EXPLORING THE MOTIVATIONS OF WHITE RACIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISTS INVOLVED IN EDUCATION

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Declaration

I, Stephanie Ebert, declare that the research reported on in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my own original research. Where data, ideas, and quotations have been used that are not my own they have been duly acknowledged as being sourced from other persons. No part of this work has been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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Note on Style

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

'Whiteness' studies in the United States of America and South Africa have explored both the concepts of 'white' privilege, as well as 'white' racial identity. In post-apartheid South Africa, the literature reveals that in many instances, 'white' South Africans are constructing identities around victimhood and colour-blind narratives that can support their privilege. However, there are few studies which seek to understand 'white' South Africans who are attempting to embrace more positive alternative narrative identities. This study aims to understand what narratives 'white' people who are actively seeking racial justice in South Africa are embracing.

Using critical race theory and theories of narrative identity and social action, as well as drawing on previous studies of 'white' identity in South Africa and the USA, this qualitative study explores the narratives of 'white' racial justice activists in education from a South African perspective. All participants were English speaking and involved in the field of education, ranging from those who primarily see themselves as educators to those who primarily see themselves as activists.

The analysis showed that the majority of participants were constructing their identities around narratives of "educator," "Christian," and "caring individual," which were rooted in larger narratives. These larger narratives provided the underlying framework for the creation of narrative identities and moral action. In terms of their racial identity, it appeared that the majority of participants in this study were constructing their identities along the lines of Steyn's (2001) *Whiter Shade of White* narrative, which highlights national, transcendent, or individual identities and avoids or denies the present implications of 'whiteness' in the post-apartheid context. This narrative shows a definite move away from overt prejudice and is a sincere attempt to positively engage with the "new South Africa" by finding common ground through aspects of shared identities; however, by not engaging with race at all, it is a way to avoid the guilt of continued racial privilege.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:

Exploring 'White' Privilege and 'White' Identity in a South African Context

The aim of this research is to examine what motivates 'white'[1] people working to bring more racial justice to South Africa (SA) through education to be involved in this work. In so doing, this study will explore the relationship between identity, motivation, and action for these racial justice activists. In a country where race, language, and living area continue to be the most prominent forms of self-identification for people (IJR, 2013), this research will attempt to understand how people can operate beyond those categories, undertaking work to benefit those who do not fall within their main categories of identification. What are the alternative narratives they use to define themselves and make sense of their actions?

Background to the Study

In early May 2014, a debate arose on social media over the phrase "check your privilege" when an 18-year-old Princeton first-year student published an article in a student publication where he called the phrase a "leftist moral shut-down to any argument" (Fortgang, 2014). The article received attention from major United States (US or USA) news outlets, such as *The New York Times* and *TIME* magazine, which propelled it into the spotlight. This resulted in a significant number of counter articles which detailed the varying points of view. Some agreed with Fortgang that this "white privilege" discourse is being overused, denying the hard work of individuals (Ponnuru, May 8 2014), while others claimed his arguments showed that he did not understand the nature of the white privilege that he was critiquing (Gastfriend, May 7, 2014).

Conversations about white privilege are equally explosive here in South Africa. Gillian Schutte's 2013 opinion piece entitled "Dear White People" and its exposition of white privilege garnered over 500 responses (most of them quite vehement), and the subsequent articles back and forth went on for months (Schutte, 2013), with counter

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[1] The use of inverted commas indicate that the classification 'white' is a social construction with no basis in biology. However, for ease of reading, from here on quotation marks will not be used around racial terminology or the word "race" as my argument throughout this proposal indicates that race is socially constructed and the terms are not biologically meaningful.

arguments from Black Consciousness[2] authors criticizing "white privilege" talk as side-lining structural issues in favor of critiquing white perceptions and discourses (Mngxitama & Nkopo, 2013).

On the other end of the spectrum, there are those in South Africa who not only question Schutte's definition of white privilege, but to the contrary, claim that white South Africans are special targets of crime: for example, one man's successful attempt in 2009 to claim refugee status in Canada based on racial violence (a ruling which was overturned in 2010 by Canada's Federal court [Evans, 2009]), or the argument that the government is intent on oppressing the white South African minority ("Red October," 2014). While many white South Africans discredit these extremist views which have been empirically proven to be unfounded (Silber & Geffen, 2009), these extremists nevertheless use an exaggerated and overblown version of the same discourses that many "moderate" white South Africans employ all the time. The trope of whites as special targets of crime, the feeling of white (or, particularly, Afrikaner, which is a specific ethnic permutation of whiteness) loss of cultural and political power, and continued feelings of victimization continue to permeate the consciousness of many white South Africans (Steyn, 2004; Verwey, 2012; Albert, 2012; and others).

It is into this tumultuous territory that the field of whiteness studies, or "the critical study of whiteness" (Frankenberg, 2004, p. 105), has established itself. A field of study with roots in the interdisciplinary field of "American studies," it began to gain recognition in the 1990s and now includes scholarly writing worldwide, from the UK to countries such as South Africa and Australia. The disciplines whiteness studies include are broad, covering literature (see West & Schmidt, 2010 and Nuttall, 2001), psychology, (see Verwey, 2012), sociology (see MacMullan, 2009), geography (see Jackson, 1998), and media studies (see Saraswati, 2010 and Ghannam, 2008). Whiteness studies aim to decenter whiteness, thus exposing and hopefully removing its privilege (Prendergast &

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[2] Black Consciousness is not a monolithic school of thought. In South Africa, most contemporary streams of Black Consciousness have historical roots in the work of Steve Biko (Muiu, 2009). Biko was active in the 60's and 70's as a thought leader and anti-apartheid activist. He emphasized the need for black people to liberate themselves from both from dominant white patterns of thought as well as from the laws of apartheid. These concepts led him to break away from the multi-cultural National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and form the South African Student's Association (SASO) for black, Indian and coloured students.

Shor, 2005). As noted, whiteness and blackness are contextually defined, and this research adopts Steyn's definition of whiteness as "an ideologically supported social positionality that has accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of the economic and political advantage gained during and subsequent to European colonial expansion… whiteness is the shared social space in which the psychological, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalised, and rendered unremarkable" (Steyn, 2005, p. 121).

Some aspects of whiteness studies seek to abolish the white identity (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Roediger, 1994), while others look for ways to construct positive identities not based around exclusion, domination, or privilege (MacMullan, 2009). Whiteness and white identity studies in South Africa have largely focused on white identity post-apartheid, and how white people are constructing their identities in the absence of political privilege (Steyn 2001; Dolby, 2001; Verwey, 2012; Albert, 2012), as well as how whiteness redefines and hides itself to keep power through colour-blind[3] discourse (Ballard, 2003). From these studies, it would appear that many white South Africans have not embraced what Steyn (2001) calls "The White African" identity. Most of the scholarship focuses on the Afrikaner "identity crisis" and highlights the confusion post-apartheid white young people face in the absence of role models with an inclusive identity (Blaser, 2002). There are few empirical studies pointing out how white people who are actively attempting to break free from recycled apartheid discourses and working for a more racially just society conceive of their identity. This is the "gap in the literature" this study aims to fill. As any use of racial categories in these studies has been questioned, a further discussion of this issue will occur in the literature review.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine how, in a country where race, language, and living area continue to be the most prominent forms of self-identification for people (IJR, 2013, p. 33), these people can operate beyond those categories, undertaking work to

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[3] Using colour-blind language to mask existing inequality and leave the status-quo unquestioned has been termed "colour-blind racism" by scholars in the USA such as Bonilla-Silva (2010).

benefit those who do not fall within their main categories of identification. The specific research questions are

 o What motivates people to work against their "self-interests" in order to make a more racially just society?

 o What framework or narrative do people use to view the world that prompts them to get involved in racial justice activism?

 o How does their sense of self (personal narrative/identity) fit into this larger framework/narrative?

 o What (if any) are the key indicators in their journey that can be useful for educators/leaders/politicians who are trying to encourage a more racially just society?

Further, in order to make a two-fold contribution—i.e., to the field of whiteness studies and to the body of literature on education—this research focuses on those working for racial justice in the education sector.

Before any real exploration of the topic can begin, however, the post-modern and deconstructionist critiques of race need to be considered. After all, while whiteness studies is a *critique* of racism and the privileging of the white race over and above other races, it uses race as a category of study. These concerns will form the first part of the literature review. A brief summary of the following chapters is outlined below.

Structure of Thesis

Chapter Two, the Literature Review, first examines the contemporary discussion both internationally and in South Africa around the use of race in scholarship, as well as how various scholars have attempted to critically engage with race. It also examines the continued relevance of focusing on racial justice in the context of education. The chapter then places this study in the context of whiteness studies both internationally and in a South African context. It looks at South African studies that have focused on white identity post-apartheid—both white Afrikaans identity and white English identity.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical framework on which this research is based. Social constructionism is the underlying theoretical perspective in this work, with critical race theory (CRT) informing the analysis of race. Smith's (2003) and Somers's (1994) theories on narrative identity and social action are also used. Smith's (2003) focus on action springing from a moral framework provided by a larger narrative is adopted, as this is a similar framework used by Warren (2010) in his study of white activists in the USA. Warren's (2010) study is used as an empirical example of the moral impulse to act, and Louw-Potgieter's (1989) work on Afrikaner dissidents is compared to that. Steyn's (2001) descriptions of white identity post-apartheid are also explained, as they inform the analysis of racial identity.

Chapter Four provides a discussion of the methodology and methods employed in this study. It describes the qualitative, semi-structured interview technique that was used to gather data as well as the process of thematic analysis. This chapter discusses the reliability and validity of the project as well as issues of reflexivity and ethical considerations.

Chapter Five, the first analysis chapter, answers the main research question: "How do white racial justice activists working in education conceive of their identity in light of larger narratives, and how is this motivating their work?" Using Smith's (2003) concepts of narrative and identity, the chapter first looks at the larger underlying narratives of the activists as well as specific nuances that emerged when these larger narratives overlapped. The individuals' personal narrative identities are then explored, and the motivations of the participants are then linked to these narrative identities.

Chapter Six explores the way race was dealt with by the study participants. It focuses on the tensions apparent between self-identifying as someone concerned for racial justice while at the same time using colour-blind language, whether intentional or not, that "others" and reifies difference.

Chapter Seven examines the participants' stories of becoming involved in their work and explores points of overlap. This is then compared and contrasted with the accounts of white racial justice activists in the USA.

Chapter Eight provides a conclusion to this thesis by summarizing the findings, offering recommendations for further studies, and highlighting the contribution made by the results.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review

The aim of the following chapter is to situate my research in relation to existing studies and debates on race, generally, and whiteness studies in particular. The following review of the literature will begin with an analysis of current debates around the use of race in academic research and government policy. This use of race encourages the banal acceptance of apartheid race categories today and is at odds with South Africa's non-racial constitution (Posel, 2001). This section on race also makes the case for a continued activism for racial justice, specifically in education. Since the debates on race inform core assumptions and raise questions that inform and critique whiteness studies, they form the first section of the literature review. In this section, methods for critically engaging race and critical race theory are also explored.

The second section of the literature review is an exploration of whiteness studies. Since whiteness studies largely sprang out of American studies in the USA, the review will begin by giving a broad overview of American whiteness studies and then move on to discuss the ways in which key themes and critiques of whiteness have been applied, challenged, or adapted in the South African context. The section on South African whiteness will be subdivided into studies that focus on South African Afrikaner identity and those that focus on South African English identity, since there are some significant differences between the two, as the literature reveals.

An exploration of identity within this context will take place in the following chapter, where key theories informing this research will be examined.

Race

When people use the word "race," they are usually referring to certain phenotype markers that have come to have social significance in our society (Posel, 2001). While most people now understand that race has no basis in biology (we are not different species of humans, as was so popularly believed in the early 1900s), in racialised societies, race becomes a significant part in how people view each other and identify

themselves (Posel, 2001). This way of racialised thinking is summarised so aptly by Appiah (1989) as the belief that

> there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race. These traits and tendencies characteristic of a race constitute, in the racialist view, a sort of racial essence; and it is part of the content of racialism that the essential heritable characteristics of the "Races of Man" account for more than the visible morphological characteristics—skin color, hair type, facial features—on the basis of which we make our informal classifications. (p. 44)

This essentialised view of race informed apartheid legislation, as well as the many race-based laws before apartheid.[4] In the South African context, the combination of cultural, social, and biological indicators used to categorise a person's race means that this type of thinking easily lives on even when official legislation has changed (Posel, 2001). The majority of scholars today reject an essentialised notion of race, highlighting its social construction—the fact that it was policies, laws, and structures created by humans that put people into these categories. That these categories severely impacted people's access to resources in racist societies (such as the Jim Crow[5] South in the USA, and apartheid in South Africa) is basically uncontested, but whether these categories are meaningful enough to have continued use today is more controversial.

Debate around the use of "race" today. It is this racialised thinking—that superficially acknowledges the social construction of race while simultaneously endowing it with an "essential" or fixed nature—that many sociologists researching in the areas of race and identity wish to critique. While a sociologist can claim to believe that race is "something learned and achieved in interactions and institutions. It is something

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[4] A few of the major race-based laws prior to apartheid included the creation of native "reserves," the 1857 Kaffir Pass Act, and the Land Act of 1913. Under apartheid, laws such as Group Areas Act No. 31 of 1950, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, and Bantu Education Act of 1953 further segregated people and instilled/maintained an essentialised view of race (South Africa History Online, n.d.).
[5] Jim Crow was a racial caste system operating in the Southern states between 1877 and the mid 1960s which treated black people as second-class citizens. It involved both informal social etiquette as well as specific laws passed in certain states enforcing segregation and denying black people the right to vote (Pilgrim, 2012).

we live and perform. It is not a set of traits but is the product of social interaction" (Lewis, 2004, p. 629), the unquestioned use of racial categories in statistical analysis, and in race-based policies such as Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment,[6] continues to uncritically reproduce race. It is because of this that some theorists have strongly criticised the use of race, or any identity, in social science research (Niemonen, 2010; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), arguing that it is at odds with a social-constructionist stance. They argue that if according to social constructionists identities are fluid, negotiated entities, they cannot be rigorously studied. In order to study identity characteristics (such as race or gender), the social scientist ends up using them in research as if they have essential and unchanging properties (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Soudien (2012) argues that effectively, the power of social constructionism as a way of understanding the world (and dismantling power structures) gets neutralised by this double standard. Soudien says that scholars claim the process is to use these categories (such as "white woman") in order to critically engage with them and deconstruct them; however, the engagement and deconstruction seldom happens, and so "the categories are not only reified but are appropriated as badges of status. They come to perform the very certainty that is meant to be placed under analysis. Hegemonic status is embraced rather than challenged" (Soudien, 2012, p. 34). Soudien (2012) argues that the "law" social science accepts (identities do not have essences that can be distilled and examined) gives way to the "rule" that in practice, we all do it anyway (pp. 24-25). Appiah (1996) also highlights how political collective identities, such as race, while useful for leveraging social justice, can "go imperial," dominating all other aspects of one's identity, tightly scripting what it means to be a proper "black" (p. 103), leading people to "forget their individual identities are complex and multifarious—that they have enthusiasms that do not flow from their race or ethnicity, interests and tastes that cross racial boundaries" (p. 103).

Many South African scholars have argued that using race as a lens *through* which to view the world ends up hiding the processes used to create race, thus reifying race (Posel, 2001; Soudien, 2012; Erwin, 2012; Maré 2003, 2011). These authors argue that

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[6] The fundamental objective of the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act No. 53 of 2003, is "to advance economic transformation and enhance the economic participation of black people in the South African economy" (Department of Trade and Industry, n.d.). It involves businesses earning points for actions that support the integration of black people into the economy, looking at criteria such as black ownership, skills development, management control, and so on.

"it is for reasons of its falseness, and because of the consequences of prevalent racialism in terms of human suffering that non-racialism as a societal goal is essential" (Maré, 2011, p. 55), and continuing to use these categories undermines this goal. In South Africa, there has been a banal acceptance of race as a useful category around which society is organised and even the African National Congress (ANC)'s commitment to "non-racialism" is really more of a commitment to "non-racism" (Maré, 2003). These categories have remained unquestioned, rather than their being interrogated in the public discourse. Further, the simple conflation of class and race in South Africa by academics, researchers, and politicians means that opportunities for cohesion along non-racial lines are lost (Maré, 2003).

Critically engaging race. In view of the reality that people claim to agree that race has no basis in biology and is a social construction yet continue to uncritically use those racial categories, some scholars seem to wish to do away with studies and policies focused specifically on racial groups. Others, however, argue that given racist histories and the way in which racial ideology has been fused with material realities, there is still a place for these categories to be used in efforts to bring social justice—albeit with a critical stance.

The unfortunate fact remains that the scientific evidence which undermines common ideas about race lacks the power to change the cultural and social implications of race (Erwin, 2012). MacMullan (2009) argues that

> this is because our lived experience exceeds the microscope: while a scientist might be able to prove that genetic evidence does not support the biologically rooted racial taxonomy of the last few centuries, we nonetheless still live in a cultural and social world created by these assumptions. (p. 89)

The social structures which privileged certain racial groups in the past, and continue to do so today, need to be challenged—but how to do this without reifying race? The researcher is therefore caught in a quandary, which Radhakrishnan (1996) so aptly explains:

> No sooner do we mention "race" than we are caught in a treacherous bind. To say "race" seems to imply that "race" is real: but it also means that differentiation by race is racist and unjustifiable on scientific, theoretical, moral, and political grounds. We find ourselves in a classic Nietzschean double bind: "race" has been the history of an untruth, of an untruth that unfortunately [forms our] history… The challenge here is to generate, from such a past and a present, a future where race will have been put to rest forever. (as cited in Ramji, 2009, p. 23)

Even within anti-racist movements, this tension is felt between combating essentialist thinking in research and society (which often furthers racist aims) and using race as a tool to bring justice (Bonnett, 2000). Some have argued for a "politically strategic positivist essentialism" (Bonnet, 2000, p. 136) that contests racial categories but utilises them as a tool to achieve equality.

The anti-racists who wish to continue to use racial categories for political reasons in order to redress historic and present inequalities argue that a strong emphasis on non-racialism from those in power will simply allow the unequal status quo to continue uncontested. This unquestioning of the status quo in the name of non-racialism has been termed "colour-blind racism" by scholars in the USA (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). While the majority of studies on colour-blind racism, and the strongest critiques against it, have come from the USA (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, 2012; Lewis, 2004), their arguments do hold some relevance for South African society. Even though some have argued South Africa's problem is that "'race' trumps all other [variables for disadvantage] in terms of public and political discourse" (Maré, 2009, p. 53), those who strongly critique the use of race in public discourse and research also run the risk of "foreclosing debate regarding racism['s] continuing vitality" (Lopez, 2005, p. 50), and this can allow for colour-blind discourses to arise. Lopez continues, "by rejecting all race-conscious government action, even that designed to end subordination, color-blindness prevents the state from addressing structural racial inequality… color-blindness protects racial supremacy from both political intervention and social critique" (Lopez, 2005, p. 50). Erwin (2012), agreeing with D. Robotham, acknowledges this view, stating, "eliminating racial categories from research may limit social scientists' ability to expose unequal and unjust practices, or deprive the oppressed of viable political identities from which to rally against dominant and exclusionary ideologies and policies" (p. 97).

MacMullan too points out that whether we like it or not, race is a powerful social identity for people that needs to be accounted for, and "acting as if we can ignore each other's particular situations is often counterproductive to the task of achieving universal fairness and dignity" (MacMullan, 2009, p. 6).

In South Africa, it could be argued that colour-blind discourses would not have as much power as in the USA. In the USA, the white majority holds all political, economic, and cultural power, whereas in South Africa, the previously disadvantaged black majority now has political power, and there is a growing black middle class[7]. Given this fact, it may be that colour-blind discourse would not be as potent for preserving white privilege, and therefore talk of race in public policy and social science research cannot be eschewed. However, what also needs to be acknowledged are the various other ways that white people are fighting to preserve their privilege[8] and how black people are still specifically discriminated against based on race.[9]

While Maré states that "non-racialism as a societal goal is essential" (2011, p. 55), and he is correct in advocating for more imaginative ways of seeing our world,[10] this

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[7] "Class" here is understood in a relational explanation of economic life chance (following the Marxist and Weberian traditions)—it is understood as the relationship that people have to income-generating resources (Wright, 2003). In the South African context, race and class have been tightly intertwined because of apartheid.

[8] For example, especially in the business sector, studies have shown that while there is a rise in the black middle class, the majority of powerful businesses are owned and operated by white people, and the majority of top level managers are white (Holborn, 2012). Further, in South African business there is still a dominance of elite social networks which exclude blacks. These are "powerful individuals, family trusts and groups sharing common social, cultural and linguistic norms, bound together outside the boardrooms through old school, club, societal, political, church, sports and other such networks" (Padayachee, 2013, p. 260).

[9] In an audit conducted in 2006 and 2010 (controlling for class-based discrimination), it was shown that race discrimination occurs in booking holiday accommodation on the KwaZulu-Natal Coast, where almost one in three black people will be discriminated against based on race (Durrheim, Cole, & Richards, 2012).

[10] There have been calls for South African social scientists to look towards creating more complex class measures of disadvantage to rectify inequality (rather than race), which would achieve the same goals as race-based policies but would not run the risk of enforcing racialised thinking (Erasmus, 2012). However, Gutmann (1996), while speaking from an American perspective, comments on the weakness of these complex measures, saying,

the political strength of the complex calculus of disadvantage is also its weakness. By not calling attention to enduring divisions of color in our society, some suggest, we may be better able to overcome them. But it is at least as likely that we will thereby fail to make much progress in overcoming them. It is impossible to say on the basis of available evidence—and the enduring imperfections of our self understanding—which is more likely to be the case. What we can say with near certainty is that if blacks who live in concentrated poverty, go to bad schools, or live in single-parent homes are also stigmatized by racial prejudice as whites are not, then even the most complex calculus of *class* is an imperfect substitute for taking color explicitly into account.

statement *can* be construed[11] as not taking into account the current racial imbalances and inequalities that continue to plague South African society, or the way in which the larger global context continues to position whiteness/Europeanness as the norm. It runs the risk of underestimating the ways whiteness invents and reinvents itself, constantly positioning itself on top.[12] Unless active steps are taken to challenge whiteness (not just political or economic privilege, but social capital and cultural capital), then racial inequality continues. As Green, Sonn, and Matsebula (2007a) state,

> It obviously would be absurd to suggest that the non-racial struggles that resulted in the first non-racial democratic elections [in South Africa] in 1994 were hopeless failures, but it would also be remiss to think that the power and privilege of whiteness ended with those elections. (pp. 440-441)

While those interrogating the unquestioned use of racial categories distinctly separate themselves from those in a colour-blind position, their language can be appropriated by white people who are "accommodating non-racialism rhetorically and denying the continuing impact of apartheid [which] means that they can claim the moral high ground of being 'beyond race' while refusing sacrifice of accumulated benefits of racial privilege of the past" (Green, Sonn, & Matsebula, 2007b, p. 405).

Steyn's description of white narrative identity, which she terms *A Whiter Shade of White*, highlights the fact that the language of non-racialism has been appropriated by some white people who do not want to acknowledge their involvement in past and present racial privileging. This narrative appeals to a transcendent self ("I am who I am, I just happen to be white" [p. 109]), denies culpability, appeals to politically correct

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Perhaps the disadvantages of color can be adequately addressed by remedies that do not explicitly take color into account, but the adequacy of the complex calculus of disadvantage will then be closely related to the intention of its designers to come as close as possible to achieving the justice demanded by color as well as class consciousness. (p. 146)

[11] As Stevens (2012) states, "more importantly, in the context of what has emerged under the broad umbrella of post-race theory (see Gilroy (2000)) there is perhaps an increasing need to be hyper vigilant of the potential ideological appropriation of these ideas to suggest that race is inevitable and therefore less critical to engage with in a deliberate manner, or that race is more diffuse and therefore less visible, or that race is no longer an important proxy marker of social inequality (albeit perhaps a lazy proxy)" (p. 44).

[12] For example, see USA studies on how whiteness expanded to include the Irish, Italian, and Norwegians who were not originally considered white (Ignatiev, 1996; Roediger, 1994) and how the growing Latin@ (gender neutral form of Latino/a, now being adopted in USA social studies departments) population is experiencing pressure to be drawn into the "white" racial category, so that the white population in the USA remains in the majority (Warren & Winddance, 1997).

language, and wants to view everyone on an individual basis. However, this view "obscures a great deal of nuance of interracial contact in South Africa; real differences are too easily glossed over. The accumulated advantages of being designated 'white' and the impediments of being marked 'black' in a world still infused with a racist colonial heritage" are ignored (p.106). This acknowledgement of difference (not inherent, or essential, but created through social interactions and constructions) is something which can be glossed over by strong proponents of non-racialism who argue that focusing on difference ends up essentialising this difference, and this "plays into the hands of the hegemons" (Appiah, 1989, p. 55) and can prevent larger economic-based cross-racial changes.

        In light of the pitfalls of using racial categories, as well as the difficulties acknowledging people's different social realities and the structures of power which continue to privilege certain groups, my research will take the stance of critical race theorists, by attempting to find a way to be "intensely critical of 'race' being employed in ways that reiterate the naturalness of the category, but also of attempts to deny the significance of race" (Hunter, 2010, cited in Soudien, 2012, p. 138). The question is not one of throwing out all discussion of race, promoting a colour-blind society, but to examine the social reality (that includes a racial component) while trying "continuously and imaginatively to investigate a world beyond 'the implicit assumptions' that shape and guide our social behaviour" (Maré, 2011, p. 57). Researchers should walk the fine line of caring about the "lived experiences of 'race' and ethnicity" but also "resist and challenge the appetite for essentialism in research" (Erwin, 2012, p. 98). Practically speaking, this means that there should be a greater reflexivity on the part of the researcher and an emphasis on processes, asking questions like, "how am I being perceived as white in this context?" rather than on the experience of *being* white (Erwin, 2012). Gutmann (1996) argues that as researchers, teachers, and government leaders, we can be "color conscious" by acknowledging the lived experiences and injustices faced by people with certain phenotypical markers in a racist society, while at the same time refusing to be "race conscious" and enforcing a racialised worldview.[13]

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[13] Gutmann (1996) summarises the difference between these two views: "Race consciousness is the kind of consciousness that presumes the existence of separate human races and identifies race with essential natural

Critical race theorists use racial categories because they are concerned with interrogating certain discourses which preserve the privilege of certain groups, such as the discourse of meritocracy (which is—incorrectly—conflated with non-racialism by some). As Conradie and Brokensha (2014) point out, based on their review of DeCuir and Dixon's (2004) work, "although meritocracy is depicted as true non-racialism, critical race theorists point out that it ignores the continued effects of past racism, and attempts to maintain white—especially heterosexual male white—privilege" (p. 86). Critical race theorists are also interested in how race operates in daily life and how it is deployed in arguments or assumed in conversation. Rather than essentialising any notions about racial identity, this work reveals how race operates in our society. For example, Whitehead's (2010) work on racial category membership as both a resource and a constraint in everyday interactions showed that while South Africans reject overtly racist discourse, they employ race to legitimise their point of view/argument or assume their arguments may be dismissed based on race, so preemptively argue differently in order to combat that idea.

The aim of my research project is not to reveal a certain monolithic, essentialised white identity, or even to claim that white identity is, or should be, the primary identity that the research participants hold. Rather, the aim is to understand how these participants see themselves, the world, and their racial justice work in the current South African context and to hopefully broaden the available narratives on what it means to be white in South Africa to include those who are not constructing their identities around preserving privilege.

Racial Justice in Education. Anti-racism has a long history in South Africa, and in many ways is part of the larger story of trying to disempower whiteness. However, this term labels people in terms of what they are against, rather than what they are "for" (Warren, 2010). Given the "substantive," rather than strictly formal, view of equality that

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differences between human beings that are morally relevant… Color consciousness entails an awareness of the way in which individuals have historically come to be identified by superficial phenotypical differences—such as skin color and facial features—that serve as the bases for invidious discriminations and other injustices associated with race. Were we to lack color consciousness of this contingent kind, we would be blind to a basic source of social injustice" (pp. 163-164).

the South African constitution takes (Henrard, 2003, p. 41), the goal for South Africa is not simply to end overt displays of racism but to create a society where a person's race is no longer a successful indicator of his or her economic, social, or political privilege, but rather where every person is equally flourishing.

As pointed out in the previous section, there is a tension within racial justice activism between not wanting to enforce apartheid race categories or encouraging racialised thinking, but at the same time holding on to the fact that in a historically extremely racist society and a context of institutionalised racism, bringing racial justice often means using those same categories. As Durrheim (2010) says,

> citizenship and redress come into conflict with each other as (on the one hand) racial criteria for redress have the potential to exclude the historically advantaged from full participation and cosmopolitan citizenship, and (on the other hand) inadequate redress keeps the historically disadvantaged in conditions of marginalization and poverty that exclude them from participation in cosmopolitan citizenship. (p. 128)

However, it is worth asking—is the legacy of apartheid still impacting children's access to quality education? Has this become only a matter of class, or are there still racial components to this inequality as well? Studies in the USA have shown looking at class rather than race is not able to rectify past racial injustice in education, even though much of the poor population is black (Gutmann, 1996); however, could South Africa's different circumstances make this a viable option?

Soudien's book *Realising the Dream: Unlearning the Logic of Race in the South African School* (2012) looks at this question in depth. Soudien points out that while South Africa on the whole does not perform well compared to other countries in terms of literacy and numeracy, these low figures can at times conceal "the persistent racial and class nature of educational performance in South Africa. At every level of education in the country, privileged white learners and students are performing considerably better than their counterparts of colour" (Soudien, 2012, p. 228). Individual students are sometimes able to rise above the social structure of which they are a part, but it is clear that

while discrimination in the country is no longer only racial, given the degree to which the black middle class has entered former white schools (see Soudien 2004), the country's racial experience continues to be determinative. The significance of this racial dimension is evident in the way in which the emerging black middle class has not been able to use its advantage in the schooling process. (Soudien, 2012, p. 229)

This largely has to do with the Bantu Education system under apartheid, in which segregated schools were unfairly distributed resources (with white schools receiving the majority of the funds and black schools receiving the least), as well as a curriculum that was designed only to educate black learners at a minimum so they could be employed as unskilled laborers (Union of South Africa, 1953). Soudien gives an example of how this legacy is continuing in classrooms today, stating, "while over 60 percent of the children in former white schools could do sums successfully at their own Grade 6 level, only 0.1 percent of children in former African schools and 5 percent of children classified coloured were able to do so" (p. 228). While Soudien goes on to argue that social structure is not entirely determinative and youth do show agency in how they educate themselves given limited resources, on the whole, this work shows that in South Africa the legacy of apartheid can still be seen in our educational structures and that former black schools continue to be disadvantaged.

Many South Africans speak positively about desiring national unity and reconciliation; however, they divorce the social, psychological, and interpersonal aspects of reconciliation from the material components. If reconciliation in South Africa can truly occur, the material injustices (such as unjust educational systems) brought about by racism need to be addressed. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation has pointed out a need for "radical reconciliation" where material injustice is placed at the center of reconciliation (IJR, 2013, p. 9). Therefore, my research will focus on those who are actively bringing reconciliation and counteracting our racist history through systemic ways in education, rather than simply interpersonal dialogue. While economic and educational privilege is linked with racial privilege in our country, and one could argue that this work could and should focus simply on people who are working to improve class-favoring systems, Soudien's research shows that there is still a racial component to the advantage and disadvantage in our present educational structures and systems.

Summary. To summarise, race is a social construct with no basis in biology and should not be deployed uncritically in research. However, since it continues to have material repercussions for people in South Africa and continues to be a primary method of identification for South Africans, and since *whiteness* (not just those in the upper class) continues to be privileged in South Africa and the world, research critically using race and focusing on racial justice activism is needed.

The literature review which follows next will place this study within the context of whiteness studies, comparing and contrasting whiteness studies in the USA with the South African context, as well as positioning this work specifically within the branch of whiteness studies concerned with identity.

Whiteness Studies

Whiteness studies began as a branch of American studies, really gaining attention in the 1990s (Frost, 2007). Whiteness studies initially focused on exploring and exposing whiteness as a privileged position, rendering it visible and open to critique (Lopez, 2005; Frankenburg, 2004; McIntosh, 1988). McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (1988), which drew parallels between the way that both men and white people are treated as an unexamined norm, became a staple text. The text focused on white privilege as "unearned advantage and conferred dominance" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 191). In addition to this text, Morrison's work examining whiteness in literature[14], and Frankenberg's examinations of whiteness further developed McIntosh's initial definition of white privilege. In her most recent definition, Frankenberg (2004) highlights whiteness as "structural advantage in societies structured in racial dominance;" it is "a standpoint" (often unmarked or unnamed, seen as normal) (p. 113). In her definition she lists several characteristics of whiteness: whiteness is a product of history and a relational category; it is a site of privilege "cross-cut" by other statuses (but these other axes of advantage or subordination do not erase white privilege); and although a social construction, it is not "unreal in its material and discursive effects" (Frankenberg, 2004, p. 113).

Steyn (2005) gives a similar account of whiteness in her description of it as

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[14] Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993) was a seminal work.

> an ideologically supported social positionality that has accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of the economic and political advantage gained during and subsequent to European colonial expansion… whiteness is the shared social space in which the psychological, cultural, political and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalized, and rendered unremarkable. (p. 121)

Steyn (2007) points out that this shift in anti-racism to examine the center is similar to shifts in post-colonial, gender, and disability studies, where the center is examined rather than the margins. All of these definitions emphasise the social construction of whiteness, as well as its "normal" or "invisible" nature, and how whiteness continually centers itself as the point of all reference in racialised societies.

Steyn (2007) points out three "waves" of whiteness studies. Initially, the focus of these studies was on revealing whiteness as a "normal" center, and focused on rendering whiteness visible. The next wave focused on historically different but related spaces (which contain "family resemblances" to the original white supremacist narratives but are different due to class, historical moments, gender, etc.). More recently, the third wave has made a link between post-colonial theory and whiteness (Lopez, 2005).

Some whiteness studies scholars focus on exposing the historically constructed nature of whiteness (both in the USA and elsewhere) by tracking specific legislation and historical events where society shifted in order to enshrine whiteness as a "normal" unmarked position (MacMullan, 2009; Roediger 1994). Many of these works point to the idea that "whiteness has always been defined negatively through violence against the people of color" (MacMullan, 2009, p. 19). These scholars focus on how whiteness is created and maintained, examining how "inclusion within the category 'white' is often a matter of contestation, and in different times and places, some kinds of whiteness are boundary-markers of the category itself" (Frankenberg, 2004, p. 113). Noel Ignitav's *How the Irish Became White* (2009) is an influential work in this area. By focusing on how whiteness is constructed in the USA (often through violence and exclusion), these scholars reveal how whiteness reinvents itself in order to maintain its privilege, including people at some times and excluding them at others in order to maintain its power (Warren & Winddance, 1997).

One of the key contributions made by whiteness studies, i.e., its deconstructionist stance towards language and discourse analysis, has been used to reveal how an emphasis on colour-blindness, while sounding anti-racist and inclusive, in fact works to preserve the status quo in societies where whiteness is still privileged (Gallagher, 2003). This explicit talk about colour-blindess and implicit biases towards whiteness in media, literature, and everyday interactions has been termed "racial grammar" (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). Some whiteness scholars—responding to critiques that whiteness studies flatten out diversity within the white race and assume that white privilege is experienced by all whites, regardless of other statuses—explore the experience of poor whites and have focused on the intersection of whiteness with other statuses: for example, Wray's book *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (cited in Frost, 2007).

Other whiteness scholars are concerned not only with exposing white privilege, but abolishing it through the abolition of whiteness itself. Ignatiev and Garvey's (1996) *Race Traitor* and Roediger's (1994) *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* take this hardline approach, arguing that there is nothing in this socially constructed racial category worth keeping. The idea that white people can totally leave behind a white identity and find refuge as honorary black people has been challenged (Steyn, 2001). Other scholars reject the abolitionist approach and have focused their attention on attempting to orient white identities around anti-racism, rather than only exposing and demolishing white privilege. This has led to a plethora of university courses and workshops focusing on white privilege (Niemonen, 2010). Often these courses combine an exposure of structural white privilege ("Invisible Knapsack" being a staple text) as well as intangibles, such as exposing stereotypical ways of thinking or prejudice.

Still others have taken a more pragmatic approach, attempting to reveal what habits perpetuate white privilege and how these habits can be changed to produce a more equal society (MacMullan, 2009). It is this re-orientation of positive white identities that my research is interested in. A particularly useful book in this category is Warren's *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice* (2010), which, rather than remaining in the theoretical realm, takes an empirical approach to understanding how white Americans working for racial justice are orienting their identities. Others scholars, such as Brubaker and Cooper (2000), have explored this area as well.

Whiteness studies has not been without criticism—both from those who see it as a limited form of identity politics (Somers, 1994) to others who claim its moral stance makes it an uncritical field, thus moving out of the realm of academia into an activist movement (Niemonen, 2010). Others have criticised it on theoretical grounds, claiming that if the deconstructionist stance is fully adopted, then whiteness studies' tendency to focus on identities is contradictory, since identities are fluid, constantly changing and reinventing themselves (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Still others have criticised it for taking away from the black voice (Ratele, 2007; MacMullan, 2010). Others have cautioned against whiteness studies as the main form of anti-racist praxis, because it can end up inadvertently centering whiteness, minimizing other contributions, or simply being a discursive practice with no material repercussions (Stevens, 2007).

Several American studies with specific links to white identity may have useful implications for white identity in the South African context, so they will be explored in greater detail here. For example, Branscome, Schmitt, and Schiffhauer (2007) conducted a study involving over 180 white American undergraduate students in order to find correlations between modern racism, white identity, and reminders of white privilege. Branscombe et al. define modern racism as "denying that the existing racial inequality is due to discrimination and an assessment that Blacks are making illegitimate demands for change" (2007, p. 204). In the study, participants were asked to evaluate how they had been privileged or disadvantaged because of their race, while the control group was asked to simply write about their life experiences. The results showed that the more strongly a person identified as racially white, the more likely his or her modern racism increased when he or she was reminded of white privilege. People who did not identify as strongly as white showed less indicators of modern racism when confronted with the facts of white privilege. The researchers concluded that

> confronting White privilege is a threat to White identity and can evoke a defensive response—the highest modern racism scores were observed in the White privilege condition. We argue this reflects our participants' active attempts to protect their threatened racial identity by justifying racial inequality. (p. 207)

In other words, white people with a strong racial identification felt threatened when white privilege was challenged, showing more signs of racism.

Croll's (2007) analysis of the results from the USA's American Mosaic Project Survey in 2003 confirms these findings. His findings showed that white people with a strong sense of racial identity were split between being extremely racist or extremely anti-racist. Croll states that "the progression of the importance of racial identity for whites is not simply a path to enlightenment and activism, nor is it only an indicator of racist beliefs and ideologies. It is both" (p. 632).

The findings of these two studies may impact any exploration of white South African identity, because in South Africa's racialised society, whiteness has never been "invisible" to the extent that it has been in the USA (Steyn, 2007, 2004, 2001). If Croll's (2007) findings can be applied in the South African context, being so highly race-conscious could either be a motivator for anti-racist activism, or it could equally cause more racism. However, if Branscome, Shmitt, and Stiffhauer's (2007) research applies in the South African context, South Africans' strong racial identification has the potential to lead to racism if the white group feels its privilege being threatened. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2013 Barometer Survey reported that for most South Africans, racial identity is still one of people's top three primary identifiers (IJR, 2013, p. 33), which means this "threatened/racist" identity could be present. Jansen (2009) points out that in post-apartheid South Africa, many white people (particularly Afrikaners), despite their privileged economic position, are experiencing a deep psychological sense of loss as they see their symbols, language, and political power waning, and this high race consciousness, combined with a sense of loss, could lead to racist actions.

Whiteness Studies in South Africa

   Differences between USA and SA whiteness studies. While there is a temptation to indiscriminately apply the USA-based understanding of whiteness in the South African context, South Africa's situation is different enough that several "key claims" in whiteness studies are greatly modified in the South African context. This section will examine how these claims are adapted and modified in South Africa. Since South Africa has two distinct "streams" of whiteness, Afrikaans and English, these two identities will be explored in more depth in a later section.

White South Africans are (and always have been) a numerical minority in South Africa. While in the past they were able to dominate the other population groups, currently they no longer hold political power, and the rise of the black middle class forms a perceived threat to their previously unquestioned economic power.[15] This means that the way in which whiteness was and is constructed in South Africa is very different compared to places where white people are the numerical majority. Specifically, there is a difference regarding the "invisible" or "unconscious" nature of whiteness as the norm that is so often referenced in the USA literature. Whiteness has never been invisible in South Africa (Epstein, 1998). As the numerical minority, "even in apartheid South Africa, whiteness never had the quality of invisibility that is implied in the 'standard' whiteness literature, which is made possible by the comfort of being comfortably in the majority, demographically, economically, and politically" (Steyn, 2007, p. 421). Further, Steyn (2007) goes on to clarify that "if all racism has to do with sapping power from blackness, whiteness here has to contend with blacks who have power politically, demographically, and increasingly, culturally, and still on a small scale, economically" (p. 422). Dolby (2001) further expands on this, claiming, "as a minority power, whites in South Africa were visible not only to themselves and black South Africans, but to the entire world. But even, or perhaps especially, in South Africa, whiteness was never a pre-ordained fact" (p. 19).

The other major aspect that makes the South African situation unique is that Afrikaans and English whiteness are constructed differently. Afrikaans whiteness has been more explicit and often more overtly racist, whereas English whiteness has been more subtle, relying on the support of whiteness in the international sphere (Steyn & Foster, 2008). The reasons for this difference stem from the fact that the Afrikaans language is unique to South Africa, and this language and culture appear to be sidelined, while at the same time the English language is gaining dominance (Giliomee, 2003; Govender, 2010; *The Economist*, 2011). However, recent studies reveal that younger

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[15] While the black middle class is perceived as a threat, on the whole, although policies of economic empowerment have allowed a few black people to enter the middle class, "they have been less successful in uplifting the marginalized masses" (IJR, 2013, p. 16). Further, white people hold 69.2% of all top management positions in the economy, while black people hold only 30.8% of top management positions (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2012 South Africa Survey, p. 240). See footnote 27 chapter five for a further discussion of continued economic racial inequality.

Afrikaners are not as concerned about preserving a nationalistic Afrikaans culture or language and are taking refuge in a common "whiteness" with the English (Verwey, 2012; Blaser, 2012). It could be argued that the different ways that whiteness is constructed and deployed by these two groups will become similar.

Another aspect which is unique to the white South African context is the aggressive affirmative action policies implemented by the democratic ANC-led government. While affirmative action programmes have prompted some claims of reverse discrimination in the USA (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013), one of the most common claims by white South Africans is that "reverse discrimination" is occurring because of these policies of redress. While white people in the USA might not notice their privilege, South African white people have a strong sense of loss of privilege. This loss is more psychological than material (as white people by and large continue to occupy the highest living standard measures in South Africa) (IJR, 2013, p. 15); however, there is a strong *feeling* of victimization and loss, particularly in the Afrikaans community. This can be seen in a 2003 study of racial identity among University of Natal students (Maqutu, 2003), where findings showed that 65% of white students thought there was no advantage to being white in South Africa (since the "tables have turned" now that black people are in political power), which is in stark contrast to their *actual* educational and economically privileged position. Findings also showed that many black students felt inferior to white students. Further, as Jansen (2009) points out, the pressure to integrate more previously "white only" spaces (in education, business, and so on) stirs up a huge sense of loss and impedes white people from understanding the huge extent of their remaining privilege. "When these things happen, feelings of defeat are magnified, and any calm and reasoned appeal to the statistics on race and employment has little meaning when the emotions of loss and change are so palpable among the defeated" (p. 30).

Finally, one other way in which South Africa's situation is unique is the paradoxical over-emphasis on race on the one hand, and an almost paranoid fear of referencing race at all. In the USA, the dominant narrative had been one of "the melting-pot," where all differences were erased as immigrants actively forsook their native languages and cultures in order to be accepted into the (English-speaking) American

dream. Thus, the post-modern emphasis on difference and on situated and particular narratives and the suspicion of dominant discourses has meant that diversity is celebrated and cultural differences which whiteness previously blotted out are being highlighted (MacMullan, 2009). However, in South Africa, the most dominant narrative in our recent past was one of "separate but equal development," and this narrative was supported by language about unique cultural differences that needed to be respected and preserved. Today the fear by some social scientists that any acknowledgement of (even nonessential, socially constructed) commonalities within racial groups or experiences will be playing into that false "separate but equal" narrative.[16]

Seidman (1998) sums up this ambivalence, pointing to a reluctance to talk about race because of our past of rampant racism and our present unexamined every-day racial thinking. Further, he highlights that "new claims based largely on racial identities" (p. 435) have further entrenched division. However, he presses that the "rhetoric of nonracialism, or the democratic fiction that all citizens are individuals with equal status, could create an explosive tinderbox for South Africa; conversely understanding the underlying dynamics of how racialised group identities are constructed and maintained may be crucial to dealing with apartheid's divisive legacies" (p. 435).

Contemporary whiteness studies in South Africa. Whiteness studies in the South African context attempt to critically engage whiteness, and at the forefront of current whiteness studies is Steyn's work (2001, 2004, 2007). However, there have been several other works, both published and unpublished, which engage with the idea of whiteness. Some of this work is interested in a larger understanding of the racial identity of post-apartheid South Africans, while others specifically focus on white identity, how it has been constructed post-apartheid, and ways in which whiteness continues to fight for

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[16] Jansen (2009) illustrates this clash between US and SA practice with the following story:
"Why," persists an American anthropologist visiting Pretoria, "do you not teach your students about their differences?" The visitor insists that teaching differences is critical to ensure the ethnic self-concept of children. I offer: "We feel uncomfortable as South Africans talking about how people differ since that is all we did for decades in a country that made a fetish out of racial and cultural differences." But she presses: "You should teach about differences; it's important." The two Afrikaner women in the audience nod firm approval. I cannot understand this unusual insistence, especially in a foreign country that she clearly knows little about. "How," I ask with some irritation, "do you teach about difference in a country that has never had a national conversation about sameness?" (pp. 106-107)

dominance, as discussed above. Several of these studies will be presented below. Since the focus of this research will be racial justice activism in the education sector, studies that deal with racial identity in an educational context have also been specifically included here.

While some authors have focused on how whiteness is maintained and positioned in literature (Simoes da Silva, 2008) others have looked at how white identity is attempting to define itself in music (Ballantine, 2004) or through specific visual artists, such as Brett Murray (Passmoor, 2009). Whiteness studies in South Africa tend to emphasise situatedness, the particular aspects of whiteness as it crosses with gender, with ethnicity, and so on (Nuttall, 2001). In addition, some of the research focuses on the historic construction of whiteness and its ramifications for South African whiteness today. For example, Ratele and Laubscher's (2010) analysis of documents from the Apartheid Archive project, as well as the Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, showed how whiteness was formed, monitored, and maintained under apartheid. In contrast to places like Europe and America, South Africa's distance from the centers of dominant white power meant that "great labor went into maintaining whiteness, segregating it from non-whiteness, purifying it, and making it *visibly* powerful and attractive" (p. 97). As such, this attractiveness of whiteness still has residue even years after the end of apartheid.

Dolby (2001) shows how in a specific Durban school among students, "whiteness is re-cast as a space of fear, powerlessness, and anger largely understood through what Cameron McCarthey et al. (1997) describe as the 'politics of resentment'" (p. 6). Dolby's research revealed the white students perceived the black students as a "threat," saying, "white students sense that they are literally encircled by the dual threats of black violence and black economic prosperity" (p. 9). She points to the specific strategies white students use in this context to keep repositioning whiteness, highlighting that in the new South African context, whiteness is no longer "a morally defensible position in and of itself. Instead, whiteness can be recouped and repositioned only through a negation of blackness" (p. 9).

In more current research in a school context, Barnes (2006), using ethnographic research, examines narratives of five white educators who are currently teaching in schools with predominantly black learners and showed that these teachers fell along a

spectrum from repositioning their students as "other" and side-lining issues of race and privilege, towards more inclusive identities.

White Afrikaans identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Recent research by Verwey and Quayle (2012) on the production of post-apartheid Afrikaner identity in South Africa shows that Afrikaners are jettisoning some aspects of their identity in order to distance themselves from their politically incorrect, overtly racist history. However, as Verwey and Quayle argue, the Afrikaners in their study continue to cast themselves as victims, recycling discourses from apartheid. Afrikaners feel entitled to their status as Africans while simultaneously rejecting assimilation with "Africa" (which they equate with uncivilized and poorly run governments). This private discourse shows that these Afrikaners were not letting go of whiteness. Participants not only protect their own whiteness, but "they are aware of sharing whiteness with English-speaking South Africans" (p. 567). They see themselves as drawing closer to white, English-speaking South Africans as they feel themselves threatened by "Africa."

This research was an extension of Verwey's 2008 thesis, which explored Afrikaner identity. This research revealed that rather than re-imagining Afrikaans-ness as a way to be African and finding a sense of belonging in Africa, participants distanced themselves from Africa while hanging on to a sense of entitlement. The only "logical" option in the face of the encroaching African-ness was emigration (by literally leaving, or by fitting in with white South Africans). The focus of their discourse was on how to maintain white privilege by jettisoning the extra baggage of the negative Afrikaner identity.

Both of these works build on Steyn's 2004 examination of Afrikaner "white talk" (or discourses that justify the white position of power) in post-apartheid South Africa, specifically in Afrikaans newspapers. Fourie's (2008) examination of the Afrikaans newspaper *Beeld* between the early 1990s and 2004 supports the idea that Afrikaners are finding ways to accommodate themselves in the new South Africa but are not seriously revising their fundamental views of the self and the other. An unpublished PhD thesis by Albert (2012) takes a psychological look at Afrikaner identity post-apartheid in a discursive analysis of nine family interviews. This research highlights the positioning of

Afrikaans identity around "threat," which is different from white talk in majority-white contexts (in the USA, for instance, where there is a stronger sense of normativity and less anxiety).

In contrast to this threat-based identity (which seems to be supported by Verwey's 2012 research, and to a certain extent, Steyn's (2005) articulations of white identity), the work of Blaser (2012) attempts to emphasise different aspects of Afrikaner identity. Blaser (2012) notes that "the [essence] of our analysis lies not in the classification or identifying aspects of an immutable and dominant whiteness, but rather in gaining insights into the multiplicity, contradictions, and ambiguity of individual narratives while not losing sight of the relevance of structures of oppression" (p. 11). Blaser (2012) points out the fluid nature of identities yet acknowledges they are constructed around a certain society imaginary. However, he argues that the imaginary ceased to be Afrikaner nationalism even before the end of apartheid, and rather that consumerism, or Western individualism (based out of a consumer society), began to gain dominance within Afrikaans culture—which is in part why apartheid ended. Blaser (2002) highlights human agency in creating identities as well as the contrasting treatment of Afrikaner identity as being very insular, presenting children with a unified vision of Afrikaner identity before the collapse of apartheid (Jansen, 2009) and pointing out that there have always been multiple strains and discourses.

Blaser (2002) points to several of these different strains, highlighting the idea that "being Afrikaner is no longer just given by birth and an accepted way of life into which one is socialised" (p. 13). Some young Afrikaner narratives accept a more liberal Afrikaans identity, characterised by a positive outlook on the current South African situation, rather than a sense of loss—while others are characterised by a sense of loss and confusion (p. 14). Still others are distancing themselves from Afrikaans-ness but clinging to "international whiteness" (p. 17). He points out a lack of positive dominant identities for Afrikaners today, as opposed to under apartheid, saying, "what is perhaps different today is that besides an emerging African identity, with which to identify is problematic for many Afrikaners, no other dominant identity is readily available" (p. 17).

All of these studies of white Afrikaner identity assert that there is not *one* Afrikaner identity; however, these studies appeared to show that in a post-apartheid

South Africa, the Afrikaners interviewed are not emphasizing their ethnic identity but their racial identity. Associating more with a South African and international whiteness, rather than Afrikaans-ness (and constructing this whiteness through the binary opposite of blackness or African-ness) is a strategy some Afrikaans-speaking people are employing to identify themselves and preserve privilege. These studies (particularly Blaser, 2002) highlight the fact that there is no dominant identity other than whiteness with which Afrikaners feel they can identify. One of the aims of my research is to attempt to discover alternative identities. By researching white people who are actively engaged in racial justice and understanding more about their journey to activism as well as how they identify themselves, this research will hopefully expand the repertoire of available narratives for how white people choose to identify.

White English identity in post-apartheid South Africa. There appears to be significantly less research on English whiteness and English white identity post-apartheid in South Africa. Aside from Steyn and Foster's (2008) discourse analysis of white English newspaper articles, there does not appear to be work that focuses on whiteness as it pertains only to the English white people (the few studies that exist often do not make an ethnic distinction). As my research primarily looks at white, English South Africans (because of my location in Pietermaritzburg), it will hopefully contribute to this gap in the literature.

What research is available shows that "white people (even young 'post-1994' white people) are constructing meaning around their innocence by distancing themselves from extreme racists, but at the same time, not acknowledging the benefits of non-material privilege" (Conradie & Brokensha, 2014, p. 86). Both in Puttick's (2011) analysis of first-year narratives of racism at Wits University and Conradie and Brokensha's (2014) study at the University of the Free State show recurring themes of white innocence and white people as the current victims.

In line with Steyn and Foster's (2008) analysis of older white journalists, current white university students are

relegating racism to previous generations, constructing themselves as blameless. This move not only distances the self from guilt, but also denies any enjoyment of

the benefits that still accrue to white persons as a consequence of generations of systematic racial oppression, in forms that are difficult to address satisfactorily, such as the dispossession of land since colonial times. (Conradie & Brokensha, 2014, p. 7)

White students are especially unable to acknowledge they may have non-material advantages. For example, athletic skills and academic success in both studies were attributed to inherent ability and hard work, rather than, as Puttick (2011) explains, "the succor of centuries of segregated education and other inequalities" (cited in Conradie & Brokensha, 2014, p. 86).

Conclusion

Current South African studies show that some attention has been given to the ways that white people (especially Afrikaners, but also English speakers) are constructing their identities in post-apartheid South Africa. These studies reveal that on the whole, white people are constructing themselves as victims and ignore or minimise the role of apartheid in shaping their current privileged status. Through different strategies, they attempt to retain their privilege. However, the literature does not explore alternative identities. If there are some people who are not constructing their personal narratives around threat and victimization, but rather acknowledging their privilege and working to create a more just society, how is this coming about? That is the question this research will attempt to answer.

Chapter Three:

Theoretical Framework

While the first part of Chapter Two discussed some aspects of the theoretical premise that informs this study, in terms of how this research engages with race through Critical race theory, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an outline of the broader theoretical framework on which the research is based. The chapter starts with a brief overview of social constructionism and shows how the concepts of metanarrative, narrative, and narrative identity are useful tools when analyzing social action. The chapter then looks at specific theories of white identity and social action constructed in previous empirical research both in the USA (post-Civil Rights) and South Africa (under apartheid). The chapter ends by summarizing Steyn's (2001) model of five different white narrative identities post-apartheid, since these narratives provide a framework or basis of comparison for the narratives of the educators concerned with racial justice in my study.

Social Constructionism

The view of race in my research is informed by the theoretical perspective of social constructionism, based on the work of theorists such as Berger and Luckmann (1967) and the phenomenological theories of Shütz (1967) and especially Gergen (1985). This theoretical frame has roots in the work of Mannheim's [17] development of the sociology of knowledge. Berger and Luckmann moved the focus from an abstract focus on ideas to a focus on "common sense knowledge of reality as it is understood by the general public—reality *sui generis*" (Hurby, 2001, p. 52).

A basic assumption of social constructionism is that a person actively and consciously creates his or her own social reality (Fourie, 2008). Social constructionists are not as interested in the objective and external world as in understanding the way individuals and societies give *meaning* to things and the repercussions this has in the external world. Further, the focus is not on the meaning-making of an individual's mind

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[17] Mannheim's work *Ideologie und Utopie*, 1929 (translated and extended in 1939 to be *Ideology and Utopia)* is his principle work on this topic.

as much as "the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 127). For example, while race has no biological basis, it has consequences as a social construction, created through a history of slavery and colonization in the world in general, as well as particular racist laws in South Africa and our current discourse. Thus, even though race is biologically meaningless, it is meaningful in other ways for people in South African society.

Further, as social reality is viewed as constructed, this theoretical lens highlights that in this construction, certain voices and perspectives are privileged and others are excluded or silenced.

> Accordingly, that which we believe we know and that on which we shape our actions are products of the lens used by a limited but powerful sector of the world. Akin to the adage that "the victors write the history," socially constructed reality is seen as deriving from the perspective of the dominant groups of any society. (Green & Stiers, 2002, p. 237)

The emphasis that social constructionists place on the way humans make meaning links well with Somer's (1992, 1994) narrative approach to identity, outlined below, in which the parts of one's identity are given *meaning* through narrative.

Narrative Identity and Social Action

There are differing theories for explaining social activism, and my research will take a narrative identity approach, based on theories of Somers (1992, 1994) as well as Smith (2003), who places emphasis on the moral code embedded in narratives. This theoretical framework not only does a good job making sense of why individuals would act against their apparent material interests, but it also pairs well with Steyn's (2001) writings on white identity construction post-apartheid, Potgieter-Louw's (1988) theories on the identities of Afrikaner dissidents, and Warren's (2010) exploration of white racial justice activists in the USA.

Smith (2003) argues that humans are not simply rational beings working for their own self-interest, but moral, relational beings who create a sense of meaning and identity through their actions. Smith argues that "our stories fully encompass and define our lives. They situate us in reality itself, by elaborating the contours of fundamental moral order,

comprising the sacred and profane, in narrative form, and placing us too as actors within the larger drama" (p. 78). Although metanarratives and narratives are cultural constructions, individuals do not often realise that their personal decisions fit into a larger moral framework that springs from their narrative understanding of the world. Viewing narrative as the contextual motivation for moral behavior provides an interesting tool for analyzing social change.

Smith (2003) cites examples from American society to illustrate this point. For example, the phrases "all men are created equal" and "certain inalienable rights" are not just phrases from the American constitution, they are signifiers for larger metanarratives that shape the actions of individuals. Smith calls this metanarrative "The American Experiment" narrative, of which individual freedom and equality are two sacred values (p. 67). In advocating for social change (such as the abolitionist or Civil Rights movements), activists cast their position (both to themselves and to the larger society) as a moral issue—highlighting how the sacred values of the metanarrative have been breached, and how their actions will rectify the situation. The passion and fervor with which certain values are defended highlights the moral component—people act not just from a rational sense of self-interest, but from the moral passion that springs when "sacred" values are ignored or threatened. These values may come from larger metanarratives, but they are tightly woven into the individual's (narrative) sense of self.

Somers (1992) gives this theoretical framework more specificity using the concepts of narrative, metanarrative, and identity to explain the formation of the English working class. Somers highlights how narrative is not simply descriptive, but is a concept of social epistemology and ontology, saying it is

> through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities… we come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by our location (usually unconsciously) in social narratives and networks of relations that are rarely of our own making. (1992, p. 600, emphasis original)

This conceptualization of narrative has four characteristics that Somers (1994) unpacks in a later work:

> Narratives are constellations of *relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time and space*, constituted by what I call *causal emplotment*. Unlike the attempt to explain a single event by placing it in a specified category, narrativity precludes sense-making of a singular isolated phenomenon. (p. 616, emphasis original)

Somers (1994) clarifies that it is the selection, the piecing together of the plot (revealing what is seen as significant and what is insignificant), that gives actions and episodes meaning. There is selective appropriation of actions and elements which fit thematically into larger cultural constructions (e.g., "husband as breadwinner" or "union solidarity," p. 617).

> After establishing narrativity, Somers explains how this relates to identity, stating,

> *Ontological narratives* are the stories that social actors use to make sense of—indeed, in order to act in—their lives. We use ontological narratives to define who we *are*, not just to know what to do. Locating ourselves in narratives endows us with identities—however multiple, ambiguous, ephemeral or conflicting they may be (hence, the term *narrative identity*). (1994, p. 618)

Somers's (1994) idea of ontological narratives is a powerful way of conceptualizing identity and social action that avoids the pitfalls of so much of identity politics. While theories of social action relying on identity have been criticised for essentialising identity—which is socially constructed, rather than fixed (Niemonen, 2010; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000)—Somers's (1992, 1994) conceptualization of identity as narrative avoids this danger (since narratives are relational, interconnected, and constantly being created and re-created, they are able to encompass temporal and spatial components that a "fixed" idea of identity is unable to do), while at the same time retaining some of the explanatory power of identity politics. Somers (1994) explains, "theories of identity politics posit that 'I act because of who I *am*' not because of a rational interest or set of learned values" (p. 608). The politics of identity help answer the question (posed by Somers), "How can we formulate viable sociological accounts of moral action that do not resort to external constraint (or 'internalized' external constraint) to explain action that 'deviates' from the universalist premises of mainstream theories?" (1994, p. 608). Somers contrasts the rational interest-based approaches to understanding social action with an identity approach:

> Whereas an interest approach assumes people act on the basis of rational means-ends preferences or by internalizing a set of values, a narrative identity approach assumes people act in particular ways because *not* to do so would fundamentally violate their sense of *being* at that particular time and place. (p. 624)

Somers's (1994) idea of personal narratives (identity) fits well with Smith's (2003) concept of metanarrative. Somers (1994) explains that the fluid nature of narrative identity

> does not mean that social actors are free to fabricate narratives at will. Rather, there is only a limited repertoire of available representations and stories. Which kinds of narratives will socially predominate is contested politically and will depend in large part on the distribution of power. (p. 629)

To summarise these two concepts of metanarrative and narrative identity together—larger, socially constructed metanarratives supply social actors with the meaning and moral values that they situate within their own narrative identity. Social action occurs because of who people understand themselves to be in a particular time and place. In terms of my research, if I want to understand why certain white people are involved in working for racial justice in education, I need to understand how they see themselves in light of a larger narrative that provides their moral framework and sense of self. The next section will explore more fully how this theory is used to explain activism.

Theories of Social Action and (White) Narrative Identity in Empirical Research

This section examines how narrative identity fits into social action in general and white racial justice activism in particular. Theories of how narrative identity prompts social action in general and a summary of Warren's (2010) model for the motivation of white racial justice activism in the USA are discussed below. Again, Warren's model is included in this section because his findings provide a basis of comparison and contrast for the findings in my study. This theory will be compared and contrasted with Louw-Potgieter's (1988) model of Afrikaner dissidents during apartheid. The section concludes by acknowledging that while I am interested to see if these specific models of motivation

apply in a current post-apartheid context, I am cognizant of the fact that what emerges from the data may be completely different.

At the end of this section, Steyn's (2001) descriptions of post-apartheid white identity will be explored. Steyn's descriptions of white narrative identity are included in the theoretical framework section rather than the literature review because her study aimed to produce a middle-level theory on white identity post-apartheid, and it will be interesting to compare and parallel her findings with the findings from my research.

Narrative identity and social action: Warren and the moral impulse to act. Poletta and Jasper's (2001) study on activists in the USA revealed how the concepts of identity and social action are linked by exploring whether an identity compels an individual to act, or if through activism an identity is formed. They found that for a large number of participants, their activism began through a "moral shock" (p. 41). This was a specific incident where they were exposed to a distinct event where one of their deeply held values (and their understanding of how the world worked) was violated. This provoked not just cognitive dissonance but a sense of moral outrage. Using Smith's (2003) language, the participants encountered something that contradicted the values embedded in their prevailing metanarrative (and therefore their personal narrative), and this moral shock led to activism. Examples of this in the study included animal rights activists who saw animal abuse or images of animal abuse, and this inhumane treatment of animals contradicted with their understanding that animals should be treated in the same way they treat their own pets. Warren (2010) found a pattern of anti-racist activists in the USA initially starting their activism because of a similar moral shock—an incident where they directly observed racial injustice which flew in the face of their deeply held values of fairness, an equal chance for all, and the American Dream, which are embedded in the "American Experiment" metanarrative (Smith, 2003). Poletta and Jasper (2001) also found, however, that previous involvement in activism predisposed individuals to become involved in activism again. In other words, as individuals entered the world of activism, they began to identify as activists and so new causes for protest beyond their initial cause were undertaken.

Warren's model: White racial justice activists in the USA. Warren (2010), in his exploration of white American anti-racist activists, sketches out a model of activism based on this narrative identity concept. From the fifty activists whom he interviewed, Warren found an emerging pattern that explained their initial involvement in activism and what continued to sustain them over a career of working against racial injustice. This model will be explained below, as it forms an interesting basis of comparison for my research of South African white people working for racial justice in education. While these are laid out below as sequential stages, they are often cyclical, with an ever-deepening sense of identity and activism occurring at each stage over time.

The first stage for many of the activists was what Warren (2010) called a "seminal experience" which led to a moral impulse to act (p. 27). This seminal experience is some encounter with racial injustice that created cognitive dissonance and caused the individual to question his or her prevailing understanding of the world but also provoked a sense of moral outrage that one of his or her deeply held values was being "profaned" (to use Smith's (2003) word). This seminal experience prompted them to initially get involved in racial justice work.

The second stage was relational. As the initial involvement began, relationships were formed with people of other races who were fighting racial injustice, and the injustice was not simply an abstract thing to be fought against but a personal one. Through close relationships, white activists identified with people of other races (for example, when a personal friend is insulted, or denied service, it is no longer an abstract principle but a personal connection). This fits with several "contact theories" (the idea that if people of different races are exposed to each other and in equal relationships with each other, then racial prejudice, stereotyping, and hopefully systemic injustices would decrease). However, it goes a step beyond just breaking down feelings of prejudice, but creating an ethic of care that moves the white person towards action. The identity of the participants became tied to the relationships formed through their activism (Warren, 2010, p. 227).

Through the relationships and continued activism also came an increased sense of moral vision for participants. They wanted to bring racial justice because they saw it as directly benefitting themselves, not just others (Warren, 2010). They conceptualised a

"beloved community" (p. 110) where racism no longer limits people's life chances, and this vision spurred on their action. In the words of one activist, Roxane Auer,

> It's not really about contributing to someone else's cause. I feel that I'm contributing to the world that I would rather want to live in… I think inequalities—extreme inequalities—hurt everybody. For human beings to be very complete and really experience the full sense of community or a full, happy life, there needs to be more equality in it. So I see it as serving myself. I see it as working for what I want, not just what they want or need. It's what we all need to be a little happier and more centered and fulfilled in this world. (Warren, 2010, p. 81)

Participants conceptualised their identities not primarily in terms of racial interests, but in terms of human interests. Many did not identify as strongly with the white community anymore (some because of feelings of rejection, others because of where they presently lived or worked). There was some ambivalence and a sense of homelessness expressed by some of Warren's (2010) participants, who felt their racial justice work isolated them from white people, but because of their race they were never completely in the in group when interacting with those of other races.

South African, apartheid-era white activism: Afrikaner dissidents (Louw-Potgieter's model). Warren's model makes for an interesting comparison with Louw-Potgieter's (1988) exploration of White Afrikaner Dissident identity. While this is a social psychology (rather than sociological) perspective, social psychology is an area that shares many traits with sociology and is useful to explore. This work looks at the process by which Afrikaner dissidents came to break away from stereotypical Afrikaner nationalism and hold dissident views (on apartheid, racial matters, and so on). The question being explored was, "How does a group member start questioning the position of his/her group within the broader society, and, following from this, what are the implications of such a critical stance for the group member's social identity?" (p. 15).

Louw-Potgieter (1988) makes a distinction between studies on activists in the USA in the 1960s (who pointed to a sharp, climactic moment of change, perhaps similar to Warren's [2010] idea of a seminal experience), and the more gradual transition towards dissent of the Afrikaners interviewed. However, the ideas of experiencing things

which conflicted with deeply held values, as well as relationships with other races and exposure to new ways of thinking, are found in both Warren and Louw-Potgieter's analysis.

While many did not refer to a specific moment or "moral shock" as did Warren (2010) and Poletta and Jasper (2001) in the USA,[18] they did speak about a growing realization that the religious or family values they were taught at home did not seem to mesh with the reality around them. One said, "As a Christian, I gradually became aware of the unacceptability of a lot of things that pass as traditional Afrikanerhood" (Louw-Potgieter, 1988, p. 36). Some, however, did express a moment of shock when they uncovered a sense of government deception about the realities of apartheid; one respondent said that he had believed the government who said "the Coloureds were only disenfranchised temporarily (in 1951) and that the large-scale migration of black people from white areas was a possibility." He realised with "crushing shock" that "this was not going to happen." Because of this, he gradually began to realise that the apartheid National Party was not going to change their policies that denied the vote from other races (p. 42).

Afrikaner dissidents also experienced a sense of homelessness similar to the activists from the USA; however, theirs was perhaps more profoundly felt. They did not feel accepted (or want to be accepted, in some cases) within the fold of Afrikansness; however, they did not feel at home with the English or other racial groups in South Africa, either. One respondent said,

> I also experience the unpleasantness of rejection, or at least, avoidance, by fellow-Afrikaans speakers, because I am too progressive or radical, while English speakers don't accept me because I remain an Afrikaner after all. The price is thus a fair amount of loneliness, but on the other hand, there are some compensations, namely engrossment in my work and intensification of the relationships that are still available to me. (p. 45)

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[18] Moss's (2014) generational memoir of white radical anti-apartheid activism by university students in the 70s also focuses on how people were gradually drawn in to the movement rather than experiencing a shocking experience. Moss credits the counter-cultural, anti-authoritarian international environment of the 60s and 70s, as well as the challenge of Black Consciousness as being contributing factors. While Moss highlights his anti-establishment tendencies before joining the anti-apartheid movement as being significant in his story, he does mention that the 1973 shooting of mineworkers at Anglo American's Western Deep Level's mine as being a catalyst in causing larger numbers of motivated students to get involved with the Wits Wages Commission.

Some wanted to re-appropriate the term Afrikaner and re-define it along less exclusive values, while others wished to reject it completely for broader terms such as "South African," "African," or even "human" (p. 59).

Steyn's model of white South African narrative identity post-apartheid. While the models above have looked specifically at social action, I am particularly interested in the specific narratives that white people are adopting that promote this type of social action. In doing so, I have found that Steyn's (2001) unpacking of white identity in South Africa post-apartheid provides an interesting point of comparison. Steyn sketches out five different narrative identities that white South Africans were adopting as they attempted to negotiate their place in South Africa's post-apartheid social landscape just a few years after the end of apartheid. I will briefly outline them below. Steyn (2001) identifies in the fifth narrative a real engagement with the "other" and notes that many of these people are not only involved in acknowledging and unpacking how they are privileged in a racialised society but also are engaged in challenging this system. These narratives were captured over ten years ago, and the way white South Africans are conceptualizing their identity today might have transformed; however, in my literature review it was clear that there are still many white South Africans who are embracing different forms of almost all of these narratives. This framework therefore still has explanatory power in our current society.

Narrative One: Still Colonial After All These Years: This narrative is characterised by an embrace of the white master narrative, where the dichotomies of master and slave, civilised and uncivilised, Christian and heathen are still strongly held. It takes different forms (ranging from "Hardliner Colonial" [Steyn, 2001, p. 59] to "Altruistic Colonial" [p. 64]). However, in each of these subnarratives the person still constructs whiteness "around the belief that whites are in a position to define themselves and the 'other' more or less unilaterally, and intervention needs to take place on 'white' terms for the good of the 'blacks'" (p. 59).

Narrative Two: This Shouldn't Happen to a White: This narrative retains many of the dichotomies of the master narrative; however, there is an understanding that things have changed in post-apartheid South Africa. It draws on discursive repertoires "of injury, disability, warfare, confinement, displacement and exile. The pervasive tone is outraged, aggressive, blaming" (Steyn, 2001, p. 78). In this narrative, white people are cast as the victims of a new regime that privileges blacks, and a sense of loss and anger is palpable.

Narrative Three: Don't Think White, It's Alright: Those who adopt this narrative, while still retaining some traces of the master narrative, are different from narrative two in that while they have a sense of loss and uncertainty in the new South Africa, they recognise that they cannot reject this change outright and are looking for ways to fit in (even if they complain). This narrative is more open-ended than the previous one. This group holds on to its white identity, seeing it as an important "strand" in the "rainbow nation" (Steyn, 2001, p. 84). In this way the narrative is similar to many multicultural discourses.

Narrative Four: A Whiter Shade of White: This narrative is characterised by a strong colour-blind discourse. While it has overtly rejected the discourse of the white master narrative, it seeks to find a place in the new society by minimizing racial identity and appealing to a transcendent self. However, with this comes a denial of the current racialised reality (as well as our recent racist history). Thus, this discourse absolves its adopters of guilt and ignores the privilege that comes from being white in a racialised society. It is characterised by appeals to an overarching identity (Steyn, 2001, p. 102), nonapplicability (p. 104), politically correct ethnicity (p. 107), a transcendent self (p. 109), and external forces (p. 111).

Narrative Five: Under African Skies (or White, but Not Quite): Unlike the previous narratives, this narrative discards the old white master narrative and looks to create and define "new subjectivities by drawing on other discursive and cultural repertoires to supplement or replace previous white identity" (Steyn, 2001, p. 115). Unlike previous narratives, this narrative does not seek to deny personal implication and privilege in a racialised society.

There are three distinct strains of this narrative.

1. I Just Don't Know What to Do, Being White (Steyn, 2001, p. 116): This narrative wishes to cast off previous narratives but does not know how to identify without the old narratives. There is a feeling of being "trapped" by a racialised system and by history and a sense of ambivalence about the way forward.

2. I Don't Wanna Be White No More (Steyn, 2001, p. 121): This narrative also casts off previous narratives; however, rather than remaining in ambivalence, this narrative wishes for a direct cultural exchange, switching whiteness for blackness. This group over-identifies with white guilt, seeing nothing redeeming about a white identity, the "*secret* overidentification with the sins of being white is then externalised into a *public* overidentification with everything that is black" (p. 121, emphasis original). There are those who idealize black African culture, which Steyn refers to as *Romantic Don't Wannabe* (p. 121). These people do not have real personal experience with black culture. Those who have a grounded, first-hand experience with black culture she terms a *Dedicated Don't Wannabe* (p. 121). Sometimes those in the "Dedicated" group are people who were part of the struggle to end apartheid and often are currently working with marginalised groups to end continued racial injustice. However, the feelings of tension and ambivalence that come with a white identity are "alleviated by an act of racial and cultural self-negation" (p. 126).

3. Hybridization, That's the Name of the Game (Steyn, 2001, p. 127): An understanding of whiteness as social position of privilege, as well as empathy for how this impacts others, is shown in this narrative. The support of changes in the country post-apartheid is not lip-service but is combined with actions of contributing to this society. Those who tell this narrative are excited for a future in South Africa where whiteness has lost much of its power to dominate. For these respondents, there is a need to acknowledge their past and history before letting it go, and an "admission of culpability" (p. 134) is often a part of this. Those in this group have immersed themselves in the new order, not waiting for others to come to them. There is an emphasis on mutuality, on working together for a

better South Africa, of everyone using his or her own sphere of influence to make changes, but also proactively engaging with systemic racism that still exists. There is a "dialogic" approach (p. 138) that actively listens to the "other" and a process of "undemonizing the other" (p. 140). There is an acknowledgement that one does not step into another's process to avoid one's own. There is a commitment to personal growth and acknowledgement of personal fears and losses as well as an optimism and hope about the new possibilities in South Africa.

In my research, which will explore the motivations of white South Africans involved in racial justice activism in education, I am interested to see if there are any similarities between Steyn's five narrative identities (particularly the last one) and the narratives of my participants. I am interested both in how their identity motivates their activism and if it is modified because of their activism.

Conclusion

Social constructionism and CRT inform the perspective on race in this study. In addition, this research is guided by Smith's (2003) and Somers's (1992, 1994) concepts of narrative identity which arises out of larger narratives that provide grounds for moral actions. This focus on social action springing from a moral impulse and sense of identity is also found in Warren's (2010) examination of white racial justice activists in the USA. Certain elements of his model are also reflected in Louw-Potgieter's (1988) look at Afrikaner dissidents. In addition, it was important to provide in this chapter a summary of Steyn's (2001) post-apartheid white identities, which form a point of comparison when looking for the specific identities and narratives held by participants in my study.

Chapter Four:

Methodology

The aim of this research is to examine the motivations of white people working to bring more racial justice to South Africa through education—how do they conceptualise their narrative identity, and how is this conceptualization both motivating them to do their work and shaping the way they view their work? In order to understand the way the participants in this study construct their identity and interpret their actions, a qualitative research approach has been taken. This chapter will provide substantiation for this approach as well as for my specific choice of responsive interviewing technique and thematic analysis. The last part of the chapter will focus on the ethics and moral choices involved in any research project as well as the importance of reflexivity, especially in qualitative research.

Research Philosophy and Approach

The fundamental assumption of the social constructionist paradigm is that "reality is socially constructed" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.1). This paradigm, as described by Berger and Luckmann, is based around five core statements which have been summarised by DeLamater and Hyde (1998) and are shared below.

First, our experience of the world is ordered rather than chaotic. Second, language provides the basis on which we make sense of this world (our means of ordering and meaning-making). Third, the reality of our everyday life is shared, and language is what allows for this sharing to take place (this inter-subjective characteristic is what makes our reality different from things like dreams). Fourth, typifications of reality become institutionalised, and lastly, this knowledge may be institutionalised at the level of society or within subgroups (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). This emphasis on the social construction of reality through language means that researchers using a social constructionist frame tend to rely on qualitative research because of its ability to uncover meanings and the processes of constructing meanings (*how* and *why* questions).

Houston (2001) expands on several other core social constructionist arguments that flow out of the central thesis that the social world is manufactured through human

interaction and language. Houston emphasises the social constructionist idea that "our way of understanding the world is more or less contingent upon time and setting" (p. 846); in other words, it is culturally and historically specific. Consequently, constructionists argue against the idea of essential structures and emphasise "the relativistic and subjective nature of the social world where all knowledge is perspectival and contingent" (p. 847). Lastly, constructionists emphasise the link between our actions and our understandings of the social world (meanings). Social constructionism "links our narratives (or beliefs) about ourselves and the world to our actions" (p. 847). Therefore, the research questions of a study using a social constructionist standpoint are concerned with understanding individual narratives and actions, specific cultural understandings, and subjective interpretations, all of which lends itself to a qualitative approach.

My research questions for this study are as follows:

- o What motivates people to work against their "self-interests" in order to make a more racially just society?
- o What framework or narrative do people use to view the world that prompts them to get involved in racial justice activism?
- o How does their sense of self (personal narrative/identity) fit into this larger framework/narrative?
- o What (if any) are the key indicators in their journey that can be useful for educators/leaders/politicians who are trying to encourage a more racially just society?

As these questions deal with understanding *why* people act in certain ways and *how* they view the world, a qualitative approach was seen as the most useful, since qualitative research "seeks depth rather than breadth" and the aim of qualitative research is to "learn about how and why people behave, think and make meaning as they do, rather than focusing on what people do or believe on a large scale" (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995, p. 880). The research questions deal with issues such as motivation, respondents' self-conceptions, and personal histories, which dovetails with the qualitative approach's focuses on "processes and meanings" and seeks "to answer questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4). Qualitative research, while being informed by literature and existing theories, has as

its primary commitment conveying the empirical world in "its phenomenological integrity" and therefore has an inductive approach. Rather than hypothesis testing, emerging theories and ideas are the focus (Ambert et al., 1995, p. 880). Qualitative researchers are more focused on "probing and interpreting cases of lived experience than on making generalizable assertions. They are also more self-conscious about the researcher's role in co-creating, observing, interpreting, and representing the natural world" (Reihl, 2001, p. 116).

Selection of Participants and Sampling

As my research question deals with a specific segment of the population (white people involved in racial justice in education), a completely random sample could not be taken. Rather, in keeping with many other biographical researchers who use network sampling methods, I have chosen to rely on "snowball sampling,[19]" which is a non-probability sampling technique. With snowball sampling, the initial participants are chosen on an opportunistic and network basis (Squire, 2008), and the remaining participants are recruited through this initial group (Handcock & Gile, 2011).

This process starts with a convenience sample being drawn from the specific target population, and those selected then select others in the hard-to-reach population, and so on (Goodman, 2011). For quantitative research, once a significant number of the population have been reached, a probability sample from that frame is drawn. While the sampling frame itself might be biased (this method assumes members of hard-to-reach populations know each other, and those who are socially isolated are not included), statistical analysis can still be undertaken (Kalton & Anderson, 1986). However, for this study, the non-probability snowball sampling method was used (all those recruited were included in the final study). This is because this qualitative research is exploratory and concerned with the specific experiences of a subset of the population and will not be

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[19] There has been some confusion in the social sciences over what snowball sampling means. Originally as described by Coleman (1958, 1959) and Goodman (1961), snowball sampling starts with a random sample of people from a given population, and then referrals from that random group form the second wave, while referrals from the second wave form the third wave, and so on (Heckathorn, 2011). This was a method to create a statistically viable way to measure relationships in a population (Goodman, 1961, 2011). However, today, many use the same term to describe a method where the first group is a "convenience" sample of a hard-to-reach population, rather than a random sample. I am using the latter definition.

analyzed using rigorous statistical methods. Furthermore, it only involves a few people (Handcock & Gile, 2011).

Using this method, I took advantage of my existing networks as someone working in community development to identify two initial participants and one initial contact who referred me to others. These initial participants/contacts then suggested two or three other potential participants for the study. In some cases, they simply gave me contact information, but in other cases, they actively screened potential participants themselves by determining if they thought participants fit the criteria before putting me in touch with them. Those participants also made suggestions and referrals for other potential participants.

Definition of Terms and Criteria Used in the Study

All the potential participants were emailed the letter of consent. In the same email, I included a summary of my research topic and specifically asked the participants if they felt they fit the criteria of the study. For this study, my criteria included participants identifying as a) white, b) a racial justice activist, and c) involved in education.

Finding people involved in education was not too difficult, as my initial contact had recently left the public educational sphere. Those who ended up participating were involved in a range of education-related activities. Their activities are shared below, along with their pseudonyms.

- o Recently retired from the Department of Education and now assisting in creating curriculum and volunteers upskilling teachers in a predominantly black community (Julie).
- o Lecturing at the university level around topics of peace and justice (Joe).
- o An academic who "seeks to reveal, whether in writing or in educational work, how race is operating, its destructive effects, and the positive results if we can find ways of breaking away from racial socialization" (Simon, in his own words).
- o Running after-school education centres in rural KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) (Lewis, who is married to Hailey. Hailey also assists with this).

- o Teaching at an education institute created to help early childhood teachers from previously disadvantaged groups gain skills they need to be good teachers (Jennifer).
- o Teaching in a rural school (Hailey).
- o Working in community development focused on education (Susan and Steven, who are married).

These participants *self*-identified as white when they confirmed they fit the criteria of the study. Further contacts were reached through the snowball sampling method, which meant that initial participants contacted those they assumed would fit the criteria of "white racial justice activist in education," and those potential participants had the opportunity to deny or confirm if they felt they fit. While I had no potential participants say they did not feel they fit the criteria of the study based on race, several felt they did not fit the "racial justice activist" component.

I was very careful in how I defined "racial justice activist." Firstly, "racial justice" was a specific choice. Rather than using the term "anti-racist," which defines itself by what it is not, I wanted to use a positive construction of the idea (Warren [2010] made a similar choice). Secondly, by using the word "justice" I am deliberately linking ideas of formal equality (the idea that everyone is equal before the law, and the law should be unbiased) with both substantive equality (the idea that context and differing circumstances created by historical processes need to be taken into account when trying to create a fair and just society [Henrard, 2003]) as well as ideas of "radical reconciliation" that place economic injustice as central to ending racial discrimination and injustice (IJR, 2013, p. 9). Racial justice is conceptualised not only as *not* being personally prejudiced or racist, but as actively seeking to subvert and change structures and systems that privilege(d) white people. Many South Africans speak positively about desiring national unity and reconciliation; however, they divorce the social, psychological, and interpersonal aspects of reconciliation from the material components (IJR, 2013). If reconciliation in South Africa can truly occur, the material injustices brought about by racism need to be addressed. Lastly, the term "justice" has a moral component. Since my theoretical framework takes into consideration the way that moral obligation created

through metanarratives motivates human action, using "racial justice" rather than "anti-racism" seemed appropriate.

Defining "activist" was more problematic. "Activist" generally summons ideas of protests, marches, strategic campaigns, and organizing people around causes. Initially, this was my conceptual understanding, but in discussing my research topic with potential participants and in reviewing literature, I came to embrace a broader definition of activist. For example, some feminists—including bell hooks[20] and others (as cited in Maxey, 2001)—view all women as engaged in the process of building equality and, therefore, as activists. There are other traditions of social activism, beyond just feminist activists, that view all people as activists. For example, "a moral and strategic commitment to embrace all people as 'activists' is central to the Gandhian tradition of *Satyagraha*" (Maxey, 2001, p. 201). For scholars like Maxey, "activism means doing as much as I can from where I am at" (p. 202). The focus is not particularly on a certain type of activity, but rather on doing whatever one can, in whatever context, to consciously further the aims of racial justice. While some of the participants shared that they did not initially think of themselves as activists, or even consciously stepped into their current work with firm ideas about racial equality, they do now see their work as an active part of creating a more just society. They are engaged in activities to bring racial equality, even though they would not choose "activist" as one of their primary methods of identifying themselves.

In total, eleven interviews were conducted, but only nine participants were used in the study. One participant asked to be removed in order to preserve her anonymity, and another participant was excluded because in hindsight she did not fit the criteria of the study closely enough (the main thrust of her work was focused around individual orphans in a children's village quite removed from the larger community and had more of an interpersonal focus rather than a systemic focus).

There were five women and four men who participated in this study. The participants ranged from 34 to 68 years in age, with the mode being 67 and the average 58.4; therefore, the majority of the participants were born and raised during apartheid.

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[20] bell hooks' (who spells her name with lowercase letters) main work on this subject is 1994's *Teaching to Transgress*.

The majority of participants attended university in the '60s and '70s. Susan and Steven, who were the youngest participants, attended university in the '90s. It is also interesting to note here that Joe is married to a South African of Indian decent, which has played a role in his understanding and experience of race and racism. All of the participants had English as their home language. This could be because of the demographics in KZN, where there are less Afrikaans speakers than in other provinces. While it would have been interesting to analyze results from a mixture of Afrikaans and English perspectives, the result is that this study can make a unique contribution to the literature on the perspectives of English-speaking, white South Africans.

Data Collection

Interviewing techniques run a spectrum from structured (where exactly the same questions are asked in the same order and same way every time) to completely unstructured interviews where the researcher gives a prompt then allows the participant to speak freely. A semi-structured interview format was used for this study, as it allowed for the flexibility needed to gain an understanding of the participants' views. This is in keeping with the phenomenological approach taken in the entire study (Gray, 2008). In a semi-structured interview, the topic being discussed is roughly described and open-ended questions are used. Further, "the sequence of the questions and the degree to which topics are discussed is not fixed" (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993, p. 295). The interviewer focuses on what the participant is saying and directs probes and follow-up questions based around what has already been said; thus, there is room for "improvisation" (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993, p. 295) based on the context. This type of interview focuses not on the researcher's own ideas and concepts but on the participant's views and understandings of his or her environment and concepts in his or her own terminology (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993). This flexibility and "improvisation" in a qualitative interview approach has been compared to jazz music in that "the 'score' in qualitative research is the initial design or plan. The plan is adapted and elaborated according to the evolving themes of the inquiry" (Oldfather & West, 1994, p. 24).

The strength of this approach is that its flexibility allows the respondent to discuss what he or she deems essential (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and as new themes emerge from

the interview, these can be expanded upon and discussed. It also allows for rapport to be built up between the researcher and participant, which helps the researcher get deeper into the "life world"[21] of the participant and understand things from his or her point of view (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 58).

The interview questions were based off of my prepared interview schedule that included questions on the participant's upbringing and current work in racial justice and education, as well as questions relating to his or her identity and motivation for his or her work. A responsive interviewing style, as outlined in Rubin and Rubin (2005), was used. In positivist, quantitative approaches that aim for standardization, the researcher is viewed as a "yard stick" who strives to be "anonymous" and "exchangeable," and his or her "personal influence on the course of the conversation is restricted to a minimum" (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993, p. 294). In responsive, qualitative interviewing, however, rather than seeing the researcher as a neutral, objective, and non-intrusive measure, responsive interviewers agree with the feminist assumption that we can never displace ourselves (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It privileges the relational dynamic involved in interviewing and therefore encourages the interview to operate more like a conversation rather than a formal interview.

Seven of the nine interviews were done face-to-face and the audio was digitally recorded. Two of the interviews were conducted by phone as the participants lived an hour inland from Pietermaritzburg and cost as well as time commitments limited my ability to interview them in person. The phone interviews were also digitally recorded. Before the interviews, all of the participants gave their express permission for the interviews to be recorded.

Of those conducted in person, the majority (six) were conducted either in the participants' own homes or at their places of work. One participant preferred to meet me at my own home, and the interview was conducted there. Interviewing participants in their own environments is seen as preferable when doing an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), because the aim is to understand things from the point of view of the participant. Thus, when participants can be interviewed in their own

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[21] I understand the term "life world" to be as Shütz defined it: as the "experiential world every person *takes for granted*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1996, p. 263, emphasis added).

environments, they are not only more comfortable, but a greater level of understanding about their world can be gleaned by the researcher (Smith & Osborne, 2007). Interviewing participants in their own environments gave context to the interviews, and participants often referred to things in their environment to explain themselves (for example, pointing out specific gifts, housemates, neighbourhoods, specifics of their work place, and so on). I also took notes during the interviews to capture some of the main gestures and emphases the speakers used and to aid in follow-up questions.

For some of the participants, it was necessary to specifically ask almost all of the questions. However, for others it was possible to simply give a summary introduction of the topic, and the participant spoke without further questioning from my side. Sometimes I asked for clarification, but as much as possible I wanted participants to share their stories from their perspective without interference. The two questions that I *did* consistently ask every participant explicitly related to how they identified themselves. Some participants indicated this was a difficult question as it is a bit abstract, and so at times I clarified by asking participants, "How do you think of yourself? How do you most often see yourself?" All the participants, however, did have something to say about their identities. Since none of them mentioned race in response to this question on identity, I then followed up by asking, "Do you ever identify racially, or think of yourself in terms of your race?" If they did, I asked them to elaborate on their answer and to describe where or when they are conscious of thinking of themselves in terms of their race. If they did not, I asked them to try and explain why they thought that was so.

After the interviews I transcribed the audio recordings. First, I typed the transcript while listening to the interview at a slower speed. I then went through and edited the transcript for typos. I then listened to the interview a second time to check for accuracy and emphasis. If a section was extremely long, I broke it into paragraphs to make it easier for participants to read. I did a straight transcription, including where participants repeated themselves or used verbal fillers such as "uh" or "um." While I gave supportive verbal and non-verbal feedback throughout the interview (e.g., "Mmm," "ja"—South African slang for "yeah" or "yes"—or head nodding), I only included these comments where there was an obvious break with what the participant was saying and it appeared my affirmation prompted further speaking. I included where there seemed to be a long

pause, laughter, or interruptions. I also included some context before the interview, referring to the environment in which the interview was conducted and a few of my field note observations. While I was planning on doing a thematic analysis (which does not need such a high level of detail), a straight transcription rather than a summary makes it possible for other analytical tools to be used (such as a rhetorical analysis using Billig's [1991] method), and I wanted to allow for this potential.

The interviews were anonymous, so all names of institutions, people, and specific place names were changed, unless they were of a famous public figure. If it was easier to describe the person's relationship rather than giving him or her a pseudonym, I did this (e.g., putting in "my brother" or "my husband" or "the principal" rather than a name).

I then emailed the participants the transcripts and gave them the opportunity to make any edits or remove any sections they wished to remove. This was to help guarantee internal validity, and more details about this process are explained later in this chapter. About half of the participants said they were happy to leave the transcript as it was, and those who did make editorial changes mostly clarified what they had said previously. (For example, some removed things like "um" or "uh," clarified pronouns they had used, or corrected words that I had misheard.) There were no real substantial differences between the edited and unedited transcripts in terms of real content. In some cases, some clarifying concepts were added, and I included these in the final transcripts. In one case I emailed the participant for clarification about some religious terminology that he had used, and I included his definitions in the final transcript.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data, after being transcribed and edited by the participants, was analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is closely linked to ideas inherent in symbolic interactionism, which focuses on how meanings are constructed in an individual's world. IPA is concerned with exploring how participants make sense of their world—how they understand the world and what meanings certain events, situations, or ideas have for them (Smith & Osborn, 2007). It is concerned with an "individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53). These

concepts are rooted in Shütz's (1967) explanations of the term *"Verstehen"* (a term closely associated with the work of Weber, 1864-1920) as a method for the human sciences to understand how other people make sense of, or interpret their world (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1996). In this way, IPA is theoretically linked with hermeneutics and theories of interpretation. IPA acknowledges that one can never directly transcend one's own world to get completely into the world of the participant, and so interpretation is a two-stage process: participants try to make sense of their world, and the researcher tries to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

This process of interpretation can take two different stances: a more sympathetic stance (taking the point of view of the participants) or a more critical stance (questioning the point of view of the participants, asking what the participants are trying to achieve in the way they are sharing information, and so on). A combination of both sympathetic and critical stances generally gives a more balanced analysis overall (Smith & Osborn, 2007), and in this analysis, I aimed to achieve this balance.

In order to understand how the participants saw themselves, their work, their motivations for their work, and their identities, I used a thematic analysis as outlined in Rubin and Rubin (2005). I inductively searched for themes by re-reading all the transcripts and jotting down ideas, topics, or events that kept re-appearing. I studied these notes in light of my research questions and thereafter re-read the transcripts, checking the accuracy of my themes. I then manually coded for my themes by marking in the transcripts every data unit (story, event, notable quote, paragraph, or sentence) that related to the different themes. This allowed me to search all the transcripts for all the data units relating to a specific theme.

Since my theoretical framework was a combination of critical race theory and Smith's (2003) concepts of human motivation and social action being based in moral frameworks embedded in narratives, after inductively looking for themes, I also deductively looked for indications of moral "shoulds"[22] and broader narratives and paid special attention to themes that related to identity or the participants' understandings of racial identity.

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[22] This concept of a moral "should" is explained further in the Analysis section, Chapter Five.

Validity, Reliability, and Generalization

Reliability relates to how much someone can trust his or her research instrument. A repetition of the test, with the same results, is usually a test of reliability (Gray, 2004). However, in qualitative research, this is difficult as the researcher is an integral part of the research instrument. Even if one repeated a qualitative interview with the same respondent, it would not lead to exactly the same findings, since other information might emerge as well. The focus of reliability, therefore, in qualitative research is on whether "new information is compatible with the information found before" (Heyink & Tymstra, 1993, p. 298).

Validity refers to the idea that the research instrument is measuring what it was intending to measure (Gray, 2004). In my case, this would be: Did my interviews and subsequent analysis explore the motivations of white racial justice activists, or in my questions and follow-ups, was I really exploring something else?

Internal validity relates to how strongly one's causal conclusions can be drawn. In qualitative research, internal validity is usually measured by the quality of the research process and findings (Payne & Williams, 2005). In the context of my research, the question would be: "Can the findings about motivations of white racial justice activists be trusted for this group of participants?"

External validity relates to the findings' relationship to the larger universe: "Does the reader have enough information in this study to decide whether the findings might be transferable to other settings?" (Payne & Williams, 2005). In my case, the question would be: "Are the findings about the motivations of white racial justice activists applicable only to the nine people interviewed, or could they apply to other white English speaking racial justice activists in education in South Africa?"

Usually qualitative research cannot make strong claims of generalizability, because IPA and other qualitative methods like it are not focused on broad generalizations. Its idiographic mode of inquiry means it is "committed to the painstaking analysis of cases rather than jumping to generalizations" (Smith & Osborne, 2007 p. 56).

Answering these questions of reliability and validity in qualitative research is often difficult; however, there are several methods that qualitative researchers use to

strengthen the reliability and validity of their research, which I engaged in during this process. First, a careful documentation of the research process can provide the audience with information to determine whether the research is reliable (Payne & Williams, 2005). Second, internal validity can be strengthened by allowing research participants the opportunity to edit and adapt their transcripts, allowing them a second chance to communicate clearly how *they* understand their world before the researcher begins with his or her own interpretation. Third, in the process of analysis, internal validity can be strengthened through the process of "double-fitting," where "researchers generate conceptual images of their settings, and then shape and reshape them according to their ongoing observations, thus enhancing the validity of their developing conceptualization" (Ambert et al., 1995, p. 881). Fourth, as subjectivity and bias can compromise reliability and validity, if researchers reflexively state their assumptions and initial theoretical frameworks as well as ongoing feelings and reactions during the research process, this can assist both the researcher and readers in recognizing bias (Hsiung, 2008). This concept of reflexivity is expanded on in the next section at length.

Reflexivity

Feminist theory has deeply informed many of the approaches used in qualitative research. Feminists have been at the forefront of highlighting that "the researcher occupies a position" and there is no view from "nowhere" (Ambert et al., 1995, p. 882). As Cotterill and Letherby (1993) summarise, "The general agreement is that the 'conscious subjectivity' of much feminist (and other) research which has replaced the 'value-free objectivity' of traditional research is not only more honest, but helps to break down the power relationship between researcher and researched" (p.72). As such, reflexive examination of the researcher's own agenda, assumptions, and beliefs is needed throughout the process; "it is imperative for qualitative inquiry because it conceptualizes the researcher as an active participant in knowledge reproduction rather than as a neutral bystander" (Hsiung, 2008, p. 212).

The researcher's social position influences his or her approach and interpretation (Ambert et al., 1995) and rather than attempting to minimise one's situation in the

research, one should reflexively expose it for critique by oneself and others in the research process (Salzman, 2002). This helps to ensure reliability and validity.

However, while the feminist critiques of power and positionality hold true, there has been debate on the power of reflexivity to impact or expose positionality in research, given the human capacity for self-deception in self-presentation. The researcher can over-ascribe the impact of his or her positionality in the research process just as much as under-ascribe. The entire basis of qualitative research is the presumption that humans have the capacity to imagine, empathise, sympathise, and above all, *listen* to what participants are saying and report on that, whether we share their experiences or not (Salzman, 2002). In that sense, whether we share anything in common with the participants or not, if we are good researchers, we should still be able to represent reality as our participants see it.

However, there is still something to be said for researchers "turning the investigative lens away from others and towards themselves" and both becoming aware of and acknowledging their "assumptions and locations, as well as their emotional responses in an interview," all while understanding their observations and notes are interpretations of the interactions of others (Hsiung, 2008, p. 213). In light of this, I would like to explicitly share some of my assumptions, experiences, and emotional responses in this interview process.

Setting out, I assumed I would meet many more people who primarily identified as activists but who were involved in education in some way. I expected to hear much more about protests against apartheid and continued racial injustice. However, the majority of participants saw themselves first and foremost as educators and were involved in on-the-ground education work. Many of them only became truly aware of the full extent of injustices of apartheid post-1994, although all had a certain level of awareness previously.[23] However, all the participants were involved in work which directly and primarily affected people who were not of their same race, and all of their work was focused in some way on striving to improve the education of people whose lives were still deeply affected by the legacy of apartheid. I realised that I could continue screening out potential participants until I encountered people who fit my initial

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[23] This will be discussed further in the Analysis chapters that follow.

conceptualization of what an "activist" was (which would take more time, something I did not have in abundance), or I could expand my thinking on how I was defining activist. I chose to expand my thinking and through this, to gain more participants.

Another one of my main assumptions was given that the majority of these participants were involved in some type of racial justice work, they would have a concept of their own racial identity that was similar to Steyn's (2001) "White African" narrative. However, this was also not the case. First, many participants had a strong preference for colour-blind language (perhaps as a response to our overtly racial past), and secondly, many participants also revealed a level of discomfort with the term "white," and it had many negative associations for them. I found this frustrating, as I had set out to find more people who embraced this "White African" narrative, and on the whole, most participants had never reflected on their white identity nor had a sense of what their white social identity meant. While they were committed to activities aimed at providing quality education for all and rectifying some of the continued injustices from apartheid, overall they did not have a good concept of the ways white people continue to be privileged post-1994.

Initially I was quite skeptical of the way participants talked about race, feeling they were side-stepping the issue rather than facing it (which may in fact have been the case). Perhaps my American undergraduate education at Taylor University, with its focus on colour-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2009), created a bias against this type of talk, which could also easily be interpreted as non-racial rather than colour-blind. In reviewing the literature on non-racial discourse in South Africa, I saw that there is a feeling that the colour-blind critique can be misapplied in a society where racialised thinking (ideas that race is a qualitative difference between people) is still so deeply ingrained in people. This helped me to try to hold my judgments in check and interpret the participants' comments with sympathy for their non-racial ideals, rather than only criticizing how their language and views *could* perpetuate colour-blind racism. In my analysis, I hope that I have been balanced in both presenting how participants saw their world but also critiquing the potential problems with some of their language.

Another one of my struggles in the interview process was frequently feeling the limitations of audio transcriptions in capturing the meanings communicated in the

interviews. For example, one participant often used the phrase "you know" as a filler (similar to "um" or "uh") but also used it when she wanted to illicit a response or agreement from me, indicating her assumption that we shared a common understanding and I "knew" what she meant by what she said. This nuance is difficult to capture in an audio transcription. Also, the emotion, tone, and manner of speaking cannot be captured well. I tried to make up for this with notes in the transcripts (for example, marking where participants banged the table for emphasis or said something softly or loudly), but this was not always possible. This is one reason why I chose to do a thematic analysis rather than an in-depth content analysis, rhetorical analysis, or even narrative analysis. Most participants did not have the interview questions in advance and were talking "off the top of their heads," and while they did have the opportunity to edit their interviews afterwards, this is not the same as thoughtfully constructing a piece of writing. I therefore came to the conclusion that it would be unsympathetic (if not unethical) to deeply interrogate the nuance of their every word, and rather I needed to take a broad approach that focused on the *content* of what the participants said (their events, stories, and ideas) rather than focusing too much on the *way* in which they said it. As stated, good IPA should strike a balance between sympathetic and critical analysis (Smith & Osborne, 2007), and it was my aim to strike this balance.

For example, one participant frequently referred to those she spoke about as "little." A critical analysis could deconstruct this use of the word "little" and highlight the narrator's subconscious paternalistic (or in this case, "maternalistic") views towards people of other races. Perhaps this is true. However, in the context of the interview, it became clear that the speaker often referred to *any* person (not just those of other races) as "little;" that she had taught preschool for many years and habitually referred to people with terms of endearment ("lovey," "sweet," "darling"); that she was now in her 60s, thus older than most people she was speaking about; and that she did have mutual friendships with people of other races where she was not simply in the "provider" role. This incident highlighted for me that in my interpretations and analysis, I wanted to treat my participants' narratives with sympathy, taking context into account as much as possible.

Of course, one of my main assumptions is built into my theoretical framework: namely, that people act out of a sense of who they are in terms of their position in a larger

metanarrative, and this is what drives their activism. Therefore, in the data analysis and interpretation I was searching for larger narratives and elements that would reveal how participants saw themselves and the world and did not examine any other motivations for their activism in detail.

Insider/Outsider Status

The way a researcher is positioned in society does affect the way he or she is seen by participants and can affect the type of data collected. Participants may choose to narrate their experiences differently or highlight certain aspects based on if they view the researcher as an insider or an outsider. Particularly when researching ethnic or other identities, if respondents perceive a researcher as an insider, they may make assumptions or communicate differently than they would with an outsider (Young, 2004). There is also a tension between the ideas that an outsider is able to neutrally observe the environment, noting norms that an insider would be blind to, while an insider has access to private, nuanced forms of knowledge, as well as quicker rapport (Merton, 1972).

In this study, I personally felt I was perceived at different levels of insider/outsider. I always presented myself as a student (something the participants were familiar with as educators), and I have the sense that this was how most participants related to me. However, since I also work in community development and my initial contact was through work, those who were recruited through this initial contact viewed me more through the lens of community developer. Stories about poverty or lack of infrastructure or social problems were referred to with frequent "you know" commentary. Further, in terms of racial/ethnic identity, in society I am generally perceived to be a white South African (given my physical features and for the most part my accent, which tends to sound South African when with South Africans, but transitions into a more American accent when with Americans). I was born and raised in South Africa, but my parents are American, and my undergraduate degree was done in the USA. Sometimes this would come out after the interviews when I was chatting with participants, and often there was surprise on the part of the participant that I was "American." (I put that term in quotes because it is not how I usually identify myself). While none of the participants really referred to my racial identity in any way during the interviews, the fact that several

participants were surprised at my American heritage indicates that for the most part, participants probably viewed me as an insider.

A further level of "insider" status afforded me by some participants was that of religion. The organisation I work for is Christian, and therefore participants who were referred to me by my initial work contact correctly assumed that I was Christian. These participants (who were also Christian) therefore used Christian terminology often and assumed I understood what they meant by statements such as "the kingdom of God." However, I tried to clarify what participants meant by these sorts of words, especially when it related to their motivation or identity, and in one case I had to follow up by email with a participant so he could clearly articulate what he meant for the purpose of the analysis.

Ethics and Morals in Research

As Roth (2005) so aptly states, "Without doubt, ethics regarding human participation in research is an extremely important issue" (p. 158). At all stages of this research, ethical procedures were followed to ensure the humanity of all participants was honored and participants experienced no harm. First, this research proposal was granted ethical clearance by the Board of Ethics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This board reviewed the proposal to ensure that no harm (psychological, social, or physical) could come to participants as a result of this research. Once ethical clearance was obtained, potential volunteer participants were recruited through a snowball sampling method, as mentioned. The participants all had the purpose of the research explained to them in writing (via email and the informed consent form) as well as verbally at the start of the interview. All participants signed an informed consent form, and it was explained to participants that they had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time (and in fact, one participant did withdraw). I also asked the permission of all participants to audio record the interview. Further, when I asked questions or follow-up questions (particularly relating to their perception of their racial identity), I reminded participants that they did not need to answer every question, and how *they* saw themselves was what was important. I explained to the participants their identity would be protected through the use of pseudonyms and that only I and my supervisor had access to these full transcripts and

recordings. Participants were also given a chance to review their transcripts before analysis to clarify any elements they wished to adapt or remove. A few participants changed their pseudonyms and further obscured the identity of some people referenced in the transcripts, as well as clarified some of the details they referenced. All of these steps ensured the participants not only received no harm in this research process but also felt they had control over how they presented themselves and their ideas.

Conclusion

This chapter provided substantiation for the research methodology undertaken in this study. This study is qualitative, based on a social constructionist research philosophy. The participants were selected using snowball sampling, and in total, nine participated. The participants all self-identified as white racial justice activists. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the results were analyzed using IPA thematic analysis. The chapter concluded by discussing issues of validity, reliability, reflexivity, and ethics in this study.

The next chapter will look at the results of the thematic analysis, and using Smith's (2003) theories of narrative and identity, will explore the motivations of the white racial justice activists who participated in this study.

Introduction to Analysis Section

The analysis of the data and discussion of the findings have been divided into the subsequent three chapters. Chapter Five deals with my main research questions, which focus on the interlinking of metanarrative, narrative identity, and motivation in white racial justice activism. Using Smith's (2003) and Warren's (2010) frameworks for analyzing social action, in order to find out what motivates white racial justice activists, I searched for the underlying large worldview or metanarrative that is guiding participants' identity and moral sense, which in turn informs their motivations.

Chapter Six deals with the conspicuous absence of an explicit racial element in any of the narratives or motivations shared by participants, and using a critical race theory lens, as well as Steyn (2001)'s views on white identity, associations, assumptions, and contradictions in the way race is talked about and given meaning by the participants is teased out.

Chapter Seven attempts to answer my last research question: "What (if any) are the key indicators in the activists' journeys towards activism, and are there any elements that could be useful for others trying to encourage a more racially just society?" The findings of the activists' journeys are shared and a discussion of similarities and differences between South African and American activists' stories follow.

Chapter Five:

Analysis of Narrative Identity and Motivation of Racial Justice Activists

Working in Education

Big Stories

We... most fundamentally understand what reality is, who we are, and how we ought to live by locating ourselves within the larger narratives and metanarratives that we hear and tell, and that constitute what is for us real and significant.
(Smith, 2003, p. 64)

Smith (2003) argues that human action is not driven by pure self-interest or by pure altruism. Rather, it is driven by a sense of identity ("who we are") and morality ("how we ought to live") that springs from a larger metanarrative or story that explains core, non-negotiable truths about the world and provides us with the framework for interpreting reality and deciding what to value and hold significant.

Using this framework, the transcripts were analysed to discover what "big story" or narrative[24] undergirded the participants' lives. Unpacking a large narrative is difficult, because it is the invisible structure that informs all the smaller stories and actions, the filter through which the participants' stories are told. However, by looking for the effects—looking at how the participants identified themselves as well as what moral framework they held to strongly—a sense of the larger stories were able to be pieced together. In order to discover how the participants identified themselves, their narratives were examined for clues implicit in their stories (How did they most often refer to themselves in their stories? What stories did they tell? Why did they preference some stories over others?) as well as how participants explicitly responded when asked to identify themselves.

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[24] Smith (2003) uses metanarrative in the same way that Lyotard (1924-1998) does (especially in his principle work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [1984]), as a "grand" theory or totalizing account that includes various events, histories, and experiences into one story grounded on a truth that is (seen to be) universal and non-negotiable. However, within these metanarratives, Smith points out there are layers of nested narratives within—for example, the narrative of American Nationalism fits inside the metanarrative of Christianity or Capitalism (Smith, 2003, p. 75). In my analysis, while some of the large narratives could be called metanarratives (e.g., the Christian narrative), I am not placing them at the level of metanarrative, because while smaller narratives are nested within the large narratives, not all of them are as all-encompassing as metanarratives.

Smith (2003) holds that people get a sense of morality from their narratives, which naturally focus around the sacred and the profane and provide individuals with a "moral ought." Smith uses this term to describe how narratives create normative duties, stating,

> when an action or order is moral, in this sense, it entails an imperative to affirm a commitment to shared rules or obligations that apply to people in certain defined situations and statuses. The moral also involves a sense of normative duty to express or perform obligations that are intrinsically motivated—because they are right, good, worthy, just and so on—rather than motivated by the means/ends-oriented desire to obtain the benefit of consuming a good or service. (p. 10).

Therefore, in analyzing the transcripts, I specifically searched for the "ought" in their transcripts. Any time the participant made a comment such as "people/I should" or "we've got to" or "must" or even referenced "responsibility" I marked it in the text. For example, Steven, referring to how he envisions South Africa changing and becoming a more equal society, says, "people become less self-orientated, more willing to sacrifice because… because that's what we *should* be doing" (emphasis added).

Big narratives are also normative. They create and encode the social norms that guide individual decisions without conscious thought. Therefore I looked for language that showed the participants were taking something for granted, as normal, or as part of the way everyone should live or think (for example, when participants said "obviously" or downplayed their actions as "normal"). For example, in this quote from Susan, who is describing her current work in education and justice issues in relation to her upbringing: "Because, we were just brought up with this was just normal, and this is how things should be." Her qualifier "just" ("just brought up" and "just normal") emphasise her view that this lifestyle was ordinary. Her statement that it was "normal" and "how things should be" also emphasises the normative power of her underlying big story. Smith's (2003) view that human action springs from this value-based sense of moral "ought" is echoed in Warren's (2010) analysis of white racial justice activists in the USA.

In analyzing the transcripts in this manner, three large narratives emerged as guiding the meaning and sense of self from the majority of the participants. The three big stories are:

1. "People Are People": The Humanist Narrative

2. "Following God": The Religious Narrative

3. "Quality Education for All": The Educationalist Narrative

These narratives are not mutually exclusive, however, and interact or overlap with one another. Smith (2003) points out that narratives are "more or less compatible with each other depending on their plots, actors and other elements" (p. 74). Most participants seemed to derive most of their actions and sense of self from one main story, but I noticed certain identifiable nuances where two main stories overlapped in some of the responses of the participants, which I have also explored. These "sub-stories" are:

A. "Created Equal": The Religious Humanist Narrative

B. "Children's Right to Education": The Humanist Educationalist Narrative

C: "Holistic Development": The Religious Educationalist Narrative

I have used a Venn diagram to visually illustrate the way in which the larger stories overlap to create subset narratives that combine elements of both larger narratives in a unique way (Venn diagrams are usually used in mathematics to portray the relationships between sets that may contain overlapping elements). In the large circles, I have placed the three large narratives (1, 2, and 3). However, where I found that participants were combining elements of two large narratives and these narratives had specific nuances that deserved attention as well, I called these "sub-narratives." These are illustrated on the diagram where the two large circles overlap and are labeled "A" and "B." One participant seemed to combine elements of all of the Big narratives in his descriptions and responses, so I have labeled this point "C" and placed it centrally, showing how all the stories overlap.
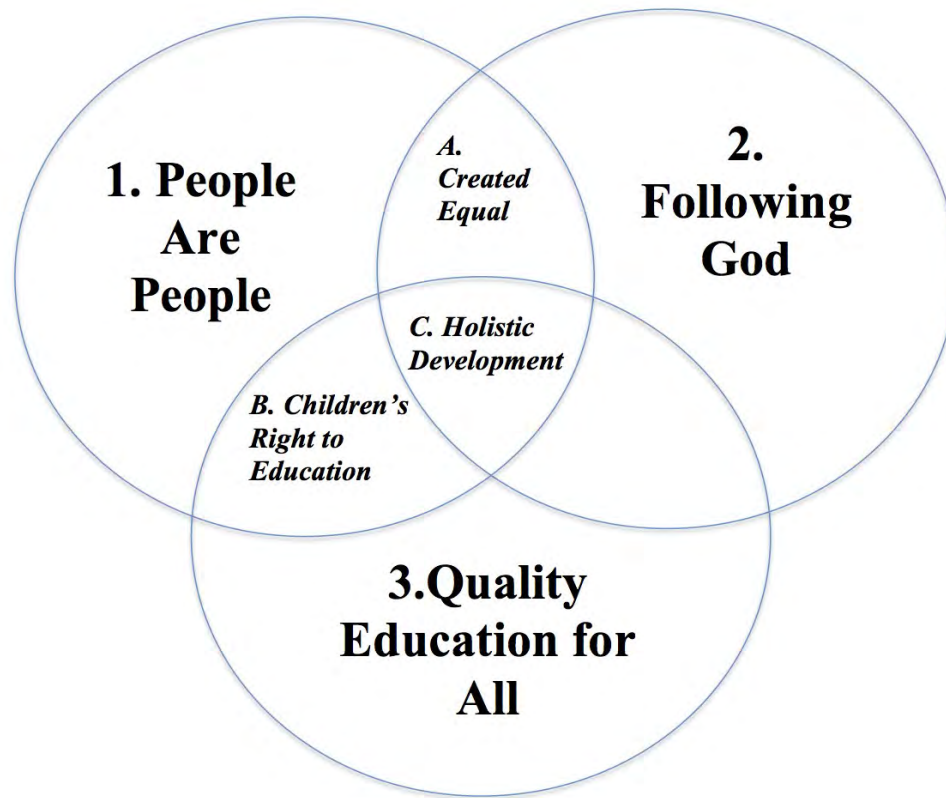
In the following sections I will first explore and define the three large narratives and then the three sub-narratives. Following that, I will explore the participants' individual narrative identities in light of these larger stories and then look at the motivations which sprang out of these larger stories.

"People Are People": The Humanist Narrative. This metanarrative is characterised by a strong belief in the equality of all human beings. In this story, no one is worth more than anyone else because of an external feature (such as skin colour, socio-economic class, or history); everyone has basic human rights that should be upheld. This concept is so central to one participant, Lewis, that he makes a point of explicitly "drilling" it into his young students:

Lewis: And, and we've got to get people, people have got to get, still get those things off their eyes, and just see people as people. And they have, you know

what? People, whatever colour, creed, or denomination, we, we all have the same things, we have desires, we have ambitions, we have feelings, we have—we feel happy, we feel sad, we all feel—it's the same. It's the same for all of us. So no we don't, I don't see myself as anything special, and I don't see myself as anything different from anybody else. I say to the kids in my class and they'll, they'll tell you—I say, "Am I better than you?" And they'll say, "No, sir!" And I'll say "Am I more important than you?" And they'll say "No, sir!" because I've taught them that. I say to them we are all the same. God made us all the same. Maybe I have some talents that you haven't got, but I can tell you for sure, you have got some talents that I haven't got.

Lewis invokes a moral basis for his views, the "ought," when he says, "we've got to get people, people have got to get, still get those things off their eyes…" His repetition and the way he interrupts himself to make sure his point is clear shows how emphatic he is about this idea. Smith (2003) points out that strong emotions are often indicators of the sacred and the source of the moral centre in narratives. This focus on emotion springing from a violated moral code is echoed in Warren's (2010) study of racial justice activists. As Jasper (1997) argues, "We become indignant (emotion) when we discover information (cognition) that violates our sense of right and wrong, thereby jeopardizing our system of meaning (morals)" (quoted in Warren, 2010, p. 53).

Lewis then follows this up with examples that clarify what he means when he says "people are people." He points to human experiences, desires, and emotions that all humans share. He illustrates a story of how he enforces this thinking among his students (and even invites the listener to corroborate his story by asking the children themselves), by drilling his students in a People Are People catechism ("'Am I better than you?' 'No, sir!' 'Am I more important that you?' 'No, sir!'"). With this illustration he shows how even someone in a position of authority (teacher) is equal to his students. Lewis does acknowledge that we have differences has humans (he mentions "talents" at the end, and "colour, creed, or denomination" at the beginning) but argues that these differences are not better or worse, nor a justifiable basis for treating others differently. Rather, they are simply differences.

The following humorous story highlights another participant's desire to emphasise our common humanity to his friends of other races:

> **Simon:** I have a very good relationship with somebody from the township[25]… I remember talking to him once about issues of race, and he said to me, well I said, "You know I heard that some black people thought that white people didn't go to the toilet? Because you know they're white and too pure." He said, "I used to believe that until I was about eleven or twelve or something." So I said, "You know what that makes me full of?"

The strength of the People Are People narrative is that it provides a strong foundation to combat the racist assumptions that there is something qualitatively and fundamentally different about people who are different races, as illustrated in this comment from Simon:

> **Simon:** You know we can de-deconstruct the sort of whiteness, because I think this idea, um, in the end, you know people are bodies. Right?

Simon in particular, perhaps because he was an academic and had been exposed to different ways of thinking through a peer counseling course, was able to link this People Are People narrative to larger systems of injustice that oppress people. He spoke of oppressive systems (like racism) that rob both black and white people of their humanity and create situations where violence, injustice, and personal disconnection are the norm.

However, the tension within the People Are People narrative is that it privileges individual human rights (a right to education, to safety, to shelter) and therefore has the *potential* to highlight individual isolated incidents of injustice or immorality and be blind to larger systemic injustices that are creating the situation, as the following story illustrates:

> **Julie:** …Something that made a huge impression on me. When I was about, oh, I don't know, nine or ten, I was quite young, there was, in those days there were pass laws, and people had to have their *dompass*[26] and all of that, and the police

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[25] Under the Group Areas Act of 1953, only white people were given permission to inhabit the cities, and people of other races were set to designated segregated "townships" outside the city centre. There were townships for black people, Indian people, and Coloured people (South African History Online, n.d.c). While this official form of segregation has ended with the end of apartheid, cities such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg are surrounded by townships that are still largely racially homogeneous. I have removed the specific names of townships in the participants' quotes, but in all of the cases, they were referring to townships that were formerly residential areas for black people only.

[26] While pass laws had been in effect South Africa since slavery in the 1800s, as well as under British Colonization, the system was continued and enforced during apartheid. Along with segregating communities, the Group Areas Act of 1953 required people who were not white to carry an ID book (pass book or *dompass*). In order to work or stay overnight in a white area, people who were not white had to have permission from relevant authorities stamped into their pass books to be in that white area. They could

van stopped outside our house, and they were really beating this man up. And my father went out and tried to calm the situation down, and when he came back in I remember he—I remember the whole thing was about "people are people." It doesn't matter about the colour of their skin that just happens to be your accident of birth.

In this story, we see how Julie was informed from a young age that people have certain human rights that should not be denied (such as protection from violence), and these should not be based on an external feature such as skin colour. In this story, it is immoral to act violently towards another person, even if he or she has "broken the law;" the fact remains they are still a person and should be treated as such. This incident enforced Julie's idea that it is wrong to treat people badly because of the colour of their skin. While the People Are People narrative has the potential to challenge an entire system of racism and racial privilege, we see in this story that at this stage in Julie's development, the importance was placed on being a person who acts kindly and generously towards others regardless of their skin colour *and* regardless of their behavior. This story comes out as a strong condemnation of violence but does not question the morality of the pass law system.

"Following God": The Religious (Christian) Narrative. All of the participants who chose to participate in the study had some form of connection to Christianity. Either their parents identified as Christian or the participants themselves identified as members of some variation of the Christian religion. Therefore, while this type of thinking might apply a broader context (someone of any religion may get his or her sense of identity and morality from a religious narrative), in the context of my study the religious narrative was an explicitly Christian narrative and the nuances of this narrative are specific to the Christian religion.

A summary of this narrative entails the acceptance by individuals of a God who has a good plan for how the world should work. He is a personal (interactive) God with whom humans can communicate. Central to his character and how the world should work are the characteristics of love, compassion, and justice. However, as the Bible (the

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be prosecuted for illegally being in white areas if their pass book did not give them express permission (South African History Online, n.d.b).

Christian sacred text) explains, while humans are made in God's image, they rebelled against God and the brokenness, injustice, suffering, and pain on earth are the result of human sin. Some participants explicitly focused on the person of Jesus (God's son, and the means through which God reconciles the world to himself and reverses the effects of human rebellion) and emphasised these characteristics of compassion, love, and justice in the life of Jesus in their explanation of their motivations and identity (for example, see the books of Genesis, John, and Romans in the Holy Bible).

In the following excerpt, Susan gives an explanation for why she stays involved in her racial justice education work, despite challenges, by emphasizing the role that her understanding of who God is plays in her life:

> **Susan:** And then *of course*—I don't know if you're including any of this in your thing? But for me my faith obviously is the number one determining factor in all of this. Because I believe that justice is something that God cares about, and so, uh, I mean that's just, that's at the very core of everything.

Here her language "of course" and "obviously" show the normative element in this narrative. She emphasises it by calling her faith "the number one determining factor" in everything she does, and her justification for why she is involved in this particular work relates to her understanding of who God is. She sees him as a God who cares about justice. The implication in this is that because she sees her God in this way, she wants/needs to/should act in this way. The moral impulse to act comes from her understanding of God's character.

In his explanation of his initial involvement in racial justice work, Steven emphasises the interpersonal nature of God (the fact that humans can interact with him) as well as the idea that God has some ultimate plan for the good of the world and society.

> **Steven:** So there was a group of us that decided that what we would start doing is just praying and saying, "Well, God, what, what do you want us to do about this? What is it that you, you would have us do?"

Steven goes on to explain the tension he felt between the ideal values given to him by his faith tradition (an idea of living selflessly like Jesus) and his own reality of living a comfortable, self-centred life.

> **Steven:** I suppose that was probably the main catalyst to me realizing that it is my responsibility to do, to be a part of, of, changing the situations that exist, bringing *justice*, is [I] suppose, was the word we used a lot. And um, and not living for myself, but actually living for the outsider and the oppressed. Um, and that would be the way Jesus does things.

He clarifies this idea by saying,

> **Steven:** If I really believed in this Jesus that I do…I would be following in his footsteps and I would be involved in this kind of things.

Here again we see the moral power of narratives in giving individuals an organizing principle of what is the good, the true, and the just that one *should* strive for, even if one is not doing so currently (Smith, 2003). Steven's excerpt illustrates his idea that he *should* live a certain way, and his point of reference for how he should live comes from his guiding narrative, which centres around the life of Jesus.

Another participant, Joe, spent quite a bit of time in the interview explaining how his spiritual life is very significant in the work that he does. Joe was involved in academic work to promote peace, equality, and justice, and in this work he came to realise that Quakers (a sect with roots in the Christian tradition) were very central in promoting peace. In exploring this worldview and way of life, he came to have this spiritual aspect take a central role in his life and even speaks of his work now as a "calling." While he was engaged in this type of work previously, he now engages in it because he feels he *should* live out this calling whether it is easy or not.

Other participants mentioned religious and spiritual elements in passing; however, they did not appear to be as absolutely central as with these three participants. For example, Julie referenced being raised as a "pseudo-Christian" and then her parents getting "saved," and she later on referenced friendships with other "strong Christians" as being encouraging. Jennifer said she grew up in "obviously a Christian family" but did not reference her religion beyond that. While Hailey and Lewis both mentioned feeling like God wanted them to be involved in this work, this was not the main emphasis in their stories to the extent that it was with Joe, Susan, and Steven.

The Christian narrative provides a very strong organizing system for right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust. Since it is based in a transcendent source, it is a

powerful external authority for those who embrace it and has the ability to dramatically shape individuals' actions. However, one can see there are nuances in the manner of interpretation of this narrative, and that is then played out in the way individuals both act and articulate their action. Steven's version of this narrative seems to emphasise the person of Jesus as the central organizing principle. Steven looks at the life of Jesus and asks himself, "Am I living in a similar manner?," whereas Susan's version seems to focus more on absolute principles of right and wrong, justice and injustice found in God's character and explained in Christian scriptures. For example, before discussing how God cares about justice, Susan mentioned feeling worn out at times in working to bring more equality in the education system (through giving teachers access to better curriculum and resources and giving them opportunities to improve their skills and values). She says,

> **Susan:** You feel like you constantly, you're fighting a massive system and you trying, well, live, or work or whatever, *anti* that system, and, I guess, in any environment where you are swimming upstream, it's, that's tiring. So, that is challenging. Um, but I don't suppose justice was ever meant to be easy because, that's why we have injustice! [laughs] It's going to be easy if you go that way.

Susan's justification for continuing to swim upstream even when it is tiring is because of her understanding that she is doing the right thing, the thing that God requires of her.

The Following God narrative has the potential to challenge systems of racism and injustice, but again, its transformational power is linked to the manner in which it is interpreted. While Steven, Susan, and Joe seem convinced that God wants them to do this work, the previous apartheid regime also used the Christian narrative to justify its actions. The participants argue that bringing racial equality is seen as part of the purpose God has given them in the world; however, historically many white people (for example, colonisers and the apartheid regime) have conceived of their purpose in an opposite fashion. The gnostic dichotomous thinking of good versus evil and light versus dark fed into European ideas of civilised and savage as well as heathen and Christian (Steyn, 2001). This way of thinking cast white people in a savior role, sent with a divine mission to civilise and Christianise Africa. This thinking also allowed white people to be cast as the norm and black people as deviant, even evil. This type of thinking undergirded much of the rationalization for apartheid laws of segregation and oppression (Steyn, 2001).

"Quality Education for All": The Educationalist Narrative.

> **Susan:** [My parents] weren't the kind of teachers who just wanted to teach until eight til twelve, they were the kind of people like, that my sister and I had to spend our weekends painting boards, and marking soccer fields and stuff, 'cause they were fully sold out [laughs] for education. So, I guess I grew up with this thing that education is vital. And, like, without it… we're… messed [laughs].

Since this research focused particularly on the sphere of education, it is not surprising that almost all of the participants had very strong views on the importance of education. However, this was not seen as simply an aspect of treating everyone in an equal, humane manner. As Susan's quote above shows, decisions about what is right or good and who we are as humans were dictated by the understanding that education is key (perhaps *the* key) to what makes us who we are. In this narrative, "good" is defined as giving someone access to quality education, and "evil" is defined as denying people that education. One of Smith's (2003) key examples for how to determine when something has taken on the sacred nature of a large, guiding narrative is to do something opposed to a basic value in that narrative and see how people respond. While I myself did not try to prompt a reaction by opposing any narratives with my questions, many of the participants gave examples of people (both in the past and in the present) being denied quality education. The vehemence with which they told these stories and their obvious disgust for those denying education show the moral heart of the Quality Education for All narrative.

For example, few participants brought up very many aspects of apartheid injustices, but almost all the participants voluntarily singled out Bantu Education as one of the most unjust aspects of apartheid, as this comment from Jane shows:

> **Jane:** Bantu Education was wicked. [pause] Um, uh… there's just nothing else to say.

On the one hand, this statement could be read as a trite recitation of political correctness—the fact that Jane has "nothing else to say" implies that this belief is not one that is deeply held or substantiated. However, in the Quality Education for All narrative, poor education is evil. My field notes taken during the interview process showed that

when Jane made this statement, she made it quietly and with force, implying that there is nothing that *can* be said, because Bantu Education was *unspeakably* wicked. Further, she uses "wicked" rather than "wrong," which is a stronger moral condemnation. Later in the interview, Jane made a comment that explained the importance she places on education, therefore shedding light on why she sees Bantu Education as so evil. Jane shared a story about a friend being harassed out of the country because of her work with black students under apartheid, and she says,

> **Jane:** …that's how stern [members of the National Party government] were about keeping, about not educating the black people, because they know you can't stop educated people. They, they, just… um, they can take control of their lives in, in certain ways. But education sets you free. Not from complete tyranny. But it can, to, to a large extent.

Education in this quote is seen to be crucial in empowering people and setting them "free." Jennifer emphasised in her interview how important education is to get people to "think and to critically evaluate."

Many of the participants referenced their own good education. For example:

> **Jennifer:** But I had, I had such a richness in my upbringing. And, um, I had a, a privileged education.

> **Susan:** And obviously because I grew up in a white family, um, I had a really, opportunity for great education myself, and I went to really good schools. Always in the public system. Um, yeah, but really, really good schools around.

> **Simon:** I remember, a funny situation [when I was teaching], of this one well-known family, but the father actually came to the school and threatened to physically attack the principal! [chuckle] That was something that wouldn't have happened in my background; we went to this private school, expensive private school.

For these participants, providing Quality Education for All is made the ultimate good, and therefore, denying education is the ultimate evil. Since participants themselves were offered a good education, they feel a double obligation to provide good education to others.

The Sub-narratives

As mentioned in the introduction, these three large narratives are not contradictory or exclusive, and in fact, strains of them could be found in many of the participants' narratives. However, I would like to draw special attention to the specific nuances that certain combinations of stories create. These combinations are unique enough to warrant their own examination as narratives; however, it is also clear that they quite easily nest into the three larger narratives.

"Created Equal": The Religious Humanist Narrative.

> **Susan:** So, I guess I, from my whole, uh, upbringing and what I believe about God… I, I believe that all people are created equally and that all people um, should be becoming all they were created to be, or if you want to say, all people can reach dreams or goals that they set, and, um, I feel like in communities like [the one I work in] people have never been given those opportunities. A lot of people have never been given those opportunities.

As Susan exhibits in the statement above, her humanist ideas that all people are equal is based in a strong religious context. Her reason *why* she sees all people as equal and deserving of equal treatment is based in the idea that God created them all equal. Treating people differently, keeping them from learning, and denying them opportunities to develop ("becoming all they were created to be") are therefore unjust because it is going against their God-given rights. Here, her understanding of structural inequality is unclear. In the township community she works in, she says people have never "been given opportunities" to reach their potential, but she does not give an explanation as to *why* this community does not have opportunities.

Susan's beliefs echo Lewis's earlier statements,

> **Lewis:** I say to them we are all the same. God made us all the same. Maybe I have some talents that you haven't got, but I can tell you for sure, you have got some talents that I haven't got.

So while there is a strong People Are People element to these explanations of their beliefs, both Lewis and Susan have a distinctly religious narrative that underlies and informs their humanist narrative. In this narrative, to treat people unequally is not just to be inhumane,

it is to transgress a serious sacred teaching. This narrative also emphasises the innate potential and ability of all people, regardless of their circumstances. If this understanding of God-given human worth is coupled with an understanding of systemic injustice, this narrative has a basis to be a powerful critique of paternalistic "savior" narratives, since people are seen as *all* having the ability to contribute something, rather than needing a savior to rush in and help. However, if this God-given human potential narrative is coupled with an over-emphasis on individual choice, it can result in an understanding of inequality and poverty where the poor are blamed for their poverty ("They have the same potential as everyone, so why are they still poor?").

"Children's Right to Education": The Educationalist Humanist Narrative. This narrative places specific emphasis on the rights of children and particularly the right of children to a good education. I have designated this a hybrid of "humanist" and "education" because while the education narrative does encompass some of these ideas, this narrative *particularly* focuses on how the rights of young children are being denied because of a lack of education.

When it comes to children (who are dependent on others providing most things for them) and education (which is very difficult to obtain on one's own), many of the participants expressed a moral indignation over the fact that children were not receiving a good education. In this narrative, both a lack of providing decent education in the past and, more pressingly, a lack of decent education at present were seen as one of the ultimate evils.

> **Jennifer:** To try and start getting things right so these poor, these little children have got a chance in life. It's it's, it's, ja, we've got to start with the children… And we [are] never going to get, get our children to think and to critically evaluate what is what is going on in 80% of our schools… And if we, we're not going to address it at the bottom it's pointless putting sticky tape at the top. Trying to patch matric [grade 12], because it's not going to work.

Here, Jennifer is arguing for the urgency educators have to make sure that children get a good education, since it impacts the rest of their lives. Her black-and-white language

around this issue ("we're never going to get" and "it's pointless") show her firm belief in the importance of educating children and the normative power of this narrative in her life.

> **Hailey:** I mean you're fighting people who, who really don't, I suppose, don't have the passion and really care, um about the children. It's not about the children; it's about trying to impress the—trying to look good in the eyes of the public and the eyes of the world and whatever.

In the above quote, Hailey, one of the strongest proponents of this Children's Right to Education narrative, is revealing the moral indignation she feels when one of her central beliefs about what is good (educating children) is violated by others in the Education Department. From my notes, it is clear that her tone was one of intense frustration over those who are not putting the children at the centre of their work.

One of the characteristics of this narrative is that for those who identify with it, it has the potential to take a paternalistic stance towards others. Since it is focused around uneducated children, the participants who hold to this narrative are constructed as being in a superior position (given their status as both adults and as trained educators), which puts the work being done because of this narrative in a hierarchical frame.

"Holistic Development": The Centre of the Overlap. This narrative places an emphasis on improving education (Quality Education for All) but grounds this in an idea that all people need to become what they were created to be (Religious Humanist narrative). One participant summed up his view of why he would work to improve education for others with his definition of working for "God's Kingdom":

> **Steven:** I believe that when God's Kingdom reigns, it means people are at peace with one another (*shalom*), with themselves, and their environment. What that means is a healthy, vibrant, cohesive, and joyful community will come to exist, not just now but passed on from generation to generation. Some examples of this: there won't be hungry people or children; healthy families will dominate; abuse, neglect, infidelity will not exist; and probably most importantly, children will grow up with the support, education foundation, and much more to become all they were created to be—healthy, vibrant, and selfless citizens of this world bringing more and more peace and harmony and true justice to more and more communities.

Education is seen here as being part of this larger picture of human development that is initiated by God. The "kingdom of God" is seen here to be a situation of holistic human flourishing.

Smaller Stories: Narrative Identity

"People's lives are also always constituted and guided by smaller, sometimes autobiographical narratives of personal existence and experience." (Smith, 2003, p. 75)

"We come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by our location (usually unconsciously) in social narratives and networks of relations that are rarely of our own making." (Somers, 1992, p. 600)

As both Smith (2003) and Somers (1992) have argued, people's identities can also be conceived of as narrative in constitution. This next section will deal with how the participants identified themselves. Through both their explicit statements and the stories they told, the participants shared their sense of who they are. Unsurprisingly, this was quite strongly linked to the larger narratives they seemed to hold. There were three primary identities that participants shared: Educator, Christian, and Caring Individual. These were the three most common responses to the question at the end of each interview of how they identified themselves, and these were also three that were very easily corroborated with the other stories they shared. Only one person mentioned race in reference to his or her identity. Since race, which is of central interest in this study, was not focused on by the participants in describing their identities, a full exploration of this is undertaken in the following chapter. There were a few other identities mentioned by participants, including gender, age, parenthood, sexual orientation, and nationality. However, since most of these participants also mentioned the other three identities as well, those are the three that I will explore at length.

Educator. When I asked participants to share how they identified themselves, the majority of them mentioned being an educator or a teacher in some form.

Jane: I don't think I'm very well-known outside of the school sort of system, and then I think just sort of teacher, just as a teacher.

Julie: I always think of myself as a teacher first. Always an educationalist perhaps, but as a teacher. And I don't, I don't mean a teacher in the classroom but I mean somebody who can teach other people. But within that, I, the word teacher to me simply means I'm a facilitator of knowledge. I'm a very strong constructivist, I don't mean by teaching I can impart my knowledge to you, but rather that I may have knowledge, I don't know, and I can help facilitate—I always see myself as a teacher first.

As the quote from Julie shows, being an educator is not something that only happens in the classroom during school hours. Being an educator means being focused on giving others access to knowledge, whatever form that takes. This also is seen as a profession that becomes such a part of a person's identity that it is a passion.

Hailey: I don't see myself as a, a school principal or anything, I just see myself as here to work in education and to serve first children, really more than anything else.

Jennifer: I think I'm passionate about ECD [early childhood education].

Hailey's quote shows that for these participants, the profession of teaching is not just a job; for the participants it seemed to be some form of a calling. Hailey says, "I just see myself as here to work in education;" in other words, her purpose for being here on earth, the core of her identity, is linked to educating and serving children.

The identity of "teacher" or "educator" also overlaps with other aspects of a person's identity.

Caring individual.

Hailey: And I think something that, ja, just came from the heart. I came from a very, um, child-friendly home, if you want to call it that.

Another strong identity that came up when I asked participants to share how they saw themselves was related to their sense of serving and caring for others (especially children). As Hailey's quote shows, she says her desire to work with children in

education "came from the heart." Often the participants' sense of themselves as educator was tied directly to their interactions with children.

> **Jennifer:** And I think, I suppose I'm, it's, I—I suppose I've got a strong heart to sort of improve things.
> **Interviewer:** Mmm.
> **Jennifer:** There's that compassion I suppose.

In Jennifer's case, she first described herself as someone passionate about ECD, and then she went on to explain that she also sees herself as someone with a "strong heart" to improve things, and that "strong heart" she recognises as "compassion."

A slight nuance of this is Jane's description of herself as a "stepping stone":

> **Jane:** So, sometimes it's nice to be a stepping stone, and just, um, you don't have to go on and on helping people, but if you can help them to get one step up, then they can go a bit further on their own.

Jane emphasises with this description that people are born with capabilities, but at times the larger context makes it difficult for them to get ahead in life. In cases like this, Jane sees herself as a "stepping stone" to help them make it to the next level. This is also an image of service for others. Jane's other main identity was "mother." Historically, the feminist definition of motherhood was the "subjugation of the self for the needs of others" (Gieve, 1987). This putting aside of one's self and needs for others can be seen as an aspect of identity for both a mother (or parent) and a caring person.

Spiritual person.

> **Joe:** What's very important about me… is also sort of a spiritual dimension to my life.

Like Joe, in the course of the interviews several of the participants focused on their spiritual lives as being very important to them. Steven explains below that his identity as a "follower of Jesus" is in some ways an "aspirational" value, rather than a lived value, and this sometimes creates tension:

Steven: But as I think about it, um, you know I think, I like to think that more and more my identity is found in Jesus, so, um, so, yeah I wouldn't say totally, but most of the time that's why I do what I do. Um, because I, yeah I, I believe that, that uh, I have a relationship with him in and, and that, that he wants me to live, live in a certain way which is definitely going to be best for me, so I'd say ja, my identity is, is there.

Julie was a participant who did not mention her spirituality when asked about her identity; however, in a few of the stories that she told about her relationships with people of other races, she mentioned one of the things which helped her to connect was their common identity as Christians.

Julie: And, again, I was blessed, Thulile is a very strong Christian, so we had a common ground that we could talk about and work from.[27]

Again, identities are narrative and constantly changing, and people hold multiple overlapping identities all the time. The following quote from Hailey reveals both her sense of self as a "caring individual" (she is "here to serve")—and to specifically serve children through education ("educator")—but also as someone who has been given gifts by God that should be used for others.

Hailey: I just, I just see myself as being here to, to serve. And to, ja use the gifts that I believe God has given me not for me but to use them to serve others.

Other identifications. Since many of my participants were near retirement age or had formally retired from the educational sector and were now involved in pro-bono non-profit work or grass-roots early childhood development teacher training, it is not surprising that age was an identity that several participants mentioned in their interviews, as the following quote from Joe shows:

Joe: I'm 68 now, um—you know, you missed your chance to respond in shock "No you don't look 68!" [laughter on both sides] But I guess in mid-70s or something I might think, "Well is it time to sort of step back a bit?" and so on.

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[27] Comments such as this are examined in more detail in the next chapter with relation to how participants perceive difference. In this chapter, it is used simply to illustrate Julie's identification as Christian.

Age, and a sense of urgency in looking for others to finish or continue their work, was a theme that emerged not only in Joe's interview. Jennifer refers to both her age and her passion for raising the standard of education provided to the poorest in the province of KwaZulu-Natal and those who were previously disadvantaged by apartheid when she says,

> **Jennifer:** Does wisdom come? [laughs] I don't know. I don't know, you know it's worried me as a younger person, but it's worried me more and more as I've got older.

When asked about his social identity, Simon mentioned age as well:

> **Simon:** Then um, older man. [chuckles; pause] Which is both positive and negative because I don't feel in any way unhappy about getting older.

Both Julie and Jane mentioned being a mother as a significant aspect of their identities. Julie mentioned this in a story where she was talking about her first black friend:

> **Julie:** And as we talked we realised well, both of us, that actually, we both were mothers; we felt exactly the same thing. We wanted the same thing for our children, we had the same desires and aspirations for our children. It just happened, now, that she was black and I was white.

Jane, when describing how she saw herself, stated,

> **Jane:** When my kids were little, I was known as Grant and Sally's mom, or Chuck's mom, [laughs] so you sort of also get that.

> A few participants mentioned seeing themselves as "South African" or "African."

> **Susan:** I'm always just like, "I'm South African."

> **Lewis:** I'm a South African to the back teeth. I'm an African to the back teeth.

> Julie mentioned being a woman as the second most important part of her identity, and Simon mentioned being queer as an aspect of his; however, no other participants

mentioned sexuality or gender in their identification. Joe mentioned being an "internationalist" because of his upbringing in Australia.

Motivations for Involvement in Racial Justice Activist Work in Education

Smith (2003) argues that an understanding of individual's larger guiding narratives and personal narratives uncovers an individual's moral framework that prompts his or her social action. In this sense, humans exhibit agency but within the framework of a moral system (for example, whether it is an honor code of killing in the Mafia or returning a wallet full of money). This does not mean that people only act out of a sense of duty. Somers (1997), Warren (2010), and Smith (2003) also clearly argue that it is people's sense of *who they are* (e.g., as Christians, teachers, or caring people) that motivates their actions, but this sense of who they are is embedded in larger narratives that encompass moral orders.

In the interviews, in order to get a sense of what was motivating people to do this work, I asked for their story of initial involvement as well as what helps them keep going in the face of challenges. I tried to find out from the perspective of the participants *why* they were involved in this type of work. In the following sections I will pair a narrative identity with a specific motivation to illustrate how identity and motivation go together.

Calling and religious obligation (identity as a spiritual person).
Calling.

> **Joe:** I guess I identify as someone who is doing what they feel called to do and feeling enormously privileged in the process... I don't think of myself, I just think— think the main thing I think about is my calling is to teach peace, and um, just get on with it.

Joe is a Quaker, and while he did not have a religious upbringing, he kept "running into" Quakers through his interest in Peace Studies. He shared he was at a spiritual retreat,

> **Joe:** …and from the front, the speaker said, " You, Joe." Pointing me me, Joe, all the way down the back corner who didn't know anyone. He said, "You know, your calling is to teach peace, isn't it?" and I'd never really thought of it as a calling. [Where I am from] we don't really talk about God, it's like being in

Northern Europe type of thing. You know, things don't talk about it in polite society, you know God and—it really struck me then, yes this is my calling, and that's what I'm here for. And uh, I'd, I'd been doing it without fully recognizing it.

Joe has fully embraced this idea of calling, which he defines as being both difficult but rewarding.

> **Joe:** I think there are two characteristics of a calling. One is that they are challenging, they're not just easy sort of things. Secondly they are ultimately satisfying, and you just think, wow, this is fantastic!

This concept of an ultimately satisfying but also challenging life purpose or calling was something Steven shared as well when he stated,

> **Steven:** There've been many challenges along the way, and I believe that I'm still here because of that calling on my life. Rather than because, um, I think it's a good thing to do, or I think it's um, it feels good or whatever the case might be. Because it doesn't always feel good. And up, so um, yeah, I believe that this is where God wants me and I believe for this country—it's one of the reasons Jesus would be doing this kind of thing is because, um this country needs it, and needs more people willing to look towards the outsider rather than the insider.

Like Joe, Steven had a combination of deliberate choice and a sort of "stumbled upon" discovery to his calling. Steven was teaching at a private school and volunteering with a small community development organisation. He was approached by the board to take on the position of director. While being a director was not something he had planned, he says,

> **Steven:** As I looked at my life and looked at the changes that God had made in my life and… also the circumstances I was in, in my present position, I realised that God was actually calling me for this and getting me ready to, to manage this.

Lewis, who is married to Hailey and works in education in the rural sector, also spoke of this sense of calling.

> **Lewis:** And again Hailey and I felt we had been called here to come and offer what we could to rural education, and maybe impact, you know, make whatever impact we could on rural education.

Religious obligation. While Susan did not use the word "calling," she did exhibit as strong moral "should" springing from her religious tradition. In the following quote, Susan was discussing what keeps her going in the face of challenges. Previously she had been discussing difficulties such as a lack of capacity to upskill educators who desire (and require) further training, meeting people who are uninterested in improving education, low finances, and working with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop best practices for how to bring better ECD access to the majority of South Africa's children.

> **Susan**: Because I believe that justice is something that God cares about, and so, uh, I mean that's just, that's at the very core of everything. So, yeah, it's because I don't think that—aw, I'm going to probably get all emotional about it [tears up; wipes eyes; laughs]. I don't think that Jesus would lose hope in the people who I lose hope in all the time.

Seeing herself in a relationship with a just God means that justice is something that Susan feels she should care about as well, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable it is. She implies that since Jesus would not lose hope in people that she loses hope in, she should keep going and be more like him in this regard. Susan also showed this obligation in her language she used to describe her vision for how she would like to see South Africa one day in the future. She links people fulfilling their purpose in life ("becoming all they were created to be") with her values of selfless sharing and community.

> **Susan:** …I feel really strongly that part of people becoming all they were created to be, is people understanding that they're not here for themselves. So it's about community and it's about sharing, and it's about making sure that everybody has enough, rather than some of us being super wealthy and some of us not having enough food to eat.

Again, it is unclear from her explanation of this future, equal society if she has a strong understanding of the sources of structural inequality and what it will take to dismantle this system. There is an understanding of inequality ("some of us being super wealthy and some of us not having enough food to eat"), but in this statement it is linked to selfishness and lack of sharing. There is no reference to the roots of inequality (one of the reasons some people are "super wealthy" in South Africa is because of the history of

apartheid), nor to redress or structural changes that can be implemented to right the wrongs of the past.

Compassion and guilt (caring person).

Compassion. Warren (2010) puts forward the concept of a "moral shock" as motivating or sparking people into activism. While none of these narratives had a specific "shocking" experience, several of them shared how their emotions were stirred when they saw the difference between their strongly held ideals about education and humanity and the poverty, injustice, and inhumanity that happened during apartheid and continues in our poor education system today. In all of these cases, the participants did not blame people for their poverty or lack of education but rather were able to acknowledge the circumstances that had created this situation, and they were compelled to act to put an end to these kinds of situations.

Julie shares a story about working at a teacher training college and making a joke about slipping in some money if they wanted to pass. When she got the exam books back, two books had money in them.

> **Julie:** I felt *sick* that I had joked, and I had thought that they'd understood that I had joked. And again it was so sad for me that they thought that was the only way that they were going to pass. It was so *sad* for me because by that stage I'd realised it was actually about building people up.

In this story, we see how when Julie was confronted with the reality of the student teachers' sense of inadequacy, she had a strong emotional reaction, realizing that there was some larger circumstance that was causing this negative behavior. As Smith (2003, p. 15) states,

> Human emotions provide excellent telltale indicators of the moral assumptions, convictions, and expectations that pervade and order our personal and collective lives… these emotions and most others are signs of moral orders fulfilled and moral orders violated. They serve as clues of often unarticulated, assumed beliefs about and commitments to normative expectations embedded in larger moral systems within which people make sense of and live out their lives.

Many of the participants had personal stories of friends or colleagues who were facing immense difficulties, sometimes as a result of present racism and other times because the economic structure in South Africa is still stratified on racial lines because of the history of apartheid, the result of this being that many black people still live in poverty, while most white people remain wealthy.[28] These personal stories showed that personal connections with other people and a strong belief that People Are People causes distress and moral outrage when their friends are not treated well.

> **Simon:** I think one thing that white people often just don't quite get is how much disaster—damage—hits black people. Um, especially working class black people, but not only working class, I mean I, I [previously in the conversation] referred to the courses in '87-'88 for these UDF [United Democratic Front] comrades. One of them did very, very well, and he became a city manager… and he came to see me and invited me to his wedding. He was doing very well for himself. Um, and then he and his wife killed themselves. [pause] And we never got to the bottom of what that was about. I don't know if it was about an affair, I don't know if they found out they were HIV-positive and couldn't face it, I don't know. And you think, that wouldn't happen, that wouldn't happen to people from my background, that sort of thing. Like really, extreme, extreme situations… But… the more I listen to people talking about violence in their lives, the more I think why are things not much worse? Given what people have experienced, why are they not more violent than they actually are? Why… so I'm quite interested in where are the restraints on violence in society? If you listen to young black people talking about what happens to them—it's like ugh, you know—and you're still sane?

Here Simon relates a story of a personal relationship he had with someone, and from his manner when he told this story, and his comments afterwards, one could see he was

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[28] According to 2011 study by the Institute of Race Relations, white people hold 69.2% of all top management positions in the economy, while black people hold only 30.8% of top management positions. (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2012 South Africa Survey). The unequal distribution of wealth is also seen in the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation study (IJR, 2013) which highlighted that over 73% of white people are found in the two highest living standard measures (LSM) groups, as opposed to black people, where only 16.3 % are in the highest LSM groups. While the past ten years has seen a growth in the black middle class, the lowest for LSM groups are constituted almost entirely of black people; 35% of the black population is in these four lowest groups (IJR, 2013). As Holborn (2012) has pointed out, social networks still play a huge role in business hiring and opportunities, and therefore, despite the Employment Equity Act, white people are still benefiting from the historic privileges given to white people under apartheid. This is supported by the finding that black/African people make up 41.2% of the educated post-school population in South Africa, yet only 21.1% of managers are black/African, "suggesting that a lack of people with adequate qualifications is not necessarily the reason for the smaller portion of managers that are African" (SAIRR, 2012, p. 242). This finding does not necessarily hold up with the professional sector, where lack of qualified Africans could be holding back diversity, however, Soudien (2004) has shown the education provided in historically black-only areas is still not of a high standard. In other words, the historic privileges and disadvantages of race continue to play out in material ways today.

visibly moved. Here we see how compassion is not just some form of general concern for humanity, but here, as in cases with other participants, it takes the form of the face of a friend. The common bond created through relationships helps create a sense of shared identity. For the most part, participants were not compelled to help some abstract group of people. Rather, their personal relationships with people of other races opened their eyes to the realities of structural injustice or oppression, and this injustice conflicted with their moral code embedded in the People Are People narrative, as well as their personal identities as Caring People, and this prompted action.

Julie shared a story about a time she was leading a workshop on teaching reading and was verbally attacked by a young Zulu woman in the audience on the basis that she was white/English and did not know anything about the woman's context. Julie was moved when the rest of her (Zulu/black) co-workers immediately jumped in to defend her. She shared the following story, and mutual identification across racial lines can be seen both in her retelling of the story and also the words of her co-worker.

> **Julie:** I said to her one day, we were in Joburg doing something, and I said, "I'll never forget that day," and she said, "Oh, I was so angry with her," and I said, "I think I need to say, I've never said thank you for how you defended me. She said, "No Julie, it wasn't you, it was—she was attacking a person *that was as if she was attacking me.*" And you know what that told me? That although I don't see things as racial, or being involved with it because I want necessarily to uplift the community, it has happened like that. And I've been supported in that. Does this all make some sense to you? (emphasis added)

Here we see Julie explaining how her personal relationships with others have led to a deep co-identification across racial lines, a real embodiment of the People Are People narrative, which leads to actions on behalf of those across racial lines.

Jane told a story which highlights how she acted out of compassion for her domestic worker, one of her first friends of another race. This action ties in so closely with her moral framework that in the telling, she first described it as a "kind" action, then corrected herself to describe it as "ordinary," emphasizing acting towards others with care is not exceptional behavior but expected behavior.

> **Jane:** I did help her a little bit, I remember making—her children weren't allowed to go on a school outing unless they had school uniform, so we bought the

material, so we sat and sewed dresses for all of them. So that's the only kind thing, or ordinary thing, that I remember doing.

Guilt. One participant brought up guilt as part of the reason for her involvement in education work today.

> **Interviewer:** Do you ever think of yourself as a white person, or are there contexts where you feel maybe more white than others, or is that not something that you, that really comes to your mind or you really experience or think about that often?
> **Jennifer:** [pause] I—I suppose I feel guilty?
> **Interviewer**: Mmm.
> **Jennifer:** I do feel a guilt. Because I've had privilege. I had, had a, you know a wonderful upbringing from my parents. Um, we didn't have lots of money. But, um, you know my Dad worked in the banks, and there was very little money to go around, and there were four of us. But I had, I had such a richness in my upbringing. And, um, I had a, a privileged education, so there is that guilt there. So I want to give back, I suppose. So if you think, in—and you said, going back to your question, do I think of myself in terms of being white, I have that, I suppose that we have a guilt of that.

The quote above shows that Jennifer feels guilty about being white, but this is also linked to her motivation for why she does the specific work she does in education—she realises she has had a privileged education because she is white and so she wants to "give back." This feeling of guilt shows that Jennifer holds to a moral code where quality education and caring for others are good. The fact that she experienced the good while others did not (and do not) creates the moral tension resulting in guilt.

In his interview, Steven also referenced guilt in terms of his motivations for why he first got involved in education work that focused on empowering the impoverished, predominantly black neighbouring community. He references the injustices of apartheid and the unfair privilege he has experienced as well as current inequalities when he says,

> **Steven:** I suppose there were times I felt guilt and shame about what had gone on, and there still are sometimes. Even some of the decisions I make now I struggle with right now, sometimes, when I think about how should I be living this life, if I consider my neighbour down the road, the black neighbour specifically in this country, and um, that's a wrestle for me all the time. But I… ja, I like to think it's a good wrestle to have, and I like to think that's part of, um, living this out. And um, I don't ever want to end up in a situation where I find myself in a bubble where I don't have to wrestle with these things. You know maybe, maybe one day

you won't have to wrestle because more and more people will live like this, um, especially my fellow white South Africans.

Since Steven was the second participant to voluntarily bring up guilt (and interestingly, also connected to whiteness, which will be explored more fully in the next chapter), I asked him to explain what he meant when he used words like "guilt" and "shame." For Steven, guilt and shame are not positive things, but they seem to be necessary things. He says,

> **Steven:** I like to think that a good way to think about it, I'm not saying it is, but I *think* it is, is that guilt and shame are, are good things when they can convict you and show you the things that, that are not right—but they're not good things. They, they're not something that I believe that you should be dwelling on, or, or holding onto for long periods. Um, obviously if one isn't willing to change, then, then one can't expect the guilt and the shame to go away. But, um, but I think if one's willing to say "Okay, I realise there's something wrong and I need to do something about it." So I think initially they're good, but if one dwells on it, then they, they actually become detrimental, and I think um, I don't think God wants us to dwell on, on guilt and shame.

Steven's explanation of guilt is that it is not a good long-term motivator.[29] It is an indicator that something is wrong and needs to change—so in that sense, it is an emergency response to wrongdoing that prompts one to correct his or her behavior. It is seen to prompt action, to get people to be "willing to change" and to have the feeling that they "need to do something about it."

Pragmatic and "for the children" (educator).

Pragmatic. There were a few participants who mentioned that their work has less to do with a large ideological reason and more to do with paying the bills. These participants, however, also mentioned that while "paying the bills" was their primary motivation when they set out in their education work, their personal friendships and first-

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[29] It is worth noting that Steven used the word "responsibility" often in his descriptions of his activities. It is because of this that I would place him more under the "calling" category than the "guilt" or the "moral obligation" category. As Warren (2010) says about white racial justice activists in the USA, "responsibility is not the same as guilt… activists speak of a willing acceptance of the responsibility to act. In other words, a calling is not something they feel they should do but rather something they want to do because it gives their lives meaning. In this way, activists appear to have embraced this duty or responsibility to act" (p. 85).

hand experiences of previous and present injustices in the education system are a large part of why they continue today. If a teacher chose to stay in education under the new administration,[30] he or she had no choice about which children appeared in his or her classrooms. This could result in a teacher doing work to educate pupils who were majority black, and rather than being motivated to bring some equality and redress for the past, it could simply be a job. For some participants, this was how they started out.

However, as the majority of the participants are now retired from formal teaching positions and are voluntarily continuing with pro-bono education work focused on upskilling teachers in disadvantaged communities, it does seem that a real internal desire to see change and not only monetary gain is currently the primary motivator.

There is an interesting paradox between the combinations of people who "found themselves" in situations where they were suddenly teaching predominantly black students in previously disadvantaged communities, and others who intentionally set out on that path. Julie's story shows a good mixture of someone who first got involved in this out of necessity but then continued both with her paid and unpaid education work because she recognised a need:

> **Julie:** We were in the department with the amalgamation and we all had to decide if we were taking the package—and we were not taking the package—this was around 1996, but we stayed in the department. I stayed not out of any altruistic motive whatsoever, but because my husband was having a breakdown and he needed to leave work and one of us had to earn a salary and that was going to be me.

But then she progressed to forming much deeper friendships with people and coming to understand the realities and challenges that teachers were facing because of lack of adequate training, both under apartheid and at present. Here Julie is referencing a situation where people in the Department of Education were misreporting on the work that was being done, and she says,

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[30] See Dekker (2011) for an exploration of the identity construction of Afrikaner car guards in Durban. Many of her participants had previously held government jobs (railway, administration, and so on) under apartheid, and when government institutions were reorganized, many Afrikaners left or took redundancy pay in anticipation that they would lose their jobs because of their whiteness or because they did not want to work with people of other races.

> **Julie:** I stayed in it because I needed to earn money, and then I stayed in it because I could see I could make a contribution, I could make a contribution, even if it was just getting one person to tell the truth, I could do that… I also knew that if I could affect one teacher, that was forty children in the year. And next year another forty children.

Julie's statement shows her understanding that by impacting teachers she would be able to have an exponential effect on the level of education in South Africa, as each year the teachers would impact a new group of students.

Joe also had a story of "falling into" his present position of working in academia around issues of peace and social justice. He had a colleague who worked in peace studies who

> **Joe:** …was looking to retire in about 1990, so he picked on someone, someone young and uh, and so on, and so that was me. And that was, that was, as it turned out, a great gift.

However, similar to Julie, later in the interview, Joe shares about being told his calling is to teach peace and he says,

> **Joe:** It really struck me then, yes, this is my calling, and that's what I'm here for. And uh, I'd, I'd been doing it without fully recognizing it.

Again, in Hailey's comments we see the duality of both being pulled into something by necessity, or accident, and then falling in love with it:

> **Hailey:** But, we needed the finances, um, and so I applied and got a teaching post at the school, and just found it absolutely amazing working with those children.[31]

    "For the children." As Hailey's previous comment shows, once she began working in this environment, her passion for the children motivated her to continue. For many of the respondents, the impact that their work would make on children was a huge motivator. One could argue this source of motivation is rooted in all of the stories and identities; in other words, as humane people, innocent children are important to protect and develop; as religious people, children are precious and important to God; as

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[31] Hailey's use of the word "those" in describing the children is an example of the way the language of the participants often revealed a tension between their professed ideals of non-racialism and color-blindness and their unconscious use of racial and othering language. This idea is explored more fully in the chapter on race (Chapter Six).

educators, children are our future leaders, and if they do not have access to a good education now, then it is too late to fix it later.

Steven, in discussing what keeps him going when things in his work get tough, says,

> **Steven:** Ultimately, when I think of the, the children we serve, it's not about me and what I feel actually, it's actually about *them* what what's best for *them*.

Julie, who focuses on upskilling teachers, says,

> **Julie:** And I said, why am I still involved? I'm still involved because I'm passionate about educating young children.

The times when respondents got the most upset in the interviews were on topics relating to children not getting access to the education they need (due to past injustices or present), as can be seen in this quote from Jennifer about why she thinks her work is important:

> **Jennifer:** To try and start getting things right so these poor, these little children have got a chance in life. It's, it's, it's, ja, we've got to start with the children.

In the following quote, Jane relates a story from her work about helping someone access free textbooks online and navigating the Department of Education website.

> **Jane:** And, I cannot—I've been on all the Department of Education websites, they'll tell you what career opportunities, what jobs there are, how you can get more money here, what you can do. There's not one mention of schools, there's not one mention of children, there's not one mention of books. Um, and nobody answers their phone in the Education Department. [pause] So, um, I can't even remember what you asked me.

Jane's frustration here is that there is not one mention of "schools," "children," or "books"—the elements she thinks are elemental aspects everyone (and in particular the South African government) should be focusing on. She became so upset when discussing these issues that once she got on this topic, she forgot what my initial question was about.

Hailey echoes this same passion for children and righteous indignation over the way the children in the rural school she came to teach at were written off as being too far behind to ever catch up.

> **Hailey:** All I heard was negatives. And I took their picture home and I literally wept, and I said, "I can't—you cannot do this to children."

This emphasis on "cannot" indicates Hailey is operating out of a strong moral framework here—people "cannot" deny children education or write them off; this is out of her moral boundaries. In the following quote Hailey, relates another incident where she became upset because the children were not being given first priority:

> **Hailey:** I had an Education Department official telling me—I had children coming from a school where they spoke English second language, and they come to our school and they learning first language—and he said they have to write ANAs [Annual National Assessments]. And I asked for a special dispensation for them, and he just said, "Let them fail." And I said, and I—I didn't say anything, but I like, I *cannot* do that to children, psychologically.

As these two incidents reveal, the greatest reaction came from participants when they were talking about situations where children were not put at the centre of some policy or departmental plan, or where they felt needy children were being overlooked. Jennifer shares about visiting ECD classes where schools are under-resourced, with the result that good ECD practice is not being implemented, and describes herself as being "horrified" because the children were unable to learn properly:

> **Jennifer:** You know, I've been into classrooms where there are forty-nine little children stuffed into a room, and it's all tables and chairs, they—it's, it's not good practice being put into the schools. It's just tables and chairs. It's, the one school that I went to I was horrified, was two years ago, there were forty-nine in the, in this one classroom, tables and chairs wall-to-wall, and then every few minutes "Ma'am, can I go to the toilet, ma'am, can I go to the toilet?" The children needed to move.

Lewis and Hailey not only teach children, but also run an after-school programme at an educational centre where children can learn computer skills, read, and play chess. Lewis is passionate about the educational side of the centre but also that the children in the community have a safe place to be outside of school hours.

> **Lewis:** And what has driven us on is our intense desire to impact children—however many, whoever we come into contact with, to actually improve their lot in life.

Lewis went on to say in the interview that he doesn't see himself as being special, or altruistic:

> **Lewis:** That's all. Um, and there's nothing else, there's no personal glory, there's no self-gratification, it's nothing like that, it is purely a service to the children, and in the best interests of the children, and that's, that's as simple as it is.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the "big stories" which seemed to be undergirding both the participants' identities and the moral framework from which they acted. The big stories of People Are People, Following God, and Quality Education for All, as well as the various nuances produced when these narratives overlapped, seem to have provided a sense of identity and moral framework which prompt and motivate these participants to be involved in education work that is aiming to bring a more racially just society. These participants see themselves as educators, as Christians, and as caring people, and these identities spur action grounded from a moral framework. As Warren (2010) says, activism for many social activists "does not represent a denial of self but rather a way to define the self as a moral actor" (p. 20).

None of the identities that the participants voluntarily shared with me seemed to reference race or whiteness, and I therefore had to explicitly bring up the topic of race with the participants. Considering that they self-identified as someone whose work was part of bringing racial justice, this absence of race as well as the double standards and tensions in their discussions of race and difference are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Six:

Race, the Absent Element

As a researcher researching in the area of race and identity, I was very interested to see what role race played in the narratives and motivations of the participants. Most South Africans' primary identities lie in their home language, neighbourhood, or race (IJR, 2013), and thus working for people who are in a primary identity group different from one's own is a bit of an anomaly. Although some of the participants started out working in the public sector and therefore post-1994 had no control over which students they taught, many of the participants are now retired from formal education work yet continue to do volunteer work in teacher training or education for children who do not have access to this type of education because of the history of apartheid.

So while participants were working to bring justice for people not in their racial group, in the stories that the participants shared, as well as when I explicitly asked them to identify themselves, their primary ways of identification were not racial. Further, it was not only that participants did not seem to identify as racially white, they also employed colour-blind frameworks for their interactions with people of other races as well. Critical race theory is less concerned with questions like, "What are white people's opinions?" as it is with questions of meaning and construction of meaning—for example, what white people mean when they use words like "white" or talk about race. So using that theoretical framework, I will explore some of the major themes around race and whiteness that emerged as well as compare the participants' understandings of a white racial identity with Steyn's (2001) work on white narrative identities.

Anti-apartheid = Anti-racist = Race Does Not Matter

All of the participants constructed their ideas of race in opposition to the framework of apartheid racism, which argued there was something fundamentally and qualitatively different about people of different races. All of the participants had an understanding that this conception of race was completely wrong. They all saw race as something that was not rooted in biological fact; it was an "accident of birth" (Julie) and as irrelevant as hair colour (Julie and Jane), and treating people differently on the basis of

skin colour was wrong. These are all elements that came through strongly in the People Are People narrative.

Additionally, most participants revealed a strong bias towards colour-blindness. This was held up as the ideal. In fact, many of the respondents told a story where race was present, but they did not notice it at first. These stories were often told as "turning point" stories, tangible signs to themselves that they are "no longer" racist or trapped into viewing things in a racial way. These stories had the ring of conversion stories, variations of the "I once was lost, but now I'm found" narrative told by charismatic religious converts (Smilde, 2005). Perhaps because the majority of these respondents spent a large portion of their lives in apartheid, these moments are significant for the participants, as concrete examples that they are moving beyond the racist ways of apartheid thinking, as Julie's story shows below:

> **Julie**: The other day and I was talking and I said, "Oh, I forgot you were black," and I realised how far along the road I've come. That I simply don't like, you've got blonde hair, I've got grey hair, it simply doesn't occur to me. Then I know how I've grown. Because I mean I came out of apartheid era. I certainly know that.

This type of story was repeated by several respondents; for example, Jane shared a similar story of teaching and realizing she did not automatically "know" how many students of each race were in her class:

> **Jane**: Every year we always had to fill in a form of how many blacks, whites, coloureds you had, or people would say, "How many black kids have you got in your class?" and it was always very hard for me to say how many I had in my class, because I never bothered to count how many there were. And they didn't stand out as a separate group, they never stood out as a separate group, so you always had to, you know, do it, like you say, "How many dark haired kids do you have?" You'd have to count.

Lewis and Hailey also shared about not noticing race in their classrooms, and Susan and Steven both mentioned not noticing race in their interactions with black co-workers. However, there is a double standard at play with these stories of colour-blindness, because although almost all participants emphasised the irrelevance of race and held colour-blindness as an ideal, in their stories and answers to questions, they referred to

people with racial labels (as "black"—sometimes "African"—"white," "Indian," and "coloured").

Some participants also used othering language, like "those children" (Hailey), when referring to people of a different race. This reveals a tension regarding the participants' conceptualizations of race and difference, because while they explicitly want to affirm colour-blindness and equality between people, they still perceive things racially and still see differences between people. This tension is captured in Julie's quote about her and Thulile's common Christian identity:

> **Julie:** And, again, I was blessed, Thulile is a very strong Christian, so we had a common ground that we could talk about, and work from.

On one level, this is an affirmation of unity, commonality, and sameness built around a shared religious identity. But in emphasizing the common religious identity, Julie simultaneously shows an awareness of difference between them—the religious identity was needed in order to help them bridge their differences and connect.

Dealing with Difference: Race, Culture, Language, Class

While participants expressed no difficulty interacting with different people because of race, they mentioned the biggest differences they see and feel today are language, culture, or class. Scholars have showed that these things can be viewed as new markers of race or difference in a so- called non-racial society (Ballard, 2003).

> **Julie**: And I thought after all these years, and John and I were very close, very close, um, he, that joking still was, had a cultural issue. It was, ja, I was really surprised about that.

In the quote above Julie shared a story about joking with her black boss about needing a hip flask, only to find out that he was not laughing at the joke because he did not know what a hip flask was. Julie shared that humor is often something she struggles with in inter-racial relationships, and she attributes this to cultural differences. However, what is interesting about this specific story is that Julie is sharing it as an example of a cultural difference that creates a barrier—implying that even though she is very close with John,

there are still differences between them because of their cultures that keep them from connecting as easily as she could with someone from her own culture. Julie attributes the difference to culture but does not acknowledge the differences of class or systemic privilege attached to the knowledge of hip flasks. Hip flasks, like cigars (Wenger, Malone, George, & Bero, 2001), are markers of economic privilege and status in Western society. It connotes images of a polished gentleman drinking his whiskey on the sly. It may be true that growing up, John did not encounter anyone who used a hip flask, but is this because black people do not use hip flasks or because under apartheid the majority of people were poor and therefore no one attained a lifestyle where a luxurious item such as a hip flask would be purchased? In Julie's perspective, culture is seen as essential, immutable, and prescriptive. The economic, social, and structural influences on culture are obscured in this view. In a sense, when individuals hold rigid views of cultural differences and see them as fixed entities passed down through birth, culture can easily become a politically correct substitute for what would have been seen as racial differences twenty years ago (Ballard, 2003).

Many of the participants referenced language—feeling different or being more aware of their race in contexts where they are a minority and do not know the language. Only one participant had a basic understanding of isiZulu, though over 70% of KwaZuluNatal residents speak isiZulu as a mother tongue. Rudwick (2008) notes that

> linguistic features still play a decisive role and constitute a dividing force in the economic empowerment of the individual. In other words, an individual has little prospect of finding a well-paid position in South Africa's job market without English proficiency. Although job advertisements increasingly call for proficiency in an African language, proficiency in English remains the unspoken prerequisite. (p.107)

Pillay (2014) explains how attitudes towards accented English in post-apartheid South Africa continue to "reflect and maintain" racial prejudice of the past (p.283). Wiebesiek (2007, cited in Pillay) states, "varieties of English which are stigmatised and thought to be 'bad' English are often those varieties associated with non-white speakers of English, specifically Black, Indian and Coloured South Africans, the previously disadvantaged sections of the population" (p. 283). English spoken with a non-white accent is

misconceived as a mark of lower class or poor education (Wiebesiek, 2007; Makalela, 2007). This is a phenomenon also found in other multi-lingual societies where English is spoken, such as the USA (Smitherman, 1999).

In the following quote, Susan shares that she does not feel different from black people who speak English well. She links differences between people to class and language, rather than race:

> **Susan:** But I, also feel like because now, for example, that fact that we have neighbours who are a black family, and they both chartered accountants, they're both well off, their English is like mine. Um, what was I trying to say about that? Oh, I, I feel like it's more become about socio-economic status, than it is about colour, actually. So, *I* notice it more now, with I notice a difference between me and other people, more relating to that than to colour of skin.

Here Susan emphasises her ability to connect with her neighbours because "their English is like mine;" however, she does not reflect on her inability to communicate in isiZulu with them. Susan also disassociates race from class in this quote, emphasizing it is not racial differences but class differences that really matter in South Africa today.

However, Steven, in his descriptions of interacting with the surrounding communities, betrays in his language that race and class are still linked in South Africa. Even though this is changing—and he is quick to correct himself to include black people in the upper and middle class—in our current reality, class and race are still very connected. In this instance, he was lamenting the apathy people have towards fighting for equality and justice in our education system in a local township, saying,

> **Steven:** And, um, ja, talking probably mainly white South Africans, but having said that, interestingly enough I've met a few black South Africans who feel the same, I think it's becoming more of a class issue. I mean I still think there's race issues there, but I think from what I've seen, it's a class issue that's developing.

Later, he did the same thing—specifically mentioned white people, then adapted it to be a statement about class:

> **Steven:** I think that... I've thought a lot about it. And the one thing that I've, I've thought is that, you know, the way that most white people in South Africa—well

let's just say wealthy people in South Africa—it's not sustainable for everyone, it's not, it's not going to even be possible.

While it is still clear that Steven associates white people with wealth and black people with poverty, it is also clear he wants to emphasise that in South Africa today, race and class are no longer inextricably intertwined, and we should talk about them separately. While it is true that there are now opportunities for a black middle class to emerge and there are a few super-wealthy black people, as the recent Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (2013) survey report shows, "race and class remain intimately connected" in South Africa today (p. 7). It is difficult to tell whether Steven is opting for a more nuanced, complex way of looking at race, class, and inequality in society or if he is attempting to "opt out" of needing to discuss race because class is the only relevant aspect.

Steven and Susan appear to believe that class dynamics currently (and increasingly) will replace the race factor, whereas Joe, an economist, is less optimistic about the growing middle class and sees race and class as still very linked:

> **Joe:** I think economic justice is important. And clearly that's very strongly linked to the race factor, I think. You know there are ever-increasing numbers of middle class and well-off blacks, but it's still very largely a racial thing. And um, I think when, sort of political power was given over to… um, black people in the early 90s, uh, the economic power stayed pretty much as it was, and continues to stay pretty much as it was, with a with a few people moving across, but uh, that's just to keep, I think, keep people sweet and reasonable. But for the vast majority economic injustice is what they live with… Structural violence, I think a classic example, the classic example of this is economic inequality and it's a form of injustice which is, uh, in the South African context very much applicable along race lines.

Participants also had varying views on the subject of difference itself. The majority of participants tended to use language and tell stories that minimised the differences between themselves and others, wanting instead to focus on what they had in common with others, and did not want anything to detract from that. This emphasis on common humanity can be summarised by Susan's statement:

> **Susan:** And so for me, as yes, someone who did come from a privileged background in South Africa, um, I need to become fully who God created me to be, *exactly* the same as someone [who] is born into [the black township] and is orphaned at six months needs to become all they were created to be. So I don't think that it's useful to differentiate, rather just that we were all created by God to become fully who we were meant to be, and like, let's do that. And so to put too many differences between us then takes away from that, which I really believe is at the core.

This statement is informed by Susan's religious narrative, which states that all humans (no matter if they are rich or poor, or black or white) are created valuable and in God's image but are held back from reaching that full potential because of the sin in the world and in every human. On one level, this explanation is a powerful critique of paternalistic narratives which see the poor (and in this case, poor black) people as needing a (white) savior to step in and save them. In this explanation, all people are constructed as equally flawed and equally gifted. While this narrative's strength is that it minimises superficial differences, its weakness is that it is blind to larger structural inequalities that cause these differences. By refusing to acknowledge difference in the name of fairness, it rules out the possibility that different circumstances have created different obstacles for people which require different strategies to bring equality (or help people become "all they were created to be"). [32]

Joe mentioned feeling connected to others on the basis of their shared profession as academics (and therefore, shared class). He talked about how having a shared interest in economics means that when he's talking with his black Ghanaian friend, race is not an issue.

> **Joe:** So you know, the fact that he's black and I'm white doesn't actually make much difference, it doesn't make any difference. And I never, never ever thought about he was black, I mean he *is* black, but you know it never occurs to me.

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[32] The quote by Susan was in response to my follow-up question about why Susan does not like to think of herself as white or think in racial terms. Earlier in the interview, Susan explicitly said that children in the township where she works do not have access to the opportunities they need "to become all they were created to be," and her NGO work relates to upskilling ECD teachers and providing support for vulnerable children in this community. I find this quote interesting because it shows that while on the one hand, participants identified as people whose work was part of bringing racial justice—and clearly one result of Susan's actions is that children in a previously disadvantaged community are finally gaining access to quality education—they can simultaneously hold ideas which seem to conflict with this.

Susan uses the language of difference in a negative fashion (difference as being a potential obstacle in connecting with people) in relation to language in this quote. She had just mentioned that she does not feel that different from her co-workers of other races, except in certain situations where race or culture is specifically brought up. She goes on to say:

> **Susan**: And then obviously the language thing does make a difference. And so, like, in this, the context on our staff team, I can honestly say that I don't feel like, a difference then, unless we start talking about cultural differences and that type of stuff.

One respondent held the same priority on our common humanity; however, he viewed difference as a positive attribute. For him, the problem was we do not have *enough diversity* in how we identify and how we express ourselves. Social identities (like race) are too limiting in this view—they collapse our ability to see differences within racial groups and cause us to over-generalise commonalities. What is needed is a celebration of difference at a higher level:

> **Simon:** And then, um, how would I like things, ideally to be? [pause] Well, I think you see, if, when, when people address issues like racism, when people distance themselves… from this stuff. Then what happens is I think the people move to a—then we see more individual diversity more clearly. I think it is the nature of humans to be very, very diverse. Extremely diverse. So it's not as if we'd all have the same identity if we got rid of all the racism, we'd actually be more diverse, and, and people would feel much freer about being very different. Um, I think what these, the rigidity of social identity does, uh, is to make, is to um, narrow human expression so there's just very, very much more um, um, there's very much more diversity that becomes possible once we get rid of these, these hang ups.

Here, we see Simon rejecting racial categories not because they create differences between people but because they do not create *enough* differences between people. We do not recognise nuance and individuality. His words bear a resemblance to Appiah (1996) when he says that social identities

> lead people to forget their individual identities are complex and multifarious— that they have enthusiasms that do not flow from their race or ethnicity, interests and tastes that cross the racial boundaries, that they have occupations or

professions, are fans of clubs and groups… Collective identities have a tendency, if I may coin a phrase, to "go imperial," dominating not only people of other identities, but the other identities, whose shape is exactly what makes each of us what we individually and distinctively are. (p. 103)

Appiah goes on to say that "the identities we need will have to recognise *both* the centrality of difference within human identity *and* the fundamental moral unity of humanity" (105, emphasis original). Interestingly, Simon was the only participant interviewed who referenced language *and* mentioned that he is actively learning and improving his isiZulu. In the course of the interview he also greeted several isiZulu speakers in isiZulu. While the others mentioned language as a difference that divides them from other black people, in Simon's case a different language was not a barrier.

Seeing Myself: Whiteness and Feeling White

If the first section explored how the respondents said they saw others, this section looks more at how they saw themselves. Implicit in their stories were many references to how they primarily identify; however, at the end of the interviews, I explicitly asked the respondents how they would identify themselves. The majority of the respondents did not mention race; rather, they emphasised:

- o Educator
- o Spirituality (being a member of a particular religion or denomination)
- o Individual character traits (caring person, interested in specific things)
- o Other (mother, etc.)

When I specifically asked them to reflect on their racial identity (asking them if they ever identified racially or thought about themselves as white, and if they ever "felt" white, what those circumstances were), most of the respondents did have something to share on this topic. The responses were interesting, as most expressed a level of discomfort with feeling white. Some automatically interpreted the question as "When do you feel racist?"

The responses were mixed. Some participants tried to avoid the label "white" altogether in their answers; however, many of them used it in reference to themselves in stories (for example, mentioning "other white people," therefore including themselves in

the category "white"). Further, in agreeing to participate in this study, all the respondents said they fit the criteria of a "white racial justice activist," so on one level there is an understanding that they are part of the white racial group. Some respondents outrightly tried to avoid identifying as white (even in their own thoughts, as the following quote reveals):

> **Susan:** I don't, I always try and avoid—except in conversation where we kidding about stuff—but I really try to avoid things like, "I'm a white South African." Or… even, trying not to be… on this thing of I'm a, I'm advantaged or, I don't know, I try not to think like that, so I try, I try to be, um, "I'm, I'm just a person."

This emphasis on "I'm just a person" is an example of what Steyn calls an "appeal to a transcendent self" (2001, p. 109) and is a characteristic of what Steyn refers to as the *Whiter Shade of White* Narrative. This narrative is characterised by colour-blind language, but this obscures the structural inequalities still prevalent because of race. "Denial is the overriding factor… raconteurs of this narrative dissociate themselves from the white groups who are held responsible for the country's dismal racial record, while yet screening out attention to personal involvement in structures of whiteness" (Steyn, 2001, p. 101). As Susan emphasised the "created equal" language previously, it is interesting that here she also appeals to a transcendent self. Steyn points out that "discourses about selves that transcend circumstances can, of course, also draw on dominant religious discourses" (p. 110), and the quote used by Steyn, from a secretary, supports this: "God made us all equal. If we have equal rights, we have equal chances" (p. 110). This bears a resemblance to Susan's previous comment, "I need to become fully who God created me to be, *exactly* the same as someone [who] is born into [the black township] and is orphaned at six months needs to become all they were created to be."

Lewis, who identified himself as previously being very racist, was even more emphatic about not seeing himself or thinking of himself as white. He, too, appeals to a transcendent self.

> **Lewis**: No, no, like I said, when I was in the National Department it was four years when I didn't see a white face. No, no, I am me. Everybody around me is them. And all together we are *we.*

Both he and Susan also previously mentioned their primary way of identifying was as African or South African. This is an aspect of Steyn's (2001) *Whiter Shade of White* narrative that she calls an appeal to an overarching identity. While Steyn admits that some people are using this label with integrity and identify themselves with nation-building, it can also blur current social privileges that come from being white in South Africa and can "render a base of privilege unassailable through adopting an alias of correct national identity" (p. 103). In the case of Lewis and Susan, it is clear that they sincerely want to work for a better South Africa for all and in fact are devoting their lives towards that. However, their discomfort with racial terms and discussions means that they "cannot engage with difference in a way that encourages knowledge of self or other. The internalised sense of (English) whiteness as norm remains deeply buried and continues unchallenged…" (p. 108). This buried norm of English whiteness can be seen in Susan's previous comment about her black neighbour's use of English.

For some participants in this study, race seemed to be more of a neutral identity; for example, Joe stated, "I mean, I don't identify particularly as white." In this comment, the participant acknowledged that while he is white, it is not a very salient aspect of his conscious identification. This respondent was married to a South African of Indian decent and was born and raised in Australia. He explained that in most contexts, he is engaging with people around his academic work, and it is in the context of those settings that he identifies himself in relation to people (for example, as student, colleague, researcher). This participant's statement could be seen as a form of denial of whiteness, and part of the *Whiter Shade of White* narrative; however, the rest of his narrative lacked a sense of the avoidance, denial, and guilt that characterise the *Whiter Shade of White* narrative.

One respondent emphasised that his lack of concern with his whiteness is a mark that he's not as racist anymore—the break-down of identifying as white is seen as a mark of progress in his journey towards non-racism.

> **Steven:** …there was a time when in university when I thought about it a lot, but since that time I've, I really believe God's changed my heart in that. Because I think… ja, I think it doesn't really cross my mind anymore. So on this team, I don't think of myself as the white person, or they're the black people, I just don't.

While the *Whiter Shade of White* narrative is marked with a feeling that the speaker has "arrived" (because he or she quickly sorted out his or her issues or did not have any issues to sort out), Steyn's (2001) *Under African Skies* narratives have an understanding of the complexities of racialisation and racial thinking and understand there is a complex process of letting go and taking on new identities that must emerge. Even while there is ambivalence about things, there is an understanding of the need to process and engage with whiteness. Steven's quote above can be seen as part of this *Under African Skies* narrative—which accepts a need to process the "baggage" that comes from being white in South Africa, rather than denying it. While Steven's statement here has a sense of "arrival" (in that he says he does not often think of being white now) his comment shows that this was a process. His other comments are often filled with qualifiers like "*I* think" and "perhaps" and "what I've come to see" and he often referred to his narrative of coming to be involved in his current work as a "journey."

One respondent seemed comfortable with using white as a social identity, as long as it was understood that race has no basis in biology and like any other identity, it's a construct, constantly changing:

> **Simon:** Well, look… when it comes to racial identity I think I uh, I see myself as sort of white. And I'm not one of the people who just says we shouldn't use that term. And the reason I don't say that is simply because if you were to—I think the, the danger is you then silence the analysis of race. But I understand absolutely that race is rubbish. Um, and um, [pause] um, so I see myself as, sort of "white" in inverted commas, but when you think of it, most identities are actually like that.

Simon's emphasis that not using the label "white" can "silence the analysis of race" shows he has a more developed understanding of whiteness than many of the participants.

You Make Me Feel White When…

After asking participants if they ever identified themselves racially or thought of themselves as white, I asked participants that if they ever *did* think of themselves as white, if there were certain contexts where they were more aware of this than others. For the most part, participants were only aware of their white racial identity when people who were not white made them aware of it. As Steven says,

> **Steven**: …these are the ones I can think of straight away—the other one is when I come across, um, someone—well, like, like a black person, um, being... uh… raising it or stating it, or, highlighting it, whether it's in a even a gracious way or in an aggressive way.

Julie gives an example of having her attention drawn to her racial identity in an aggressive way by a supervisor:

> **Julie***:* And for the first time in five years I thought of myself as being white. Because she told me that. Straight out. "I will have nothing to do with you arrogant white people."

And here she gives an example of being seen as white, but it was done in a gracious way:

> **Julie:** When I got home I got a phone call from my gardener to say, "Are you safe?" That was so special, that was so special. I said to my husband, "You don't phone to see if I'm safe." And it was when he phoned me to say "was I safe?" that I realised he had seen it that I was a white woman alone in a car in a black area; I hadn't felt like that.

In this case, where Julie had gone to visit her gardener in his township, she had not been thinking of herself in racial terms. She had not thought of herself as different; however her gardener's concern and follow-up call showed he was worried about her as a white woman driving in a black area.

Respondents also felt whiteness more strongly when others were emphasizing their culture or language:

> **Susan:** But then in the community, like if I'm in a meeting or something and it's all in Zulu and I don't really know fully what's going on, then I notice it.

> **Julie**: But I do find a cultural thing, I don't think that as a white person I will ever fully understand the role that the—and I only know the Zulus—that the Zulu culture, the extent of the role that the Zulu culture plays in things. I know quite a lot, but, I can't ever know it; I'm not a Zulu.

Sometimes an awareness of whiteness happens just by being the minority in a situation—being the one person who is different, or as being *seen* by others as the one person who is different:

> **Joe** : You know occasionally I'm in a room here I think "Oh yeah, I'm the only white person here," but it's only occasionally. But I also occasionally think "Oh I'm the oldest person here by about 25 years" as well, but that's also only occasionally.

Simon recounts a humorous story of visiting a friend in the township and being hounded by people in the township for money, whilst other black people attempted to defend him from his own friend, fearing for his safety. He recounted the story at work the next day, and says:

> **Simon:** The two black staff members I was telling about this were in hysterics about it. They said it would never happen to them, but it's all to do with being a white person in this environment, you see.

Some participants are aware of being white when they feel they are not being treated well, simply based on their skin colour. Susan, for instance, states,

> **Susan:** I've been in one or two situations, but very few and far between, like, in the municipal office or something like that, where I think [laughs] that the fact that my skin colour is white actually does, what's the word? dis—is a negative thing. They would sort out my problem quicker, but if you come across someone who's clearly got a chip on their shoulder on the fact like they're black or whatever. So I think once or twice in those sorts of situations.

Conversely, participants are also aware of being white when they are in situations where they feel black people are demanding extra services or treatment based on their skin colour.

> **Julie:** It was just like an entitlement, they could do that, because we were white we should then give them—and that was quite difficult. It was quite difficult to come to handle those kinds of issues, because for me it was not an entitlement thing. If you're going to study, you don't get extra marks because you've got red hair; some of them couldn't understand that.

Whiteness: Guilt, Shame, Privilege, Prejudice

The majority of the participants showed that their associations with whiteness were quite negative.[33] Steyn (2001) uses the term *Whiter than White* to describe people uncomfortable with whiteness, because those who tell a variation of this narrative see themselves as "translucent" or as transcendent selves beyond categorization (p. 104). While on the one hand, this type of language is perhaps being employed to emphasise individuality as well as common identities in order to bring a more united society, the *Whiter Shade of White* narrative carries tones of denial and a desire to avoid engaging with the messy complexities of both the historical and present meanings of whiteness. There is not a sense of white pride or overt racism as in Steyn's depiction of the *Still Colonial* and *This Shouldn't Happen to a White* narratives. There is also no bemoaning or complaining about the current positions of white people in South Africa under majority rule (a complaining about loss of privilege and status) as there is in Steyn's description of the *Don't Think White, It's Alright* narrative. The characteristics of the *Whiter Shade of White* narrative is a rejection of racism and ideas of racial superiority but no understanding of white privilege. There is an unwillingness to examine whiteness because of the guilt and shame associated with it, as well a reluctance to contemplate continuing white privilege or to engage with current prejudice. Julie, Jennifer, Lewis, Hailey, and Susan seemed to clearly reject overt racism. By working to improve education, they also have some understanding of larger structural issues contributing to injustice. However, they did not show a deep engagement with whiteness or white privilege and seemed to use the language of avoidance and denial that is more characteristic of Steyn's *Whiter Shade of White* narrative than her *White African* narratives.

This discomfort with whiteness and discussing racial issues can be seen in the interchange below, which shows how the respondent immediately associated racial awareness with racial prejudice:

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[33] There was one respondent, Joe, who treated being white as a somewhat neutral category. Perhaps because he was born and raised in Australia, he did not feel the need to either defend South African whiteness or deny/avoid it, as he did not carry the psychological baggage of having lived through apartheid as the other participants did. However, he did have a concept of how our present social structure still benefits white people.

> **Interviewer:** …your first memory of being becoming aware of race in South Africa, and, sort of the meaning that, that race had.
> **Jane:** [long pause] I'm just thinking.
> **Interviewer:** That's fine.
> **Jane:** The first time I became aware of my prejudice was my first grade one, little Mimi.

The fact that the Jane replaced the phrase "meaning of race" in the question with the word "prejudice" in her answer hints at some of the reasons why respondents seemed reluctant to talk about race—it is automatically associated with racism and prejudice. Hailey interpreted the question in a similar manner as well; when I asked her about identifying racially or thinking in racial terms, she mentioned an incident where she received poor service and she found herself attributing it to the person's race; however, she had to "catch herself" and remind herself that the poor service might not have been because of the person's race.

Some of the adjectives used to describe white people (sometimes in reference to what others think of white people, but sometimes raised by the participants) were "cut off," "arrogant," "know-it-all," "wealthy," "exploitative," "racist," and "guilty." For example, in the quote below, Steven shares a story about how one of the traditional leaders was prejudiced against him as a white person but now accepts him into the community. Steven's description of the type of person the counselor thought he was (based on his skin colour) contains many of the characteristics which the participants themselves associated with white people.

> **Steven:** One of the counselors told me this story once, that um, when he first met me he thought I was a typical white, know-it-all, wealthy, you know, kind of, just here to, just kind of pat-the-black-people-on-the-head kind of thing…"

Julie talked about a "run-in" she had with a black supervisor, as mentioned earlier, and her negative associations with feeling white come across quite clearly:

> **Julie:** And for the first time in five years I thought of myself as being white. Because she told me that. Straight out. "I will have nothing to do with you arrogant white people"… And it was very clearly a black-white issue. It was not a personality thing. It was not that at all. It was black-white. So in that situation in the end I definitely ended up I know, I *felt* as though I were white, I *felt* as though

I knew more than she did, and I was *rude* to her. Which is again, not part of my nature, but, um whereas I would have been very careful [not] to be very rude to a boss, and I would have been very careful about [not] being rude to a black person, but because of her attitude to me, it was, it was, it polarised, it was terrible.

As mentioned earlier, Jennifer associated feeling white with feeling guilty:

Jennifer: So if you think, in and you said, going back to your question, do I think of myself in terms of being white, I have that, I suppose that we have a guilt of that.

Simon, in his analysis of the history of white people in South Africa, mentioned exploitation as being a key way white people viewed themselves and their relationships with others.

Simon: The primary way in which white people saw themselves was in this exploitative relationship, we were here to get, and to, you know, extract wealth.

What is interesting is that most of the South African explorations on identity which have focused on an understanding of what it means to be an Afrikaner and what a "true" Afrikaner is showed a reaction against the stereotype of the Afrikaner with "his comb in his socks" (Verwey, 2012). The participants in this study are all English speakers who do not have a clear-cut caricature of "South African Englishness" to react to—however, they all do seem to have some kind of stereotypical whiteness in their minds that is based on arrogance, exploitation, and so on that they are reacting against in their attempts to position themselves as "not really white."

Steven, Joe, and Simon's narratives seemed to not really fit in with the *Whiter Shade of White* narrative, because these three participants did seem to engage with issues of whiteness and white privilege (however, at different levels). Joe clearly linked economic injustice with racial injustice. As discussed earlier, Steven described himself as being on a journey, and in the quote below he explains in more detail his current processes for dealing with racialised thinking:

Steven: So, maybe one of the other challenges that, that I, that I've found, is that um, uh, when you grow up in a certain culture, you have a whole lot of preconceived ideas that develop because of the people around you, because of the

nature of how you, you engage. And I realised that one of *my* big challenges is that I've had to strip away a lot of that… so I haven't gone like, "Oh, I've got to stop thinking that," but more I've got to find out more about what is the truth actually. So let me talk to people, let me hear from them, let me understand what they actually think, let me understand why this happens. Why, why, you know. *Why* is crime happening, why does—you know, all those things from people in, in communities like the township community we work in. And that, that's been, been a massive, it was—it's still—a challenge at times. I still find myself falling into the trap of thinking things when I haven't actually found out the information. But, but what I've found the most useful thing is to talk and ask and to engage, and that, that has helped me overcome that, that challenge quite dramatically.

He goes on to explain that he has had to learn how to think in a more complex manner about things he once took at face value. He has an understanding that he was socialised to think in certain ways ("when you grow up in a certain culture you have a whole lot of preconceived ideas"), and he also has an understanding that he needs to challenge these ways of thinking by engaging with people who can explain the contexts and circumstances that create the realities around us.

This emphasis on the "why" behind problems and on the emphasis he places on asking and listening, shows an active process of negotiating new understandings of self through real engagement with others. Steven does not give specific examples of an explanation for something like crime, so it may be that even with this "growth mindset" he would still not engage with the social privilege still attached to whiteness, nor how racial injustice under apartheid still affects people today; however, the fact that he is asking and discussing with people of other cultures and races shows an openness to engage around these issues. This openness to engagement is characteristic of those in Steyn's *Under African Skies* narratives.

Using Whiteness

One participant, Simon, was an academic and had read within the area of critical race theory and whiteness studies and had a bit more nuanced understanding of not just white as a social identity but also what whiteness continues to mean in a racialised society, in that white people continue to be privileged. He wanted more white people to be aware of their white privilege in order to "exploit" it for the sake of others. He had a history of this concept, of "using whiteness," both from his own involvement in resisting

apartheid as well as from his mother. While one could argue that perhaps all the participants are "using" their whiteness for others to a certain extent (using their privileged educational backgrounds to empower previously disadvantaged groups, or, for example, using their position as a director of an organisation to get funding from white businesses for community development, and so on), none of the others articulated this concept or were perhaps conscious of it to this same extent.

Simon shares about some of his early work in the struggle against apartheid. At this stage in the struggle, because organized protest and the major anti-apartheid political parties were banned, funerals were often used as political events, and could become quite violent:

> **Simon:** …around '85 I started going to funerals. Because the, the, I was a member of the Progressive Federal Party, but obviously I was on the left of it. The MP [Member of Parliament] was quite a good guy; he would get pulled in to going to funerals. Being asked to go to funerals, and he came to funerals, and the whole idea was white people being asked to go to funerals to protect black people in general. So this was very, very stressful, [chuckles] going to there and people say, "OK, can you park here between the ZP—the Zulu Police—and the mourners, and they won't fire at us, because your car will be there."

Simon was part of the group of activists in the 1960s on white university campuses who began to question the prevailing solutions to apartheid offered by white liberals because of the challenge of Black Consciousness. These students recognised the need to focus on mobilizing and working with white groups to challenge racism and apartheid. With this came the notion of critically analyzing the racial power structures and focusing one's attention on exploiting or subverting them for non-racial purposes. Simon spoke about his past involvement in using his role to empower others:

> **Simon:** where, where I felt I was much more, most successful in, in terms of my sort of white role, and I've got access to resources, educational resources especially was, when at Durban College, and when, at the other campus when I became head of school—I became head of the School of Education and went on to the other campus when we took over the other college, um, and I increasingly became a person who would support the development of young black students…

And he articulates this vision quite clearly here, linking it to his mother:

Simon: But, I, you know, something that I think is really important is, is for white people to be thinking about well, how do we use—we [are] in a particular position, for most white people, not all white people, there are some whites that are just poor and struggling, but for most, we have, we have access, we have all kinds of… resources. Um, how do we use them in the most effective way? Like my mother would use her role as a white, middle-class woman in a very, um, assertive way. So she wouldn't play that down for the sake of appearing to be non-racist, she would actually use it. She would just sail into situations, knowing—she must have known—that being white would make things different. But she would do it, use it to challenge what was being done wrong under apartheid.

This understanding of whiteness is found in Steyn's (2001) variation of the *Under African Skies* narrative that she calls *Hybridization, That's the Name of the Game.* Steyn argues that white people embracing this narrative have an understanding that

whites are still better placed to do many things at this stage. Their positioning in global history since the period of colonization can be turned into a resource, utilized for the benefit of all "racial" groups, rather than furthering the sectional interests it originally served. (p. 143)

Conclusion

The majority of participants in this study showed a discomfort with discussing race or identifying racially, and, in general, associated whiteness with prejudice, privilege, guilt, and shame. Many of them used language similar to those who embraced Steyn's (2001) *Whiter Shade of White* narrative. There was a tension between, on the one hand, wanting to be colour-blind and affirming the equal worth of all people, and on the other hand, racial language and othering in the participants' stories. Notably, Steven and Joe, and in particular, Simon, did not fit with the major characteristics of the *Whiter Shade of White* narrative, with Simon most clearly articulating an understanding of whiteness and white privilege that Steyn identifies as *Hybridization, That's the Name of the Game.*

Chapter Seven:

Key Indicators in the Journey Towards Activism

My final research question was "What (if any) are the key indicators in the activists' journeys towards activism, and are there any elements that could be useful for others trying to encourage a more racially just society?" Warren (2011), in his analysis of white racial justice activists in the USA, looks at specific elements that led to their initial activism, and Thompson, Schaufer, and Brod's (2003) look at the narratives of white males challenging racism also focused on specific elements that started their activism and how it developed over the course of their lives. While the previous two sections have looked at abstract concepts like motivation and narrative identity, this section will look at key events that the participants had in common. One cannot create motivation in people, but one can create an environment, or circumstances, where people's understanding of the world and motivations can change. By focusing on these elements, some understandings can be gleaned on how to create environments that encourage a more racially just society.

I will focus on three elements that played a role in the thinking of the participants, which I have labeled as follows:

- o Cracks in the inner circle
- o Initial involvement (the interplay between "found myself" and "choice")
- o Inter-racial friendships

Cracks in the Inner Circle: White Environments, White Role Models, Growing Awareness

Most of the participants described their upbringings as fairly insular and focused on white people and white interests. Participants used phrases like "very conventional white, middle-class life" (Simon) and "very ordinary" (Susan). Others said that although they were not on the wealthy end of the income scale, they had very good educations and a strong upbringing.

Julie: My mother always taught us that poor is not what it's about. You can be poor but proud. You don't have to be wealthy to be proud. And we *were* poor. Um, but we could still be clean.

Jennifer: There was very little money to go around, and there were four of us. But I had, I had such a richness in my upbringing.

All of the participants (except one, who was born and raised in Australia) were brought up during apartheid; however, there was a generational split between those who were in university in the 60s and 70s (the majority of participants) and those who were in university in the 90s (two of the participants) as apartheid was ending and integration was beginning.

Except for one participant, whose parents made a conscious effort to raise her to be aware of racism and the injustices under apartheid from a very young age, most participants described themselves as being initially unaware of the reality of the injustice being perpetuated daily against black people in this country. Most explained they had a sense that everything was not okay, but they were unaware of the extent of injustice around them and were not burdened to do much about it.

One participant described being raised in a "hugely racist" environment:

Lewis: I had parents and particularly a mother for who white was the only colour, and anything that wasn't white was, was evil and from the devil, and communist, and all of those kinds of things. And um, ja, that's what, that's how I was brought up.

However, most spoke of growing up in homes that were more on the liberal side (even if they were not in any way radical). As Simon shared, in his home when he was younger there was a level of awareness that the National Party (and Afrikaners) were wrong, "but it wasn't very critical" at that stage in his life.

Some participants attributed their ignorance to their younger age:

Jennifer: I suppose it was more sort of in my, my teens that I became aware of it. You know as a young child, I, I think you're a bit oblivious to all that.

Other participants attributed their ignorance to National Party repression of information.

> **Hailey:** Even though my family were fairly liberal, we, we were really not aware. Well, I know I wasn't, um, of exactly what was—and I mean, as vehemently opposed to what was happening that my mom was, she wasn't like, I suppose *politically* hugely connected, so also wasn't—we just saw the surface things that we didn't like, but we weren't aware of much of it. It was very cleverly kept from us.

These responses reveal an interplay between personal choice and responsibility and a larger system of oppression at work. Some participants took more responsibility for their level of awareness in their younger years, while others emphasised an environment or system that screened out the injustices that were going on around them.

> **Steven:** I grew up in a fairly insular environment in South Africa, and I um, I didn't really—how do I put it? I—I suppose it was partly I didn't really know, or and also I didn't really take notice of the, the realities of apartheid and what was going on around me.

Here, the participant describes his state of ignorance growing up, and on the one hand blames his ignorance on his "insular environment" but on the other hand takes responsibility for maintaining his ignorance ("I didn't know" *and* "I didn't take notice of").

Alternately, in this comment, the participant emphasises the larger system that was working to create ignorance in people. Here Lewis echoes Hailey's comments on how the reality of apartheid was "cleverly kept from us":

> **Lewis:** The Nationalist government were incre- —and Afrikaners—were incredibly good at weaving uh, tales of deception, and tapestries of deception. Um, so you know, it was kept from, it was very cleverly kept from us. You know people were just going to jail and because they were communist, because they were black and they were—they then disappeared, or they hung themselves in their cells or so on and so forth.

All of my participants were ethnically English, and it is interesting that in recounting stories from their upbringing, many of them mentioned thinking of apartheid as "an Afrikaner thing." This positioning of the source of racism and apartheid onto Afrikaners is also a denial strategy Steyn notices in the *Whiter than White* narrative, because it

exempts the speakers from considering how the system of apartheid provided them with privilege as well.

A few had specific stories of being socialised into racist behavior as young children:

> **Jane:** And it was quite shocking for me because, um, I remember being allowed to be very rude to the, our workers. And, the one lady that my mum actually fired or dismissed, we were actually encouraged to be rude to her, it was actually just shocking thinking back to it now.[34]

Simon describes the typical socialization of most white people in South Africa as being one of increasing disconnection from people as a form of abuse:

> **Simon:** Um, and it's not abuse of white children by black people at all, it's abuse of white children by white people. And it's around being socialised into, um, this is the world, this is how your life has to be. You have to be cut off from people… So, you know I think it's quite important for white people to um, to say, "Okay, what, what, what is *done* to us to make us accept, to, to..." Yes, we end up being in these privileged roles, we end up unaware, we end up, but, but that's not a normal, natural process. That was something forced on us at some point. Um, and we have to move things ahead in terms of racism, and we have to go back to this stuff. How did the racism get instilled in us?

However, at the same time these environments were attempting to preserve the racist norm and cut people off from connection with other races, they were simultaneously inculcating values (either liberal humanist or religious) that had the potential to go against some of these racist ways of thinking. Here Julie shares about the strong People Are People narrative in her home:

> **Julie:** So although we had two maids in the house and there were always the gardener in the garden—my mother worked always which was unusual in those days—Dad still made sure that we all understood we were never allowed to be disrespectful to anybody.

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[34] The maid/nanny-and-child relationship under apartheid is complex. On one level, close relationships with black nannies meant that children had strong bonds of attachment to those who were of a different racial group, which provided the potential to question prevailing social norms. However, the unequal status between the child and nanny (the master-servant relationship) as well as the social significance of race (white as superior, black as inferior) meant that those initial bonds were mitigated to a large extent by social norms (Goldman, 2003).

Simon was unique in that quite early on in his upbringing he became aware of resistance to apartheid:

> **Simon:** I… mean I was aware of resistance from a young age, I remember in 1961 quite clearly, um, uh, I remember Sharpeville [Sharpeville massacre where unarmed people protesting the pass-law system were gunned down by police] , I remember these things. So I was, we were quite aware, we were well-read, we were exposed to things.

The element that seemed to make the biggest impression for many of the participants was an individual person in their "inner circle"—of their same race, in their same environment—who thought differently and challenged them to think differently as well.

For some participants, it was their mothers.

> **Hailey:** I had a mother who was vehemently opposed to the injustices during the past. And so, I heard a lot of that type of thing from her as I was growing up.

> **Susan:** [laughs] I remember so clearly in my mind my mother, like, showing us things like, "Look here, this is the bench that we're allowed to sit on and wait for the bus, and this is the bench that black people can only sit on and if they sit on this bench then they'll go get put to prison and whata-whata." And so, like, they always pointed stuff like that out to us, and my mom especially would tell us how wrong it was.

> **Simon:** My mother was… somebody I think of quite strong racial views, in a way, but she was also a very radical character, I mean her views were very sharp on anything, one way or the other. She'd always take a strong line independent of anyone else. That's the kind of person she was. And she'd have long arguments with my elder brother about politics. Um, but, so I think increasingly she became persuaded the situation was not acceptable. Um, and it, it conflicted with her religious beliefs.

In Simon's case, his older brother also played a role:

> **Simon:** Then my brother went to, in 1963 he went to, uh, spent six months in the United States in a rural high school in Minnesota. And, uh, I remember him coming back and he'd basically become a sort of Marxist in rural Minnesota. [chuckles] And um, a high school teacher had, you know, really encouraged his reading and exposed him to the material and said, "Read this stuff." So, um, that—that was quite interesting you know, and my brother came back saying,

"We were brought up to believe that the good people were people like Anglo-Americans," you know, but he was saying, "But Anglo-Americans are exactly the people who are you know exploiting workers." So that certainly influenced my thinking and that of my twin brother as well.

For two of the participants, their mothers-in-law were the people who shifted their thinking:

Jane: His mother, when I first met him, we used to go visit her. She used to have a whole crowd of African ladies popping in to visit her. Some were old maids, some were old friends, and they'd all sit around in the dining room, and it was the first time I had ever seen black and white women, or people, sitting together chatting. So it was his mom that gave me that leg up. [laughs]

Lewis: It was after I'd married, and even we'd had children, both of my children were born, and my dear, dear mother-in-law, we had, we only had one disagreement in 38 years that Hailey and I've been married, and she challenged me one night and said, you know, the—what I'd said was racist, and it wasn't acceptable, and what have you.

For Steven, it was his relationship with his girlfriend (now wife) that really challenged him to start thinking differently:

Steven: So a number of different things, one of them being a leadership conference I went to; [my wife], I was dating her at the time; and, um, and some of my friends at university helped me *see* this and, um, then start to change…

And for Jennifer, it was a high school English teacher who challenged her to think:

Jennifer: I think maybe perhaps in my matric year we had a, a wonderful English teacher. Um, he was a priest, an Anglican priest, and I, I think he made, he made us all think. And I, perhaps that was the sort of crystalising moment, I would say.

All of these incidents point to the importance of these participants having relationships with other *white* people who were concerned about racial injustice. For all of these participants, their first real introduction to thinking differently came from someone on the "inside"—and often very close to them, someone in their family. However, two referenced the role that teachers had—Jennifer was directly influenced by

a teacher, and Simon's older brother was also influenced by a (US) high school teacher (and he, in turn, influenced his siblings).

There are two points of discussion to draw from this. One is that this element of being initially drawn into a new way of thinking by a close connection is a common idea found in religious theories. The move from racist to anti-racist is one that has similarities to a religious conversion, especially since it has to do with deeply held belief systems. According to this social network theory of religious conversion, as an individual's close social networks become dominated by a particular religious group, he or she becomes more and more likely to convert. The affective ties that an individual has with religious people form an important "bridge" through which information is relayed, and the individual comes to a point of belief (Snow & Macheleck, 1984, p. 183; see also Stark, 2001 and Stark & Finke, 2000). For the participants in my study, it was a close personal connection with another white person who formed the trust bridge that helped lead to their "conversion" to a more non-racist worldview. While they all singled out an individual, several also emphasised the community (e.g., Steven's friends in university, Simon's siblings). This finding ties in with Jansen's (2009) exploration of post-apartheid Afrikaner nationalism and racism at the University of Pretoria. He argues that as a black person, even though he was the Dean at the time, his words did not carry enough moral weight and authority to convince his students to abandon deeply held beliefs about white superiority. He refers to these beliefs, handed down through parents and teachers, as "knowledge in the blood" (Jansen, 2009, p. 171). Even when presented with facts contrary to their beliefs, students are unable to let go of this belief system because it has been reinforced by their inner circle, including family, teachers, and the like, to the point that it becomes seemingly common sense. In cases like this, a white insider has the ability to form the trust bridge needed to help students cross over into new beliefs in a way that a black person cannot (p. 171).

This characteristic of the insider forming a trust bridge which leads to new ways of thinking was not prominent in stories of white racial justice activists in the USA in either the narratives collected by Thompson, Schaeffer, and Brod (2003) or in Warren's (2010) model for white racial justice activism. Warren mentions that some of his participants began to be involved in racial justice work because they came from activist

families, and so were continuing this tradition of activism (p. 35); however, in his model he emphasises what he calls "seminal experiences" (p. 27), and these seminal experiences played a role even in those who grew up in activist families. Warren argues that his participants had a journey towards activism, not just a "conversion" experience; however, most of them could still recount an experience of witnessing racial injustice that represented a profound moral shock. According to Warren,

> These experiences make whites aware, for the first time, of the reality of racism. They lead to righteous anger for the very reason that racist practice violates the values of justice and equality with which these people have been brought up and in which they deeply believe. (p. 27)

It was interesting that only one participant shared a memory of witnessing a specific incident of racial injustice (Hailey recalled some boys on her bus calling out verbal abuse to a black woman walking on the side of the road, and how upset and ashamed she felt of them). Most participants spoke of small incidents that led to a growing awareness of injustice, rather than some form of turning-point experience. For most of the participants, their relationships with white people who were more anti-racist brought a cognitive critique to racism which opened the door for them to better engage with the reality of injustice around them. Steven mentions attending a conference; Simon mentions his brother's radical reading; Jennifer mentions her teacher who challenged her to "actually think;" Jane mentions just witnessing black and white people together at her mother-in-law's house and realizing there was a different way to think and live. Warren (2010) found that for American racial justice activists, the cognitive aspect played a supporting role but did not *cause* people to act. Rather, it was the moral shock of first-hand experiences of racism that conflicted with their values, and the righteous indignation that was produced as a result, that caused them to act (p. 41).

The differences between these two groups could be due to the different samples—Warren's (2010) focused on community organisers and those who were involved in typical "activist" movements, whereas my sample was focused on educators. However, I would speculate that perhaps this difference has to do with the nature of apartheid and the

banality of evil.[35] In the USA, the current dominant narrative is subtly racist and quietly pushes "whites away from racial understanding and toward a 'white world'" (Warren, 2010, p. 35). The numerical majority of the white population in America means that there is less potential contact between races and less opportunity to see racism first-hand, and it is easier to believe that America is a just and free society.

However, in South Africa, where white people are the numerical minority, all the participants had experiences with black people on a daily basis. Racial injustice was perpetuated constantly, but since racism was the norm, these unjust actions were constructed as just part of the way the world works. The worst of the atrocities were hidden from white people, but white people knew they had access to better employment, property, and the right to vote, and that was seen as the norm. Julie's story of a black man being beaten for not having his pass is an example of this. As a young girl, she remembers that "people are people" and should not be beaten, but she does not question the injustice of the system that requires the black man to carry a pass in the first place. Rather than this violent incident contrasting with her deeply held beliefs and challenging her to act, it reinforces her beliefs. What white people in this situation needed was not a first-hand experience of racial injustice—because their worldview had programmed them to interpret these experiences through a racist lens. Rather, what was needed was a deconstruction of some of their deeply-held racist beliefs, and only *then* were they able to see the racial injustice around them and allow them to move them to action.

Many of the participants referred to "seeing" in their stories in relation to their growing understanding of injustice. In the following comment, Jennifer talks about

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[35] The banality of evil refers to the way ordinary people in ordinary contexts can do awful things (Berger, 1993). This was first coined by I. Arendt in her description of A. Eichmann, the chief executor of "the final solution" under Hitler. She saw him not as an exceptionally hateful person, just as a bureaucrat who was committed to his job and pleasing his superiors. She saw bureaucracy in a similar fashion to Weber (1864-1920), where people mindlessly cling to their jobs and work their way up the bureaucratic ladder without thinking about the meaning of their actions (cited in Miller, 1998). It has been argued, however, that banality of evil can also refer to the way ideas about who is right and who is wrong, who is "inside" and who is "outside," are constructed in such a way that it seems "common sense" to destroy the "other" (Ried, 1999). A combination of these two understandings of the banality of evil has been used to describe the Holocaust in Germany and genocides in Rwanda (Ried, 1999) and may also apply here. Apartheid not only structured society so that white people would think of themselves as the good, the moral, and the right and black people as deviant, but the bureaucratic system of pass laws and segregation allowed for situations such as that depicted by Julie earlier, where people were punished for "breaking the rules." This meant that "good white people" would condemn harsh, inhumane punishment for breaking the rules; however, they did not question whether "the rules" were even fair.

working with a team of teachers after 1994 as part of an assessment of the quality of education in KwaZulu-Natal.

> **Jennifer:** And then we, you become, you know I really became *really* aware of, of, of the injustices. You could just see what had happened. You know all along I was aware, I'd know that it was, that people were, were, didn't have a decent education, but then you *really* saw.

Jennifer contrasts her previous knowledge that she "was aware" that people under apartheid did not have a decent education with the process of actually visiting all the different schools where she "could just see" what had happened, and she "*really* saw" the injustice. It was *really seeing* that caused the moral urge to do something to improve the school system.

Lewis talks about being a principal at a private school and challenging the staff and the students not to call the ladies who did the laundry the "laundry girls." No one in the institution seemed to think it was a problem, but Lewis saw it as clearly disrespectful, since many of the ladies who worked there were older than he was. Following this story, he stated,

> **Lewis:** And, and we've got to get people, people have got to get, still get those things off their eyes, and just see people as people.

Lewis also shared with me that he spent hours listening to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) airings, trying to come to grips with what had really happened in South Africa under apartheid. The TRC was a restorative justice technique used after the end of apartheid where perpetrators of gross human rights could receive amnesty for full disclosure of their crimes, and could prove they were acting under orders. The TRC was aired on national radio, segments even forming parts of the evening news bulletins. One of the aims of the TRC was to educate people about the crimes committed under apartheid, and to create a common historical memory/narrative for South Africa (Krog, 2000). Lewis devoted himself to listening to the broadcasts, trying to re-educate himself in order to "see" what had really happened.

Susan, too, reflected on seeing the "*monster* gap" between herself and the students in her class who had been educated under Bantu Education. In the following incident, she

shares that unlike her peers, who attributed her Zulu classmate's poor performance with her race, Susan was able to see that it was because her classmate had been denied a good education under apartheid.

> **Susan**: And, um, so, just realizing that seriously there was this *monster* gap, and they were struggling… and the awareness of that gap grew, even in my class when I was studying teaching, um, there was a Zulu girl, and she was just so far behind the rest of us. And, why, I, most of my classmates used to like rip her off and be like, "*Ugh you know*"—I don't know how sensitive is supposed to be—but like "*these black people and whatever.*" It used to really anger me, like, "You just don't understand!" So, ja. It was… there all along, and it just built up and built up and built up.

The moral impulse to act for justice was only possible because these participants began to "see" the injustice around them. In order for their eyes to be opened, it took not only exposure to situations of injustice but also their cognitive interpretation of injustice around them, and this was possible because of other white people who had built a trust bridge creating a way for the participants to begin to see things differently. The next theme I will explore touches on this concept of a growing awareness of racial injustice.

Initial Involvement: Interplay Between "I Found Myself" and Choice

In the exploration of the participants' motivations, the theme of "finding oneself" in—or making a deliberate choice to be in—a context where one was working for the benefit of another racial group was briefly explored. However, it is worth looking at again in comparison with the stories of US activism, since those stories highlighted personal choice and the stories of these participants highlighted a combination of pragmatism or "falling into it" (followed by a continued desire to work for racial justice) and those for whom this work was a personal choice.

As explored in the previous section, one of the unique characteristics of the South African experience is that while white South Africans held political and economic power for hundreds of years, they are a numerical minority. While segregation policies such as the Group Areas Act (1950), the creation of Bantustans, and the Reservation Separate

Amenities Act (1953)[36] meant that apartheid was structured to keep white people isolated, the potential for contact with black people and the opportunities to witness racial injustice were more prevalent than in the USA, where black people are a minority. However, another consequence of this characteristic is that when the white political power structure crumbled, government positions (such as teaching) began to be managed by black people, creating many more opportunities for cross-racial interactions, friendships, and experiences than the majority of white people in the USA have access to. When the South African government changed in 1994 and the different Education Departments amalgamated,[37] many of the participants "found themselves" in positions where they were compelled to interact with mostly black people (either as their students or as their supervisors). Educators had to choose whether to stay in these positions or make the choice to retreat further into white enclaves.

Again, we see the interplay between the system and personal choice. When choosing to stay in public education with black students, co-workers, and supervisors, if the participants had been previously unaware of injustice under apartheid, they were very quickly made aware through their interactions with people and schools. As mentioned in the previous section, many of these participants had anti-racist groundwork laid by close white family and friends, and perhaps this allowed them to be more open in learning from black co-workers and supervisors and helped them to actually see the injustice that had been perpetuated.

Whether it was suddenly teaching black students for the first time and becoming aware of her own prejudice and some of the realities faced by poor black people (Jane and Jennifer), being handed a Peace Studies programme and finding out it was his calling (Joe), or staying in a job for the pay (Julie and Hailey), many of the participants had stories of "stumbling into" education work that had a more activist nature, rather than making a deliberate choice. However, as they witnessed first-hand the destruction that

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[36] The Group Areas Act segregated residential areas in the cities; the Bantustans were areas of South Africa created to be independent homelands for black people, with their own governments, education systems and so on; and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act segregated the use of public facilities such as buses, parks, beaches, and toilets (South African History Online, n.d.a).

[37] Under apartheid, there were different nationwide education departments for the different racial groups, as well as provincial departments for the white schools. The Bantustans also had their own education departments. At the end of apartheid, the process of unifying and standardizing the government education system began.

apartheid had brought, they were motivated to work towards restoring it. As Jennifer says:

> **Jennifer:** Oh, oh, it's just grown, as I've just seen more and more, and more and more sad and horrified. And more *determined* to do, to do even more.

This emotion and determination to act to end racial injustice in education ties in with Warren's (2010) ideas about activism springing from the sense that a moral system has been violated. While those who participated in the US studies generally experienced these moral shocks in isolated or direct instances, for the participants in this study, the moral shocks came through a growing, gradual awareness of injustice. This gradual awareness of injustice is similar to Louw-Potgieter's (1988) exploration of the journey's of Afrikaner dissidents.

Presently, the majority of participants are no longer working for the government but are retired and doing volunteer teacher-training, assessment, and educational support programmes to continue bringing justice in the field of education, advocating for children in communities that were previously disadvantaged and continue to be disadvantaged in the current system. Their choice to stay in the field of education and work for justice there points to the fact that even when it was a job for a paycheck, there was possibly still an "activist" component to their work as well. As Lewis, who is formally retired from public education but now runs an after-school education centre in rural KwaZulu Natal, very passionately put it:

> **Lewis:** And we can still say right now twenty years after democracy, and I can still say that the rural education in general being offered to the rural children is unjust. It is still below standard. It is still substandard. No matter what anybody wants to say… So really it's just the calling to fight injustice and education is our playing field… I mean this is rural situation that we work in, you know, children who walk to school, children who come from child-headed homes, children who have, live with Gogo [isiZulu for Grandmother]… And they have, some of them have no television, they have no radio, they have none of those kinds of things. Some of them travel forty kilometers to school in a day. I mean we have kids here who come to the centre whose, who have an extra eight kilometers onto their, their travels twice a week, you know to come to centre. And so, ja. There are, there are many, many mitigating circumstances that some of the schools, that are supposedly schools, are still in horrendous conditions and the infrastructures are impossible.

The fact that he uses the word "still" shows that he is placing responsibility for the poor rural education not only with the current democratic government but with the previous apartheid government. The type of poor education that apartheid offered is "still" being offered in rural areas. His emotional language shows that these issues are things he feels strongly about.

While the majority of participants fit this theme of finding themselves in new circumstances, growing in awareness of injustice, and choosing to continue to work for this justice, Steven, Susan, Simon, and Joe had slightly different stories. Susan and Steven were the two youngest participants, and the stories they shared showed more of a deliberate choice to leave previous employment in education to focus strictly on community development.

> **Steven:** When I was teaching at a local private Christian school, um, and also part of the local church in the white affluent community, uh, when we started praying and sort of thinking about what we would do, we, we just started asking questions of people that were from the community down the road and saying well, how can we get involved?

> **Susan:** I just felt that, you know, there are so many people who study teaching so that they can teach in this environment, but there are not very many people that I've met that want to go out and try and do something about schools *in* communities, and what's going on there, and how can we try and build there, and help people become all they were meant to be.

Joe and Simon are both academics. Joe entered academia in South Africa post-1994, but his story of being involved in peace studies had a similar "found myself" theme in that he started out teaching peace as part of his job but then came to see it was a calling. Simon's story was unique in that he was actively involved in anti-apartheid protests from quite a young age and was very involved in National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Post-1994 he continued to work around issues of racial injustice in an attempt to leverage whatever resources he had as a white academic to mentor and assist young black academics.

In Warren's (2010) study, a seminal experience led to initial activism, which then led them to deeper friendships and long-term commitments to this work. In this study, it appears that the majority of participants stumbled into this work, and then, through an

exposure to the realities of the effects of apartheid, they began to view it less as a job and more as a calling to fight injustice.

Inter-racial Friendships

In these work contexts, many participants formed personal relationships. Literature shows that personal relationships with people of another race are a significant factor in increasing someone's sense of a need for racial justice. Allport's (1954) Contact Thesis argues that when white people have contact with black people it will lessen their prejudice, but only under conditions where black and white people hold relatively equal status, share goals, and social norms support their interaction. More recently, Putnam (2007) has found that in the United States, areas with higher levels of racial diversity are lower in social trust. As Warren (2010) states, "in other words, diversity absent cross-racial relationships works against a sense of shared fate in the entire community" (p. 227).

South Africa is a much more racially diverse society than the USA, but this diversity and the resulting higher chances of interracial contact do not automatically mean cross-racial friendships will form that will challenge prejudiced beliefs and fuel racial justice. However, Warren (2010) found that when these friendships do form, allowing people to share their stories, it builds a sense of common identity. As a participant in Warren's study stated, "You've got to have the relationship with somebody to understand that what hurts you hurts me. If you don't have a relationship with people, it doesn't hurt as much" (p. 55).

All the participants in my study shared a story about how their friendships with black people (either peers at school, students, friends, partners, or co-workers) helped them engage with their own lingering roots of racism, opened their eyes to the realities of poor education and poverty that apartheid forced on the black population, and helped them find a strong sense of common identity (either as teachers, as parents, or as people) that crossed racial lines.

Like any process of development, the journey from being neutral about racial injustice (or even blatantly racist) to becoming an engaged activist is not linear or exactly sequential. Many of these elements overlap (for example, some people find themselves in cross-racial relationships because of work, become more aware of injustice, and then

become more concerned, while others formed friendships only after being made initially aware of racial injustice).

Julie, who stayed in the Department of Education after the amalgamation because she needed a job, but through that process formed deep friendships across racial lines and began to understand the injustices that had and continue to be perpetuated, shared about her growing friendship with a black co-worker:

> **Julie:** If I look back to the beginnings, it was probably with Londi, because she was talking about not letting her daughter go to somebody's house for a sleep-over. And I said, "I agree with you, I would never let my kids go if I didn't know who the parents were." And she looked at me and said, "Would you really do that?" And I said, "Yes, no ways would I let my kids go if I didn't know the parents." And she said, "I thought it was only black people who did that."… She had young children, quite young children, her eldest was just going to school, whereas my children were um, well, one was in high school at that point. And as we talked we realised well, both of us, that actually, we both were mothers; we felt exactly the same thing. We wanted the same thing for our children, we had the same desires and aspirations for our children. It just happened, now, that she was black and I was white.

In this story, Julie shares how a friendship with a co-worker helped both of them recognise assumptions and stereotypes they had about each other. The focus is on overcoming prejudice and stereotypical thinking about different racial groups rather than an awareness of racial injustice.

Jane, too, shares about how her domestic worker grew to become a really good friend, and through that friendship her eyes were opened to the realities of poverty and injustice that many poor black people were and are facing. While this is a case where the friendship was not formed in a situation of equal status, Jane shares that she feels this relationship transcended the working environment and was reciprocal. When Jane says her domestic worker still comes to her for help, at first it appears that Jane is simply in a providing role and there is not agency on both sides. However, Jane shares that her friend still brings her gifts, and in fact, the tablecloth currently on the table during the interview was handmade by this friend (and obviously much treasured and in daily use), so this shows a level of mutuality and respect on both sides.

> **Jane:** But she stayed in contact with me, she eventually left for a better-paid job, which was nice for her. Um… but we stayed friends and we, um, I met her from time to time. She got, oh, especially when she needed help. And she used to bring me gifts, this is one of them, [points to the tablecloth on the table] and she used to bring me gifts always, I mean, just so incredible. [points to the detailed work on the tablecloth].

This element of gift-giving is an interesting inversion to the usual domestic worker-madam relationship, where the madam bestows gifts in a paternalistic manner that the domestic worker is expected to receive with gratitude.[38] In this case, it is the domestic worker who is bestowing gifts. The fact that one of these gifts was in daily use and Jane is amazed with the "incredible" handiwork speaks to a level of reciprocity in this relationship. This is not a one-way relationship; there is an equality in offering and receiving. It was through her relationship with her domestic worker that Jane met many other black friends, visited in the township, and became aware of the social inequalities apartheid created. Jane also shared that it was through her friendship with a black student, Mimi, in her preschool class that revealed to her she still had internal prejudices and assumptions about black people she needed to dispel.

Simon's stories were peppered with anecdotes about his friends, many of whom were black and lived in a nearby township. Simon often continued to help these friends' children (he mentioned being a godfather to a few). Simon currently has more than ten people living in his house, many of them black; the most recent arrival was a PhD candidate who was eating breakfast when I arrived for the interview. Simon's dedication towards learning isiZulu, and speaking the isiZulu he knew, was evident in the brief interactions I witnessed. Simon also challenged the notion that being a white person with material advantages did not mean that in his inter-racial friendships he was the one with most of the agency.

> **Simon:** Relationships are always a two-way thing. It's not only driven by—I mean, when you think of it, the idea that a relationship between a white person and black person is driven by a white person is itself a racist idea. So we have to

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[38] Goldman (2003) goes so far as to call this gift-giving in maid-madam contexts a form of psychological exploitation, where the gift is a form of maintaining loyalty and gratitude in a servant, enforcing the hierarchy of the relationship, and asserting dominance and possession of the servant.

look at agency on both sides. Is agency on both sides? And recognizing the mutuality of agency is important, and that challenges the racial thinking.

Julie also shared how her friendship with Thulile is one of real reciprocity, and also highlights the role that her spiritual life plays in connecting her with people of other races:

> **Julie:** And, I found that I made some very good friends, I mean *really* close friends. Thulile, she says to me, "You're closer"—she doesn't have brothers and sisters—"You're closer than my sister," and I might not see her or speak to her in six months and she'll phone me and say, "I was praying for you today; I felt the need to pray for you today; I know there is something wrong with you." Now I feel very blessed by that, *very* blessed, that somebody is praying for me. And I know that I had an influence on her life, and she knows she's had an influence on my life. And I think that was, that has been important for me. It's not just about me having an influence on somebody else's life.

In Julie's Christian worldview, to have someone praying for you is a great privilege. Julie feels that Thulile has influenced *her* life in the same way she has influenced Thulile's. Through Thulile, Julie was able to understand more about the dynamics of racial inequality.

Joe shared about his friendships with academics of other races and that race seems to play a very small part in those friendships:

> **Joe:** One was that I had a Ghanaian student at, in Australia, and when I came to South Africa he was actually here, at Maritzburg in fact, and he was the only person I knew when I came. Um, and now he's back in Ghana now. But he said to me, "I don't think"—*I* (*points to self*)—"don't think in race terms." "Well what do you mean?" And he said, "Well," and we had this quite an interesting discussion, and I think what he, I think if my memory is not mistaken, he said, "We think we're connected by class. Um, so because we're academics and we think about economics and we think about these sort of issues, that's what connects us."

Because Joe , as mentioned, is also married to a South African of Indian descent, he automatically has many friendships with other people of Indian descent through his wife's connections.

Simon also mentioned that through his relationships with black people he has been made aware of the continued racial injustice and structural oppression that still faces them. He shared a story of taking in a teenager at the request of his friend, finding out the boy was on drugs, and the complications that ensued from that. He goes on to say,

> **Simon:** He ended up on his long and awful history ending up with him being shot dead by the police, um, in Township South of Durban, um, under awful circumstances, in which he was not at all to blame. It was a straight, straight racial killing in my view, it doesn't matter whether the people who shot him were black or white, uh, it would never have happened to a white person, it just never would have happened. You know I really understand the racial dimensions of things now. Like, you know, Marikana[39] for me is, like, [hands covering face] this is simply *awful*, you know, this is unacceptable, and it's racial. It's, it doesn't matter whether… who the police were, um, the, it's still a racial system we live in.

Here, Simon shows one of the elements that Warren (2010) highlighted in his study. Warren found that relationships help to get "white activists beyond the cognitive dimension [of racism] and connect them to the personal and emotional levels. In other words, they make a statistical understanding of racial discrimination direct and real in the lives of people of color that activists know personally" (p. 64). This "ethic of caring" means white activists are committed not only to an abstract cause "but also to real people" (p. 72).

Many of Warren's (2010) participants shared stories similar to that of Simon in that relationships helped them grasp racial injustice more deeply. The majority of participants in my study shared stories of relationships with people of other races that helped them deal with their own prejudice and stereotypes. In some cases, these friendships also were gateways to learning and seeing more about racial injustice (as with Jane and her domestic worker). Joe shared that through his cross-racial marriage he has become more personally connected to issues of racial injustice. However, it was really only Simon who shared stories that showed how friendships with black people had both personally challenged him[40] and personally connected him to the cause of racial justice.

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[39] In August 2012, police opened fire on striking miners at a platinum mine in Marikana, Northwest Province, killing 34 and injuring 78. The majority of the policemen and all of the miners were black (Nicolson, 2014).

[40] Simon also shared about being challenged by Steve Biko's ideas of Black Consciousness during his time at university, and actually organized the seminar where Biko led his walkout. Simon says, "It was quite an

The "overcoming personal prejudice through relationships" stories told by participants also tie in to Steyn's (2001) *Whiter Shade of White* narrative—which highlights individual action in order to exempt the speaker from being part of larger systemic structures. It may be that participants had not deeply connected around issues of racial injustice in their friendships with black people because of their desire to distance themselves from the apartheid past and avoid implication in current racial privilege.

Conclusion

The key indicators in these participants' journeys towards becoming more aware of racial injustice and being moved to act around those issues parallel many aspects of Warren's (2010) study; however, there are interesting differences. Warren's model emphasised the role that an initial moral shock plays in prompting initial activism and then emphasised how deep, cross-racial friendships that form through initial activism make the cause personal. While the participants in this study did share stories that showed their moral outrage over injustice in the education sector, for many of the participants this came as a gradual awakening to the injustice around them, rather than a sharp turning point. Changing circumstances forced some of them into positions where they encountered the effects of apartheid, and in encountering this, the violation of the participants' moral codes prompted them to begin working to create a more just society—it was no longer just a job, it was a passion or calling that continued even when the formal employment contracts ended. The participants also shared how friendships with people of other races challenged their assumptions and prejudice, yet the majority did not share how their relationships personalised issues of continued systemic racial injustice.

The unique aspect of these participants' stories was the emphasis they placed on a close relationship with another white person who formed a "trust bridge" for them to begin to think differently about race and racism (using a term from Snow and Macheleck). This finding may be useful for others who are concerned about how we can encourage a more racially just society in South Africa. From the stories the participants shared, it

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interesting thing. We didn't quite understand the issues at stake. I—and it was very much not a personal thing. He actually said that my twin brother and I could use his room to sleep in the night before I think, before the walkout." Stories like this one show how Simon was challenged to think differently about not only issues of racial injustice, but the way he was engaging issues of racial injustice, which none of the other participants mentioned.

seems that perhaps a key part of helping white people move away from racism and towards a worldview that embraces racial justice in the South African context requires more white South Africans articulating to other white people a commitment to racial justice and anti-racism.

Chapter Eight:
Conclusion

This study opened with an exploration of the current debate around white privilege. It then moved to an overview of debates around the use of race (specifically in the South African context) and examined how race can be engaged with critically in research. The literature review then presented an overview of whiteness studies in an international and South African context, positioning this study within that larger context. Whiteness studies focus on exposing white privilege, de-centering whiteness, and exploring ways in which white identity is being constructed.

The broad theoretical approach adopted in this research was that of social constructionism. Social constructionists point out that researchers should be mindful of taken-for-granted assumptions which inform social practices, such as the use of racial categories. In light of this, this study embraced critical race theory in the discussion and analysis of the data presented. The specific theories of narrative identity, morality, and social action of Smith (2003) and Somers (1994) were adopted to analyse the data, and comparisons to the empirical studies of Louw-Potgieter (1989) on Afrikaner dissidents and Warren (2010) on American white racial justice activists were examined as potential "middle theories" with which to compare and contrast my results. Steyn's (2001) explanations of white identity post-apartheid were also explored as a point of comparison for the data gleaned in this research.

The analysis showed that the majority of participants were constructing their identities around narratives of "educator," "Christian," and "caring individual," and these identities were rooted in the larger narratives of People Are People, Quality Education for All, and Following God. These larger narratives provided the underlying framework for the creation of narrative identities and moral action. In terms of their racial identity, it appeared that the majority of participants in this study were constructing their identities along the lines of Steyn's (2001) *Whiter Shade of White* narrative, which highlights national, transcendent, or individual identities and avoids or denies the present implications of whiteness in the post-apartheid context. This narrative shows a definite move away from overt prejudice and is a sincere attempt to positively engage with the "new South Africa" by finding common ground through aspects of shared identities;

however, by not engaging with race at all, it is a way to avoid the guilt of continued racial privilege.

All of the participants were engaged in work in the field of education which aimed to bring about a more equal and racially just society. While the majority of participants started out working in education "because they had to," their engagement with people of other races and their growing awareness of the injustice perpetuated under apartheid (particularly in the field of education) made them passionate about being part of bringing quality education to all in South Africa, regardless of skin colour or social background. The majority of the participants were born and raised under apartheid, and they all referenced other white people who played a positive role in their lives by helping them begin to think critically and question the prevailing racial injustice and prejudice around them. The majority of the participants are now volunteering or working with non-profit organisations even after retiring from the formal education sector in order to see children from previously disadvantaged communities get the education that they deserve. In spite of their participation in activities which are impacting the structural inequalities remaining after apartheid and their obvious desire to be unprejudiced, participants revealed a tendency to use racial terms and othering language. As mentioned previously, they showed discomfort with discussing their whiteness and automatically associated it with guilt, prejudice, and arrogance. Perhaps these negative associations are part of what drives their appeals to emphasise a transcendent self rather than acknowledging and critically engaging with their whiteness. It is also worth noting that participants raised under apartheid showed a strong desire to emphasise transcendent identities (such as "we are all people"), perhaps because the apartheid narrative emphasised and essentialised difference. Their stories shared several points of commonality with American white racial justice activists; however. the unique situation in South Africa, as well as perhaps the specific context of being educators, meant that there were several differences—most notably an emphasis on a gradual awakening and the role that other white people played in their journey.

The field of education was specifically used to narrow the scope of this project and also to make a two-fold contribution to whiteness studies as well as to the field of education. However, the results may have varied had I expanded the criteria to include

more political activists, those involved in the criminal justice system, or grass-roots organisers (for instance). It may be that white people in those contexts are better able to critically engage with their whiteness and are constructing their identities along different lines. Further research will show whether these findings can apply to white South Africans in other contexts beyond just education. It may be that activists involved in other fields exhibit a much greater conscious choice to be involved in work that benefits those of other races and are therefore more aware of how their whiteness impacts their identities.

This study was also limited in that it only focused on English-speaking, white South Africans in the Durban/Pietermaritzburg area. A broader study that includes a larger geographic area, as well as Afrikaans participants, would show if these findings are true for the majority of white South African racial justice activists, or only this small set.

One of the more useful findings that participants shared was that it was other white people they trusted (family members, close friends, or teachers) who laid the foundation to begin questioning the apartheid norms and made them more open to "seeing" the injustice which had been perpetuated, rather than denying or ignoring it. This finding is useful for those who are concerned about how to help South Africans of all races begin to strive for a more racially just society, particularly those who are white. While first-hand experiences of injustice and close inter-racial friendships are all a significant part of moving an individual towards actively seeking racial justice, relationships with other white people who are "trusted" also play a significant role. It appears that for these participants, relationships such as these formed a bridge (what I call a trust bridge) that allowed them to accept different and new ways of thinking about race and injustice.

Whiteness studies have sometimes been critiqued as a new way of centralizing the white voice, and white people have been challenged to "stop talking" in order to allow people of other races to play a central role in conversations on race (MacMullan, 2009). While I agree that this is a potential pitfall of whiteness studies, my findings highlight that perhaps helping white South Africans move from a denial of racial privilege and a discomfort with critically engaging whiteness will require not fewer white people talking, but *more.* Especially when engaging around deeply held belief systems and ways of

thinking, the "insider" status of a white person allows him or her to challenge existing ways of thinking that someone of another race is unable to do. Given the studies on conversion by Stark (2001) as well as Jansen's (2009) study on white Afrikaans-speaking students, this is a potentially useful finding that could contribute to current debates and discussions on moving forward toward a more racially just South Africa.

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