despondency that came through in all their responses on family, marriage and children.

Shoba: I see how my mother lives...she's always so afraid of my father...she can't make a move...he...he...hits her for every little thing. I get so angry ...I even feel like hitting him. I want a good life... but I know that's not meant for me... so I just want to be left alone ...my children must not go through what I went through...so I don't want to ever have children...who needs them? They will just hold me back...how can I progress in life?

Nirupa: Look... what a life we had? I'm just waiting for the divorce to come through... then we...my mother...can have a decent life. He (the father) dragged our family name through mud... I am so embarrassed to talk about it... family...children ... means nothing to me... I'm dead inside...he hurt us so much. What if my husband is the

same...I rather try to further myself... take care of myself...no-one telling me what to do.

Saloshna: At home I have to see to everything...I don't think that is going to change when I get married. I'm just that kind of person...I can take charge of the home. I know it will be hard...to have a career and to look after my home...but I am sure I will cope.

Jessica: You can't depend on the men to help you...so you have to learn to cope...with your job and your home life.

Nazia: The men of today haven't changed much. They might allow you to work and all but they still expect everything at home to be ship-shape. So it's like blackmail. As long as you can manage both the home and a career it's okay but the moment you complain that you are tired or you want the man to help with something then the first thing they will say is you must leave work if you can't cope.

Rekha: Most of the men still feel that they must be the breadwinner in the family. They don't want the women to earn more than them or to have a more important job than them. I think it does something to their ego. But they must learn to change too, like how we have changed. The men want to eat their cake and have it too. But they will have to wake up, times are changing and women are changing faster than men. We are learning that we have a choice we don't have to obey the man as a lord and master.

In view of the higher costs of living, these women felt that they had no choice but to look for and remain in employment even after they had married. They had realized that self-fulfilment could no longer be solely confined to their homes and their traditional values of housekeeping and child-rearing. They acknowledged that the disintegration of the extended family system had created problems for child-

minding and domestic responsibilities. There was a general acceptance that they would need to strike some sort of balance between their careers and duties in family life.

All the women overwhelmingly chose or planned for patterns of domestic labour which only serves to continue women's subordination in the family and in the workplace. But they were not powerless in the process. They resisted some aspects of it, whilst seeing through some of the inequity. They also at times, found advantages for themselves in traditional patterns.

An examination of how they decide to organise domestic labour, and why, reveals the structural and ideological factors that become critical in reproducing old, familiar patterns. It also reveals the factors that might change and lead to different kinds of decisions with different consequences for these young women themselves and for others. What is exposed is the struggle, the weighing of forces and the problems confronting them, rather than submitting to the total powers of the system.

They all assumed that paid work outside the home could only be possible when domestic responsibilities had been addressed. They firmly believed that if they wanted to "create space" for themselves for other activities, they would have to be responsible for making alternative domestic arrangements such as "working a double shift", coercing their spouses to "help out" with domestic responsibilities or finding someone to take care of the children and the home.

Their belief that work outside the home would be secondary to work inside the home is critical to an understanding of how these students planned their lives and "chose" paths that actually served to reproduce their secondary status at

work and paradoxically, in the home. This predisposes them to gender stereotyped jobs for women which are often less attractive and poorly paid; thus limiting their aspirations. The further implication is that the jobs that they do aspire to are treated as less important than their husbands'. The general inference was that their husbands' be allowed to devote more time and resources to performing their jobs well, whilst they would play a supportive role. However, a women's lack of monetary resources severely limits her power in the home even though much of her time and energy is expended there.

Although these young women often claimed to be part of the new generation of liberated females, there was the continued assumption that women shoulder the domestic responsibilities, that required closer examination. These women arrived at their aspirations not through a simple internalisation of domestic ideology but through individual beliefs and choices that were dialectically related to social forces that were beyond their control or choice.

The domestic ideology coerces women into placing family responsibilities first, by presenting this image as a preferred pattern for womens' behaviour. Domestic work is presented as fulfilling and satisfying as any career outside the home. Most women tend to assume that domestic work is based on a womens' special interests and abilities which makes her different from males. This type of ideology obscures the power differences and uses gender, rather than choice or ability as the criterion for determining who does what.

### **4.3. Interviews with the Family**

#### **4.3.1 Socialisation and sex-role stereotyping**

The parents taken-for-granted, lived reality of sex roles, was found to be deeply sex-stereotyped. The mothers in this

study, tended to be highly aware of a need to empower their daughters through education.

"Even if... how much education girls have,... they must still care for their husbands and children"

"It is our job (women) to keep the house clean and tidy... to be loving and caring..."

"We as women...it is our duty to prepare the meals for our family...that is how we were brought up. Everyday, we must cook something fresh... not take-aways. After all, what else is there in life?"

"As a father, I always treat my children equally, but there are some things that are meant to be done by girls and other things by boys... this cannot change"

Parents were asked to describe some of their spare time activities that they engaged in. The women were asked at earlier interviews about their parents spare time activities, so this served as one of the ways to triangulate data. The results of both sets of interviews showed that parents made up strongly sex-typed role models. The mothers were engaged in shopping for groceries, preparing and cooking all meals, washing and ironing the clothes and cleaning the house. There was very little evidence to indicate that the fathers were involved in any of these activities, although many parents and the women had stated that the men should share the housework. In reality, very few of these families appeared to be practising what they preached.

When asked the question: What does your daughter like to do when she is not at university? The responses clearly indicated that again, sex-stereotyped behaviour was evident. From the descriptions that they provided, very few of the



girls had participated in stereotypically male play such as football, fishing, war games, etc. A large number of the girls were described as enjoying stereotypically female jobs such as cooking, knitting, sewing and baking. Ironically, cooking and cleaning the house were often described as **hobbies** of women. But the "hobbies" of the males were described as fishing, playing sport, watching television; none of which could be compared to the repetitive, mundane and unfulfilling "hobbies" of the females of the house.

#### **4.3.1.1 House-hold chores**

Parents' sex-stereotyping and the socialisation process in the home, were not just articulated as abstract ideas; they took concrete forms. One of these was the household tasks that their children were expected to help with. In the interview, parents were asked whether they thought girls and boys should do the same household tasks and the majority said yes. But when they responded by listing household tasks that their children regularly helped with, the results were quite strongly differentiated by sex. The daughters were expected to help with various tasks around the house when they got home from school in the past, or university as was the case presently.

The most striking division was in the number of women that were expected to do the washing-up of dishes. This is supposed to be one of the areas that "helping" fathers, husbands and sons have entered. But the results of this study indicated that the younger generation of males are not exactly comfortable with this breaking away from tradition. Surprisingly, the root of this problem could be traced to the attitudes and behaviours of the mothers in particular, who expressed guilt and embarrassment about initiating such changes in their households.

"My son doesn't mind...to wash the dishes...but I don't like anyone must see him... what will people think of me. And

when he gets married...people will say that his wife is controlling him..."

A significantly large number of girls also helped with the cleaning up of the house, cooking, tidying up their rooms and taking care of their siblings. They were more likely than boys to be involved with shopping, washing and mending clothes and laying the table. The males in the families, more often than girls, washed the car, did gardening, and helped with minor repairs; typically "male" tasks.

Although the parents were careful to allow their children sufficient time to study and complete homework, generally the girls spent more time on these household tasks, and were more heavily committed than boys.

"...daughters...you can depend on them to see to things in the house... my son likes to spend time with his friends... he's not always around...he won't know how to look after his small sister"

#### **4.3.2 Educational and career aspirations for their daughters**

Parents expressed concern over the growing number of marriages that fail. It was strongly felt that the future husbands of the women, would not abuse and enslave them once they understood that they (the women) were self-sufficient. All the parents who responded to the interviews, attached great importance to their daughter's education and had high educational and occupational aspirations for them. The level of interest was manifested in the actual responses to the questions posed to them.

##### **4.3.2.1 Maternal influence**

Almost all the mothers projected their own feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem on to their children. Their responses were in terms of the experience of

themselves as mothers and wives.

Elaine's mother: I did standard five...being the biggest in my family, I had to leave school to look after my younger brothers and sisters. I didn't want to get married...but it was arranged. When my husband died, he had no will...so I had to fight for what was mine...myself...no-one stood by me...I was alone with my children. I almost lose my house...I didn't know how to read documents. With experience, I learnt. Today, **my** mother feels guilty she stopped me from school. I don't want one day for Elaine to hate me for blocking her road. I was deprived of education but I want Elaine to go as high as possible...so she won't struggle like me.

Jessica's mother: I was at home first...then financial problems started. It was better if the woman was working. I wanted to provide a good life for my family. I knew I wanted them to go to varsity. So I started saving...two parents working...we get more...Jessica's father was not happy but he adjusted. Every women has the right to be independent, not just a house-wife. You see, when a woman stays at home, a man becomes so...so...he can manipulate her...he thinks he can control her. Jessica must not end up like that...that is why I force her...she **has** to go to university.

Rekha's mother: I wanted to complete my studies when I got married but my husband didn't want me to. He is that conservative type you know...he doesn't like a woman working. That is why Beverly must do as much as she can now...before she finds someone.

"I don't want my children to be pushed around like me. Because I had no education, I just had to listen to my boss. I don't want them to end up in a factory like me..."

All parents had expected their children to continue their schooling without any interruptions or possibilities of dropping out. All wanted them to go on to some form of tertiary level of education. Mothers in particular, attached just as much importance to girls' education as to boys' within a context of concern for their daughters' futures

"The girls must educate themselves. We look after our daughters ...we give our daughters everything, but when they get married, ...we don't know what will happen to them...no-one can look after them like us... at least if they have a job, they won't have to struggle like we had to..."

Good prospects and security were seen as particularly important for boys, while interesting work and the child's own preference were more commonly mentioned for girls. This distinction carries with it the implication that boys have to work as providers, but girls' work is less serious.

Parents' ideas about the sex-typing of occupations were explored more thoroughly in the interviews. Although very few believed that men and women should do different jobs, their qualified replies suggest their reasons. They indicated that there were some jobs that women could not do because of the physical stress involved, such as mining, construction work, heavy duty driving. When told that there were many countries where it was not uncommon to see women in these jobs, the general response was that it was not feminine, and that these ladies were probably built like men! This notion evoked much discussion about the struggle for women's rights being equated with women wanting to dress and behave like men, which they disapproved of strongly.

Many stressed that the man should be the main breadwinner in the family but approved of mothers taking employment outside home and men doing a share of the housework. But they were

careful to specify that the children should not be neglected.

#### **4.3.2.2 Mathematics, sciences, computers and computer studies**

An open ended enquiry into what they thought to be the most important subjects for their children to learn at school produced a unanimous response - science and maths.

There appeared to be a variation in the interpretation of computer-related careers. Most of the parents had no proper understanding of what computer-related courses and careers were all about.

Whilst the majority of them defined it as simply being able to use a computer, they had no doubts at all that their daughters should try to become computer literate to keep abreast with the changing demands of society.

Reflecting on the sexual division of knowledge, the parents emphasized that computer science was perceived as a male field of study. However, at the same time parents strongly encouraged their daughters to attempt to gain entry into this field if at all possible.

Komla's father: Computers is the in thing now. At least it is a respectable job.

There was, however, general consensus that within the present South African context, it was important to be computer literate in order to secure a job. These thoughts were further extrapolated to include issues such as affirmative action for Blacks. Fears were expressed that the Indian women might become marginalised within this process, as they were relatively better off having received a slightly better deal in education, than their African counterparts. Computer proficiency was thus viewed as

empowering, thereby enabling the Indian woman to establish herself as a serious contender in the labour market.

Renu's father: We don't know what's going to happen in this country. Mandela seems okay...but what happens after he goes? I might be dead by then. Renu...if she is good with computers can at least be guaranteed a good job...

The question of empowerment was strongly rooted in the status that computer science occupies in the South African society. This being due mostly to its association with the concept of "intelligence" and "superior" mental capacities of individuals. Even at this stage, no mention was made about the earnings factor in the field of computer science. Clearly, being perceived as "intelligent" emerged as being more important than the question of how much money would be earned.

#### **4.3.2.3 General**

Most of the parents had high aspirations for their daughters, encouraging them to get middle-class jobs such as teaching or social work. When asked to give reasons, happiness and financial security took priority.

In general, parents wanted their daughters to study broadly the same subjects at school as boys and tenaciously rejected the notion that boys' education was more important than girls'. They were consistently in favour of equal pay for men and women and most parents saw no problem with women and men entering the same occupation and sharing the housework.

Parents were also asked to discuss the suitability of various jobs for their children. In contrast to the school subject responses, the responses to occupations showed strong sex stereotyping. The jobs of nurse, secretary, social worker and teacher were considered much more suitable

for girls than for boys; the jobs of engineer, draughtsman were considered much more suitable for boys than for girls. The only jobs that were not sex-stereotyped were doctor, dentist and computer operator. Many parents did not distinguish clearly between different grades of work with computers and thought that a computer operator was a professional.

An overall comparison of occupations with school subjects revealed that the parents were not seriously considering the aptitudes and interest of their own children but responding to the social prestige of a job.

Parallel to their commitment to equality of educational and occupational opportunities for their daughters, were other attitudes and behaviours, which made the possibility for true equality, futile.

It was obvious that parents' ideas on sexual equality presupposed that girls and boys have different adult roles and that equality is relative to these roles.

Despite arguing for equality, the majority of parents still perceived the roles of men and women in the family to be fundamentally different. They viewed the women's main responsibility within the family as primarily one of raising her children well. Women should have the right to work, but only if this did not disrupt the generally accepted patterns in the home and complied with their maternal and domestic roles. They could not construe how equality between the sexes would achieve any great change in the way society was organised. Although not articulated in this manner, mothers especially, viewed equality between males and females, as having to be negotiated within **existing** social arrangements.

The theoretical implications are also mixed. As Arnot (1981) has suggested , gender socialisation is not a

uniform, unproblematic process. Parents' ideas and behaviours are often contradictory; the same is true at school where a formal ideology of equality often coexists with sex-stereotyped expectations from teachers. These contradictions should not be denied but recognised as reflecting social realities. The acknowledgement of these conflicts should not imply acceptance. It should, instead, serve to raise consciousness so that the contradictions are addressed and eventually transformed.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The lives of the women in this study reveal to some extent, an outline of the structural forces that have acted upon and shaped their development. However, the study also reveals their own consciousness of their worlds, their choices, and their attempts to redefine their realities. Freire (1985) refers to this as the relationship "between subject and object, consciousness and reality, thought and being, theory and practice", stating that "any attempt to deal with the relationship that is based on the subject-object dualism, while denying their dialectical unity, is unable to satisfactorily explain this relationship".

This tension and dialectical relationship was made manifest in the contradictions, confusion and ambivalence of the women in the sample, and reinforced by their parents. For example, they expressed a sincere commitment to some form of equality of opportunity for males and females, yet negated this view in actual practice. This was particularly evident when the respondents were given some time to think about the questions posed, but when they responded spontaneously to the probing, a different picture emerged.

The parents' everyday assumptions about the way their lives were organised, was seen to eventually have had more influence on the students' perceptions and aspirations than their abstract and rarely expressed ideas about equality of



opportunity for women. This dialectical relationship was clearly evidenced in the influences of the family and the women's experiences of schooling; the influence of wider society and events in their lives that have made them critique the context in which they found themselves and the role that society had defined for them.

This awareness, whilst acting as a catalyst in their lives, coaxing them to transform their life chances, was not as unhampered and straight-forward as it may appear.

"Life histories can reveal past struggles and oppression; they also show people in the process of generating self-critique as they struggle to understand the imprint of historical forces upon them and to act in the present in circumstances beyond their immediate control."

Weiler (1988)

There was an on-going struggle to resist and mediate the social influences on the one hand, and the desire to be critical and act independently, on the other.

This chapter has shown how the reproduction of family life and the gendered nature of education, makes visible a set of assumptions within which the perceptions and aspirations of these young women are embedded.

The interviews give some insight into the way this pattern begins in the expectations of young women about to embark on adult life and into the factors that begin to produce change in their expectations. Although a few of them accept their traditional role as women, the majority of them did not embrace these traditional roles so easily. They did not like domestic responsibilities as they were viewed as confining and unfulfilling. Education and a career was viewed as providing them with independence and money. However, incorporating domestic responsibilities into their

lives was viewed as necessary, given that men are not able to readily change their ways.

The young women in the sample reiterated the point that the main hurdle to change lay in the very nature of men. They firmly believed that men will not or cannot share in domestic work. Likewise, men were seen as incapable of rearing children properly. From all their responses, men were depicted as either unwilling to be full time fathers or simply incapable. The women felt that men's masculinity would be threatened if they involved themselves with child-rearing.

Their perception of men, masculinity and femininity displayed very little change despite the heightened awareness of women's issues. To the extent that they expressed incredulity at the idea of men becoming domesticated.

Their constructions suggest that "what men **are** like is what men **must** be like (Gaskell, 1992). Their perceptions were shaped by the domestic ideology's construction of the nature of men.

Their beliefs are also validated by their experience of patriarchal family structures. From their responses it is clear that they do not see men in domestic roles. They have become accustomed to believing that their fathers and brothers "help out" or do them a favour when they assist with domestic responsibilities. This idea of men and masculinity is influential in shaping the dilemmas that they confront. It places severe restrictions on what they see as their options to having no children and an unkempt home, or fashioning adjustments for themselves. But what becomes obvious is that men still remain outside of this entire decision-making process.

The issue of the organisation of family life is important in itself as it makes visible a set of assumptions in which vocational planning of young women is embedded.

There were also suggestions that women could change if they took their own needs more seriously and when social structures provide alternatives. These women were definitely not entirely committed to traditional patterns, such that new opportunities did not make a difference to them. These changes would become part of their experience and thus provide potential challenges to the dominant ideology. This dialectical relation between ideology and structure exposes the systematic process of production, reproduction and resistance.

In this study, the young women display the passivity that reproduces traditional roles, but there is also evidence of the beginnings of discontent that provides the possibility for change. Whilst most of the women challenged the notion that the traditional division of labour by gender was equally fulfilling for both males and females or that it was the only logical way to organise the family and work, it was apparent that this discontent was not enough to bring about equality for males and females. The interrogation of domestic ideology by the women was not sufficient to stop them planning their lives around this hegemony.

Their life choices were being constructed by their assessment of how the world actually works, what paths were open, what opportunities exist, rather than by abstract principles of what ought to happen.

This analysis suggests that in order to provide young women with a sense of their own agency in this world, reality has to be presented to them as being constructed through a series of actions that could be altered. It involves more than ideological input, it requires institutional change

that will demonstrate the possibilities of change. The boundaries of reform must be established by showing young women how much the lived world of young women can actually be demonstrated to be changeable and not just by how well an alternative account of the world can be conveyed. Income differences between men and women, domestic responsibilities, traditional division of labour, are all part of the world they experience.

In exploring some of the reasons for this, there is a need to stress the incorporation of elements of the dominant ideology and their interaction with social institutions.

To understand how pervasively dominance operates via the concept of hegemony, is to understand that the process of decolonisation still has to continue within the terrain of feminism.

Comparing these findings to research is difficult as the problem has not been focused in the way of this study.

The findings also try to expose the danger of speaking for the 'other'. It is important that this emerge into individual's consciousness.

As these narratives have shown, there is no choice between womanhood and ethnicity because it is not possible to be one without the other. Difference does not, as is commonly expressed, nullify identity, it is instead an aspect of identity. Minh-ha (1987) states that the notion of two illusorily separated identities, one ethnic and the other women or female, is yet another depiction of the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning with its motive to divide and conquer. She claims further that when a woman of colour takes up a feminist issue, she is immediately said to qualify for three possible betrayals - either man, her culture or women. "The pitting of anti-racist and anti-

sexist struggles against one another allows some vocal fighters to dismiss blatantly the existence of either racism or sexism within their lines of action, as if oppression only comes in separate, monolithic forms".

The young women in this study demonstrate clearly that "survival is not an academic skill...it is learning how to take differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, 1983).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study has explored aspects of the process of social production, reproduction and resistance as it occurred in the young womens' journey from secondary education to tertiary education. The research was motivated by the desire to accentuate human agency within the context of structural analysis and to deepen our understanding of the intricacies of gender as integral to social structure. This concluding chapter reviews some of the major findings together with the arguments that have been raised and examines the implications for research, curriculum and policy.

Beechey (1988) presents an outline of what a theory of gender would need to address. These themes have resonated throughout the discussion of the findings of this study and are captured in the following questions:

- a) What are the basis and consequences of the separation of public and private spheres for men and women?
- b) What are the reasons for the division of labour and its persistence in different cultural settings?
- c) How do the cultures of the home, school and workplace contribute to the maintenance of inequality between men and women?
- d) How are subjectivities constructed?
- e) What are the relationships between gender divisions and other forms of divisions such as race, ethnicity and class?

This study explores the dynamics between the power of structural determinants and the consciousness of the young women who exhibit a growing awareness of the determinants

and thus initiate attempts to change them. The focus of this study is a group of South African female students of Indian origin, studying at the University of Durban-Westville. An examination of their lives, perceptions and experiences, reveals a tension between the power of institutions created under particular historical, economic and social conditions, and the will of these young women, who at times, are in opposition to those hegemonic forces. There is evidence of a constant interplay or dialectic between the two: the historically formed and institutionally restricted individuals, and the humanly created and defined institutions. This dialectic is discussed in Chapter One, as one of the major concerns of contemporary social science theory. Whilst in philosophical theories this tension is expressed as that between structure and agency in educational theory it has been approached through the paradigms of reproduction and resistance. As has been evident in the lives of these students, both ways of viewing social reality are necessary. Freire (1973) asserts that individuals are determined but they are also able to reflect on that determination and thus begin to free themselves.

The study begins with the accounts that these young women give of their experiences in the family, their passage from secondary education to tertiary education and their aspirations. The research not only describes and analyses the everyday lives of these young Indian women but moves beyond the realms of mere description, to locate itself in a clearly articulated theory that places consciousness and human action in a historical and social framework, thus encompassing individual consciousness as well as the ideological and material forces that mould human action. These accounts are examined critically, trying to appreciate where the young womens' conceptions and constructs come from and how society and culture shapes their accounts and influences their actions as they make their journey through life.

The women in this study try very hard to achieve **within** the structures they did not create, but also end up recreating the very environment that they are dissatisfied with. They have a very clear sense of, for example, what constitutes maleness, femaleness, domestic responsibilities and what careers are suited to them. They believe that they are doing their best within a world as they know and experience it. The result is the reproduction of gender divisions, not because they are desired but because they do not believe it could be otherwise.

These young women are not simple components of some mechanism of social reproduction; nor are their lives solely dictated to by the demands of capitalism, racism or patriarchy in such a way that they are mere automations. They are agents in complex social sites where social forces powerfully shape the limits of what is possible. At most times they retain the ability to be conscious and to analyze and act within these socially defined sites. In this way they critique and seek to begin to transform the social world they inhabit. They struggle against patriarchal hegemony and try to develop a critical consciousness of the roles of men and women, and sexism. But as is evident in their accounts, their concerns move beyond a deliberation on feminist issues alone. Instead we see in their own accounts of their perceptions and aspirations, a recognition of the overlapping oppression of race and ethnicity. Their critique of reality serves to unveil different forms of oppression.

The complexity of the social sites in which individuals of different class, race and gender subjectivities come together is illuminated by their descriptions of their experiences of the education system and the family. The family and the education system are however, not isolated from the dynamics of the wider South African society. On the contrary, they serve to amplify the contradictions and



tensions of the South African society, which is marked by a legacy of racial and sexual inequality and oppression.

These students try to make "sense" of educational discourse according to their own particular histories and social location. In many respects, what is reflected amounts to a kind of negotiation of competing oppression and power, as they unconsciously try to make sense of, appropriate or reject their situations. Because of these tensions and conflicts in terms of identity, gender and race, it becomes inevitable that competing subjectivities come into play. It is because these tensions surface and are expressed, that they begin to realise that social reality can be questioned.

Although the analysis begins with the accounts of these young women, it closes with historical and institutional enquiry into some of the patterns in the family and the education system, that women see as being beyond their control. Their assumptions develop out of their experiences of the world, which is interpreted and understood within the context of their culture and ideology. The startling feature of this process is the taken-for-granted assumptions built into their accounts; that women are responsible for raising children; that males do not know how to bring up children; that men are more suited to certain types of jobs than women, that students who excelled in mathematics, physical science and computer science were more employable. These assumptions were pivotal to their perceptions and actions that led them to reproduce the existing inequalities in most instances. Their sense of powerlessness served to place limitations on what was possible. There is the constant attempt to justify existing social relations and blame themselves for all failings.

The young women in this study seriously believed that education was the key to upward social mobility. This was reinforced by their parents, teachers and guidance

counsellors who convinced them that success in education would translate into attractive occupations for them. But there is no truth in the suggestion that the link between school and work is a transfer of skill for money. Women are not rewarded with salaries and responsibilities equivalent to their skills and knowledge that they take into the workplace.

Efforts were directed at finding out what attitudes or roles women held that led them to be different in their aspirations and ambitions from men. The tendency was to attribute women's lesser achievements to sex-stereotyped socialization and role conflict, for example, the competing demands of family responsibilities or a husband's career. It was only later that lesser came to be understood as different or even better. It became evident that their approach to life tended to take whatever men typically did or said as a norm against which women were being unfavourably compared.

These Indian women struggle against both racism and sexism. They are empowered in part of their subjectivity while oppressed by other parts. The complexity of these lived subjectivities in an unequal and oppressive society must be recognised for a critical pedagogy to be developed. These conflicts reflect real forms of oppression and inequality and an environment that encourages the exploitation of each student's own subjectivity, will elicit these contradictions and tensions.

The hierarchical structure, the content of the formal curriculum, the nature of the hidden curriculum of rules and social relationships all tend to reproduce the status quo. In the South African society, it entails the reproduction of existing class, racial and gender divisions. Those who are in control, who dominate and benefit from this structure, attempt in both conscious and unconscious ways to shape

education so as to maintain privilege. In this way school organisation and practices tend to reproduce and justify racism and sexism, those features which characterize contemporary society.

It is important to recognise the implications that emerge from this recognition of multiple oppression. It is vital to encourage a rigorous critique and analysis of all texts and to contest the standards of conventional views of academic analysis. Education should not be seen as solely the transmission of 'facts' or of the knowledge of the dominant culture of society, i.e. white, western, male, euro-centred and middle class. The basis of this work is an appeal for the recognition of the value of students' own voices, subjective experiences of power and oppression and the worth of their gender and ethnic cultures. There is a need to seek a dialogue with female students and try to unravel and understand the dynamics of their own life histories.

Not only do issues of racism and sexism directly in texts need to be raised, but also in classroom practice and interactions with social structures. There is a need to make the gendered subjectivities of students part of the texts that are used for teaching. At the same time, developing a critical inquiry into students' lives and cultural values.

This type of assumption rests on a recognition of the multiple subjectivities of women. It makes as part of its text the inherent tensions of South African society that are expressed in the classroom discourse in the schools. The study recognises female students' multiple subjectivities and the ways in which different forms of oppression may come into conflict in schools and wider society.

There is need for the recognition that power is not unified, coherent and centralised, but 'dispersed constellations of

unequal relationships' (Beechey, 1988), which leaves space for human agency.

Why is it important to incorporate an anti-racist perspective within all work on gender, especially within the South African context? The main reason why such a perspective is still absent from a large body of research on gender is that most white analyses regard racism as synonymous with the experiences of blacks. What is not fully appreciated is that racism is fundamentally an endogenous dynamic of the South African social formation. There is a need to understand the nature of such contradictions in order to develop strategies to combat sexism and racism.

Feminist theories need to recognise how race and ethnicity influence the category of gender by acting as a filter through which oppression and subordination are experienced. Postmodern proponents present a convincing argument that exposes the partiality of academic accounts and the role of language. Language is said to conceal and universalise the particular and 'conflate truth with those prejudices that advantage the knower' (Hawkesworth, 1990). Failure to acknowledge this will result in these theories falling into the trap that reveals knowledge and the truth as singular and universal. Feminist theory should focus on presenting alternative ways of viewing social reality. Postmodernists aptly make an appeal for humility, whilst denouncing dogmatic claims to truth.

The task that lies ahead is to understand the nature and causes of gender related problems. Information is essential for accurately diagnosing the barriers to female education and identifying which programmatic strategies work and which do not. There is a need to gather or report data on enrolment, dropout and repetition, by gender. Gender specific data collected over a number of years is essential

to monitoring the situation and evaluating progress. Comparing secondary and tertiary education data across geographic regions and demographic groups is imperative in order to dissect the problems and isolate trouble areas for targeting policy changes. **However, all of this must be lodged within the articulation and interrogation of the subjective experiences of women.**

The relationship between women's access to university and their exit needs to be carefully documented as well. While the emphasis in recent years has been on access to university, very little is known about who exits from there. How long do students take to complete their degrees? What are the attrition and success rates, and how do they compare for different fields of study as well as for different types of institutions? Are there significant gender differences? These are all areas in which there is relatively very little detailed information. **Where there is quantitative data available, it is seldom complimented by qualitative studies.**

There are also some theoretical issues involved in engendering the research process. The research process has tended to ignore those aspects which address the relationship between women and men with an attempt to provide theoretical explanations to the subordination of females to males. There is the need for a change in epistemology and the methods which have traditionally dominated the research process. It is no longer acceptable to rhetorically demand academic freedom and democratisation of the learning process, while women are continually marginalised in the production of knowledge and worse still are hindered or refused efforts of developing theoretical analyses which explain the existing attitudes and values which regard women as inferior. This is the context within which engenderisation of social science research is recommended, as it would entail creating an environment which will facilitate better participation of women in the

research process and secondly, encourage a deliberate effort to incorporate gender analysis in the research process.

Coupled with the engenderisation process is the recognition of difference. Unfortunately, difference is essentially taken as division in the understanding of many. It is imperative that we do not fall into this semantic trap. Minh-ha (1989) states that such an approach sets us up against each other as anticipated by the ideology of separatism.

" it is, indeed, much easier to dismiss or eliminate on the pretext of difference (destroy the other in our minds, in our world) than to live fearlessly with and within difference(s) "

Minh-ha (1989).

Given the above context, the following discussion focuses on some priority areas for curriculum, taking women's experiences as the starting point.

The study has demonstrated how the education process has contributed to building attitudes and values which reinforce existing gender inequities. Various disciplines and subject combinations are directed to consciously groom individuals to stereotyped sex roles. Women are steered into roles which society has given them and inferior status in terms of material remuneration and social status. Education is therefore pivotal in influencing employment gender patterns.

It is necessary to identify the existing biases and subject combinations which stereotype women, to identify those constraints which limit women from entering other disciplines and to take transformative action in the existing disciplines in order to deconstruct gender roles.

Related to the above problem is the omission of the knowledge of the role of the female in society. The historical knowledge is provided as if it is only the males that have been responsible for the making of history. Politics is taught as though it entails power relationships between men and women, the economy is analyzed as though various processes have had the same impact on the two genders. Cultural knowledge often portrays the patriarchal ideology as if it is divine, whilst language is used and developed to portray an inferior image of women. The performing arts are also promoted to reinforce and portray the inferior status conferred on women. There is a need for the re-examination of the curriculum with the purpose of removing sexism in the educational process. The immediate objective is to review the existing gender biases in the existing academic programmes with a long term objective of effecting curriculum transformation for the purpose of engendering the educational process. This can be achieved by facilitating the integration of gender analysis in the process of producing knowledge and consuming knowledge.

As the highest institution of learning, the university deals with an adult population whose monopoly of knowledge in the specific fields gives them power and authority to influence and shape the ruling ideology. The university should therefore play a leading role in the deconstruction of the ideologies which legitimise the subordination of women by men. In more general terms, the university should play a leading role in challenging oppressive ideologies by developing counter hegemonic strategies and practice.

Changes in the existing university curriculum would have a greater chance of impacting on other levels of learning. It could facilitate the redirection of the research process towards engendered research. The university also produces teachers and curriculum developers who are in a very good position to facilitate the incorporation of gender in their

teaching and the curriculum at different levels.

As the preceding chapters have shown, the answer to why the gender gap in education and the division of labour exists, lies in a complex mix of socio-economic and cultural factors that stem from the family and home, schools, communities and the nation at large. The challenge that remains for policy developers and researchers, is to determine which barriers are key to specific settings or sub-populations and what specific policy measures are appropriate and affordable.

Finally, one could view the study, with its analyses and descriptions discussed in the previous chapter, as depressing, or a constant reminder of women's subordinate, oppressed and exploited position, or one could focus on the descriptions of the places of change in the content of gender divisions as not only revealing of the ways in which the gender hierarchy can be maintained, but also of how it can be transformed.

Hagen and Jensen (1988) argue that 'women's situations are neither eternal facts of nature nor social constructs given once and for all. Rather, there is a state of flux ...the final outcome will be the product of choices made by all the actors involved, including women themselves and the institutions within which they act and which help to structure their everyday lives'.

Theoretical proposals, coupled with and informing practical initiatives, are therefore imperative to ensure that women become more than mere footnotes in the history of the future.



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