

## **Moral Dilemmas:**

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Managing white privilege in the context of white female employers' relationships with black female domestic workers in contemporary South Africa

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## Declaration

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Social Science**, in the Graduate Programme in **Research Psychology**, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, **Joanne Teresa Phyfer**, declare that:

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## Abstract

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For many years whiteness has been a neglected topic of study globally, but within the last 20 years academics have made great strides in theorising it. In South Africa, a country with a history of violent racial oppression, understanding the functioning of white privilege holds great relevance for understanding the continued racial hierarchies and race-based tensions in the country. This study sought to investigate the functioning of white privilege in the current setting with a particular focus on the ways in which whites make sense of the continued economic and social privilege they enjoy in post-apartheid South Africa. This was done by examining how white female employers of black African female domestic workers managed their privileged identity in talk about their relationships, considering the moral dilemmas attached to employing a domestic worker.

Through the use of a Google+ online community, twelve white female employers from an affluent suburb in KwaZulu-Natal participated in this study, contributing their thoughts and reflections about their relationship with their employees to an online focus groups. This data was analysed using a broadly Foucauldian discourse analysis method, drawing guidance from Willig (2008) and others. Analysis identified patterns of accounting for the participants' racial identity that suggested that the participants were actively working to produce favourable identity in their talk, despite the unfavourable positioning in which identifying as an employer of domestic worker placed them. This was found to be achieved in two key ways, by either constructing themselves as more moral than their employee (relational morality style) or constructing themselves as more moral than other whites (functional morality style). The participants worked to prove that they were virtuous, ethical people as means of undoing the unflattering characteristics associated with whiteness in South Africa. The findings of this study suggested that through managing how their morality is perceived, whites are able to reconcile their privileged whiteness with post-apartheid.

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## Chapter One: Introduction and literature review

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### Introduction

The social institution of domestic labour in South Africa is complex, fraught with difficulty and deeply tied up with South Africa's apartheid history. Even in contemporary South Africa, the relationship typically comprises of unskilled black women of low socio-economic status, performing domestic labour for families of middle to high socio-economic status (Ally, 2010). Thus, to this day, the relationship reflects the power dynamics of apartheid: the ultra-exploitation of a group of people based on their race, their class and their gender, to the benefit of a privileged minority (Cock, 1980). The persistence of this inequality entirely contradicts the explicit ideals of the "new" South Africa, those of non-racialism and equal access to rights and opportunities, making it an uncomfortable subject in the contemporary context (Fish, 2006). The continued existence of this institution suggests that the end of apartheid may not have changed South Africa much and that the majority of black, and black African women in particular, remain deeply underprivileged, while white privilege remains intact.

In the past two decades efforts have been made to transform the socio-economic landscape of South Africa, with a particular focus on improving the economic opportunities of black Africans (distinct from the broader category of blacks, which in this study will refer to all groups who were discriminated against under apartheid legislation). However, even with these changes, the majority of whites remain as privileged, or even more privileged, than they were during the height of the apartheid regime. This, no doubt impacts on the capacity of blacks to access socio-economic opportunities, because whites, as a whole, continue to have better access to economic resources and education (Statistics South Africa, 2015; South African Audience Research Foundation, 2014). Understanding why this privilege remains entrenched and how whites make sense of their privilege, considering its contradiction with contemporary norms, are important factors in understanding the current inequalities and social dynamics of the country. As a number of authors have shown, whiteness in contemporary South Africa is not the whiteness of the apartheid regime (Dolby, 2001; Steyn, 2001; Wale & Foster, 2007). The character and features of whiteness have changed as the

country has transformed and whites have found ways to carve out a new place for themselves within the new regime. Understanding how whites make sense of their racial identity in the current setting can help provide a more nuanced insight into why white privilege remains intact and how it effects South African society.

This study sought shed light on some of these dynamics by exploring how white women made sense of their privileged identity within the setting of their relationships with their black African female domestic workers. This relationship is one of the few sites where privileged white South Africans are guaranteed to be in extended contact with underprivileged black Africans, making it the ideal setting to explore how whites manage their identity when they are faced with the “other,” or the “one against which power is exercised” (Foucault, 1982, p.789). That is, by accessing the participants’ meaning making around their relationships, the researcher could obtain evidence of how not only the economic power imbalance between employer and employee was managed, but the racial power imbalance as well. Through examining the participants everyday discussions about their relationships with their domestic employees, the researcher was able to obtain evidence of how whites construct their own and others identity and make sense of their place within contemporary South African society.



## Literature Review

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### Introduction

In recent years, much academic exertion has gone into interrogating white privilege and its role in defining the disadvantage experienced by blacks both internationally and within South Africa (Kolchin, 2002; Steyn 2001). This research has suggested that part of the problem of white privilege is that it is so hegemonic and normative, it is barely visible to whites themselves (McIntosh, 1988). In South Africa, this is largely true, as although whites have been forced to acknowledge that apartheid privileged them in the past, many whites are unable to see how they continue to be privileged by their whiteness (Steyn, 2001). However, one site where this privileging is difficult to escape is in the context of the relationship between white employer and black domestic worker. While the employer has had access to opportunities that have allowed them to be released from the burden of housework, the employee has not, and is forced into a relationship where they have limited power (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010; Durrheim, Mtose, Brown, 2011). Within the parameters of this relationship, so saturated with historical and social significance, the employer and employee must find ways to justify and explain their engagement in a relationship that sustains the privilege of one at the cost of the other (Durrheim, Mtose, Brown, 2011; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014).

This literature review will seek to outline the crucial concepts relating to white privilege as an academic discipline both internationally and within South Africa. In particular, it will look at the context in which white privilege exists in present-day South Africa and outline the key discourses that research has identified as allowing whites to manage their privileged position. The review will then turn to the topic of domestic work and outline the central dynamics that define this historic and oppressive form of labour relations in South Africa. It will finally consider the ways in which employers make sense of their privilege in this relationship, suggesting that these discourses relate strongly to discourses used to manage white privilege generally. Overall this literature review will seek to highlight the complicated and powerful place white privilege continues to hold in everyday South African society and how the

relationship between employer and employee draws attention to this privilege in uncomfortable ways.

## **White Privilege**

### **Whiteness as privilege**

The study of white racial identity has, until recently, been limited when compared to other racial identities, with academics only beginning to theorise whiteness during the 1980s and 1990s (Frankenberg, 1993; Kolchin, 2002). This embarrassing oversight is highly telling as it demonstrates a fundamental and defining characteristic of white racial identity, its invisible privilege (Black & Stone, 2005; Matthews, 2012; McIntosh, 1988). This evasive quality of white racial identity came to characterise much of the global theorising around it, as in finding it so difficult to pin down, academics such as McIntosh (1988) argued that the power of whiteness lies in the fact that it is so entrenched and hegemonic, no one ever thought study it.

The qualities of whiteness, such as its structural privilege and invisibility as a legitimate racial and cultural identity, are not arbitrary and result from centuries of social forces at work. The origins of whiteness can be traced back to the era of colonialism, which brought into being for the first time the concepts of race and racial hierarchy (Dolby, 2001; Hall, 1992). Colonisation resulted in the first long-term contact between European settlers and native populations and was fundamentally defined by the European desire to exploit the resources of these native peoples (Steyn, 2001). Discourses that justified these actions were critical to Europe's success and thus, the notions of distinct races, racial hierarchy and whites' superiority developed (Steyn, 2001).

It is important to emphasise that the essentialising discourses of the era produced unity where there previously was none (Hall, 1992). The superior "west" was constructed out of a mish-mash of culturally diverse European civilisations and the inferior "rest" out of a similarly culturally diverse collection of civilisations outside of Europe (Hall, 1992; Steyn 2001). Europeans therefore whitened as they colonised, using foreign peoples as a foil against which to construct a common identity and racial identity came to be produced in ways that were mutually constitutive and relational (Lucal, 1996; Steyn 2001).

This was achieved through appropriation of various discourses, such as that of the civilised and the savage or the Christian and the heathen, as well as narratives of Enlightenment science that saw Western man as the superior race, all of which worked to produce “a master narrative of whiteness” (Steyn, 2001, p. 24). These discourses of the superiority and normativity of whiteness made available particular ways of understanding blacks in relation to whites; a binary that separated the superior, modern west from the inferior, primitive rest and firmly establishing whites as the master race and blacks as the “other” (Hall, 1992; Steyn 2001). Once set in motion, these social processes resulted in a long negotiation of racial identity and power over time, which worked to produce, and deeply entrench, white privilege.

The concept of race was thus established relationally and worked as a means of social organisation that served particular interests from the start (de Kock, 2007; Steyn, 2001). While race is now considered to be a social construction rather than a biological fact, it continues to have powerful social, economic and political effects on society (Nuttall, 2001). In particular, although whiteness may be more accurately considered to be a discourse or ideology than a unitary group of people, it continues to play a role in regulating daily social life and working to benefit whites (Nuttall, 2001). In recent years, the study of 'whiteness' has emerged as an effective tool for analysing the workings of privilege in numerous societies, with Wale and Foster (2007) noting that “whiteness literature represents the emerging body of research that is attempting to turn the academic gaze from the object of racism onto the subject of racism” (p. 50). In other words, whiteness literature attempts to understand how power operates through whiteness to produce unequal, racialised and racist societies rather interpreting racism as a problem of individuals.

According to whiteness studies, white privilege is characterised by being such a normalised fact of life, that it is barely visible, particularly to whites themselves (McIntosh, 1988). It is defined specifically by its centrality in social life, which works to make whites’ identities and culture so fundamental to global and national cultures that the exclusion of other race groups from common discourse becomes unremarkable (de Vos, 2012; Matthews, 2012). This is a privilege that is granted by virtue of being born white, not earned, and is therefore a special advantage that benefits some and marginalises others, for reasons that are beyond all peoples’ control (Black & Stone, 2005; Matthews, 2012). With this privilege also comes the

sense of power and entitlement that distinctly characterises whiteness (Black & Stone, 2005; Matthews, 2012). This entitlement involves the assumption that the white self is more moral, fair and ethical than the 'other', an entrenched sense of authority and responsibility and a kind of 'ontological expansiveness' where whites tend to view themselves as entitled to be the masters of their environment (Matthews, 2012, p. 175). Here, the line of continuity between modern whiteness and colonial whiteness becomes apparent.

Whites therefore benefit from apparently neutral social arrangements that appear to have no racial basis, which renders whiteness the absent standard against which others are judged (Black & Stone, 2005; Hartigan, 1997; Matthews, 2012). Race is associated with a deviation from the social norms established by whiteness rather than whiteness itself, while racism is associated with the oppression of blacks rather than the oppressiveness of whiteness (Hartigan, 1997). Thus, the invisibility of white privilege and the benefits whites enjoy are maintained and reproduced not through force, but through control over discourse around identity, where characteristics associated with whiteness can be made central and positioned favourably while characteristics associated with other races are positioned unfavourably (Maré, 2001; Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). Although white privilege is not an excessive benefit, its advantage lies in the fact that no other race has access to the privilege experienced by whites and often, this privilege represents ways of relating to one another that all people should reasonably expect to be able to enjoy (Vice, 2010).

### **Understanding white privilege and its dynamics in the context of South Africa**

While white privilege is hegemonic and influences race and power relations all around the world, it is not homogenous (Steyn, 2001). The nature of the white privilege varies depending on the dynamics of the context in which it is found and, with much of the literature produced on whiteness being generated in the United States, its findings cannot be said to be relevant everywhere. In South Africa this is particularly the case, as the country has a history of race relations that is arguably, unique. From its first colonisation by European powers to the end of apartheid in 1994, the social, political and economic landscape of South Africa has been shaped by regimes of white privilege. Only through long and violent struggle was absolute white political power abolished and as a result, white privilege has always been a far more

overt social fact in South Africa than elsewhere. Indeed, many would question whether white privilege can be considered invisible in a context where it has been so visibly powerful.

Whiteness finds itself in an unusual place in contemporary South Africa, as in the last 20 or so years it has gone from a position of being the legitimate master race, to being a somewhat resented racial grouping among others (Steyn, 2001). As a group that has very abruptly lost its central place in South African society, as well as guaranteed economic, social and cultural privilege, whites have had to find new ways to make meaning about themselves in a very short space of time (Steyn, 2001). Thus, while whiteness in South Africa shares some of the overarching attributes of white privilege, it is different to the whiteness discussed above, and has been produced by the rich social, economic and political history of its immediate setting.

### ***White racial identity in South Africa***

The apartheid regime, as well as the systems of racial hierarchy set in motion before its inception, have fundamentally influenced the social landscape of South Africa. For the better part of the 20th century racial segregation and hierarchy were enforced by law in the country, and these processes worked in variety of ways to privilege whites. Legislation worked to ensure that the white minority had access to high quality employment opportunities, education and living areas, while the black majority were provided with inferior education, earned menial salaries for unskilled work and were forced to live on the outskirts of cities or in underdeveloped rural areas (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). White development was supported by an underpaid black labour force who faced a multitude of daily injustices (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). The regime worked to disempower blacks in systematic and violent ways, disrupting the family structures and communities through forced removals and coercive migrant labour practices (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). The harsh inequality of the system can be seen government spending during this period as, for example, while R644.00 was spent on a white child attending school per year in 1976, a meagre R41.80 was spent on a black school going child (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). Thus, whites enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world at the time, supported by the labour of blacks (Johnstone, 1970). South African society came to represent the ultimate embodiment of racism, or the “fullest expression of imperialism’s logic” (Steyn, 2001, p. 23).

However, maintaining the regime required a constant production of boundaries and separation between races, as well as continual work to construct whiteness as superior and blackness as inferior (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Ratele & Laubscher, 2010). During this period the performance of whiteness was achieved through the violent interpersonal and structural oppression of the “other”, as well as a vehement internal repression through mechanisms of denial (Ratele & Laubscher, 2010). Meanwhile, black South Africans experienced a chronic sense of insecurity, hopelessness and helplessness, denied any opportunity to obtain a fulfilling life (Biko, 1978; Ratele & Laubscher, 2010). The power whites wielded was therefore by no means natural and required constant work to remain intact.

This extreme and violent regime may seem arbitrary and unjustified, but it arose out of a very particular a dilemma that has plagued South Africa for many centuries: “who owns this land?” (Steyn, 2001, p.27). While whites have always formed a minority in South Africa, the white population’s “self-image and expectations were shaped by ... the master narrative of whiteness” (Steyn, 2001, p. 24). In other words, whites considered themselves the superior race who were justified in taking ownership of the land from other races (Steyn, 2001). However, because of their small numbers in comparison to other groupings, as well as the strong cultural heritage and identity maintained by these groups, whites position was never assured (Steyn, 2001). What is more, whites were not themselves made up of one united cultural grouping and power was contested between the English and the collection of European settlers who formed the Afrikaners (Steyn, 2001). With the end of the Anglo-Boer War and establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, it was necessary to unite white South Africans, and this was done through collectively defining themselves against blacks (Dolby, 2001; Steyn, 2001). Thus, white privilege has always been somewhat insecure in South Africa, despite its almost total commitment to its own superiority and entitlement. This lack of assured authority resulted in the need to oppress more violently and maintain power more systematically.

Considering all this, the significance of the end of apartheid cannot be underemphasised. Blacks were afforded the rights they had been so violently denied and a narrative of a new South Africa was developed. This discourse of the “rainbow nation” was characterised by a

sense of united identity, freedom from all forms of discrimination and equal access to opportunity (Phiri, 2013, p. 164). This radical change in the prevailing norms dramatically decentred whiteness and placed blacks at the centre of South African discourse making and politics (Steyn, 2001). Whites meanwhile came to feel marginalised, displaced and faced a sense of a loss of privilege (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). Essentially whites, “believing for several centuries that they were feudal lords, woke up to find they had actually been squatters all along” (Steyn, 2001, p. 156). Whites could no longer claim South Africa as exclusively their own and now needed to negotiate their place in it with blacks (Steyn, 2001). However, it is important to emphasise that this was not so much a process of marginalisation as one of relativisation, where blacks became as entitled as whites to aspire to thrive (Steyn, 2001).

Despite this deep sense of marginalisation felt by many whites at the end of apartheid, the post-apartheid era has largely proven to be kind to whites. A look at statistics generated since 1994 shows that whites, on the a whole, continue to live in better neighbourhoods, earn better salaries and have access to better services than any other race group (South African Audience Research Foundation, 2014). For example, in June 2014 whites made up 51.4 % of the richest South Africans compared to 28.6% black Africans (South African Audience Research Foundation, 2014). This may seem like evidence of transformation, until one considers that comparative sizes of the black African and white populations and the fact that black Africans made up 98.5% of the poorest South Africans, with whites not even featuring in that category (South African Audience Research Foundation, 2014). Similarly, in the fourth quarter of 2014, unemployment among whites was 7.7% compared with 27.2% among black Africans (Statistics South Africa, 2015). While the black middle and upper classes have certainly been shown to be growing, these figures demonstrate that a continued disproportionate economic advantage is enjoyed by whites and that the overarching patterns economic distribution have remained the same (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; South African Audience Research Foundation, 2014). Many whites would contest this, stating that their opportunities have been limited by affirmative action policies and stiffer job competition. Although this may be partly true, and there certainly have been whites who have fallen on hard times since the end of the regime, the evidence incontrovertibly shows that

whites, as a whole, continue to be better resourced than any other racial grouping, as a whole, and therefore whiteness has preserved its comparative privilege.

Similarly, while whiteness was socially decentred with the end of apartheid, whites continue to maintain a level of privilege in the social arena as well. Whiteness is still strongly associated with modernity and the west, attributes that hold great social capital in the current global economy (Steyn, 2001). So although the representation of African, Indian, Asian and coloured cultures have become more prominent in the post-apartheid context, these are often framed as traditional cultures, with those wishing to be perceived as modern tending to align themselves with westernised identities. This is a significant phenomenon that causes a crisis of identity among many blacks, particularly because of the tensions between maintaining an authentic black identity while navigating a job market that largely requires people to be westernised (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). Labels such as “coconut”, which describes a black African person who identifies most strongly with western white culture, are used disparagingly and highlight the conflict that exists between staying true to one’s heritage and integrating into the modern, white world (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Phiri, 2013). So by virtue of its link to global trends of white power, whiteness remains a valuable social and cultural resource in South Africa (Steyn, 2001).

In summary, despite the significant social change that has taken place with the end of apartheid, white privilege has not experienced a radical disruption and in fact continues to hold on to a degree of social and economic power in the country. This is significant, as it suggests that while much has changed, much has stayed the same. The continuation of white privilege has implications for the potential for continued transformation because white privilege is entirely dependent on black disadvantage. An important factor in predicting the potential for unsettling white privilege is whites’ own approaches to understanding their place in South Africa. The next section will explore how whites work to manage their identity in the new South Africa.



### ***Managing white privilege in South Africa***

Following the end of apartheid, a number of academics turned their attention to interrogating the transformation of whiteness in South Africa and the mechanisms through which its privilege continues to be managed and maintained. The findings of this work suggest that maintaining an unwavering sense of supremacy is no longer sustainable for whites and that “white domination tends to prefer silent tiptoeing to loud stomping” in contemporary South Africa (Matthews, 2012, p. 173). However, this does not mean that some sense of supremacy has not remained intact.

The abrupt decentring of whiteness and apparent loss of privilege, as well as the racism, arrogance and other negative stereotypes associated with whiteness, have made whiteness, and particularly white privilege, a difficult position to manage in contemporary South Africa (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Steyn, 2001). Whites’ identity is still deeply associated with apartheid and this has left whites in the morally troublesome position of trying “to live with dignity and humanity while maintaining the benefits of privileged acquired at the expense of exploited others” (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011, p. 44). Whites have in effect experienced a “loss of face” at having been found out as an oppressor and have experienced negative social consequences as a result (Steyn, 2001, p. 160). Whiteness has therefore fragmented as whites have begun to find new ways to manage their identity favourably in the new South African context. In fact, the last two decades have been a crucial time of redefinition of what it means to be white in South Africa, with multiple narratives of whiteness competing for legitimisation (Steyn, 2001).

### ***Denial***

Literature on this topic has identified a number of key ways in which whites not only make sense of their position in the post-apartheid narrative but work to manage, maintain and even justify their continued privilege and for some, sense of supremacy. One major method through which this has been achieved is through strategies of defensive denial. This denial can take many forms and is typically focused on distancing whites’ identity from the notion that they are currently privileged, as well as avoiding admitting complicity with the racism of the past (Steyn, 2001; Wale & Foster, 2007). For example, a discourse of meritocracy has been

identified by multiple academics as allowing whites to avoid acknowledging their past and continued role in systematic forms of oppression (Lucal, 1996; Matthews, 2012; McIntosh, 1988; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Wale & Foster, 2007). This discourse constructs the world as a place where people get what they deserve and where everyone has an equal chance of succeeding. This depoliticised stance allows whites to unproblematically argue that they have earned their place in society through hard work, implying that those who are not doing as well simply haven't worked hard enough, and in so doing defend their position in the social hierarchy. This discourse works by repressing or denying any structural origins of inequality in South Africa and attributing all power to the individual, rather than broader forces. This links strongly with other familiar discourses, such as those that construct the world as being a fair place and hard work a being virtuous, which themselves are often drawn upon by white South Africans (Wale & Foster, 2007). The "Protestant work ethic" discourse is particularly useful in efforts to bolster a favourable interpretation of whiteness, as it maintains that hard work is a sign of virtue and those who do not appear to work hard, or who are not successful, are not virtuous (Wale & Foster, 2007). These kinds of discourses allow whites to justify the status quo and hold on to the notion that they not only deserve what they have, but are good people too. Whites can present their privilege as the result of individual hard work and interpret any uncomfortable economic inequalities between racial groupings as a result of a lack of individual virtue and hard work.

Another way whites work to distance themselves from negative associations of their white identity is through discourses of non-racialism. These discourses feature appeals to let by-gones be by-gones and to move on from a time when race defined every aspect of South African life (Steyn, 2001). While on the surface this discourse may seem hugely forward-thinking, it typically works rather dubiously to shut down discussion around race and privilege that may discredit whites. As Steyn (2001) notes, "the appeal to let sleeping dogs lie hides the crucial issue of which dogs are still holding onto the bones" (p.112). This strategy therefore allows whites to avoid the unpleasantness of acknowledging their own part in a larger system of inequality, as well as the system of inequality itself (Steyn, 2001).

A similar discourse has emerged out of the sense of threat whites felt with the end of apartheid, where whites not only emphasise that they are not racist, but deem policies such

as affirmative action as signs of the reverse racism of the new government, which some hold, seeks to punish whites. By drawing on individualist and colour-blind discourses and constructing a version of South Africa that is meritocratic, whites are able to convincingly define affirmative action as discrimination (Wale & Foster, 2007). This may be a difficult case to make otherwise, as like the figures above demonstrate, whites still face significantly better odds of being employed at any given time in South Africa than blacks (Statistics South Africa, 2015). This approach highlights some whites' continued sense of entitlement to better treatment than other racial groupings and unwillingness to recognise the structural inequalities that still exist in South Africa (Steyn, 2001). The use of these kinds of discourses therefore allows whites to discredit policies that threaten their position while allowing whites to appear to have the moral high ground.

A further discourse that works through appeals to the moral high ground is that of "the good white Samaritan" (Wale & Foster, 2007, p. 46). This discourse denies the structural relationship between white privilege and black poverty and instead locates solutions to poverty on an individual level, stating that each white should do their part to help individual blacks (Wale & Foster, 2007). By arguing that one is willing to use one's privilege help an individual, whites demonstrate that they are not opposed to equality and in fact are working to secure it (Wale & Foster, 2007). However, a closer look at this discourse shows that it works not only to deny the structural nature of the inequality in South Africa and whites' role in perpetuating it, but that it also works to legitimise this system by constructing whites as the necessary saviours of black people (Wale & Foster, 2007). This kind of discourse clearly has its roots in the discourses that justified colonialism, the notion of the civilised white saviour of the primitive black native (Steyn, 2001). Thus, this discourse allows whites to appear transformed, while subtly facilitating the maintenance of their privilege.

A final discourse that academics have identified as allowing whites to defensively deny their privilege is that of working to delegitimise the current South African government and black power in general (Wale & Foster, 2007). While whites continue to hold on to power in economic and social spheres, their loss of power in the political arena threatens whites' sense of legitimacy (Wale & Foster, 2007). To manage this difficulty whites have been shown to construct current political systems as corrupt, greedy and incompetent and with a sense of

inevitably doom (Wale & Foster, 2007). While there is no doubt that contemporary regimes of political power in South Africa have their flaws, these discourses specifically reflect racist colonial constructions of blackness and thus represent a continuation of these socially embedded ways of delegitimising blackness (Wale & Foster, 2007). Whites also work to delegitimise the government by emphasising the value of the economic realm, where whites still hold power, over the political realm (Wale & Foster, 2007). By doing this whites are able to re-centre white power and discredit black power's legitimate authority (Wale & Foster, 2007). Thus, discourses of delegitimation work to manage whites' sense of threatened marginalisation and allow whites to avoid being decentred by blackness. They provide a convincing way for whites to resist the increasing prominence of black power and hold on to feelings of supremacy and control.

### *Escape*

White South Africans have also been shown to use strategies of escape to manage their uncomfortable place in the post-apartheid context. For some, this has meant quite literal forms of escape, with an estimated 841 000 white South Africans emigrating from the country between 1995 and 2005, a significant proportion of whites considering that they numbered a total of 4 434 697 in 1996 (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2004). Ballard (2004) in particular has identified a similar phenomenon of "semigration", in which whites escape the changing South African context by retreating to gated communities and complexes within the country's borders (p. 52). This is a less extreme form of avoidance that nevertheless has become a significant trend in the past two decades, in part as a result of the diversification of South Africa's urban areas. These estates feature reproductions of traditional European architecture and landscape styles, such as Tuscan or Tudor, suggesting that their symbolic appeal to whites is their ability provide a safe and removed place where European whiteness is still dominant (Ballard & Jones, 2011). This kind of geographical escapism is often explained by whites as being based on a desire to escape the high levels of crime in South Africa (Ballard & Jones, 2011). However, it also works to escape some of the other unpleasant realities and anxieties of social change and ensures that whites have one place where they continue to have control over their environment (Ballard & Jones, 2011). Set in their ways, it appears whites have produced a new form of segregated living, not unlike

that enforced by the Group Areas Act of 1950, where purchasing power allows them to retreat from some of the harsher realities of the new South Africa (Ballard & Jones, 2011).

Other less literal forms of escape have been noted, with Dolby (2001) documenting the multiple forms of escape used by young white high school learners to manage their whiteness in a racially diverse school setting. For some people, whiteness is so problematic that they wish to escape it altogether and cease to be white, in some cases immersing themselves in black culture and identities (Dolby, 2001; Steyn, 2001). However, more commonly, others seek to escape their environment rather than their race and abandon the confines of South Africa by identifying with more global forms of whiteness (Dolby, 2001). This is done through processes of “cling[ing] to the styles and tastes of ‘global whiteness’”, where whites identify with and construct their sense of self around the culture of white-dominated nations such as the United States or the United Kingdom (Dolby, 2001, p. 15). This provides whites with a sense of security in their identity and allows whites to avoid new challenges to their identity.

#### *Self-critical whiteness*

As this discussion has shown, whites have developed multiple ways of managing their identity that do not require them to question their privilege or their supremacy. However, whiteness has also taken more self-critical forms that are more reflective of the dilemma of being white in contemporary South Africa. Steyn (2001) describes a brand of whiteness that seeks to let go of the privilege attached to this identity and create new subjectivities that are not necessarily associated with being white. Within this discourse, change as a wholly positive thing and white privilege needs to be left in the past so that whites can become more equal and integrated citizens (Steyn, 2001). This discourse therefore forms a kind of hybridised whiteness, a whiteness that is not only self-critical and willing to face the unpleasant feelings of relativisation, but is also willing to leave behind the inflated sense of self whiteness imbues and allow oneself to be decolonised. Through an exploration of identities, immersing oneself in diversity and acknowledging the voice of the “other”, this discourse carries a sense of hopefulness for a new kind of social dynamic (Steyn, 2001). It similarly emphasises the importance of a dialogic approach to identity management where white identity comes to be co-authored by the “other” and ideas of hierarchy and purity are rejected (Steyn, 2001).

Essentially, this discourse is characterised by a sense that change is welcomed and trust that whites do have a place in the post-apartheid context (Steyn, 2001). Though this is not without discomfort, this optimistic discourse allows whites to view this as a worthwhile challenge (Steyn, 2001).

However, even this self-critical approach to managing whiteness faces challenges in the new era, with Vice (2010), for example, arguing that “white South Africans cannot unproblematically see themselves as fitting into or contributing much to the post-apartheid narrative. There is a sense that we need to earn our place in a country and continent that is not simply ours” (p. 332). Vice (2010) describes the sense of moral difficulty around being white in South Africa and the need to find ways to somehow atone for the past in a situation where there has been limited material transformation. This has been described as a schizophrenic existence, where whites face a constant conflict between what benefits them (their taken-for-granted privilege) and what is morally correct (Nuttall, 2001). Whites experience the bitter-sweet reality that transformation, a positive thing for many people, will come at a personal cost to themselves (Steyn, 2001).

It has also been suggested that there is no way for any whites to be moral while being white because they are unavoidably a perpetual product of their white privilege (Vice, 2010). Whites are constrained in their ability to leave behind their identity and must always bear the blessing and curse of everything associated with their racial identity. The question then becomes how whites manage the implications of this identity and how whites find ways to be decolonised and relativized by blacks, despite their structural privilege. While many whites may be entirely convinced of the value of social transformation for the country and for themselves, there may be no liberating, wholly moral position for white South Africans to take, considering the history of the country (Steyn, 2001). This leaves whites in a moral dilemma, where they may deny, escape, atone and feel guilt for their white privilege, yet inevitably play a role in maintaining it in some way, because it is entrenched in the social fabric of the world at large.

The discussion above has highlighted the complicated and problematic discursive space whites occupy in contemporary South Africa and the ways in which whites seek to set about managing the difficulties attached to their identity in their everyday lives. The discourses

described have been found by various authors to be drawn upon in any number of ways in talk and action, invariably to meet the immediate need of identity management in daily interactions. Whites may work to escape, deny or indeed atone and critique their white privilege, depending on the environment in which they find themselves. What is of vital importance is how these strategies may be changing to meet the needs of whites in the contemporary era, as this can indicate the level relative power white privilege continues to hold in South African social life. As has been discussed, whites continue to be privileged socially and economically and many of the discourses described above are evidence of this privilege reproducing itself. However, there may be entirely novel ways of managing white privilege becoming available and understanding these and their implications may suggest something about the changing nature of racial identity in South African society.

### **Domestic work**

Just as white privilege is still entrenched in post-apartheid setting, so is the labour that arguably supports it, the institution of domestic work. Domestic work is a hugely normalised form of labour relations in South Africa, partly because of its deep historical and social roots in the periods of colonialism and apartheid. Often termed the “last bastion of apartheid”, this labour practise represents a continuation of the gender, class and racial inequalities established during colonialism and is the product of the persistence of white privilege (Fish, 2006, p. 107). This is because domestic work is an inherently power-asymmetrical relationship that is performed almost exclusively by an already extremely marginalised group of people: poor black women. While this pattern of labour relations is present around the world, in South Africa this form of relationship therefore carries an unsettling reminder of apartheid and highlights the limitations of transformation in South Africa (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010; Fish, 2006).

In light of this, the relationship poses great difficulty for employer and employee, as having entered into this problematic form of labour relations, which greatly contradicts the ideals of the post-apartheid context, both must find ways to manage and justify their dependence upon each other (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014; Fish, 2006). This relationship therefore forms a microcosm of race relations in South Africa, where

employer and employee manage not only their individual identity, but their racial identity as well (Cock, 1980; Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). For these reasons, the context of domestic work offers a useful site to explore the broader nature of race relations in South Africa.

### **The nature of domestic work**

While many consider paid domestic work to be a phenomenon that is exclusive to South Africa, it is a form of employment that is found worldwide and has a long history (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010; Jacobs, Manicom & Durrheim, 2013). Throughout a range of settings, from Thailand to Canada, similar employment patterns are present and these characteristics are distinct from the typical features of other forms of paid labour (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). To begin with, unlike any other form of employment, this work takes place in the privacy of the employer's home, where the domestic worker is isolated from other workers in their field and is subject to the rules of an employer's home (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). Similarly, the work performed is labour that is traditionally considered caring work, the manual as well as emotional labour of cleaning the house, cooking the meals and raising the children (Ally, 2010; du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). Because this work is "often associated with what women do to express love for their family" and because it takes place in the context of the home, domestic work is often not perceived to be 'real work' (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010, p. 396). What is more, domestic workers typically spend extended periods of time with their employers, sometimes even living with a family, getting to know the intimate details of their employers' lives and operating within their private spaces and among their personal possessions (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). This causes a level of familiarity, friendship and even affection to develop between employer and employee that is unlikely to exist in other employment settings. The result is that the boundaries between professional and private become difficult to navigate in this relationship and complex interpersonal dynamics develop (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010).



This is problematic as the employee is a real worker and what is more, relationship between employer and employee is usually defined by an extreme power asymmetry (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). Domestic labour, as well as being women's work, is also the mundane, tedious and dirty work that most would rather not do (Ally, 2010). Thus, being able to pay for domestic labour to be performed relieves those who can afford it of these tiresome tasks and allows them to seek out more gainful employment (Ally, 2010). This labour therefore frees up the wealthy to accumulate more wealth and works to sustain the rich (Ally, 2010). Domestic workers meanwhile usually come from disadvantaged circumstances and, as a result of their low socio-economic status, struggle to find any other form of employment. For the employee, domestic work can be seen as an escape from poverty and an opportunity, as typically unskilled labour with limited education, to gain access to more lucrative employment in more developed or urban contexts (Cock, 1980). The result of these dynamics is that the employee becomes extremely dependent on the employer and an obvious hierarchy falls into place. The basis of this hierarchy is often more than just class, encompassing other forms of difference such as race or nationality, for example Mexican domestic workers in the United States (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). Thus, a power imbalance exists as a result of the employees' limited capacity to gain better employment, their isolation from any structures of collective bargaining power and the degree to which the relationship is considered to be non-professional (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). In effect, "to see what other people have, and what she herself does not have, can be called the essential job experience of the domestic servant" (Cock, 1980, p. 309).

However, while employees are often utterly dependent on their employer and vulnerable to their every whim, the employee also possesses their own degree of power. Because domestic workers know the intimate details of their employer's life, have access to their entire inventory of possessions and spend extended periods of time with the employers' family, employers can be left with their own sense of vulnerability, deflating their overall feeling of control over their relationship. Thus, this relationship features complex power dynamics, blurred boundaries and intense emotional conflicts that make it extremely fraught with difficulty (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010; Fish, 2006; Shefer, 2012). Indeed, the paradox of paying someone to do caring, and often unpleasant, work to maintain a family

is that it rarely leaves either party feeling particularly at ease. Nevertheless, current socio-economic inequalities worldwide continue to render this kind of relationship valuable.

## **Domestic work in the context of South Africa**

### ***The apartheid context***

While domestic work in South Africa features all of the dynamics discussed above, it is characterised by the additional complexity of representing the continuation of the racist agendas of apartheid. The legislature of the apartheid regime worked to restrict the occupational opportunities and quality of education available to black South Africans, steering blacks into a vast unskilled labour force ready to be exploited (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). And while the regime worked to fiercely separate the races, it “at the same time crafted urban and labour control policies that channelled black women ... into the most intimate spaces of white households” (Ally, 2010, p. 2). Thus, for most black women, particularly black African women, domestic work was one of the only available employment options, making them highly exploitable (Ally, 2010; du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010).

During the apartheid era, domestic workers were the victims of what has been termed “ultra-exploitation”, taken advantage of not just as a result of their racial identity, but also because of their economic vulnerability and inferior position in the gender hierarchy (Cock, 1980, p. 6). As poor black women, employees had limited ability to control their wages, working hours and working conditions, and often employment came at the additional cost of requiring an extended absence from their own family in order to ‘live-in’ with their employer (Cock, 1980). This meant that most white families could afford a domestic worker and worked to maintain white privilege, allowing white women to escape the drudgery of performing domestic labour themselves (Cock, 1980; Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014).

However, the labour of black women served more than just a physical role in maintaining white privilege. Most importantly, it also served an ideological role (Cock, 1980). The institution of domestic work played a crucial role in reproducing the ideologies of the apartheid regime by ensuring that the most significant contact between black and white

South Africans was in a context of a deep power imbalance (Cock, 1980). This is especially noteworthy because so many white South African children were raised by black domestic workers (Cock, 1980; Shefer, 2012). The first black person the majority of white South Africans engaged with in their formative years was a deeply disempowered person who took orders from their white parents, not an equal. Though some whites may later seek to reject any sense of racial hierarchy, these early experiences certainly worked to embed in them a sense of racial superiority. For domestic workers, the reverse was undoubtedly true; submission, hopelessness, resentment and even a sense of inferiority, were embedded in their consciousness through involvement in this relationship (Cock, 1980).

However, apartheid was fraught with contradictions that challenged its rigid agenda. In the relationship between domestic worker and employer this was the fact that in many cases, the intimate contact between white and black also worked to unravel myths of racial hierarchy. This was especially true for children who grew up under the care of a 'nanny' and for whom a domestic worker often embodied the role of caring mother figure, disciplinarian and role model of domesticity (Shefer, 2012). Early socialisation with blackness was therefore not entirely characterised by racial hierarchy and often worked to problematise such assumptions (Shefer, 2012). Domestic workers were often a source of comfort and care, in the absence of a biological mother, and the main adult relationship in a young child's life (Shefer, 2012). Furthermore, domestic workers also often represented a fascinating gateway to the hidden world of black South Africa for white children (Shefer, 2012). For employers too, the relationship worked in some cases to humanise blacks and reveal the harsh material effects of apartheid on blacks (Cock, 1980). Thus, despite the seemingly unremarkable, normalised and everyday nature of this form of labour relations, it had a significant effect on politics of identity in South Africa and worked at times to subvert and challenge the assumptions upon which it was based. Domestic work in South Africa has therefore featured the added complexity of being the point of interception between white and black South Africa and a site where external social conflicts became personal.

### ***The post-apartheid context***

The post-1994 period saw a rapid reversal of apartheid policies and domestic work was identified as an important labour system in need of transformation, with the intention being to provide domestic workers with the rights structure and legal protection of any other paid worker (Ally, 2010; Jacobs, Manicom & Durrheim, 2013). In recognition of the significant exploitation experienced by this category of worker previously, the state set about crafting “one of the most extensive and expansive efforts” globally to recognise paid domestic work as a type of formal employment (Ally, 2010, p. 3). This meant that domestic workers now had access to a state set minimum wage and the right to mandatory formal employment contracts, annual increases, leave, formal registration, severance pay, a government sponsored pension fund, unemployment insurance and government sponsored training to access a domestic work qualification (Ally, 2010; Jacobs, Manicom & Durrheim, 2013). These rights were important landmarks and even world firsts, transforming domestic workers into a legitimate, empowered workforce (Ally, 2010).

However, this strategy was only partly successful in transforming the institution of domestic work, and its accomplishments remain mostly paper bound, with relatively few domestic workers or employers adopting its regulations (Ally, 2010; Jacobs, Manicom & Durrheim, 2013). While domestic workers rejoiced in the fact that they now had rights, many refused to sign mandatory contracts or let their employers register them for unemployment insurance (Ally, 2010). Many even claimed that democracy had made no difference to their working lives and that things were worse than before (Ally, 2010). While there may be many dynamics that play a role in discouraging the formalisation of domestic work, a primary factor is that in the absence of a formal rights structure during apartheid and as a result of the intimate bond between employee and employer, this relationship has developed complex and informal set of power relations of its own (Ally, 2010). Imposing a formal labour system on to this relationship was therefore simply unhelpful because this relationship is inherently informal and based on complex, social power structures (Ally, 2010). The result was that domestic workers were left feeling sceptical about the potential for the state to improve their lot when they already possessed an informal system labour relations in which they could, through maintaining their personal relationships, manage their employment affairs in ways that favoured them (Ally, 2010).

Thus, despite efforts to transform this labour category, domestic work remains largely unchanged in contemporary South Africa (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Fish, 2006). It continues to be made up of a significant labour force, with almost a million (approximately 943 000) domestic workers employed in the country in the fourth quarter of 2014 (Statistics South Africa, 2015). While the demographics of employers have diversified slightly, with the growing black African, coloured and Indian middle classes employing more and more domestic helpers, a good majority of employers remain privileged whites (Dilata, 2008; Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Russell, 2002). Similarly, while patterns of employment have changed somewhat, with greater trends towards employing a 'live-out' cleaner rather than a 'live-in' domestic servant, the relationship itself remains essentially the same (Ally, 2010; Shefer, 2012). Employees are still performing caring and dirty work in isolated contexts where compliance with laws is difficult to monitor and where they remain highly vulnerable to exploitation. In fact, research has shown that these power asymmetries continue to be entrenched in all contexts, regardless of the race of the employer (Dilata, 2008; du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010; Fish, 2006). Most importantly, domestic work continues to be performed, in a huge majority, by poor black African women, suggesting that these women have not yet seen any significantly positive material effects as a result of the end of apartheid (Fish, 2006).

### **The dilemma of identity management in the domestic worker/employer relationship**

Domestic work therefore poses an interesting challenge to employer and employee in contemporary South Africa, as both continue to be dependent on this relationship and yet are also aware of the morally unfavourable implications of this arrangement. For the domestic worker, entering into this relationship means allowing oneself to be somewhat exploited and subjugated in spite of the fact that domestic work is no longer one of the only categories of employment legally available to black women (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). For the employer meanwhile, taking on a domestic worker requires finding ways to reconcile this obvious evidence of one's privilege with any feelings of guilt, discomfort or desire to believe that one is no longer unduly privileged (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). In other words, apartheid no longer enforces the inequality of this relationship and so both parties are left with the dilemma of explaining their engagement in a system of

relations that is widely considered to be unfair. In essence, “both workers and employers need to maintain dignity in the face of their participation in relations of exploitation” (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011, p. 182).

Another component of this dilemma is that this relationship continues to be a site where the racial dynamics of the country play themselves out and as a result employers and employee’s actions come to be rendered meaningful through “a rich lexicon of racial imagery” (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011, p. 182). This means that employers and employees identities are only not defined by their respective role in the relationship, but invariably by characteristics stereotypically associated with their racial grouping as well (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). Employers are stereotyped as being abusive, arrogant and racist and employees as being lazy, criminal, stupid, and uncivilised (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). However, while race continues to be highly salient in this relationship, the racialisation of this labour is no longer a socially acceptable fact. The result of this is that on top of managing the exploitative nature of this relationship, workers and employers also work to repress the racialised nature of the relationship through certain routines of talk and embodied action (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). While for employees this involves the management of being viewed as an exploited and incapable black, for employers, management of identity revolves around avoiding being viewed as exploitative and unduly privileged white. Thus, for employers, managing their identity is about more than just the immediate relationship but about their privileged identity as a white South African.

With the difficult position in which this relationship places employer and employee in mind, research has shown that both parties typically work to manage their relationships in ways that soften the harsh inequalities between them and reframe the relationship as less exploitative (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). However, it has also been demonstrated that efforts to make the relationship appear less unequal usually work to reinforce this inequality (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). One example of this is the use of discourses of paternalism, which reconstruct the power inequality in the relationship in terms of mutual caring and helping (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). Within this discourse, the employer frames the employees’ unequal position in terms of disadvantage and positions themselves as working to undo this disadvantage by providing the domestic worker with

employment and other benefits (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). Meanwhile, the employee attaches value to the employers' willingness to be generous, framing the relationship as good when they receive additional benefits (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). This works to entrench rather than disrupt the power inequality between employer and employee, as the worker submits to the employer's authority in order to enjoy these extra benefits (Cock, 1980; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). In other words, efforts to construct the relationship in more socially favourable terms, in this case as caring, also justifies and maintains the power inequalities between employer and employee, even if it appears to sanitise their motives for participating in this relationship (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014).

One way in which this paternalism is specifically achieved by employers is through discourses of the heroic and helpful employer (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). This involves constructing employees as hugely disadvantaged and blameless victims of a historically unequal world (constructions with which domestic workers rarely identify) in order to frame their own actions in terms of sympathy and caring, rather than as taking advantage of these vulnerabilities (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). In Durrheim, Jacobs and Dixon's (2014) research, employers gave examples of massively generous gifts they had given to their employees in order to alleviate their suffering, from paying for their children's school fees to even using their own retirement money to buy the employee a house (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). Such statements work to position employers highly favourably, as extremely sympathetic and generous, while concealing the fact that domestic workers might not require such assistance had the system they occupy been more fair (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). These ways of constructing the relationship work to repress the more unpleasant, racist or historical attributions associated with it and allow employers to refute accusations of exploitation (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). Similarities are visible between this approach and the discourse of the "good white Samaritan" discussed earlier in the chapter (p. 13)

Another familiar part of the paternalistic discourse is the use of the cliché of a domestic worker being "part of the family" (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014, p. 10). This widely used phrase works to imply that an employer's relationship with their employee is so close, affectionate and free of animosity that they are literally treated and feel like part of the employer's family. It is often used by employers as a way of proving that their relationship

with their employee is closer or better than the typical employer/employee relationship. However, this seemingly affectionate phrase is heavy with paternalism, usually constructing the employee in a way that implies their inferiority or patronises them in some way. What is more, this discourse can suggest a sense of ownership, as it denies the significance of the employee's actual family to them and instead assumes the primacy of employer's family in the employee's life. Thus, this apparently innocuous phrase works to manage employers' identities and allows them to appear morally upstanding while in fact maintaining the inequity of this relationship.

Research has also identified other discourses used by employers to manage how they are perceived in this relationship, most notably the discourse of mutuality (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). Within this discourse the employer works to present the relationship as an exchange of wages for services that is mutually and equally beneficial for both parties (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). That is, the employer constructs an equation of inputs to the relationship that makes the relationship appear equal, as a way of countering the severe inequalities that usually define this relationship. This is generally constructed in terms that transcend economic or labour considerations and suggests a personal and social balance of gratitude and affection (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). As a result, despite the objectively vast inequality between employer and domestic worker, the relationship can be viewed positively because it is seen to be based on equal care rather than unequal exploitation (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014).

Managing inequality of labour in this way reflects strategies that research has identified as being adopted by heterosexual couples to achieve a sense of fairness in the commonly gender unequal labour distribution in the home (Dixon & Wetherall, 2004; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). Couples have been found to draw on a vocabulary of mutual contribution and equality, such as notion of "give and take", to maintain the myth of equality while women continue perform the majority of household labour (Dixon & Wetherall, 2004, p. 176). Mutual contribution is used to reframe the objectively gendered labour distribution in the home and allow couples to maintain a sense of equal partnership (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014). Domestic work represents a similar kind of gendered, caring labour and thus it is unsurprising that similar discourses are reproduced across these contexts. The benefit of this approach in



the setting of domestic work is that it depoliticises the relationship in terms of race and class, as well as gender, allowing the relationship to appear to as more of a partnership with equal power and mutual care, than as fundamentally power asymmetrical.

The discourses described above are essential to the management of employers' identities in the post-apartheid context because they work to construct the relationship as transformed and recast the power asymmetry in the relationship in gentler, kinder ways. However, as has been shown, these discourses often serve to justify the inequality in the relationship rather than to challenge it, and while they allow the relationship to appear more progressive, the use of such discourses suggests that domestic workers remain disempowered. As Ally (2010) notes in a discussion of domestic work in the apartheid era "employing a domestic worker was not just a choice of how to manage one's household work, it was colluding with an institution that was crucial to the production and reinforcement of raced and classed inequalities" (p. 6). This continues to be the case as even with expressions of caring and affection this social institution continues to work to privilege whites and disadvantage blacks.

## **Conclusion and Rationale**

As this review has shown, white privilege and domestic work remain socially embedded in the South African context and deeply tied to the history of the country. Whiteness has been a global product of colonialism, and with it has come the racialised practises around domestic labour that are normalised in South Africa. Today, versions of these old institutions continue to thrive, in most cases privileging whites and placing blacks at a disadvantage. Yet, as has been suggested, for white employers and whites in general, this privilege is no longer an entirely comfortable fact in South Africa. Although whites continue to enjoy economic and social privilege, endorsing this privilege outright is no longer as socially acceptable and whites therefore face the difficult task of reconciling their privilege and their morality. As has been described, this is a fundamental task of identity production and how whites resolve these incongruences serves to define what whiteness is in South Africa. Similar is true for employers of domestic workers who, as privileged individuals, must find ways manage the disparate power and privilege between themselves and their employee. This too has implications for racial identity, because this institution is so racialised. Overall, current literature suggests that

managing white privilege, particularly in settings such as domestic work where racial hierarchy remains unchallenged, is a difficult task to achieve because constructing a favourable identity requires finding ways to be virtuous while being the benefactor of a violently oppressive system, and usually results in reinforcing that system in some way.

The present study sought to build on this literature in order to develop a more complete and nuanced understanding of how whites make sense of the moral incongruences attached to their racial identity in contemporary South Africa. As the literature review outlined, many people have theorised white racial identity in South Africa but the moral difficulties surrounding this identity have not yet been fully explored, particularly in the current setting. Contemporary South Africa is an interesting site in which to reinvestigate whiteness because whites are likely to experience different kinds of moral dilemmas in this setting to those experienced in the past. With the beginning of the third decade since the country's first democratic elections, South Africans have settled into the new order of things and many of the injustices and tensions of the past are no longer as fresh and raw. Yet, this does not mean these injustices have gone away and the majority of South Africans continue to live in poverty, as they did during apartheid. What is more, new tensions and dynamics have developed and white privilege continues to be challenged in new ways, most obviously through greater diversity in schools, universities and the work place. While many whites continue to employ impoverished black help in the home, they are also surrounded by black colleagues and employers, which creates difficulties for how whites conceptualise themselves in relation to blacks. Whites no longer exist in a system that positions them as strictly superior and, as has been discussed, their "ways-of-seeing ... and ways-of-being in the world" have been shifted aside to make room for other cultural groupings (Willig, 2008, p. 117). This increasing complexity of social life challenges how all races think about one another, and for whites in particular this means that both their own sense of superiority and their sense of others inferiority are contested regularly.

The setting of the white employer's relationship with the black domestic servant was identified as an ideal site in which to observe these moral dilemmas in action because it is simultaneously such a comfortable and uncomfortable social arrangement. While most employers have always lived in homes serviced by a black person in some way, it is much

harder to feel entitled to such a social arrangement in contemporary South Africa. Black no longer exclusively means poor, stupid and lazy, and whites are faced with trying to reconcile their current experiences with past attitudes. The dilemma of trying to position oneself as a good person when it is clear that employing a domestic worker is a somewhat exploitative and potentially counter-normative arrangement and the ways whites seek to resolve this speaks a great deal to how whiteness maintains its structural privilege. The relationship between employer and employee forces whites to confront the morality of white privilege and challenges whites to reconcile their desire to be perceived favourably with their clearly privileged racial position.

The value of studying whiteness in this setting is that also it allows strategies of managing privilege to be identified in a non-threatening way. That is, rather than asking participants outright about their opinions of racial identity and white privilege, which would undoubtedly lead to predictable, defensive or extremely tactical discussions, examining the participants relationships with their employees served to provide a naturalistic context in which to observe the management of identity. Because the topic of interest was framed in relation to domestic work, the participants were not necessarily actively managing whiteness in this study and were more concerned with how they are perceived as an employer. For this reason, the kinds of constructions they produced were more representative of the everyday ways in which they manage their identity, the kinds of constructions they, and other whites like them, might draw upon in casual conversations that ultimately work to reproduce white privilege and its various forms in South Africa.

Thus, this study was motivated by a desire to obtain evidence of the kinds of discourses that are drawn upon and strategies that are used by white South Africans to construct and manage their identity, as many studies have done before it. However, this study was also concerned with identifying how the construction of whiteness has changed over time and most importantly, how white privilege is managed in the context where is most salient and unavoidable, that of the relationship between employer and domestic worker. Here, it was reasoned, morality of white privilege would be most greatly challenged, and the most work would needed to achieve a favourable identity.

Bearing in mind the discussions of this literature review and rationale, this study therefore sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do white female employers manage their white privileged identity within discussions about their relationship with their black domestic worker? And, in so doing, how do employers reconcile their morality and their white privilege?
2. Does the way the employers manage their identity speak to any strategies previously identified in literature on whiteness in South Africa? For example, is there evidence of strategies of denial, avoidance or self-critique?

## Chapter Two: Methodology

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### Introduction

When considering how best to study white privilege in South Africa, a qualitative, and specifically social constructionist, methodological approach was selected because of its utility in making sense of how broader structural power functions on an individual level. Social constructionism, which falls within the broader qualitative paradigm, takes “a critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge” and argues that this taken-for-granted knowledge is constructed through social interaction, in everyday talk between social actors (Burr, 1995, p. 3). Within this approach, talk is studied in its “own right and not as a secondary route to things 'beyond' the text, like attitudes, events or cognitive processes” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 160). This is because social constructionism holds that language is central to shaping our identities and social worlds, and that it is through talk, and specifically interaction, that knowledge, the world and the self is produced (Burr, 1995).

Adopting such an approach meant that this study was concerned with the way the participants spoke about their identity and how this produced certain kinds of meaning around racial identity. This study was not therefore interested in defining stable psychological traits, such as racism, or in understanding the participants’ state of mind. Rather, it adopted an epistemological approach that rejected that such things can be known and argues instead that constructs, such as whiteness, are best studied in social interaction because their nature is dependent on how they are socially produced (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wilbraham, 2004). Through such an approach, the way everyday patterns of talk maintain broader regimes of power can be interrogated. That is, structural systems of power can be studied through observing how they inform and are informed by the everyday way meaning is produced. Such an approach is worthwhile when attempting to understand the operation of a hegemonic force (such as white privilege), because it renders its everyday functioning visible.

Having settled upon a social constructionist methodology, the researcher sampled two groups of six white women from an affluent upper highway suburb in KwaZulu-Natal. These women were selected because they currently, or had in the past, employed a black female domestic

worker for an extended period of time. Each group participated in a focus group that took place on a private online community and lasted a number of consecutive days. Within this online community, participants were encouraged to discuss their relationships with their employees as they would in any informal setting, with the goal of producing talk that was as naturalistic and as everyday as possible. The data produced in these groups was then analysed using Foucauldian discourse analysis, a social constructionist method that allows the analyst to draw out the discourses used in everyday talk that speak to broader structural discourses (Wilbraham, 2004). While great efforts were made to ensure that the research was ethically sound, rigorous and of a high quality, it also faced a number of methodological limitations. All aspects of the research procedure will be discussed in greater detail below.

## **Sample**

### **The participants**

As already stated, twelve white women from an affluent upper highway suburb in KwaZulu-Natal participated in this study and sampling was based on a combination of convenience and purposive methods (Patton, 1990). The researcher sought out participants who were of course white, but also participants who were female, of a middle to high socio-economic status, formed an already existing social grouping, had the technical means to participate in online discussions and employed a domestic worker (Patton, 1990).

These sampling criteria were selected based on the following methodological reasoning. Firstly, because of the inherently gendered nature of domestic work, women were far more likely than men to be the ones managing and interacting with domestic workers in the home, making them ideal candidates for discussions about the difficulties and discomfort attached to this relationship. Secondly, selecting women of a higher economic status increased the likelihood that the women would currently be employing a domestic worker, as well as the likelihood that they would have regular access to a computer and have some experience using online social platforms. The moral dilemma of white privilege was also expected to be more materially obvious to these women, increasing the potential that their talk would include clear examples of their privilege being managed. Finally, the researcher targeted real life social communities, rather than groups of strangers, in an attempt to ensure that the

discussion environment was as comfortable as possible. It was hoped that by including friendship groups who already discussed their lives and current social issues with each other frequently, the data collected would be more naturalistic and resemble a slice of everyday conversation.

Using these criteria, the researcher recruited a group of twelve women (a number sufficiently large for a qualitative study), who were all white, had access to computers and who currently, or had in the recent past, employed a domestic worker. Through discussion during data collection it was gleaned that the participants had a range of different employment relationships with their help. All but two participants currently employed domestic workers, with four participants employing two or more domestic workers concurrently and the remaining six participants employing a single domestic worker. An approximately equal proportion of employers had live-in and live-out help and relationships between employer and employee ranged from indifferent and to very close. This diversity of experience is worth noting here as it highlights the fact that despite their shared broad demographic characteristics, the participants did not enter into the research with the exact same frame of reference for this relationship. It is also worth noting that a majority of the participants were homemakers, with the remaining proportion being skilled professionals. This suggested that the group of participants did fall into an economic bracket far higher than their employees, meaning that white privilege was likely to be economically apparent, even if not socially apparent, to the participants.

The specific location of the study was selected because it was most convenient setting in which to access participants who met the researcher's criteria. A practical benefit of sampling from this community was that the researcher was a member of this community. This meant that the participants were likely to feel more comfortable with the researcher and that the researcher had a degree of familiarity with local norms and social knowledge of this context. Although taking such an approach did have ethical implications, which will be discussed in detail in ethics section of the chapter (p. 49, sampling from this community did little to jeopardise the rigor of the study and in fact may have enhanced it in ways described above.

## **Recruitment**

The researcher took convenience based approach to recruiting the participants in this study, an approach that is suitable in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). The researcher identified women who she was familiar with in her own social life who were likely to fit the requirements of the study and who would be able to act as gatekeepers for the researcher, providing access to their groups of friends who were likely to share their characteristics (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The researcher contacted three such women via telephone and social media, requesting that they and their friends consider participating in the study. Two of these potential gatekeepers agreed to participate. These participants then played a critical role in the study by pitching the research to their friends and appealing to them to participate. To assist in this process the researcher emailed a letter to the gatekeepers that could then be forwarded to their friends outlining what the research was about and what participating in it would entail (see Appendix 1). In both groups, the researcher was then able to meet with the participants in person and explain the research process to them: outlining the general research topic, the structure of the data collection process, explaining the ethical considerations and answering any questions they may have had. Once having met with the potential participants, the researcher provided the participants with an opportunity to privately agree or decline to participate, ensuring that all participation was voluntary and that no participants felt pressured to participate. A number of participants dropped out of the study at this stage of recruitment. All the women who agreed to participate signed an informed consent document before participating (see Appendix 2). Again, while this recruiting approach was appropriate for a qualitative study and did not bias the study as such, it posed a number of ethical issues that will be discussed (p. 47).

## **Data Collection**

### **Methodology**

Data collection in this study consisted of two online focus groups, each with six participants who formed an already existing friend group, that ran for a number of consecutive days. The decision to sample two groups of friends was based on the fact that firstly, smaller focus groups would be less intimidating and lead to greater engagement from all participants and



secondly, that it would be valuable to access two different social groupings from the same context in order to obtain a sense of the variation within this context.

The traditional focus group is a valuable research tool because it allows for a collaborative production of meaning in a naturalistic way, producing rich data in a relatively brief period of time (Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, this approach can at times be limiting because it requires all the participants to be present in one place at the same time, it only accesses a brief segment of talk and it can have some of the confrontational and intimidating qualities as a result of being face-to-face. This was problematic as in relation to the aims of social constructionist research, it would have been more beneficial to access naturalistic social interaction over a much longer period of time (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, the researcher endeavoured to find a more flexible, naturalistic and relaxed way of accessing everyday talk, which was provided by a virtual focus group.

The use of an online focus group is a relatively new technique that has many advantages over using a traditional focus group, especially in this kind of study. Firstly, it can provide a more naturalistic way to observe social interaction, a crucial goal in social constructionism, because the virtual context allows participants to forget that they are being observed by a researcher and helps them feel more anonymous (Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland & Myerburg, 2003). Indeed, with growing rates of social media use, especially in more affluent communities, the distinction between offline and online worlds is becoming less and less discernible, with people comfortably conducting their social life in both worlds simultaneously (Livingstone, 2008). As a result, people feel increasingly comfortable interacting in an online context, making online research a useful new addition to a qualitative researcher's tools.

Secondly, this approach allowed the researcher to access the participants' interactions over a longer period of time than is typically possible, permitting the researcher to gain a sense of the general patterns and trends in the participants' strategies of accounting. A third and related advantage was that of convenience, as the participants could choose to contribute at times that suited them, for shorter periods, rather than committing to one or more hours of intense face-to-face sessions (Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland & Myerburg, 2003). This meant that participation could become part of an everyday routine, rather than being intrusive, and

that recruitment would arguably a little easier because the participants were more likely to be able to fit participation into their lives (Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland & Myerburg, 2003). Finally, this method saved both the researcher and participants' time and money because there was no need to travel to a focus group venue or make use of physical resources such as pens and paper (Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland & Myerburg, 2003). This method, therefore, allowed the researcher to access naturalistic data in a way that was more convenient for all. What is more, it has been argued that online research generally produces a higher quality of data than might be obtained in a face-to-face interview, because of increased participant comfort and because data can be analysed in its raw form (Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland & Myerburg, 2003).

### **The data collection process**

Data collection began in late July 2013 and ran until mid-August 2013. The researcher used 'Google+', a Google social networking site, as the medium through which to set up a virtual social context (<https://plus.google.com/>). Despite the potential to use other sites, 'Google+' was selected because it was considered more dynamic, well known and easy to use. It was also selected specifically because it had a function that allowed a private group or 'community' to be set up where only people invited to the group could contribute and read input, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the participants' contributions. A 'community' was created for each participating group of women and all participants were given a 'Google+ cheat sheet' by the researcher (part of a general participation guide produced by the researcher) to help them to access and use the group effectively (see Appendix 3).

The procedure for participating in the study was designed to be very clear and structured so that the participants had a sense of certainty and comfort about what was expected of them. Each participant was asked to contribute one story or journal entry to the group that featured their reflections on their own experiences and perceptions of their relationship with their employee, with a particular focus on the difficulties or discomforts within the relationship. This specific emphasis was included as a way of ensuring that the participants were forced deal with issues of privilege and morality in their discussions, rather than being given the freedom of presenting their relationships in safer ways. Requesting that each participant

write up their own contribution guaranteed that the researcher would access a sizable chunk of text from each participant, even if they only contributed minimally in the discussions. The participants were given a guideline or 'inspiration sheet' outlining the kind of reflections that would be appropriate to contribute, which also worked begin the process of reflection on their relationships with their employees (see Appendix 3). Each day one participant was requested to submit a contribution and the remaining participants were requested to read the contribution and comment on it, as a way of generating discussion. This continued for as many days as there were participants, that is, six days for both groups.

Then, as a kind of insurance, the researcher contributed her own inputs for two days, using a personal reflection on her own relationship with her domestic worker on the first day and a collection of extracts on whiteness on the second (see Appendix 4). The inclusion of this vignette-style device was motivated by a concern that the participants' self-lead discussion may stray too far from the topic of interest during data collection and a desire to see how the participants responded when the dilemmas of white privilege were presented to them unambiguously. The vignette is typically used in research to as a means of stimulating discussion and promoting comfortable, honest engagement with complex issues (Wright, Heathcote & Wibberley, 2014). While one of the ways vignettes achieve this candour is through the use of non-threatening hypothetical scenarios, these have been critiqued for their lack of credibility and inability to attract participants' genuine interest (Wright, Heathcote & Wibberley, 2014). For these reasons the researcher felt she would engender more interest from the participants if she contributed something personal, albeit challenging, as they had done. The inclusion of quotes on whiteness after the participants had completed their own personal contributions served the additional purpose of focusing the conversation of the previous days in on the issue of whiteness. While this device proved to be less effective than hoped (discussed in the limitations section on page 49), it was primarily included as a means of stimulating conversation that would deal with white privilege more overtly than might previously have been done.

On the final day, the researcher requested that the participants simply reflect on the research process, contributing a comment on how they found the experience of participation and what they had taken away from it. Participants were asked to publish before twelve noon each day

and were requested to spend at least ten minutes on the site each day. Despite this structured approach to data collection, it rarely ran so smoothly. This was largely a result of the participants' busy lives and technical issues relating to 'Google+', which will be discussed in greater detail in the limitations section (p. 47). Despite this lack of orderliness, a substantial body of data was acquired that featured significant inputs from all participants and long chains of discussion on a variety of aspects of the relationship.

When data collection was completed, the data were extracted from the 'Google+' community and stored in Microsoft Word documents so that they could be analysed offline. The data were formatted by the researcher and all names and other identifying information were changed so that the data were fully anonymised. There was no need to apply transcription conventions to the data as they were already in written form. The researcher did not alter the form in which the data were written, treating any idiosyncratic features of the text as additional indicators of the meaning.

## **Data analysis**

### **Methodology**

#### ***Foucauldian discourse analysis***

The data produced in this study were analysed using a broadly Foucauldian form of discourse analysis (FDA), a qualitative methodology that falls within the social constructionist paradigm (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2008; Wilbraham, 2004). Discourse analysis is a category qualitative analysis that studies language and how it informs social interaction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The word 'discourse' itself can have many different meanings, but in this context, a discourse can be understood as a collection of statements, and at times practices, that produce certain ways of understanding specific objects, for example, race, and address certain subjects, for example, white people (Wilbraham, 2004). Discourse analysis is made up of two broad theoretical approaches: conversation analysis, which is concerned with a very close analysis of texts to determine how social organisation is accomplished, and Foucauldian or post-structuralist analysis, which is interested in the "social, psychological and physical effects of discourse" upon social actors (Wetherell, 1998; Wilbraham, 2004; Willig, 2008, p. 125).

Based on the theoretical writings of Michel Foucault, FDA explores the relationship between power and society and how this relationship manifests in language and practices. It seeks to “produce knowledge about the discursive economy within which we find ourselves, how it got to be this way (historically) and what this means for us as human subjects (for our sense of self...)” (Willig, 2008, p. 125-126). FDA is interested in identifying how fragments of larger discourses are reproduced in our daily interactions to achieve certain effects and how these effects in turn help maintain these broader discourses and therefore structural powers (Wetherell, 1998). Thus, FDA considers how we, as social actors, function within this discursive economy and work to manage our identities through deploying fragments of discourses in specific ways in our talk (Wetherall, 1998; Wilbraham, 2004; Willig, 2008).

A broadly Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis was adopted in this study, based on the methodology outlined by Willig (2008), because of its utility in identifying how the everyday talk of white women might inform and be informed by broader structural discourses of white privilege. That is, this approach allowed the researcher to obtain an understanding of how power currently operates through discourses of whiteness in South Africa to maintain white privilege. Analysis was also concerned with identifying how various discourse fragments were drawn upon to manage the moral difficulties around whiteness in the participants talk. It was therefore interested in interrogating in greater detail how power continues to operate through racial identity and the manner in which racial discourses continue to work to privilege whites. For these reasons analysis focused on exploring how participants managed themselves in talk, what subject positions were available to them to take up and the consequences of these positionings for the way the participants subjectively experienced the world (Willig, 2008). In other words, analysis concentrated on how discourses of race, whiteness and white privilege made available certain “ways-of-seeing ... and ways-of-being in the world” to the employers, and how the way the participants embodied these positions worked in turn to reproduce these discourses and the unequal power relations they maintain (Willig, 2008, p. 117).

### ***Positioning theory***

Before the exact steps of analysis are discussed, it is important to explain in greater detail the concepts of subject position and subjectivity, because these were the primary target of analysis. Positioning theory provides a dynamic alternative to the notion of the static 'role' (Wilbraham, 2004). It challenges the idea that a person has a core, stable self that is independent of their social environment and that is the origin of all meaning and action they produce, arguing that this is in fact a fiction of western individualism (Wilbraham, 2004). This theory holds that a person's identity can be better understood as a collection of subject positions, a number of slots or categories of action in relation to broader discourses, that people actively take up, enables and constrains their actions, defines their responsibilities and capacities and holds individuals accountable for their actions (Wilbraham, 2004). This theory deconstructs the agency of the subject, holding that there is no meaning outside of language and discourse and that it is the discourse, not the subject that speaks (Wilbraham, 2004). Identity is therefore a continuous production in relation to the discourses that operate within a specific context, making it fluid, varied and constantly being renegotiated, rather than homogeneous, unified and self-determined (Wilbraham, 2004). Discourses provide these subject positions by intrepellating (or calling out to and recruiting) specific subjects to take up these positions (Wilbraham, 2004; Willig, 2008). So for example, an ideology, such as white privilege, makes available certain types of representations of white and black people "and the individual is made to listen and respond [to this ideology] as a certain kind of person; and is thereby 'subjected' " by the ideology (Wilbraham, 2004, p. 501). Through this process, the discourse works to characterise the person's identity in recognisable ways based on how the person takes up or resists the discourse. Thus, this theory holds that our identities, and even our sense of self, is constrained by the discursive economy we occupy and that we are positioned as particular kinds of subjects through interaction with this framework of meaning.

While discourses make available specific subject positions, they also make available subjectivities (Willig, 2008). Subjectivities refer to the particular ways of ways-of-seeing and ways-of-being in the world that taking up specific subject positions produce (Willig, 2008). Essentially, this describes the process whereby taking up a specific subject position affects an individual's subjective experience of the world and the vantage point from which they come to view it (Willig, 2008). Discourses come to define not only how people position themselves,

but also “what can felt, thought and experienced from within these various subject positions” (Willig, 2008, p. 117). The significance of this is that these positions prescribe certain psychological responses and realities that have implications for justifying certain types of unequal power relations (Willig, 2008). An example of this might be how taking up a subject position within the master narrative of whiteness during colonialism allowed whites to experience the domination of blacks as legitimate and normal, and feel no sense of injustice in it (Steyn, 2001; Willig, 2008).

That said, individuals cannot just occupy subject positions in a static or uncontested way and while certain positions may allow people to feel justified in their activities, they are still open to critique. Subject positions are constantly negotiated in talk and people must manage their positions, position others and resist and renegotiate how others position them (Wilbraham, 2004). This is therefore a dynamic process and because they are so easily contested, subject positions are constantly negotiated in relation to the situation in which social interaction occurs (Wetherell, 1998). For this reason, discourses and subject positions are drawn upon in ways that allow individuals to manage their position favourably and not be held accountable in negative ways by others (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Being held accountable means that people cannot operate within subject positions whatever way they like, and that people must navigate their positioning by making their actions explainable and understandable within the framework of rights and duties available to them (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Willig, 2008). This negotiation can also be understood in terms of managing ones position to ensure that the self is articulated in discourse in ways that will maximise ones warrant or claim to be heard (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). And in fact, those who can take up more dominant or powerful subject positions have more legitimate voices and produce more ‘valid’ representations (Andreouli, 2010). Thus, this theory holds that identity is managed through the way people take up subject positions and this can work to produce more legitimate position that is viewed as favourable, or reduce an the individual’s legitimacy and discredit them. Drawing on this theory, analysis in this study sought to interrogate the ways in which employers took up subject positions and embodied subjectivities in order to produce a favourable identity and a legitimate position in a social context that called upon them to account for their unequal relationship with their employee and therefore their privilege. How the participants managed their identity and their morality in turn spoke to the kinds of subject positions the discursive

economy they occupied made available to them and therefore suggested at the nature of the broader discourses of whiteness in South Africa.

### **Analysis process**

Unlike more positivist forms of analysis, there is no specific procedure when conducting a discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Rather, discourse analysis involves reading the data with a specific theoretical framework in mind and iteratively exploring how patterns of broader discourse fragments are drawn upon and function within the text (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Reading the data involves studying what is said in detail, in order to determine what is constructed within the data and what these constructions work to achieve (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). By asking the question “why this utterance here?” the researcher is able to explore the specific effects the speaker’s talk achieves through constructing objects in certain ways, embodying certain subject positions, addressing certain audiences and arguing for or justifying certain views (Wetherell, 1998, p. 388). From determining what is being done by participants in their talk, the researcher can identify patterns of meaning making that suggest at the production and reproduction of broader discourses occurring in their talk. In other words, by establishing the selective ways in which talk is produced, the researcher is able to make the connection between every day patterns of meaning making and broader patterns of power, discrimination and inequality.

Within this study, the researcher drew upon the general steps for a Foucauldian discourse analysis outlined by Willig (2008), as well as the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Wilbraham (2004), to produce a post-structuralist and broadly Foucauldian analysis of the data. The researcher began analysis by immersing herself in the data, reading through the data multiple times with the question ‘why this here?’ in mind. At this stage the researcher also went through a process of coding the data. This involved breaking up the larger body of data into manageable chunks in terms of specific categories of extract (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Initially, these categories were unrefined, inclusive and based on the broad identification of different approaches to talking about race, the self and the relationship. The researcher then began the process of analysis in which patterns of accounting were identified. In this stage the researcher began to interrogate the function and consequence or action



orientation of the participants' accounts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Willig, 2008). That is, the researcher sought to understand the relevance of specific constructions for achieving certain goals, namely, managing identity favourably. The researcher also sought to identify other features in the text, the kinds of constructions, discourses, subject positions and subjectivities that were drawn upon and deployed by the participants (Willig, 2008). Through a back and forth process of critical engagement with the text and the activities of coding and analysis, the researcher developed a refined understanding of the nature of the patterns of talk in the participants' accounts.

The interpretation of the discursive character of the participants' accounts finally settled upon in this document was considered the most valid understanding of what occurred in the data because it made sense of the whole body of data, while still explaining the moment to moment interaction between participants (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In other words, analysis in this study worked to make sense of broad patterns of meaning making in the text by identifying the different components of these patterns in each participant's accounts. The exact nature of these patterns will be outlined in detail in the next chapter.

In summary, analysis involved an in depth interrogation of the features of the participants talk and much theorising and re-theorising around the how the participants engaged with discourses of whiteness and managed their identity. It is important to emphasise here that as a result of the social constructivist approach taken, this was not an investigation of the nature of the participants as people, but rather, this was an exploration of discursive context that the participants occupied. To be precise, the study investigated the kinds of subjectivities available to white female employers in post-apartheid South Africa and the ways in which women in this specific context engaged with these broader constructions.

## **Issues of research quality**

### **Efforts to ensure methodological rigor and research quality**

The use of qualitative research methodology often raises questions about the rigor and quality of the research as unlike quantitative analysis, there are no ways to prove with outright certainty that the findings are reliable and valid (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

However, this does not mean that qualitative research cannot be theoretically sound and methodologically rigorous (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The rigor and quality of a qualitative study can be demonstrated through ensuring that the audience of the research is given detailed and honest information about the procedures the research followed and theory upon which the research is based (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). In this way the audience is given sufficient evidence to determine whether they can accept the conclusions that the researcher has drawn in the study (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Thus, rigor is achieved in part through the efforts of the researcher to follow procedure and produce high quality research and in part by the audience of the study themselves (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

Beyond providing sufficient evidence of the procedure of the study a variety of actions were taken to ensure that the research was rigorous, particularly in terms of ensuring that the conclusions drawn from analysis of the data were valid. Because the researcher is the tool of analysis in qualitative research, it is important to strive towards an unbiased analysis of the data and avoid allowing personal goals and opinions to impact upon the findings (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2008). In general, the credibility of qualitative analysis is boosted through working towards an impartial and neutral approach (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Anecdotalism is one of many practices that bias research and this refers to the reporting of only well-chosen cases in the data, rather than the entire body of data (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Most obviously, anecdotalism was avoided in this study by ensuring that all of the data produced was incorporated into analysis, ensuring that data was comprehensively treated (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

In terms of determining rigor in a specifically discursive approach to analysis, there are certain guidelines for ensuring that the findings are valid (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). The findings of this study came to be viewed as more credible when the researcher considered if the claims being made rendered the body of data coherent (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). That is, the researcher worked towards an analysis of the data that explained the broad patterns of meaning making as well as meaning making at an interaction level. Initially, the treatment given to the data could not explain some its features and these exceptions posed a problem to developing a holistic understanding of the body discourse (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). However, by working to understand how these exceptions related to the patterns already

identified in the data, the researcher was able to produce a comprehensive and coherent analysis of the data. The finding of one such case, early in analysis, while initially baffling to the researcher, proved to be an initial example of the structural morality method of managing privilege that went on to inform the development of this category in addition to the relational morality category.

Another measure of rigor in a discourse analysis is determining whether the researcher's claims are confirmed by the participants' orientation in the text (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). As discourse analysis deals not simply with language, but the way in which language functions to produce genuine consequences in peoples' social lives, it was important that the researchers' claims did not contradict the structure of meaning set out by the participants. (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). What this meant was that when the researcher identified the character of a certain passage of speech, or laid out the dimensions of a particular approach, these assertions could only be made when it was clear that they did not contradict with how the participants themselves made sense of their interactions. So for example, the researcher was able to see most clearly that two separate approaches were being taken by the participants by identifying the difficulties that arose when the participants adopted opposing approaches and attempted to interact amicably with each other. The difficulty in reconciling their points view and the awkwardness this caused demonstrated that the assertion that these two approaches were distinct was a valid one.

A final, and possibly most important measure of validity, is the fruitfulness of the analysis (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). All scientific inquiry is validated through the extent to which its findings offer useful and novel solutions to research problems and the discursive approach is no exception (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). Exploring the elements and dimensions of the participants' discursive work in this study has proved fruitful because it has delineated the distinction between more familiar, historical ways of making sense of white privilege with newer, more critical ways of engaging with whiteness. Thus, although this study set out to explore whiteness in general, through the analysis process the distinct elements of whiteness and their functions have been clearly defined in a way that has not been identified before.

## **Reflexivity**

While the meaning of the term 'reflexivity' is somewhat contested, in this context of qualitative research it refers to the issue of quality that arises from the fact that while researchers are the instruments of analysis, they are also social actors in their own right, and thus can never be considered truly neutral or impartial (Eagle, Hayes & Sibanda, 2008; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). From a social constructionist point of view this is an especially important point to consider, because while the researcher is analysing the participants' constructions, the act of producing this analysis is itself a social construction that cannot be considered neutral (Willig, 2008). The social constructionist perspective holds that knowledge cannot be evaluated from outside of a discursive framework and so rather than being 'discovered', knowledge is authored by the researcher within this framework and inevitably draws upon various constructions to do so, through which power operates (Willig, 2008). Thus, because the researcher's production inevitably has some kind of power and agenda functioning within it, it is important to be aware of "the problematic status of one's own knowledge claims" and consider how the researcher's own positionality impacted upon the production of knowledge in this study (Willig, 2008, p. 126).

Conducting this study posed its own dilemma to the researcher as while she was extremely interested in the topic and its broader relevance to South African society, she also had a deep personal stake in its outcome. As a white woman with a close and affectionate relationship with underprivileged black female domestic worker, investigating this topic discursively challenged the way the researcher made sense of herself and managed her own white identity. Like other authors in this area, such as Frankenburg (1993), McIntosh (1988) and Vice (2010), investigating white privilege became an extremely personal exploration and there were times when the researcher was faced with conflict and dissonance in reconciling her personal understanding of her identity with what was being seen in the data and broader literature on whiteness. Race is invariably an extremely personal and sensitive topic, particularly in South Africa, that sits at the very core of how we define ourselves as people, and yet can be highly contested and diverse in its character.

For the researcher in this study, the challenge was firstly, to find ways to separate her own views on how best to manage white identity with the conflicting ways of managing identity

adopted by the participants. Indeed, the researcher's own biases and personal preferences for making sense of white privilege were often unsettled by those adopted by the participants and the researcher had to work to set aside these personal difficulties with the participants' approach. Secondly, and relatedly, the researcher had to come to grips with the fact that this was not a self-exploration and that the researcher's role was to document and analyse the nature of these approaches, not pass judgement on them. Initially this posed a challenge to the researcher, as she struggled remove her personal opinions from the analysis. However, through working to maintain a constant awareness of her own biases and aspiring to provide an impartial account of the participants' approaches, the researcher was able to reduce the level of personal stake and bias in the research.

Beyond these efforts, the researcher sought in general to provide a matter of fact account of whiteness by drawing upon a wide range of literature and adopting a self-critical stance. However, it was inevitable that this study would always feature some sort of agenda or bias and thus must be read with a critical eye and with the time and context of its production in mind.

### **Limitations of the research methodology**

While every effort was made to ensure the quality and soundness of this study, it faced a number of limitations. Firstly, sampling proved to be difficult because the study required entire groups of friends to be interested in discussing an uncomfortable topic over an extended period of time. This meant that the researcher would have the best luck sampling people she knew, and while this strategy proved effective, it meant that the researcher had to work hard to take an impartial stance, because of her familiarity with some of the participants. Similarly, the need to sample people who were already friends meant that not everyone in the group shared equal enthusiasm for the project and thus participation was not always even. And because these women were friends, there was also a risk that the discussions were influenced just as much by managing each other's' feelings and maintaining personal relationships as managing privilege, which in some cases made it difficult to analyse the text.

The decision to run online focus groups also proved to be a source of significant difficulty in the study and may have impacted on the quality of the data produced. To begin with, 'Google+' proved more difficult to use than initially anticipated and the researcher and participants went through a trying process of problem solving to ensure that all the participants could access the group. A second, and related problem, was that the participants faced a variety of technical challenges when attempting to participate actively on the group. These two issues undoubtedly related to the participants' lack of familiarity with the tool and the researcher's over estimation of the participants' computer literacy. Thus, the researcher underestimated the challenges that would be involved in using this kind of technology.

A third problem was that of ensuring that the participants actively participated on the group. While the participants were informed in advance when the research would begin and what day they had been assigned to contribute to the group, most participants required a lot of encouragement via text message to maintain their participation. That said, the participants' lack of engagement related strongly to their busy lives, into which they generally had to squeeze participation. In fact, two participants, that the researcher is aware of, had major life events during the data collection process that seriously affected their ability to participate as they would have liked. Thus, although participation did not run smoothly, this mostly resulted from the participants' limited free time.

These difficulties highlighted a major flaw in this research methodology, namely, that without interpersonal contact, it is easy for participants to avoid, set-aside and forget about the research. Furthermore, the participants could not as easily voice their confusion and misunderstandings to the researcher and the researcher could not pre-emptively identify any issues. This lack of personal contact, which was so beneficial in some ways, made the research much more difficult to manage and the participants less accountable to the researcher (Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland & Myerburg, 2003). This undoubtedly effected the quality of the data as had all the participants been better able to engage frequently and enthusiastically with the topic, a much larger, better quality body of data might have been produced.

Another limitation of this methodology was that the format in which the data was collected proved difficult to analyse. While FDA can be applied to any text, the researcher found it

challenging to analyse the part-discussion-part-monologue style data that was collected in this study. This was because the participants input involved interaction and discussion via large chunks of text that responded and addressed each other in ways that were not always easy to follow. While spoken conversation has much shorter, more rapid forms of interaction that usually feature a clear co-construction of meaning, and while individual reflections carry their own degree clarity, this kind of hybrid form of discussion proved difficult analyse. And in fact, this was in some ways a more complex interaction because the use of an online medium meant that the participants had time to reflect on their interactions, making them more subtle, well thought out and featuring response to multiple previous statements by their peers. So while this approach had the benefit of convenience, the quality and clarity of the data may have been improved if a more straightforward method of collection, such as a traditional focus group, had been adopted.

A final limitation that impacted on the quality of the data was that researcher's engagement with the participants in the focus groups, and in particular, challenging of the participants through the researcher's contributions, worked to shut down discussion rather than encourage it. The researcher learned through experience that the participants were far more eager to discuss and share their opinions in a relaxed way when the researcher was not involved at all in their discussions. When the researcher's voice featured in the discussions, the participants' accounts were more defensive and hostile and this produced more guarded or antagonistic responses from the participants. The researcher learned too late that challenging the participants' assumptions through her contributions to see how they might respond, actually worked to diminish the level of trust between the researcher and the participants and shut down opportunities for enthusiastic discussion. The data quality would have been improved if the researcher had engaged less and encouraged the participants to take full ownership of the discussion.

### **Ethical considerations**

This final section of the chapter will outline the ethical considerations taken in this study. All research is held to a number of ethical standards that seek to guarantee that conducting research is not harmful to anyone involved (Wassenaar, 2008). Participants are required to

be suitably informed about the nature of the research in which they participate, have the ability to withdraw from the research if they wish, should be treated with dignity, need not to be harmed through their participation and where possible, ought to benefit in some way from the research (Wassenaar, 2008). This study has attempted to meet these standards in a number of ways, at a most basic level by firstly obtaining approval from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) ethics board before data collection commenced (see Appendix 5). This study was deemed by the board to pose little risk to the participants because the sample did not include vulnerable members of society, such as children, and subject matter and methodology was considered unlikely to damage or traumatise the participants.

Within the data collection process, this study followed common ethical procedure by ensuring that the participants took part in the study voluntarily, without coercion, and that their participation was kept confidential. The participants were also asked to sign an informed consent document that explained what the study entailed and what was required of the participants clearly and specifically highlighted the voluntary, confidential and anonymous nature of the study (see Appendix 2). The participants were given multiple opportunities decline participation in the study before and during the data collection process, and a number of women who did not feel comfortable participating in the research chose not to take part at these times.

During data collection the participants' anonymity and confidentiality were at stake because although the 'Google+' community could only be accessed by those who took part in the study, there were still multiple threats to the participants' privacy. The affordances of the online context for one thing, meant that if a participant forgot to logout of 'Google+', any person who had access to that computer or device would be able to see all of the participants' comments. Similarly, it was impossible for the researcher to manage how the participants engaged with the discussion in the privacy of their own homes, meaning that the researcher could not prevent the participants from showing the data to a person outside the group. In fact, a crucial concern in this, and all focus group research, is that participants' comments must necessarily be shared with not just the researcher but the whole focus group, meaning that there are multiple parties who could potentially divulge confidential information.



While the researcher could not control the actions of the participants and prevent them from telling outsiders about the study, in the hope of limiting this kind of risk, the participants were asked to sign a confidentiality pledge before participating in the study (see Appendix 2). Pledge highlighted the importance of keeping everything that occurred in the research context confidential and maintaining each other's anonymity to outsiders, as well as respecting fellow participants' right to dignity in the research context and the need to produce an atmosphere of trust and safety. The participants were also reminded to log out whenever they had finished contributing (Appendix 3). By and large the participants responded well to this pledge and no breaches of confidentiality were identified by the researcher.

In terms of anonymity, the researcher herself was the only individual, besides the groups of women themselves, who knew who the participants were in this study. And in fact, neither group was ever aware of who participated in the other group. When completed discussions were extracted from the site, the researcher changed the participants' names to pseudonyms and anonymised any telling information, including any telling accidental profile pictures. Only when the discussions were anonymised, did the researcher's supervisor have access to them and any use of the data by other researchers in the future would be of the anonymised data. It is important to note that the participants consented to potentially having their data used by other researchers in the future in the informed consent document discussed above (see Appendix 2).

The researcher decided not to offer an incentive to the participants as it was reasoned that the research would yield better data if everyone involved was excited to participate for the sake of the topic alone. The research was therefore pitched to the participants as an act of generosity on their part and as an opportunity for reflection on social issues that may affect them. However, in acknowledgment of this generosity, and the time and energy the participants invested in the project, the participants were given a luxury chocolate bar and card as a thank you gesture when the data collection process was complete.

A final ethical consideration in this study related more broadly to the ethical difficulties surrounding discourse analytic research. Within such research there is typically and inevitably a gulf between what the participants assume the research is about and the actual use to which

their talk is put (Hammersley, 2014). Generally in research settings it is assumed that the researcher is concerned with the feelings, thoughts and experiences of the participants and so participants often engage with the study with this assumption in mind (Hammersley, 2014). However, when conducting a discourse analysis, the researcher is not concerned with the literal meaning of the participants accounts, and rather is interested in the discursive practices their accounts display (Hammersley, 2014). For the sake of simplicity and more naturalistic data quality, the actual use to which their contributions will be put is often not made explicit to the participants of such studies and this inconsistency can be viewed as a form a deception and therefore an unethical treatment of the participants (Hammersley, 2014).

Within this study such a dilemma arose as while the researcher made it clear that she was interested in the participants' relationship with their employees and issues relating to race, it was not made explicit to the participants that the focus of the study would be on the way they produced their white identity and managed moral dilemmas. This was done because the researcher was concerned that the participants may not have discussed issues of race so openly and produced such naturalistic talk had they known the exact intentions of the researcher. It is likely that the participants may have taken a more defensive or reserved stance had they mistakenly interpreted the analysis of their words as indicative of the researchers view on their personal nature, rather than as an indication of racial meaning making in general society. Considering that the participants largely agreed to become involved in the study on the basis of friendship and familiarity, this kind of deception, while necessary for the aims of the study, cannot be considered entirely ethical. The participants engaged with topic openly in a way that made them vulnerable, which allowed the researcher to obtain evidence of them managing their white identity. Yet, they no doubt would be surprised by the use to which their discussion was put and possibly, as is often the case with discourse analysis, feel as though their talk was incorrectly interpreted. So, while the researcher was as open and honest as possible with the participants and sought to ensure that they were not harmed in any way through their participation, making use of their talk to theorise white privilege, rather than engaging with their thoughts and experiences as they may have expected, proved to be an unfortunate but necessary and minor challenge to the ethics of this study.

## Chapter Three: Analysis and findings

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### Introduction

As has been stated in the previous chapters, this study sought to interrogate how white women managed the moral dilemmas of their white, privileged identity in the context of their relationship with their domestic employees. Analysis of the data therefore focused on the particular types of subjectivities and constructions that the participants produced in talk in order to make sense of their relationship and manage the meaning of their identity. This involved determining the ways in which the participants constructed themselves as employers and how they constructed their domestic workers. It also included examining how the employers dealt with hierarchical and power asymmetrical nature of their relationship. As a result, the researcher was able to establish the participants' approach to managing the moral and ethical difficulties so central to this relationship and the unfavourable implications these had for their identity, as the more powerful member of the relationship.

The chapter below will begin with a brief section demonstrating the difficulties the employers faced discussing their relationship and maintaining a favourable identity. It will then go on to outline the key findings of this research, namely that within the participants talk, they drew upon two distinct styles of accounting for their relationship. The first, the *relational morality* style, involved managing the employers' identity through construction of a comparison between employer and employee. The second, the *structural morality* approach, managed the employers' identity through a comparison between the participant and other employers. Each of these styles, and the components that constituted them, will be examined in turn and the chapter will conclude with an interpretation of the findings.

Extracts from the data will be presented in this chapter to provide evidence for the findings outlined below. It should be noted that these extracts have been given detailed labels to ensure that the reader has a good sense of the circumstances in which they were produced. They have been labelled with the pseudonym of the participant who wrote the extract, which group they were in, what day in the research process the extract was produced and whether

the extract was part of a contribution or a general comment. It is important to stress that all names that appear within the extracts are pseudonyms, not just the names in the labels.

### **Expressions of difficulty in managing their identities**

Within the data there were a number of instances where the participants reflected on the constrained position in which discussing their role as an employer placed them. The following extracts will be analysed and discussed below.

**Extract 1:** Christine, group b, day 1, contribution.

1        “The topic of domestic workers can, ironically, be somewhat uncomfortable! It is difficult to  
2        write anything about domestic workers without sounding like an arrogant, spoilt, white South  
3        African madam...”

**Extract 2:** Anna, group a, day 9, reflection on research experience.

1        “...as Samantha [*a fellow participant*] wrote, it's hard to speak of certain subjects freely for  
2        fear of sounding offensive or hurtful. However, there's no pleasing everyone and sometimes  
3        it's easier to keep quiet. I've used the backspace/delete key fairly often. Some things are  
4        better left unsaid and unwritten. I remember reading the following and it's something I  
5        remind myself and my children of often – ‘Words unsaid you're master of, words spoken  
6        you're a slave to.’ ”

**Extract 3:** Natalie, group a, day 9, reflection on research experience.

1        “I am confused. I have found this subject hard and admitted to the researcher that the last  
2        posting I sent was written by Jonathan [*the participant's husband*]. I battled to write  
3        something. I live a very quiet life and hide a lot from all the conflicts of this world.”

The extracts above all feature overt constructions of the act of talking about their role as an employer as being difficult to do without positioning themselves unfavourably. In extract 1, for instance, the participant suggests that it is impossible to speak with credibility as a white employer because when one is positioned as a white employer, one will immediately be associated with the rather unfavourable stereotype of the “white South African madam” (lines 2 and 3). In extract 2, the participant constructs this difficulty in terms of being unable

to speak freely without risking “sounding offensive or hurtful” (line 2). Here, the participant seems to be implying that this is a sensitive topic that not everyone agrees upon, with the suggestion that she may herself have unpleasant things to say that may position her unfavourably. Her use of the quote “words unsaid you're master of, words spoken you're a slave to” (lines 5 and 6), emphasises her construction of herself as trapped and self-conscious in this context. In extract 3, the participant takes a different approach again in constructing difficulty, this time in terms of her own trouble confronting the implications and nuances of this topic. She provides an account of the way discussing her role as an employer challenged her, rationalising this with the statement “I live a very quiet life and hide a lot from all the conflicts of this world” (line 3). The participant seems to be constructing the difficulty of discussing her position as an employer in terms of the discomfort it causes her and her desire to avoid it.

These extracts have been included in this chapter as first note because they offer an initial demonstration of the operation of whiteness discourses within the participants talk. They have been included, in other words, because they emphasise that the participants’ discussion about employing a domestic worker was a discussion of white privilege. In extract 2 for example, the participant seems to be constructing her experience of participating in terms of constant and active repression, which works to imply a sense of a loss of legitimacy for anything the employer says. This reflects whites’ sense of being decentred with the end of apartheid, discussed in the literature review (p. 9). It also reflects a resistance to aligning oneself with the norms of the post-apartheid context. Similarly, in extract 3, the participant’s account features indicators of a discourse of avoidance or escape, a desire to retreat from open engagement with the post-apartheid context and the discomfort that goes with it (also discussed in the literature review, p. 14). Extract 1 on the other hand does not feature forms of a discourse of denial, but discourses of resistance against being associated with the unfavourable identities associated with whites. Here, the participant seems to be working to avoid being associated with bigoted versions of whiteness.

These extracts therefore show hints of whiteness in action, demonstrating the salience of their white privileged identity to the participants in this context. The participants, through their accounts, expressed in various manners the experience of being trapped by their

whiteness and the need to find ways to carefully negotiate and manage the construction of their identity in this study. This, in itself, also formed part of the participants' management of their whiteness, representing a hedging device that was used to manage and excuse how the participants' accounts were heard. Through expressing difficulty and highlighting the likelihood of being positioned unfavourably, the participants absolved themselves from accountability for future and past statements. White privilege and the identity of employer therefore proved a troublesome thing to manage in this study. In the sections that follow, the means by which the participants successfully negotiated this difficulty, beyond simply excusing it, will be outlined.

### **Managing the dilemma of white privilege in talk**

Discussing their relationships with their employees placed the participants in difficult position, constrained by the available discourses associated with white privilege and domestic work in South Africa. Yet within this study, the participants demonstrated two styles of managing their identity that worked to position them favourably. Both these styles worked to achieve a favourable identity through addressing the employers' morality in some way. The first style, relational morality, will be examined below and will be followed by the second style, structural morality.

#### **Relational morality**

The key factor that distinguished the relational morality approach from the structural morality approach was that it involved managing white privilege through accounts of the interpersonal relationship between employer and employee, and particularly, the manner with which employer and employee negotiate the morality of this relationship. In other words, this method focused on the character of the individual relationship, often without consideration of the broader social context in which the relationship existed. Two styles of framing the relationship were identified within this approach, one in which the relationship was constructed in terms of equations of fairness and the other where a moral binary was set up between employer and domestic worker. These two means of managing white privilege will be outlined below. While elements of both approaches appear in some of the extracts, they have been divided into two sections in order to distinguish their separate dynamics.

### ***Relational justice***

There was evidence in the data of the participants constructing their relationships in terms of equations of fairness and justice. The analysis of the extracts below will demonstrate the presence of such a device in the participants' talk and its effects.

#### **Extract 4:** Anna, group a, day 4, contribution.

1        "So often the "race card" is drawn when there's a disagreement, altercation or even a minor  
2        misunderstanding between different races. In SA we don't say to someone – 'you're  
3        doing/saying that because I'm Protestant and you're Catholic' so why does it have to be a case  
4        of – 'you're doing/saying that because I'm Black and you're White.' I detest bad service  
5        whether at home, or in a restaurant, bank, or wherever. I'll speak up in a public place and  
6        hopefully a manager or supervisor will handle the matter professionally and it will be resolved.  
7        At home over the years, when I've pointed out shoddy work and said that it's not to my  
8        standard, at times the reaction from my domestic/s has been hostile and sulky. A gardener I  
9        once had told me he knew his job and I didn't need to tell him what to do. My response was  
10       that we never stop learning in life. His standards were different to mine and he wasn't going  
11       to try improve his standard of work. He left not long after and battled to find another  
12       gardening position.

#### **Extract 5:** Rosemary, group b, day 5, comment.

1        "I keep reminding my 'maid' Olivia that I hired her as a housekeeper, not a maid. It is her  
2        responsibility to decide what is for supper, and to let me know when certain groceries need  
3        to be bought. I have said to her in the past that I pay her too well to be the maid, and I expect  
4        more of her."

#### **Extract 6:** Christine, group b, day 1, contribution.

1        "The issue I'd like to raise is RESPONSIBILITY. My employees are expected to arrive at work on  
2        a Monday or Tuesday morning. I expect to see them at approximately 06h30 with a warm  
3        smile and a steaming cup of tea. I am embarrassed to admit that I don't give much thought to  
4        the fact that they have had to get up very early, brave the cold and public transport to arrive  
5        to serve the 'madam.' They have accepted this as their responsibility. (There are many other  
6        examples...)

7        However, the flip side of that equation (mixed metaphor!) is equally daunting. I have a  
8        responsibility which has evolved over years of a shared and very close relationship to be  
9        responsible for their welfare. I have come to accept difficult situations can arise and you are  
10       involved, whether you choose to be or not. You cannot opt out of your responsibilities.”

**Extract 7:** Jenny, group b, day 3, comment.

1        “I think we should view it more as a parent/child relationship where the parent censors things  
2        to protect the child, rather than beat ourselves up for having been privileged and comfortable.  
3        The only thing we can do to level the playing field is to enrich their lives in our own ways.  
4        Helping out with 2nd hand clothing to use or sell, educating and empowering, and very often  
5        just a chat and a listening ear. Charity does after all start at home!”

Within these four extracts, the participants can be seen to set up comparisons between themselves and their employees in different ways, usually on the grounds of what is considered fair in the relationship. In extract 4, for instance, the participant produces an account that constructs her employees, in very indirect ways, as being unwilling to improve the quality of their work and meet her standards of professionalism. She begins by discrediting the idea that she is forbidden to have an opinion as an employer, by first rejecting that her point of view has anything to do with race. In lines 1 to 4 the participant can be seen to construct racial categories as being as irrelevant to the South African context as the categories of Catholic and Protestant. She goes on to validate this statement by secondly, constructing herself as someone who expects good service in any context. These initial statements work to frame how her account of her employees’ responses to her suggestions are heard, in particular by constructing this relationship as being like any other in the service industry. Within the boundaries of professionalism that the participant has set up, the employees’ resistance to improving their “shoddy work” can be viewed as unreasonable and unprofessional, suggesting that despite the similarity of this relationship to others in the service industry, employees in this relationship are not professional. The participant ends her account with a story about a gardener that can be heard as a fable. In lines 8 to 12 the participant describes how her gardener wouldn’t take her advice and as a result, “battled to find another gardening position.” This tale forms a kind of lesson in an employer’s authority,



suggesting that the employer was right and had he taken her advice, he would have had more success finding employment. This complex account can be seen to construct conflict, but also difference, between employer and employee. It also suggests that this difference, constructed in terms of professionalism, can often result in the employer being treated unfairly and not being given the respect she is owed.

In extract 5 we see a similar kind of account, in which the participant constructs her relationship with her employee as frustrating because of the employee's lack of willingness to take on a more responsible role. Within this brief extract the participant constructs herself as a decent employer through references to expecting more from her employee, paying her employee well and constructing the term maid as problematic through the use of inverted commas. In contrast, she constructs her employee unfavourably, as being reluctant to leave behind the less responsible, more protected role of maid to become a housekeeper. This account therefore constructs a tension between the perspectives of employer and employee, epitomised in the employer's statement that she was entitled to "expect more from her" employee (lines 3 and 4). The participant's construction of herself is as an entirely just and fair employer, she has met all the requirements an employer should and yet her employee is still resisting her demands and treating her unfairly.

In extracts 6 and 7 this equation of justice is set up in a slightly different way, in terms of the unique and often immense responsibilities employers take on when employing domestic workers. In extract 6 the participant constructs an account which very clearly outlines the mutual responsibilities in her relationships. She constructs the duties of domestic employees as being unpleasant and implies, through the use of the statement "I'm embarrassed to admit..." (line 3), that she is cognisant of the difficulties domestic workers face. The participant constructs the responsibilities her employees take on as something they have chosen to do, positioning her employees as empowered individuals, who willingly take on their responsibilities without any constraint. She then goes on to construct her own responsibilities, suggesting through the use of the phrase "equally daunting" (line 7), that these responsibilities are no less overwhelming and unpleasant than those of her employees. She constructs her comparative responsibility as being for her employees' welfare, a role her involvement with her employees has steered her into, which she "cannot opt out of" (line 10).

In the data, this extract was followed by a number of paragraphs illustrating the significant responsibilities the employer has taken on, including revealing to an employee that she has contracted HIV and buying a house for an employee jeopardy. This account certainly has the ring of paternalism and the discourse of the good white Samaritan, with the employer constructing her duties towards her employee as being beyond a simple exchange of goods for services. Yet within this account the participant constructs this responsibility as something she did not choose take on, something that her relationships have thrust upon her and that causes her distress. These mutual responsibilities are therefore constructed as unequal and by implication, unfair.

In extract 7 the participant raises the issue of paternalism openly, suggesting that employers should not feel guilty for their comparative privilege because of the many ways they work to enrich their employees' lives. In the data, this extract followed a discussion about the participants' attempts to hide their comparative wealth from their employees in various ways. The participant provides an account that advocates for a paternalistic approach to managing this privilege and rendering the inequality in this relationship fair. However, her style of accounting, the use of the words "helping out" and "charity" in particular, suggest that the employees are not owed this further consideration and rather, this providing of extras is not part of a fair exchange.

In all these accounts, the participants can be seen to set up a comparison of duties and roles between themselves and their employees. In each case, the participants demonstrate the ways in which they fulfil these duties and the ways in which their employees do not. The employees are constructed as failing to honour the fairness of the exchange as result of not fulfilling their duty to their employer to the same extent to which their employer fulfilled their duties to them. In other words, the participants construct themselves as being more than fair and their employees as being less than fair. This exchange is not equal and results in the employer not receiving what is due to them. This style of accounting strongly resembled the discourse of mutual exchange discussed in the literature review (p. 26). Similar to the findings of Durrheim, Jacobs and Dixon (2014), the participants in this study constructed their relationships as a mutually beneficial and equal exchange, only in this case the participants positioned the employees as not keeping up their side of the exchange. Considering this kind

of construction within the broader context of domestic work in South Africa, it is possible that constructing the individual relationship as being unfair to the employer works to counter the implications of the broader structural injustice of the employer's white privilege. These participants appear to be managing their unfavourable identity as employer through contradicting the assumption that the relationship unfairly privileges them.

### ***Moral binary***

The second component of this style relates strongly to the first, in that it too compares the employer and employee. However, in this instance they are defined against each other not in terms of justice but in terms of morality. Again, a number of extracts will be presented below and analysis will follow from them.

#### **Extract 8: Samantha, group a, day 1, contribution.**

1        "1) When employing a black woman one automatically becomes the Provider to her and her  
2        entire family. One becomes responsible for her children and her home. I found this a drain  
3        on me financially and emotionally for I tend to become too interested/involved.

4        2) I believe that they actually cost one more than they are worth. The cleaning materials they  
5        waste, the food that they eat, the breakages they are responsible for and the wages they  
6        demand, all add up.

7        3) We can write a book about the nature of the average domestic worker who takes what she  
8        covets as she believes her employer is in a position financially to simply replace it. The trust  
9        we put in them so often broken and with that comes the loss of respect and that naturally  
10       compromises the relationship. Yet we are expected to understand their circumstance and be  
11       sympathetic. I have a real problem with that – trust is earned and there is NO excuse for theft  
12       from a person who is treating you with respect.

13       4) With the escalated crime rate in the country and the horrendously high rate of burglaries  
14       being "inside jobs" with domestic employees being the informants I feel I do not wish to have  
15       to look at the person I employ and constantly ask myself: "Are you going to betray my trust?  
16       Are you going to be instrumental in an attack on my family for financial gain?"

17 I choose not to have the stress of having to deal with an outsider in my private space. If it  
18 means we do our own domestic work in order to have peace of mind, it is a small price to  
19 pay.”

**Extract 9:** Anna, group a, day 4, contribution.

1 “This is South Africa, we have to be vigilant and careful about who we let into our homes - to  
2 work or otherwise. I often wonder to myself, is it worth the risk employing a domestic - yes,  
3 we're providing employment for someone, but is it worth the risk to our personal safety? A  
4 domestic knows our routine, the security features in our home, where we keep our keys, what  
5 possessions we have, when we plan to be away and all sorts of other personal information  
6 about our home and lives.”

**Extract 10:** Lauren, group a, day 3, contribution.

1 “She frequently needed help, had many days off to see to her children's needs, required lifting  
2 to various places - when I think back on the time she was with me, there were so many things  
3 I did for her, I can't possible list it all. Still, I noticed that things began to go missing - at first  
4 you feel guilty for even thinking of finding fault with the maid, and it is awful to live with  
5 continual distrust of a person (a stranger, really) who you allow into your house on complete  
6 trust - an unusual situation to be sure. It is useless confronting the person, because the lies  
7 flow very easily and even turn to an attack on you.....how could you possibly even think such  
8 a thing!”

**Extract 11:** Sophia, group a, day 2, contribution.

1 “Well, Sarah has been in my employ since April 1994 and I would not change her for anyone.  
2 We are all dreading the day she decides to retire! She has been amazing! As I said in our  
3 meeting, I have often wished I could clone her. She does not waste any cleaning products and  
4 never overeats, she never takes any food without asking me first (regardless of how many  
5 times I have told her to use what she needs!) and she is never late for work, she has only  
6 missed work once in late 1998 when taxis were on strike and she was barred from walking!

7 If she accidentally breaks something, it sits there and as I walk in the door she shows me and  
8 apologises for breaking it. She has ruined maybe 10 items of clothing in all these years, mainly  
9 due to splashes of Jik on coloured clothes! In fact, she looks after us very well! When my  
10 broccoli get hairy in the fridge she throws it on the table and tells me I am wasting my money!”

In these extracts the participants can be seen to be constructing a comparison, similar to what has been done the previous section. However, in this case it relates more to the comparative ethics and integrity of employer and employee, than the comparative duties. In particular, the participants appear to be constructing the relationship in terms of the cost to the employer in a variety of ways in order highlight the dubious qualities of their employees. In extract 8 for example, the participant puts forward a number reasons why she considers domestic workers to “cost one more than they are worth” (line 4). This cost to the employer is framed primarily as relating to loss of resources through wastage, theft and being appointed the role of provider for the employee’s family (lines 1 and 2). Within the data, this extract forms part of the participant’s explanation of her reasons for not currently employing a domestic worker and the style of the account works to suggest that this is primarily because she does not consider the relationship to be a fair exchange. While the employee can expect to benefit from the employer financially through a variety of channels, this narrative constructs this relationship as coming at a significant financial and emotional cost to the employer. This cost is framed as resulting from “the nature of the average domestic worker” (line 7), which the participant constructs as being to be dependent on their employer, clumsy and irresponsible with their tools and inevitable perpetrators behind small and large scale theft. The inequality of the relationship is as a result from the employees’ lack of virtue and subsequent willingness to exploit her employer.

In extract 9 the participant produces a similar account of the cost of an employee, framed again in terms of immorality of domestic worker. Employing a domestic worker is constructed as a risk because of the access employees’ have to an intimate knowledge of an employers’ home and security. Although domestic workers are never constructed as thieves outright, and in fact this account is very skilfully constructed to avoid stating this overtly, the participant implies that domestic workers are likely to steal themselves or inform other thefts. The participant therefore constructs the relationship as potentially coming at great cost to the employer, in terms of risks of theft and risks to personal safety. The participant constructs a similar account in extract 10, this time comparing her own giving behaviour to her employee’s frequent need for help, and in the end, thievery. Here, the employee’s immorality and cost to the employer is twofold, both terms of taking advantage of her employer’s willingness to help

her and stealing from her employer. Meanwhile the employer constructs her own identity in terms of being willing to help her employee and being bewildered and conflicted when faced with the possibility of a dishonest employee. Thus, the difference between employer and employee are strongly emphasised in this extract, with participant constructing herself as the victim of her employee's greedy and inconsiderate behaviour.

While extract 11 may seem not to fit in this section, with its upbeat and enthusiastic construction of the employee contrasting heavily with the previous accounts, it shares their approach to accounting for their relationship. Within this extract the participant lists the many ways in which her employee is "amazing" (line 2). Unlike the employees constructed in the previous accounts, this employee does not waste, overeat, take food without asking or arrive late for work (lines 3 to 6). In other words, this employee is exceptional, she is unlike the average employee. This account therefore draws upon a common narrative of "the nature of the average domestic worker" (extract 8, line 7) in order to define her employee against it. However, this works to reproduce the narrative of the self-interested and immoral employee because an honest and reliable domestic worker is not defined as normal in the participant's talk. In fact, many of the statements in lines 1 to 3, such as "I would not change her for anyone" (line 1), suggest that this not just an exceptional employee but a once in a lifetime one. These four accounts therefore share a common style of constructing their relationship where the fairness of the relationship is disrupted by the average domestic worker's greed and self-interest.

These kinds of constructions bear many similarities to the familiar discourses that are used to discredit blacks in South Africa and seem to be drawing on a stereotype of domestic worker defined by these racial discourses. These discourses tend towards constructing black Africans as being greedy, corrupt and incompetent in order to delegitimise them, discussed briefly in the literature review (p. 13). In fact, the participants' accounts seem to draw on what can effectively be considered apartheid and colonial discourses of racial difference and race essentialism, where blacks are inevitably less civilised and a drain on whites (Steyn, 2001). Although the word "black" is only mentioned once within these extracts (extract 8, line 1), these stereotypes are gestured to throughout, using what Durrheim (2012) calls "stereotyping by implication" (p. 189). Within these four extracts the speakers invite the

reader to hear their constructions in certain ways. For example, in extract 9, the phrase “this is South Africa” implies without explicitly stating that something about the South African context requires one “to be vigilant and careful about who we let into our homes” (line 1). As listeners familiar with the South Africa context, this extract gives us enough information to connect the participant’s statements to a discourse of essential black African criminality, suggesting that because of the race and status of the domestic worker, she will inevitably steal from her employer. Similar gesturing appears throughout these four extracts, and while race is never explicit, it is apparent that this discussion is drawing on discourses of problematic African blackness to produce constructions of domestic workers as immoral and incompetent.

The fact that these constructions are never overt suggests that naming them outright might open these employers up to criticism, particularly of being racist. However, drawing on these discourses implicitly within their talk appears to work to enhance their construction of moral binary in relationship. The comparison between employer and employee is now based not just on what is fair, as in the previous section, but also what is right. The participants are constructed as fair and ethical employers while the domestic workers are constructed as dishonest, greedy and lazy. The participants are therefore able to set up an equation in which they can be viewed as being treated unfairly, despite their privilege as an employer. Drawing on unfavourable constructions of African blackness can be seen to become a valuable tool for managing the comparative identities of employer and employee in this relationship and assuring the employers’ favourable positioning.

### ***Summary***

The extracts in these two sections have demonstrated how participants in this study worked to construct relational difference between themselves and their employees. Within these, and many other extracts in the data, the participants set up a comparison between themselves and their employees that, using tools of constructed fairness and morality, allowed the employer to be positioned favourably. By constructing this kind of relationship as mutual and equal and then showing how their employee deviated from the agreed exchange of services, the employers’ own position as privileged whites could not be held as problematic or immoral. In fact, this approach worked entirely through translating the employers’ privilege

and employees disadvantage into an equation of a very particular kind of fairness. This kind of construction relates very strongly to the discourse of mutual exchange discussed in the literature review and most especially to the kind of construction between heterosexual partners with unequal and gendered labour distributions (p. 26). In this study the participants found ways to translate their position of power and privilege into their own unique and very isolated form of equality. This favoured the employer's identity because the participants constructed the relationship as being more than fair to the employee, with the employer often being positioned as a victim in the exchange of resources between them. Thus, these accounts featured firstly, efforts to translate an unequal relationship, where the employer was privileged as a result of their white identity, into an equal relationship through narratives of relational justice and relational morality. And secondly, efforts to show that the relationship actually benefited the employer very little, in order to totally undo their privilege and produce them, rather than their employee, as the victim. Through these through steps, the participants undid their white privilege in talk and were able to position themselves more neutrally, as people who just wanted a fair relationship with their employee, despite their employees' failings.

### **Structural morality**

The second style adopted by participants in this study was to manage their identity through constructing difference between themselves and other employers. Rather than working on an interpersonal level, as was done in the previous approach, this approach involved positioning oneself favourably in relation to other employers and whites at a broader, structural, societal level. This was achieved in three key ways, each of which will be outlined below. Again, these approaches can be seen to overlap at times in the data but they have been separated out to emphasise the qualities that make them distinct from each other.

### ***Comparing themselves to other employers***

The first approach taken in this section involved comparison between the participants and other employers.

**Extract 12:** Jenny, group b, day 2, contribution.



1 "I am very hands on, and both Erica and Angie have always commented that I am not like  
2 other white "madams" in that I do stuff too, not just give instructions. This helps me feel more  
3 comfortable in asking them to do things, and they most often volunteer to help me. My  
4 conscience cannot allow me to sit and read a book or take a nap, while they have to work  
5 around me, I always keep busy until they have finished their day."

**Extract 13:** Denise, group b, day 4, comment.

1 "Seriously though I think the fact that we are aware that what to call our domestic help has  
2 evolved beyond "maid" shows that our relationships with them has changed, and yes we want  
3 a term that makes their position more equal, or perhaps reflect their value to us. It also does  
4 come down to respect, and I think from all of discussions and comments, everyone has said  
5 how much we appreciate and value our helpers (and love), and I think that is reflected in our  
6 wish to call them something appropriate."

**Extract 14:** Christine, group b, day 6, comment.

1 "Rosemary, your Christmas present comment also made me chuckle because I have already  
2 started buying Christmas presents for Silvia and Nonzamo! (You must think I'm mad!) Last  
3 year I got lists from all my staff of the children they support, names, ages and gender and I did  
4 presents for everybody. I must say that I found that more satisfying than buying presents for  
5 my extended, dare I say "spoilt", family. I knew that I was setting a president last year and I  
6 don't mind because Christmas is a time of excess and I would rather channel that in a more  
7 needy direction. I suppose it also helps to combat "the guilt".

**Extract 15:** Margaret, group b, day 3, contribution.

1 I am also trying to be more aware and conscious of our relationship. And I am encouraging  
2 my children to treat Emma with more respect. It is important that my children are aware of  
3 her home environment i.e. how many children she has and how her family is.

4 I always find it interesting how some visitors to my home do not even acknowledge Emma and  
5 Louisa. And I know I am guilty of this myself so I am trying to teach my children to be more  
6 aware.

In the extracts above the participants construct accounts of their relationships in which they resist being associated with stereotypes of typical white "madam" (a stereotype that was

concisely defined by Christine in extract 1 earlier in this chapter, p. 52). In extract 12, for example, the participant states outright that her domestic workers have commented that she is not like other madams, a statement that is given great credibility by the fact that it came from her employees (lines 1 and 2). The difference between herself and other employers is constructed as being her desire to actively help out in the home and to not just give out instructions (lines 1 and 2). In this extract the participant constructs a tension between her own guilt, seen in the phrases “this helps me feel more comfortable” (lines 2 and 3) and “my conscience cannot allow me” (lines 3 and 4), and her position as a privileged employer. She frames her account in terms of resisting this privilege, showing the ways in which she helps out in the house and refuses to embody her privilege by reading a book or taking a nap (line 4). She constructs her employees as being conscientious themselves, volunteering to help out, rather than being resentful because of her privilege (line 3). This extract therefore constructs a relationship that does not appear to fall within the usual power hierarchies of the relationship between employer and domestic worker, largely because of the participant’s efforts to resist the typically authoritative role of the employer and be “very hands on” (line 1).

Extracts 13, 14 and 15 involve similar constructions in which the employers contrasts their own behaviour with the stereotypes associated with the typical employer. For example, in extract 13, the participant raises the issue of what employers call their domestic workers. She constructs the name “maid” in terms of its hierarchical implications and states that this group of employers seek to be aware of the implications of what they call their employee, aspiring towards “a term that makes their position more equal, or perhaps reflect their value to us” (line 3). In other words, through her account of the group’s desire to respect their employees and show how much they value and love them (lines 3 and 4), the employer is positioning herself and the rest of the participants as distinct from the stereotypical employer who might happily call their employee by a patronising name. In extract 14, the participant provides an account of her commitment to providing Christmas gifts to her staff and their family members. This extract comes in response to a comment made by another participant about how she maintains a level of professionalism with her employees by providing them with a thirteenth cheque at the end of the year. Christine’s response constructs an account of great generosity and frames this generosity as being surprising, especially in lines 1 and 2, through

the use of exclamation marks and the statement “you must think I’m mad!” The participant rationalises this activity through the use of statements such as “I must say I found it more satisfying” (line 4) and “I suppose it also helps to combat "the guilt"” (line 7), suggesting that this generosity helps her assuage her feelings of guilt over the inequality in the relationship. This extract in particular carries recognisable signs of the paternalistic discourse of the heroic and helpful employer, discussed in the literature review (p. 25). The participant frames her account in terms of being a heroic employer in order to show herself to be distinct from the stereotype of the selfish employer, positioning herself instead as selfless, and exceptionally so.

In the final extract in this section, the participant constructs a comparison between herself and other employers in terms of a desire to acknowledge and be respectful of domestic workers. She constructs an account of her own efforts to traverse the traditional boundaries of the employer role and be more conscious and aware of her employees (lines 1 and 2). Her account suggests that not paying attention to the domestic help in a person’s home is something that is normalised in her generation of employer but that she is trying to break this habit with her children, encouraging them to be more respectful of her employees (lines 1 and 2, 5 and 6). By comparing her own desire to establish a more respectful relationship now and in future generations with visitors who do not even acknowledge the presence of her employees, the participant positions herself as quite unlike the stereotype of the traditional madam.

Within these four extracts the participants can be seen to find a diverse range of ways to distance themselves from other employers and in particular, the stereotypical “madam” employment style. This activity works to demonstrate the participants reluctance to be associated with an entitled and inconsiderate identity and instead establish themselves as employers who have “evolved beyond” (extract 13, line 2) the types of relationships established during the apartheid regime. This desire to be seen as a better employer is not constructed as being motivated by the demands of their employees and instead seems to be a self-imposed pressure, with all the participants’ accounts featuring discussions of their own rationalisations and thought processes that have motivated them to take certain steps to establish a more respectful relationship. In fact, these extracts feature a process of defining

this type white employer against that type of white employer, suggesting that the overall issue at stake here is a problem of privileged whiteness. These accounts are constructed in ways that achieve difference between the participants and other employers and establish the participants as people who are privileged but not selfish, a different kind of white. They are trying to undo the wrongs of the past and are showing themselves to be a more virtuous type of employer, and therefore a more virtuous white.

### ***Confessions of guilt***

This section examines in greater detail an approach visible throughout the extracts in the structural morality style of managing white privilege, confessing guilt and expressing shame as a way of managing white privilege.

**Extract 16:** Christine, group b, day 3, comment.

1        “You touched on a nerve when you mentioned "guilt". I am very aware of the disparity in  
2        lifestyle between Nonzamo and Silvia and I feel guilty! When I buy new things I always  
3        like to take the price tags off because I am aware that what I spend is way above what they  
4        can. I even feel guilty about the groceries I buy. Last night I bought just over 1kg of mutton for  
5        a curry - Jim is here - and I think I spent about R140. My first thought was how much meat  
6        that could have bought Silvia and her family. I must add that I am sensitive to this but I have  
7        never picked up any recrimination from my staff about anything that I have bought - outwardly  
8        they seem totally accepting. I don't think I would feel the same in their position.”

**Extract 17:** Denise, group b, day 3, comment.

1        Wow Margaret, you did so much for Louisa as her employer, like assisting her to get her Matric  
2        and the domestic workers course, that I feel- yes the dreaded word- "guilty" about how much  
3        I do for [and] have done for my helpers. The whole guilt feeling is really coming to the fore as  
4        a common thread through our submissions and comments so far. We all seem to have the  
5        same feelings of guilt about how much we have, and our helpers don't, about their sometimes  
6        dreadful or tragic personal circumstances. Is this perhaps “white man's guilt”? There is no  
7        doubt that I still find that I am so sensitive to the inequalities of the past, that I rather  
8        overcompensate when dealing with Jill, Beatrice and even some of my black colleagues as I  
9        don't want to be seen as racist.

**Extract 18:** Jenny, group b, day 8, comment.

- 1 Why do we have to feel guilt for something we didn't design...and yet we still do! Is it to do
- 2 with a Woman's nurturing instinct that we want to make thing better, or is it to do with the
- 3 closeness we have in our lives with our domestic helper, they give us so much of themselves
- 4 - why shouldn't we give them back something of ourselves?

Within these extracts the participants can be seen to provide overt accounts of their feelings of guilt. These accounts are structured as confessions or reflections, outlining their internal conflicts between their own experiences of privilege and their awareness of their employees' low socio-economic status. These feelings of shame are not disguised or avoided, with participants in all three extracts openly stating that they feel guilt, suggesting that constructing their experiences in terms of their guilt serves a discursive purpose in these accounts.

In extract 16 the participant constructs this guilt as being a result of the wealth disparity between herself and her employees and as something that permeates her life on many levels. For example, she discusses how her immediate thought when buying groceries is of the luxury of her purchases in comparison to the kind of purchases her employees can make (lines 4 to 6). She also states that she has a habit of cutting the price tags off the new items she buys as a way of managing her own feelings of guilt over her ability to purchase expensive items (lines 2 to 4). Through describing this practice, participant also constructs an honest desire to try to be sensitive about this disparity. As a final note, the participant emphasises that this feeling of guilt is the result of her own internal reflection on the disparities between herself and her employee, and she states plainly that her employees have never given her reason to believe that they resent her (line 6 to 8). The use of the phrase "I must add" (line 6) to begin these statements frames them as an afterthought and works to down play the fact that making such a statement positions the employer highly favourably. Through this meaning-rich collection of statements, the participant constructs herself as extremely considerate and morally aware, as an employer who does not take her privilege for granted and in fact is amazed that her employees are so accepting of their contrasting lifestyles ("I don't think I would feel the same in their position," line 8). Positioning herself overtly as unduly privileged and her employees as underprivileged but highly virtuous sets up a completely contrasting kind of relationship to

that perceived to belong to the typical employer, allowing the participant to be seen more favourably.

Extracts 17 and 18 feature more general discussions of the guilt employers and white people more broadly feel. In extract 17 the participant also makes a confession of guilt “I feel- yes the dreaded word- "guilty"” (line 2), in this case, as a result of a comparison between what another participant has done to support her employee and herself. Constructing guilt as “the dreaded word” suggests that this guilt is uncomfortable but it is nevertheless something employers feel as a result of the inequality between themselves and their employees (lines 5 and 6). Guilt is applied more broadly in this account with the participant stating “Is this perhaps “white man's guilt?”” (line 6), and later alluding to apartheid with use of the phrase “the inequalities of the past” (line 7). She frames her guilt as relating not just to her relationship with her employee but to her sense of a need to compensate for being white with other blacks she encounters, specifically her colleagues at work (line 8). Thus, this extract firmly attaches a feeling of guilt specifically to the participant’s white identity, rather than her identity as an employer, making guilt a problem of whiteness. The participant suggests at her efforts to work to resolve this inequality and positions herself as often taking these effort too fair, in order to avoid being viewed as a racist white (“I rather overcompensate when dealing with Jill, Beatrice and even some of my black colleagues as I don't want to be seen as racist,” lines 8 and 9). She constructs herself as someone who not only feels so guilty about her whiteness that she overcompensates with blacks, but as someone who is aware that this is overcompensating, therefore positioning herself as highly morally aware.

In extract 18, the participant distances whites from culpability for their guilt through the use of statement “why should we have to feel guilty for something we didn’t design...and yet we still do!” (line 1). Here, the participant is suggesting that whites should not feel guilty because they did not personally design apartheid, while avoiding any reference to how whites in general benefited from it. This statement works to construct participants as inevitably feeling guilt despite the fact that most whites have no intention of harming blacks, therefore, positioning those who do feel guilty highly favourably and as exceptionally morally sensitive. The participant goes on to reflect on why this might be in the context of domestic work, drawing on gendered discourses to suggest that it is in a women’s nature to try to resolve

emotional problems but emphasising that it is probably more likely to be because of the affectionate relationship between employer and employee. Elements of an equation of fairness can be seen in her final statement, “they give us so much of themselves - why shouldn't we give them back something of ourselves?” (lines 3 and 4), which constructs employees as selfless and works to suggest that their guilt is the least can give their employees. This account therefore does not fully endorse the construction of whites as wholly guilty but nevertheless constructs guilt as an appropriate response to the contribution of domestic employees to their lives.

Within these extracts the participants actively construct themselves as guilty subjects, as individuals who have unduly benefited and need to confess their sins. These confessions of guilt and detailed reports of the reasons for this guilt work soften the employers' identity hugely, turning them from “arrogant, spoilt ... madams,” into relatable people (extract 1 on p. 54). Through expressing guilt, the participants are constructed as individuals who are sensitive to the origins of their privilege and are aware of their position in relation to the broader socio-economic landscape in South Africa. Their accounts suggest an eagerness to provide evidence of their awareness of their privileged position and their discomfort with the inescapable injustice of this inequality, in order to demonstrate that they are not entirely complicit with this inequality. In other words, through these accounts, the participants work to show how they are more morally aware than many whites and therefore, despite their position as employer, are more moral. Accounts of guilt work to turn the unfavourable associations with the participants' privileged white identity on its head and allows the participants to be viewed more favourably as people.

### ***The moral employee***

Although this approach focused on constructing difference between the participants and other employers, there were times when the participants constructed the nature of their employees, as has been seen in many of the previous accounts. As a final note for this section, one extract has been included that demonstrates how the participants constructed their employees within this approach. References will be made to other extracts in this section where the participants constructed the nature of their employee in passing.

**Extract 19:** Alex, group a, day 3, comment.

1 I think that although we have a happy and positive relationship I do feel that with the unequal  
2 balance of power it is easy for me to unintentionally abuse the relationship. Our Gogo is so  
3 willing to help and sacrifice time and energy to get things done that I sometimes feel she  
4 doesn't look after her own interests enough. I think she feels quite nervous and awkward  
5 about asking for leave for example, although we are more than willing to give her time off.

In this extract, the employer seems to be openly constructing herself as tyrant and her employee as a self-sacrificing and diligent worker who is not even comfortable asking for what she is owed, specifically, time off (lines 2 to 5). Indeed, the participant highlights the power inequality between herself and her employee and constructs herself as often being able to take advantage of this hierarchy, compared to her employee who works selflessly to meet her needs (lines 1 to 4). Through this account a very unfavourable comparison is set up between employer and employee, where the employee is constructed as entirely virtuous and self-sacrificing and the employer is constructed as selfishly taking advantage of her position. The effect of this comparison, as with all other accounts in this section, is to present the participant as highly self-aware and self-deprecating and therefore, far more virtuous than a literal interpretation of her account suggests.

Similar kinds of constructions that emphasise the injustice of the employers' privilege and their employees' good natured and industrious ways are visible in other extracts in this section. Extracts 12, 16, 17 and 18 all feature references to their employees as far more virtuous and generous than their employer. In fact, although many of the accounts in this section do not feature direct references to the nature of the domestic employee, their ways of positioning themselves tends to construct their employees highly favourably. By showing domestic workers to be deserving of respect, gifts and consideration, the participants imply that their employees are not criminal, lazy or wasteful, but rather virtuous and admirable. And unlike the section on relational morality above, it is not one exceptional employee, but all domestic workers who are more virtuous than employers. Through these constructions the employers produce favourable identities for themselves, showing themselves, again, to be unlike other employers, and therefore other whites, in the way they consider and treat their



employees. For example in extract 19 above, the participant's account suggests that she is totally sensitive to her employee's needs, worries if her employee is working too hard and even refers to her with the extremely affectionate and culturally appropriate term "our Gogo" (line 2). The participant is using account of her own consideration to construct herself as humble and considerate person and resist being viewed as a stereotypical employer.

### ***Summary***

Managing white privilege through the structural morality style therefore worked as a result of the participants resisting association with the stereotypes surrounding white employers, and distancing themselves from unfavourable constructions of whiteness more generally. The participants did not seek to deny their privilege and worked to address problematic constructions of whiteness through accounts of how they differed from these constructions. This allowed them to occupy to more favourable space, as privileged, but not entitled, arrogant and selfish. This was achieved by the participants showing themselves to be more morally aware than the average employer, distancing themselves from shameless whiteness privilege in general and emphasising the virtue of their employees. In other words, the participants constructed a favourable identity by resisting talking about themselves and their employees in ways that have come to be typically expected of whites.

### **Interpretation and conclusion**

Through the analysis of the extracts above, the researcher has attempted to demonstrate the ways in which the participants managed their identity as privileged white employers within this study. In both the accounting styles above, the participants' greatest concern in talk seemed to be managing how their privileged identity was heard. As has been suggested throughout, the participants managed their identity through defending themselves against accusations of a lack of morality. As an employer, and a privileged white person, the participants were faced with a number of uncomplimentary subject positions, all of which, at their core, called into question their moral character as people. When confronted with an identity that would produce them as selfish, underserving, arrogant, racist and generally immoral objects, the participants worked to resist this positioning. Managing their privilege therefore seemed to involve managing how their ethical character was perceived and was

achieved through the resisting unfavourable positions in relation to their employee and in relation to other employers.

Constructing accounts that produced the employers as moral subjects was shown to work through constructing difference between the employers and other actors. For the relational style, the point of comparison was between employer and employee, while for the structural style this was between the employer and other employers. Creating this difference required what Foucault (1982) has called “dividing practices”, in which the subject is objectivised through division from oneself or division from others (p. 777). In other words, the participants constructed themselves as certain types of employers through showing how they differed in character from others they constructed.

Within the relational style, this worked through defining oneself against the stereotypical domestic worker, an employee who was incompetent, lazy, greedy and immoral. Here, the division was interracial, and the participants constructed themselves favourably through drawing on discourses that discredited blackness. Within the structural style the participants defined themselves against the stereotypical employer, associated with similarly unfavourable attributes. In this case, the division was intra-racial, where the participants constructed themselves favourably through resisting being associated with more bigoted forms of whiteness. In other words, for one group the problem of their unfavourable white identity was externalised and transferred onto blacks, while for the other it was internalised and transferred onto other whites. In both cases, producing a scapegoat that took on all the unfavourable associations of one’s identity, and emphasising the difference between oneself and this scapegoat, allowed the employers to produce the object of the favourable employer effectively.

In order to achieve these constructions of morality and division, the participants in this study were seen to draw on recognisable discourses for managing their identity as an employer, particularly within the relational style. In this style the participants showed signs of drawing upon discourses of mutual exchange and paternalism to set up an equation of exchange between employer and employee, an equation by which the multiple broader social injustices that characterise this relationship were not visible. Like Dixon and Wetherell’s (2004)

assertion that such discourses render gendered labour distributions in the home equal, producing comparative roles between employer and employee and framing the relationship as a professional exchange of goods for services worked to render the unequal power distribution more equal (p.26 of the literature review). For example, all the extracts in the relational style construct the employee as possessing great agency, the ability to choose to engage in the relationship (extracts 4, 5 and 6) and choose to steal, free of any economic pressures or other forms of coercion (extracts 8, 9 and 10). The employer meanwhile appears to have far less agency, they cannot opt out of their responsibilities (extract 6) and prevent their employees from stealing from them (extracts 8, 9 and 10). This worked to soften the traditional construction of this relationship as an employment hierarchy.

By constructing the relationship in terms of equality and mutuality, the participants also removed it from the broader socio-political context of South Africa and rendered it free of discourses that discredit whiteness. This allowed the employers to further enhance their favourable position by drawing on discourses that discredit blackness unproblematically and emphasise their own fairness. As with managing gendered labour division through rejecting the broad effects of patriarchy on society, this style rejected the broader effects of racial privilege on society through accounting for their relationship on an individual, relational level.

The structural style adopted a contrasting approach and rather managed privilege on a broader societal and structural level. Within this approach, the employee was barely visible, constructed one dimensionally as lovable, virtuous, innocent and downtrodden and as no threat to the employer. By placing the employee in the background, the employers were able to focus on the problem of whiteness and in particular, the problem of their own identity in relation to other employers and whites. Here, the effects of power and inequality were emphasised, so that the employer could present themselves as engaging with their privilege openly. Producing accounts of inequality allowed the participants to express their guilt credibly, framing this as an appropriate reaction in this context. Within this approach therefore, the setting of domestic work is used as a vehicle towards addressing the participants' identity in the broader context of South Africa, rather than the centre of the participants' discursive efforts. Interestingly this style, did not, like the relational style, feature

widely documented discourses for managing their identity as an employer and white South African, suggesting that the identification of such an approach may be somewhat unique.

In conclusion, the findings of this research suggest that the participants in this study addressed their identity as a privileged white employer and managed this identity in their talk. They produced favourable accounts of themselves through constructing their relationship between themselves and their employees in certain ways and constructing themselves in relation to other employers in certain ways. Both of these styles of accounting for their white privileged identity as an employer sought to defend the participants against rhetorical accusations against their good character. This was achieved through dividing practices or constructing the participant as a certain type of employer through separating them from an immoral other. While the one approach achieved this through depoliticising the relationship and constructing social actors on an individual level, the other actively emphasised social inequality in order position themselves in relation to white identity at a structural level. It is important to stress that these styles of accounting were drawn upon by the participants separately and simultaneously, sometimes in a variety of different ways within one section of text. Thus, these styles were used flexibly by the participants to meet their needs in various discursive scenarios. The next chapter will consider the implications of these findings.

## Chapter Four: Discussion and conclusion

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### Introduction

The findings of the study, presented in the previous chapter, have suggested that white privilege strongly influenced the way the participants constructed and managed their identity in this study. Although the participants were engaging in discussions of their relationships with their domestic employees, the participants were shown to account for these relationships in a manner that primarily addressed their privileged racial identity. In some cases, this was shown to be through constructing division between themselves and their employees on a racial basis. In others, the participants critically engaged with their identities as privileged white South Africans and addressed many of the implications of this identity. These findings confirmed the assertion that the institution of domestic work continues to embody a microcosm of race relations, as it did during the apartheid era.

However, the findings of this study also suggested that the kinds of relations that exist between races in this setting and the ways in which whites make sense of themselves within it are not necessarily as they were in the past. Although the participants in this study were shown to engage in a variety of manners with colonial racial discourses, they also engaged with post-colonial discourses, and two clear patterns of drawing on discourses from both eras were identified. Adopting these two approaches worked to address the implications of their white privilege in completely differing respects. Yet both successfully managed similar concerns, namely, that as privileged white South African employers, the participants lacked morality. This chapter will interrogate the findings of this study in greater detail and seek to locate them within the larger body of literature on whiteness. It will discuss how this study has contributed new knowledge to our understanding of whiteness in South Africa, along with the limitations of its findings. As the final section of the document, the chapter will end with a general conclusion and recommendations for future research.

### Two approaches, one goal

The approaches adopted by the participants in the previous chapter were in some ways surprising, because they represented such contradictory methods of managing ones' white

identity and yet were drawn from within the same context. Managing white identity in such varying ways, sometimes even in the same breath, supported Steyn's (2001) assertion that whites in the post-apartheid context are "shopping around for stories that seem to serve their interests best now that they have less control" (p. 165). The participants in this study drew on a variety of constructions that all worked to do just that, namely, navigate the treacherous terrain of the post-apartheid context in a way that allowed them to maintain a favourable, moral identity. Indeed, much of the participants accounting worked to actively align them with the norms of contemporary South Africa and avoid explicit indications of attitudes of prejudice. They endorsed non-racialism, they expressed guilt and they actively accounted for their lives in ways that implied a commitment to the new South Africa. This suggested that the participants had been successful in "shopping around" for ways to be white: they produced identities that were aligned with the present norms despite their privilege.

That said, the constructions produced in this study were certainly influenced by the fact that with the focus of the research was on the participants' identity as a white employer and thus their moral character was under the microscope. The participants engaged in a complicated negotiation of racial and historical meanings within this study, which clearly required restraint and tact to manoeuvre effectively. There may almost certainly be settings where these participants are less restrained in their discussion of race, perhaps as one participant stated in the data, "around the braai fires." However, in the research setting, the participants' accounts showed clear indications that overall, they were working to produce themselves as ethical, good people, resisting unfavourable constructions of whiteness and of employers, as they discussed openly in extracts 1 to 3.

Within the relational approach, this was achieved through constructing themselves as people concerned with professionalism and fairness, while within the structural approach the participants displays of guilt and humility accomplished morality. In their very different ways, these approaches dealt with the negative implications of their identities and positioned the participants favourably, through addressing the participants' morality. And, interestingly, this did not necessarily require totally forgoing the interests of whiteness. Indeed, constructing their identity through approaches that dealt with morality concerns allowed the participants to maintain their privilege uncriticised.

The participants in this study therefore adopted a varied, but familiar approach that sought to manage, and in some cases maintain, their privileged white identity and yet did not seek to do this in an explicit way. The participants appeared to be attempting to produce themselves as good whites by aligning themselves with some of the discourses of the post-apartheid context while implicitly shoring up their white privilege. The ways in which this was achieved in each approach will be discussed in greater detail below.

### **Relational morality**

Managing identity through the relational style saw the participants constructing equations of justice and harsh disparities in capacities for fairness and morality between themselves and their employees. Taking this approach worked to discredit the idea that the employers were unfairly privileged, or indeed privileged at all. Whilst framing the relationship as being just like any other employment relationship, participants positioned themselves as fair and considerate employers and constructed their employees as demanding far more from them than might be deemed professional. Indeed, the employees were constructed, through various means, as being substantially less fair, less professional and less ethical than their employer. This kind of construction produced an understanding of the relationship that did not require the broader socio-economic context and the power inequality between employer and employee to be taken into account. Thus, constructing the relationship as professional, the employer as professional and the employee as entirely unprofessional, worked to leave the participants' inevitable privilege uninterrogated, permitting the employers to maintain their superior position without facing rhetorical critique. Their privilege was rendered completely irrelevant to the discussion and thus, it was not necessary for the participants to take any responsibility for this inequality.

Steyn (2001) has noted that this kind of approach to managing white privilege allows whites to defend themselves against the discomfort of considering their own culpability in broader systems of oppression and power and thus hold onto their sense of moral superiority. In fact, managing whiteness in this way has been identified often in the literature on whiteness in South Africa, suggesting that it is a rather a common means of dealing with the troubling

implications of whiteness. Steyn (2001) for example, discusses how many forms of whiteness in South Africa hold on to a sense of privilege and entitlement without critiquing it while simultaneously working to justify this privilege in relation to the norms of the post-apartheid context. In one narrative of whiteness identified by Steyn (2001), whites remain fully convinced of their superiority over other race groups but do not see this problematic because they adopt attitudes of paternalism that positions them as caretakers, rather than tyrants. Indeed, these kinds of “good white Samaritan” or “heroic” white discourses, discussed in the literature review (p. 13), are common because they work to justify broader inequality in ways that allow whites to hold on to a favourable identity (Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2014;Wale & Forster, 2007).

Participants in this study could be seen to be doing just this (extracts 6 and 7 in particular, p.57 - 58), namely, distancing themselves from the suggestion that they do not deserve their privilege by showing how this privilege benefited their undeserving employees. “Enrich their lives in our own ways,” as the participant stated in extract 7, does not require much from the employer, yet works to present the employer as caring and ethical. Wale and Foster (2007) suggest that this discourse takes the problem of broader structural inequality and reforms it as being a matter of individual action and will. One white individual professing to helping a black individual suggests an investment in transformation, yet this works to gloss over and support the silencing of the need for broader structural change (Wale & Foster, 2001). As whites who are highly invested in their privilege, a loss of privilege is unlikely to be welcomed and this kind of narrative, evident in the participants’ accounts, allows them to hold on to a sense of superiority.

Other discourses have been identified that bind white privilege to the post-apartheid setting, allowing whites to avoid disrupting their privilege. Discourses of non-racialism, colour-blindness and reverse racism are prime examples of whites turning post-apartheid norms on their heads in favour of whites, discussed in the literature review, p. 12 (Steyn, 2001; Steyn & Foster, 2008; Wale & Foster, 2007). Wale and Foster (2007), for example, have presented evidence of how whites take up a victimised positionality and construct policies such as affirmative action or land reform as reverse racism. Of course, these kinds of constructions have little credibility considering South Africa’s history, but they are made convincing through



the use of discourses of colour blindness, individualism and meritocracy (Wale & Foster, 2007). Whites do not therefore state outright that they fear a loss of legitimacy or see themselves as superior and more deserving, they instead construct any kind of deviation from the ideals of equality, even if it is to produce equality, as being representative of the ideals of apartheid. This kind of discourse was clearly apparent in the participant's discussion on professionalism in extract 4 on p. 57, where she stated "so often the "race card" is drawn when there's a disagreement, altercation or even a minor misunderstanding between different races," going on to construct the relationship between employer and employee as free of any social or economic inequalities. Suggesting that we should all move beyond race allows white privilege to remain unchallenged because it implies that raising the issue of race is tantamount to racism. These kinds of constructions feature an obvious attempt to take the moral high ground and work to discredit others who seek to engage whites in open discussions about their privilege (Wale & Foster, 2007).

A significant component of the participants' discursive work in this approach was producing constructions that discredited blackness, an approach that also finds ways to align itself with the post-apartheid setting. This too is a well identified feature of whiteness in the post-apartheid, as it also works to limit critique of whiteness. Aspects of discrediting blackness identified in this study, such as constructing blacks as criminal, are common in the present setting and speak to a continuation of colonial discourses that seek to justify the domination of blacks by whites (Steyn, 2001). Wale and Foster (2007) use the example of how white South Africans construct the African National Congress (ANC) as "backward, greedy and immoral" or "a bunch of monkeys" in order to delegitimise their power and threat to whiteness (p. 58). Such devices were visible in the participants' accounts, where they frequently positioned blacks as immoral, primitive and even childlike. It is interesting to note the level of threat and paranoia apparent in the participants' accounts in relation to this, the sense that crime and violence perpetrated by blacks was inevitable. While this did work to bolster the participants' moral position, it also suggested a deeper sense of loss of control and fear of revenge, highlighting these participants' inability to consider blacks as anything but a form of enemy. Thus, while managing their privilege in terms of discrediting blackness favoured the employers, and indeed all whites who adopt such an approach, it carries with it a degree of fear of loss of privilege that also explains whites' motivation for drawing upon it.

At the heart of the approaches visible in the relational style, is an underlying strategy of denial and fear. Whites are faced with the uncomfortable position of having their assured entitlement and a sense of superiority discredited and condemned. And yet they must find ways to exist as citizens in a context that is no longer familiar or only concerned with their needs. Ratele and Laubscher (2010) discuss this dilemma of whiteness in relation to a specific incident of white violence against a black, stating that “perhaps the trauma of whiteness that sees, that is witness to violence, is not only because it sees the victim, but also because it sees the perpetrator, and the perpetrator looks like me” (p. 95). This quote speaks very well to the broader dilemma of whiteness, the impossibility of reconciling one's sense of oneself as a moral, good person with one's shared identity with an immoral and oppressive group. Indeed, the dilemma is that as a white, there is always a looming uneasiness that one might be personally complicit in a system of racial hierarchy and in fact might be the comfortable benefactor of others' subjugation. Thus, many whites who are faced with the inescapable negative implications of their white identity seem unable to engage with this unfavourable identity openly and instead work to find ways to hold on to older forms of whiteness, which inevitably involves some sort of denial. Whites, when adopting a strategy of denial, do so through denying the broader implications of colonialism and apartheid on the social structure of South Africa and seek to deny any structural inequality that may have privileged them. This makes it possible for whites to liberate themselves from the dilemmas of whiteness, while simultaneously resisting threats to white privilege.

Thus, within the relational morality style, the participants were seen to adopt very familiar approaches to managing their identity in contemporary South Africa: an array of discourses that worked in various ways to deny the negative implications of their white identity. Through discrediting or simply ignoring notions of structural inequality, the participants were able to set up a scenario of equal power relations where their privilege essentially became invisible. Of course, this is the basic premise of all whiteness studies, that white privilege is an invisible force operating within society and these participants' accounts demonstrate how the invisibility of white privilege is achieved (McIntosh, 1988; Steyn, 2001). By denying white privilege in their accounts, the participants in this study fed into this broader dynamic, effectively entrenching the hold of white privilege. Though it is difficult to argue that any

white person in South Africa is unaware of their privilege, never mind their race, in this setting it seems that the participants adopted strategies that fed into a kind of collective amnesia so as to avoid explicitly defending white privilege. Denying the benefits of white privilege allowed the participants to hold on to it, while still being able to consider themselves as progressive South Africans. The relational morality approach is one that appears to be common place in South Africa when whites, for a variety of reasons, are not yet willing to acknowledge the sense of superiority their whiteness affords, even in a context that discredits white privilege. It is inevitable that such an approach should involve transferring unfavourable attributes onto the other, in order to avoid acknowledging the unfavourable attributes of the self.

### **Structural morality**

The structural morality approach, in contrast, was characterised by an explicit interrogation into the problem of white privilege. This style of accounting featured a focus inwards, a self-critical engagement with what it means to be white, rather than an avoidance of engaging with the implications of whiteness. This approach took a more honest view of the place of whites in contemporary South Africa, accepting that whites may not be well loved or deserving of their continued privilege. When drawing on this narrative, the participants produced more self-deprecating, modest and humble selfhood and readily expressed guilt at the inequality between themselves and their employees, and the broader inequality in South Africa. These almost excessive confessions of guilt and shame, as well as self-critical expressions of modesty and humility, worked to produce a rather unsterotypical white person. This was undoubtedly the aim of such an approach because what it achieved was a way of convincingly relating to the present context and appearing morally superior, while remaining privileged and white.

Although academics, both locally and internationally, have long emphasised that whiteness is not homogenous and should more correctly be termed whitenesses, this very specific kind of comparison between whites, these confessions of guilt, this formulation as a whole, seems to have been largely undocumented until now (Steyn, 2001). Interestingly, Cock (1980) notes that one of the common attitudes of employers of domestic workers in the Eastern Cape in

the late 1970's was that of embarrassment at employing a domestic worker. She states "a small number feel embarrassed at having any servants at all, and think that being waited on by another human being is degrading" (p. 141). This sentiment is echoed in many of the extracts in this study, particularly in extracts 12, 13 and 15 on page 66, in discussions around the need to be respectful to employees. Jenny's talk in extract 12 particularly speaks to this sense of embarrassment, "my conscience cannot allow me to sit and read a book or take a nap, while they have to work around me ...". Like these other employers before her, Jenny presents herself as struggling to whole-heartedly accept the service she is paying for, because the injustice inherent in it is clear. Cock's (1980) identification of this reaction to white privilege during the height of apartheid is intriguing, as it suggests that acknowledging the unfavourable aspects of privilege has been a legitimate means of identity management for whites for some time.

Indeed, many authors have documented whites' sense of being trapped in their identity, unable to escape being viewed as bigoted and arrogant, despite working to reduce this perception (Steyn, 2001). For example, Durrheim, Mtose and Brown (2011) state, "it doesn't matter who you are ... if you are white there is always impending suspicion of your potential for racism" (p. 45). The inevitability of how one is viewed is no doubt frustrating for whites, and this has driven whites to deny these stereotypes in variety of ways (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). In some scenarios, as has been shown in the approach above, this is done by denying their privilege and showing oneself to be equal but better in other ways. However, in other cases, as this study has shown, it is possible to tackle these positionings head on, through constructing one's self as being free of the unpleasant characteristics of whiteness. With the simultaneous deconstruction of white centrality in South Africa and broader processes of globalisation, the security of white privilege is becoming more and more unsustainable and navigating between these various strategies as needed appears to have become more and more necessary in order to maintain a favourable identity (Steyn, 2001).

Steyn discusses these complex processes, where whites find ways to decolonise themselves and construct narratives of the self that align with African interests (Steyn, 2001). For the whites in this study, this involved drawing on the familiar strategy of dividing practices, used in this case to separate whites from other whites. This kind of division has been noted by

Ratele and Laubscher (2010) who state “systems need scapegoats, bad, blameworthy individuals whose acts allow systems to perpetuate their quotidian power and to not appear as comparatively unreasonable. Racist individuals do great day-to-day work of (non-racist) structures and ideologies of whiteness, because the violence of the structures can be displaced onto them: they are the violent ones, not the system” (p. 95). While in the previous approach, blacks were shouldered with burden of the negative associations of structural privilege, in this approach, it is other whites. This allowed the participants to feel removed from the violence perpetrated by their kind, to resist feeling like the perpetrator while still admitting to being one. Margaret articulates this perfectly in extract 15 on page 67 with the statement, “I always find it interesting how some visitors to my home do not even acknowledge Emma and Louisa. And I know I am guilty of this myself so I am trying to teach my children to be more aware.” In this account we can see how Margaret problematizes the behaviour of not acknowledging the presence of domestic helpers but then goes on to show that although she is guilty of this behaviour she is working to address it in herself and others. Small acts of humility, on an individual scale, to an individual employee, like the above, were used to demonstrate the division between a moral white and immoral white. This resembles quite strongly a discourse of the good white Samaritan but is distinguished by the participants’ expressions of guilt and shame at the broader, structural inequality in South Africa, rather than at the interpersonal level.

While this approach features familiar elements of white privilege, and in fact works in many ways to maintain this privilege, it also includes the novel feature of confessions of guilt and acknowledgement of shame at a structural level. Confessions of regret and guilt are activities foreign to common conceptualisations of whiteness. Whiteness theory rarely finds that whites are even cognisant of their privilege, never mind remorseful for it. Yet a piece by Vice (2010) reflects critically on the moral place of whites in contemporary South Africa and argues that the only appropriate response whites can have in this context is that of shame. Vice (2010) states that whites in South Africa are inevitably and inescapably complicit in the oppression of blacks through the habits of whiteness, the involuntary ways in which whites work to maintain their privilege. Although whites may or may not embrace these habits, they are the inevitable consequence of whites’ skin and all that can be done is for whites to select a moral response to these implications (Vice, 2010). For Vice (2010), whites face the complex

problem of deciding how to live decently, as a good person, while being unable to escape a morally discrediting identity. This moral task is at its core a dilemma of reconciling the basic desire to live a good life and be a good person with the admission that one is part of a broader process that robs one of one's virtue (Vice, 2010). Vice (2010) argues that guilt and shame are appropriate responses to this dilemma because they work to restore whites morality through otherwise uncharacteristic demonstrations of humility. By doing their moral and affective duty of feeling shame, whites show themselves to be morally conscientious, undoing some of the habits of whiteness.

This argument, though much criticised, demystifies the uncomfortable truth of whites' privilege in South Africa and advocates a kind moral accountability in substitute of a more desirable, but impossible to achieve (because privilege is historically and systemically embedded) material accountability (Villet, 2012). Although many oppose the idea that whites have anything to feel shame for, the participants drawing on the structural morality approach appear to have found adopting this style appropriate, and even advantageous, to managing ones identity (Villet, 2012). Vice's (2010) article argues that whites need to engage in self-critical internal debate to undo the habits of whiteness and within this study the participants did something very similar, attempting to undo the habits of whiteness in their relationships through reflections and discussions about their guilt. Christine's account in extract 16 (p. 70) is a good example of this, an account of this internal struggle of reconciling privilege with realities of others' lives. For example, "I even feel guilty about the groceries I buy. Last night I bought just over 1kg of mutton for a curry - Jim is here - and I think I spent about R140. My first thought was how much meat that could have bought Silvia and her family." Through presenting this personal experience of guilt for consideration, Christine positions herself as someone who is aware of the injustice of her comparative wealth and just by producing this account, is already rendered a more virtuous. Within this approach therefore the participants' accounts can be understood as attempts to repair their moral standing through producing themselves conscientious subjects, rather than the kind of whites who uncritically defend their privilege.

Although Vice's (2010) argument holds great relevance to South Africa, particularly when so many whites feel no need to engage with their racial identity despite its deplorable legacy, it

does not entirely account for the work of the participants in this study. Vice's (2010) article presents an argument for the best course of moral action for whites in the post-apartheid context, but does not address how taking such approaches might work to achieve important ends, particularly the activity of confession. Foucault considered the act of confession a complex one, bound up in power relations and governmentality (Renshaw, 2010; Taylor, 2008). When confessing, the subject "declares aloud and intelligibly the truth of oneself" and this declaration is always occasioned and made in the presence of the other (Foucault in Taylor, 2008, p. 7). This other is not a passive other, but the agent who requires or imposes the confession and in turn passes judgement on the confession (Taylor, 2008). The relationship between the subject and his or her own truth is therefore mediated by the other, determining the kind of subject they come to be (Landry, 2009). In other words, confession produces certain kinds of people and comes to regulate how people understand themselves through the workings of power. Foucault highlighted the increasing frequency and normalisation of confession in the 20th century with the rise of technologies such as Freudian psychology and has gone so far to call man the "confessing animal" (Taylor, 2008, p. 3). Other academics have noted how this continues to be the case in the 21st century, stating that "we are the subjects who now speak ourselves incessantly into being" through the use of modern tools, such as Facebook and internet, and through this process are regulated and subjugated (Renshaw, 2010, p. 174).

In this study, the participants' confessions of their inner truths, their guilt and their shame, were of course productions of the self, occasioned by the post-apartheid context. In a setting where whites are relativised and find their whitely ways constantly discredited, confessions of inner truths or the production of the self as humble subject has come to form part of the available repertoire of approaches for producing a moral self. External powers, such as the norms of the present setting, occasion such confessions, rather than the subjects' own agency, and therefore confessions cannot be treated as evidence of some superior morality. That said, the outcome of these confessions appeared to be liberating, as they seemed to put whites in a better position to be pardoned or forgiven. Adopting a confessional approach and expressing guilt and shame allowed these whites to show themselves to be the kind of white who is more willing to adapt to their context. Thus, this approach featured not only moral accountability, as Vice (2010) discussed, but moral accountability through the act of

confession. The use of the confession device allowed the participants to add weight to their construction of difference and a favourable identity in contemporary South Africa, because it suggested that they possessed a virtuous internal character.

The structural approach to managing the participants identity was therefore rather unique and featured ways of managing white privilege that do not seem to have not been detected in this setting before. Although academics such as Steyn (2001) have shown that there are whitenesses that are less inclined to deny white privilege and are willing to be relativised to other race groups, most academics have reported on how whites work to deny and shore up their privilege in the current context (Dolby, 2001; Wale & Foster, 2007). However, even researchers who have identified more decolonised forms of whiteness, have not noted this specific mechanism of managing white privilege through the act of confessing shame. Thus, the participants approach seems to be a newly documented characteristic of whiteness in South Africa.

### **Achieving a favourable identity**

At the core of managing the participants' privileged identity in both these approaches was a concern with constructing oneself favourably, as a person of good moral character and integrity. As discussions within the much of this document have argued, white South Africans are faced with a significant moral dilemma in the contemporary context because of the associations between their whiteness and broader systems of historical structural oppression. There are simply no liberating subject positions for whites as their habitual or even unconscious collusion with a system oppression continues to benefit them even without their knowledge or consent (Steyn,2001; Vice, 2010). Despite the end of apartheid whites continue to maintain their privilege and in doing so continue to be morally damaged (Vice, 2010). They are stuck in space between guilt and denial, unable to be a moral subject without managing their identity in some way (Steyn, 2001). And yet, whites must also find ways to navigate the post-apartheid context and interact with people of the same and other races amicably. Indeed, perhaps the biggest task of managing of white privilege is maintaining a sense of identity as white South African when many of its defining characteristics and even its very place in South Africa are constantly challenged.



Yet, as the participants' interactions have shown, whites are able to manage their identity very effectively and there are a range of discourses that can be drawn upon and the identities that be constructed to achieve this. For participants in this study, the troublesome setting of the relationship between employer and domestic worker rendered it untenable to adopt an unashamed, self-assured, openly privileged white identity, because this was not a moral response to the circumstances. Thus, the participants worked to position themselves in ways that did not openly endorse their privilege or suggest a lack of sensitivity to the past, and instead achieved a favourable identity through more subtle and acceptable constructions. The participants navigated their way through a number of different positions artfully, demonstrating fluidity and flexibility of identity production even within this rather prescriptive context. The range of approaches adopted by the participants, which often referenced or even contradicted each other, was telling of the diversity of positions available to whites in South Africa. The participants' accounts produced a variety of personhoods, all of whom, within their narrow frame of construction, appeared moral and fair.

By emphasising their virtue in this study, particularly through the method of dividing practices, the participants were rendered somehow less culpable and less complicit in the inequality between whites and blacks. They had demonstrated ways in which their integrity was not defined by their privilege and therefore were able to take up more favourable subject positions. Thus, by working to soften their position as a privileged white employers through various kinds of comparison, the participants were able to position themselves as possessing a favourable moral character and come to be seen as people of integrity despite their privilege and position as employer in this setting. Managing their relationship in terms of threats against their morality allowed the participants to achieve a favourable identity despite the unfavourable context.

### **Implications and limitations of the findings**

The findings of this study suggest that white privilege continues to be managed in familiar ways in contemporary South Africa and that these tend to involve some form of denial and maintenance of privilege. However, in some cases, a more transformed kind of whiteness

appears to be asserting itself, resisting discourses of denial and simply acknowledging that whites are privileged and that this is not a just state of affairs. This approach, though constrained as all others are by the inescapable continued reproduction of white privilege, seems to at least be apologetic for whites' role in the broader structural inequality of South Africa and to possess a melancholic hope that confessing guilt may lead to some form of forgiveness. The identification of this approach is significant as it suggests that for once, the problem of whiteness in South Africa may not just be whites' sense of entitlement, but instead, whites' need to atone for the past and the present so as to be able to carve out a new place for themselves in the contemporary context.

This approach featured whites in situations of privilege, who are reflective of this privilege and who resist positioning themselves as openly invested in their superiority or their entitlement. Rather than seeking to go on in much the same way as they have done in the past, in some cases, whites deemed it more favourable to construct themselves as apologetic and produce themselves as guilty subjects than to deny the continued legacy of whiteness. This is an interesting and important finding as it suggests that in some settings, it may be more favourable for whites to position themselves as accountable and guilty than to deny their role in the continued equality. While taking on a more decolonised identity is not unusual in South Africa, confessing guilt and shame has until now not been a documented feature of this. Yet this activity seems to be an obvious step towards a more relativised identity and thus may well be an essential component of the decolonisation and integration of whites into the post-apartheid setting.

The findings of this research therefore add a new dimension to our understanding of whiteness in South Africa. While in some cases whites might find it more feasible to deny or resist the implications of their privilege, in others it is more favourable to apologise for it and hope for forgiveness. Whiteness is therefore far from stable in contemporary South Africa and it seems that whites continue to shop around for tenable ways to be white. While whites cannot undo their structural privilege, apologising for it and attempting to be sensitive to and resistant of its effects is a step towards challenging it. As Vice (2010) noted, part of the problem of whiteness in South Africa is that being found out as the oppressor left whites unwilling to engage sincerely in the process reconciliation. As a result, much of the good will

generated by blacks was not well reciprocated by whites in the early years of democracy and this left whites as, if not more, resented. Though it may now be more than 20 years on, the fact that some whites now find value in voluntarily expressing feelings of guilt and shame speaks to an increasing flexibility and diversity in whiteness.

However, despite these findings, a note of caution is necessary when considering the implications of this study. This study is by no means a comprehensive exploration into the character of whiteness in contemporary South Africa and furthermore, considered the nature of white privilege in very specific context, that of domestic work. This is significant, as this context does bear a rhetorical character that may not be present elsewhere and indeed was selected because it was likely to render racial inequality in South Africa salient to the participants. Although these findings suggest a changing face of whiteness in South Africa, and describe discursive approaches that may be widely drawn upon in the country, it is important to emphasise that this study sampled a small group of whites and accessed a small segment of their talk. Thus, these findings cannot be considered a representation of whiteness as a whole, it is merely a snapshot of whiteness in a specific setting. That said, the finding of familiar well documented discourses, such as denial or reverse racism, within this setting suggest that the participants drew upon widely used discourses in their talk. Indeed, part of the theory behind the discursive approach to analysing talk is that if a discourse is present in one setting it is likely to be replicating itself elsewhere. So although these results should be considered tentatively, they appear have some bearing on the state of whiteness in South Africa.

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### Conclusion

White privilege in South Africa occupies an interesting place in the 21st century. In other strongholds of white privilege, namely the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, white privilege has not been as openly and structurally discredited and the hidden, covert nature of white privilege remains intact and therefore continues to go largely unchallenged. They remain powerhouses of white privilege, where whites continue to make up a majority of the population and be the most socio-economically privileged members of society. In South Africa on the other hand, white privilege has been blatantly and severely discredited with the end of apartheid. Whites have been unavoidably shamed and lost all legitimate claim to superiority. Furthermore, as a minority, whites cannot easily escape the implications of their privilege. The significance of this is that whites in South Africa are confronted with a unique and challenging task when attempting to find their place within a society that clearly rejects their privilege and their legitimacy.

And yet these challenges are not entirely exclusive to South Africa. Although whiteness has been most obviously discredited in South Africa, it is being increasingly challenged in other settings by growing immigrant or minority populations. Patterns of globalisation and the rejection of notions of any racial and cultural hierarchy, at least outwardly, have meant that white privilege is not entirely secure anywhere. Although white privilege remains entrenched, whites all over the world are facing the same dilemmas as white South Africans, the struggle of reconciling their privilege with their social environment. The work of this study has been to determine how whites in South Africa manage their identity and find ways to view themselves as possessing integrity, in light of the difficulties of carving out new forms of identity in a social environment that has relativised whiteness. However, these findings may have relevance outside South Africa's borders and indeed, speak to the broader challenges to hegemonic whiteness.

This study has identified a division in whites' approach managing the moral dilemmas of their privilege, a split between the traditional approach of denial, and a more unfamiliar approach

of guilt. Within the relational morality approach, the participants' extracts showed constructions that would be familiar to many South Africans, a vehement and aggressive denial of any culpability for racial inequality and the demonising of the 'other' in order to enhance this avoidance. Although often veiled in careful and vague language, these kinds of constructions help to maintain privilege by diverting attention away from the structural nature of racial inequality. This method of managing privilege has a long history and peaked during the apartheid era, visible especially in the discourse of the apartheid government. Yet, even with the increasing integration in South Africa and indeed the world, this approach continues to be drawn upon, although usually more subtly than before. When it is necessary to protect and shore up one's privilege in talk, there is no mechanism better, and thus, as the findings of this study suggest, it remains a significant feature of whiteness in South Africa.

Yet, as whiteness has been challenged, the changing circumstances appear to have forced whites to turn their gaze inwards, and question the established nature of whiteness. Indeed, as has been found in this study, the post-apartheid context appears to have made confessors out of whites, to have occasioned a critical engagement with whiteness. This is not just a South African phenomenon, as even the growth of whiteness literature and the critique of western imperialism over the last two or more decades suggests a broader occasioned confessing. The participants' style of accounting in the structural approach suggests a turn in the approach of everyday white South Africans to engaging with their racial identity because, in the contemporary setting, self-critique works to position them favourably. This is a significant finding, that to question white privilege is a favourable activity, because it suggests that whites may now be experiencing less security in shoring up their privileged identity. In some settings, denial of privilege may not be enough to manage it and an outright rejection of privilege is the most acceptable approach. This is important, as while white privilege is a deeply entrenched social structure, critical, open engagement with its nature holds great potential for challenging it and perhaps even undoing it. For South Africans, taking such an approach, as the findings of this study suggest, may simply be adaptive, as it allows whites to reconcile their racial identity with the contemporary context. The value of this is that as whites engage with their own racial identity critically, aspects of their systemic privilege may come to be undone and they may find a welcome place in contemporary South Africa.

## Recommendations

This study has interrogated white privilege in the contemporary setting from a very limited scope. The field could therefore benefit from a more comprehensive exploration white privilege and the many ways in which it functions, especially considering its current prominence in the zeitgeist of South Africa. Considering the changes South Africa has experienced in the past two decades, it would be valuable to study in greater detail the range of ways whites make sense of their identity and manage their privilege. As a result, it may be possible to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the way whiteness affects the social dynamics of South Africa and gain some sense of the changes occurring in how whites make sense of themselves. Attached to this, it may also be useful to develop complete understanding of the interaction of social processes by examining the changes that are taking place in how other racial groupings make sense of themselves in the contemporary setting. Identification of how blacks may be becoming more accepting or more resistant to whiteness and the construction of white morality, will undoubtedly be useful in determining whether white privilege can be undone. A further area of exploration might be identifying the differences and similarities in how whites in South Africa and whites in other transforming circumstances make sense of themselves and their privilege. Identifying similar patterns may prove useful in theorising post-colonial whiteness and may be valuable to determine whether lessons learned in South Africa can prove useful elsewhere.

In summary, it may be useful to making sense of the place of white privilege in the contemporary world to investigate:

1. The collection of strategies that inform how whites in South Africa, as a whole, manage their privilege in the contemporary setting.
2. How the way blacks make sense of themselves and their identity as oppressed members of society is changing in the contemporary setting and how blacks construct whites within this setting.
3. The patterns of similarities between South African whiteness and global whiteness and how whites manage their privilege elsewhere.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix 1: Letter to gatekeepers

27 May 2013

Dear potential participant,

My name is Joanne Phyfer and I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal completing my Masters degree in Research Psychology. I am currently working on my master's dissertation and need to begin searching for a sample from which to collect my data. Because a lot of the refining comes as a result of the findings of the research, my project topic is currently not strictly defined. But what I am basically interested in is how women make sense of their relationships with their domestic workers, in light of the fact that this relationship is often characterised by racial difference and always by some sort of hierarchy. I am interested in using this context to explore how race is currently managed in the South African context, so as to help to contribute to contemporary theorising around race and gain new insights on this complex social issue. My aim is to gain access to a group of women, between approximately seven and fifteen women, who know each other and preferably who currently employ a domestic worker. A group such as a book club would be highly suited to this project. However, any other club, group or collection of willing acquaintances would be suitable too. I was wondering if you and a group of your friends might consider participating? Or if you can suggest a group of women who you know who might be appropriate or who would consider participating?

Participating in this project would involve a two to three week commitment to contributing daily, for at least five minutes (but as long as you like really), to a private online chat group with your group of friends. I plan to use 'Google+' as the mechanism for creating this group. You may already be familiar with it, but if not, it works in a similar way to Facebook, it's kind of just the google version. My motivation for using such a medium to collect data is that it provides a fairly naturalistic setting where people can interact in a fairly everyday kind of way, at least compared to the artificial setting of a one on one in interview, and so I will be able to gain access to the everyday way people talk issues surrounding race. Participation will include contributing to discussion points that I upload, sharing thoughts that you have had, reflecting on your own relationship with your domestic worker and responding to others' comments and statuses. This process will therefore be rather informal and I would like to encourage that it be seen more as an opportunity for reflection and dialogue, than some kind of clinical sampling procedure. However, because of the nature of this method of data collection, it is also a necessity that anyone who considers participating has regular access to a computer and the internet, is reasonably computer literate and can express themselves reasonably well in writing.

I have not yet received ethical clearance from the UKZN ethics board so I am unable to begin data collection as of yet. However, as my research is perfectly ethical (don't worry) I expect to get ethical clearance in June or July, once the board has had time to look over my proposal. For this reason, I expect data collection will only occur in late July and would like to request you and your friends' participation towards the end of July and the beginning of August. Depending whether it seems necessary, I would like to request that I meet with you and your friends before the start of data collection just to introduce myself, clarify what is expected of you, lay down some guidelines of ethical conduct, answer any questions and thank you for helping me in the pursuit of my qualification and more broadly, for contributing to knowledge around important issues.

Once data collection is completed I will analyse the data that has been produced, write up my findings and submit my dissertation for marking. I will also present my research findings at an internal conference at the University, as well as, possibly, at other conferences at a later stage. I may also attempt to publish my findings in an academic journal. In light of this, I must emphasise that your participation is voluntary and that it will be completely anonymous. No one but me will know you have participated and all data will be anonymised. Every care will be taken to ensure that you are treated in an ethically sound manner and you are welcome to withdraw from the research at any time, should you wish.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I hope you will consider participating. This research is designed in such a way that it is also, hopefully, an enriching experience for the participants, as it will provide an opportunity to discuss issues that plague South Africans' everyday lives but which do not always have an appropriate context to be vocalised.

Please feel free to contact me at anytime, either via email or cell phone. I have included my supervisor's email address and phone number should you wish to contact him.

Warm regards,

Joanne Phyfer

My supervisor: Prof. Kevin Durrheim

## Appendix 2: Informed consent

### Informed Consent

I hereby agree to participate in this study on the experiences of employers of domestic workers.

The purpose of the study has been explained to me. I have had an opportunity to read the participant guide given to me and I understand what is expected of me in terms of my participation in this study and the time commitment I am making to participate in this study.

I have freely agreed to participate in this research and I know that I am not being forced to participate.

I know that I may withdraw from the study at any point should I wish to and that this will have no negative consequences for me.

I understand that any contributions I make in this discussion and my participation in this research will be kept confidential and that my identity will be protected.

I have the contact details of the researcher and should I have any more questions about the research, I feel free to contact her. In the unlikely event that any personal issues should arise during the research arrangements can be made for me to receive counselling from the Child and Family Centre. I am also aware that I have the right to contact the UKZN Social Science Research Ethics Committee should I have any questions or concerns regarding the ethics of this study. I am aware that I can call Ms Phumelele Ximba (0312603587), email her (XIMBAP@ukzn.ac.za) or visit the research offices' website at:  
<http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/Human-Social-Science-Ethics.aspx>

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand the information presented to me concerning the nature of this research and I understand my rights and responsibilities as a research participant. I agree to participate in the online discussion group on the topic of domestic labour.

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Signature of Participant

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Date

**Consent for use of contributions**

I hereby give permission for contributions I make to the discussion on the online discussion group to be used as data in this research project. I understand that measures will be taken to ensure that my identity is protected and that my participation in this research will be completely confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I would like to receive feedback about the research findings of this study after the research has been completed (please tick one):      Yes            No     

(Please note: You will have to wait a couple of months until the research is completed to receive this information).

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**Confidentiality pledge**

I have consented to participate in this study on the experiences of employers of domestic workers. As part of my commitment to participate in this study I hereby agree to keep everything that happens on the online discussion group confidential. This means that I agree not to talk about any of the issues that were discussed to anyone outside of the group or make known the identities of any of my fellow participants.

I understand that every member of this online community has the right to respect and privacy. I further understand that while the researcher has no control over my actions, if I break my promise of confidentiality that this may have damaging effects on my fellow participants and research in this field.

I understand that it is important for this research that I, as well as my fellow participants, feel comfortable to express ourselves without fear of any negative consequences. I hereby agree to keep everything that happens in the group confidential because I am aware that if I do not, my fellow participants may be harmed by my actions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Thank you

## Appendix 3: Participation guide

### Participation guide – Domestic work and race project

**Thank you** for agreeing to participate in this study. This guide is intended to outline your role in this research project and clarify what is expected of you as a participant. I hope it will give you a better sense of what participation entails and put you at ease.

#### 1. Outline of participation

Participation will take place on our Google Plus community page (see cheat sheet in **section 3** for more details) and will involve committing to contribute to discussion in **two ways**. The first is to commit to **writing a contribution** about your thoughts and experiences around employing a domestic worker (see inspiration sheet in **section 2** below for more details). You will be required to write **one** contribution and contribute it before **12 noon** on the day you have chosen to contribute. This will allow your fellow participants to have some sense of when they can go online and read your contribution. The second is to commit to **commenting and discussing** the contributions each day. This will involve a time commitment on each day, **at least 15 minutes each day**, to read through what has been written and contribute to the discussion. It will also involve the extra time commitment of taking the time to write your contribution, which may require some thought.

The project will run for as many consecutive days as there are participants, with the addition of two days where the researcher will contribute and a final reflection day. You will need to select a day that is convenient for you to make your contribution. I could also assign days, should this be more convenient. Here is an example of how the project will run:

Date	Participant name / Activity for the day
20 July 2013	Participant contribution and discussion
21 July 2013	Participant contribution and discussion
22 July 2013	Participant contribution and discussion
23 July 2013	Participant contribution and discussion
24 July 2013	Researcher contribution and discussion
25 July 2013	Researcher contribution and discussion
26 July 2013	Reflection day and discussion



While the research does depend on your commitment to participate, hopefully enthusiastically, it is of course understandable that circumstances may prevent you from contributing to the same enthusiastic extent every day. Though it is not ideal, skipping a day here and there and catching up later may be necessary in some cases. However, I would like to request that you try and avoid this if at all possible and commit to a very basic '1 comment a day' contribution, where this is feasible. Alternatively, if a topic really interests you and you have a lot to say about it, feel free to contribute as much as you like. Ultimately, the more contribution, conversation and reflection there is on the group, the better for the research.

It is also crucial for the wellbeing of everyone involved that **an atmosphere of trust, safety and acceptance is generated in the group**. Ideally, all participants should feel comfortable to express their thoughts and opinions no matter what they may be and this may require some restraint or patience to be exercised from time to time. I would like to request that you commit to treating your fellow participants with **respect** so that we avoid any tension or unpleasantness in the group.

## **2. Inspiration sheet - What should I write about?**

This research is interested in how you make sense of and manage your relationship with your domestic worker and how at times this may be tricky, troubling, awkward or difficult for you to do. Below are outlined a number of points of reflection which will hopefully give you a sense of what to write about. Please see them as a broad guideline for general areas of reflection rather than specific points you should discuss. This research is interested in **YOUR** experiences and **YOUR** thoughts, so if you would like to discuss a circumstance that is not discussed below but which you feel is appropriate, please feel free to do so.

Please contribute **about a quarter of page to three quarters of page** on a specific circumstance you found troubling or difficult with your domestic worker or perhaps something that more general that you find tricky or awkward in your relationship on the whole. While reading the points below think about how they may apply to your relationship. Please especially bear the fourth point in mind when considering what to write about.

- What is your relationship like with your domestic worker? What are some of the general awkward topics or situations that always come up in your relationship? Are there things you feel you try not to talk about or leave unsaid? Are there things you feel you would like to talk about but feel it might cause awkwardness to do so? Why might this be? Do you ever experience a kind of disconnect where you just don't understand each other? What do you think may be the reasons for this? Do you find it easy to manage your role as an employer or do you sometimes find it tricky to straddle the line between concerned friend and strict boss? (Assuming that is what you want to do in the first place! You may not.)

- Domestic work is a tricky profession unlike any other because it has elements of power imbalances and economic inequality but also elements of affection and intimacy. Do these kinds of contradictions ever put you in a tricky or awkward position? What is difficult about these situations? Was there ever a situation where you were really forced you to reflect on these inconsistencies? What were these reflections and how did they make you think differently about yourself, your relationship and domestic work generally?
- If you have a close relationship with your domestic worker, how do manage your relationship in light of the reality that you and your employee may have very different backgrounds and may have had very different life experiences or opportunities? What helps you generate a close relationship in light of this and where does this closeness breakdown/what are its limits?
- Many South African employers do not share the race of their domestic workers. Do the racial or cultural differences between you and your employee ever cause difficulties in your relationship? If you share racial or cultural attributes with your domestic worker, when do these similarities cause cohesion in your relationship and when do they cause difficulties? Bearing in mind racial and cultural differences, what kind of situations do you find tricky or awkward to negotiate? Do you feel uneasy mentioning issues of race and culture to your employee and why? What do you do to cope with or manage this awkwardness? Does your domestic worker ever say things to do with race and culture which make you feel uneasy? How do you manage a situation like that? How do these awkward situations generally make you think about yourself and your own racial and cultural identity?

Please note: I am interested in how **YOU** interpret and experience your relationship with your employee, however that may be. Honesty is essential here and I would like to encourage a non-judgemental, open dialogue to develop on the group. If you feel uneasy about what you have to say, this may mean you have something **VERY interesting** to say. I would encourage you to view this as an opportunity to talk about things that bug you or that may not always be easy to express in everyday contexts. However, be assured, I am not trying to trick you into saying something racist or embarrassing; I am simply interested in your honest, everyday experiences of employing a domestic worker. You are, of course, under no obligation to say something you may later regret and so please be sure to participate to the level of your comfort.

### 3. Google Plus – Cheat Sheet

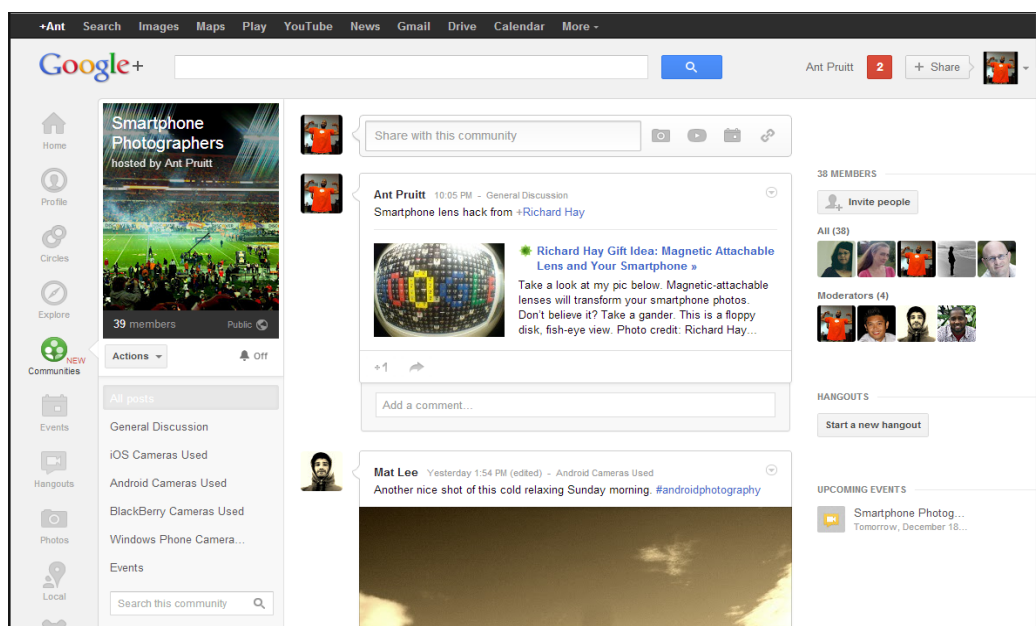
This a basic guide to help you to use our online community effectively and to ensure that technical difficulties do not get in the way of your participation. I have tried to keep it very basic and simple, while assuming that you have some level computer literacy. Peruse through whatever might be useful to you and

if it is not detailed enough, contact me for help. Also, when in doubt, curiosity and trial and error experimentation can yield useful and enlightening results!

### What is Google Plus?

Google+ (or Google Plus) is a multilingual social networking and identity service owned and operated by Google Inc. It is the second largest social networking site in the world, having surpassed Twitter in January 2013 and has approximately 359 million active users. Google has described Google Plus as a "social layer" that enhances many of its online properties, unlike conventional social networks generally accessed through a single website. If you would like to find out more about Google Plus, please see its Wikipedia page: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google\\_plus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_plus)

We will be making use of a Google Plus feature called 'Communities', which was launched at the end of last year. This feature allows people to start a private community with a select group of people on an invite only basis. The picture below will give you a sense of what a typical Google Plus Community looks like.



### How to join our Google Plus community:

In order to join the Google Plus community it seems you need to have a Google Mail or Gmail email account. If you already have a Gmail account then I will simply email you an invite and you can follow the link on the invite to join the community. Email me from your gmail account to ensure I have that address. If you do not

have a Gmail account you will need to set one up. This is easy to do and you can delete it once your participation in this research is over.

***To create a Gmail account:*** Search for 'Gmail' on the internet. One of the results should read 'Gmail: Email from Google' and below that there should be a link that says 'Sign up'. Click on this link and follow the instructions on the page to set up your account. You will have to think of address and a password and so forth. As you finish each step, click 'next' until your account is set up. I would like to request that you do not give yourself a profile photo or if you do, that you select a picture that does not include any identifying information, for example, your face. This will help protect your identity in later stages of the research. Setting up an account should not take more than 10 minutes and it is free. Once you have set up your account, please forward your new email address to me and I will invite you to the community.

#### **How to use our Google Plus community:**

***To sign in:*** Go to the Google home page and look in the black ribbon in the top of the screen for '+You', it should be on the extreme left of the ribbon (if you are already logged in, it will say +[your name] but will be in the same position). Please note, this feature may only be in place if you are using Google Chrome as your search engine, I'm not sure. If you can't find this feature, search Google Plus on your search engine instead. Click on this and it will ask you to sign in (use your gmail address and password). This will take you to your Google Plus home page. If you slide your cursor over 'Home', again, on the extreme left side of the screen, a list of features will appear below it. Click on Communities (green icon). At the top of the screen 'Your communities' will appear and you can click our community, (I'm not sure what specific name I'm giving the community yet), which will take you to our community home page.

***How to post your contribution:*** On our community home page, in the centre of the screen, there should be window which states 'Share what is new' which allows you to share different things to the group (Photos, links etc.). Make sure it is pointing to the word 'text' with a green pencil underneath it (you do not want to add a photo or any of the other options). Then you can simply type up your contribution in the window and click 'share' when you are satisfied. Alternatively, you could type up your contribution in advance on a Word document and then copy and paste it into the window and share. This will allow you to edit and reflect more on what you write before you share your contribution, so this option may be preferable.

***How to comment on a contribution:*** For each contribution you will see that there is an option to 'add a comment' below the contribution. Simply click on this option and type up your comment in the window

and then click 'post comment' . You can post multiple times on a single contribution and these comments have the potential to form a kind of conversation between the people in the group.

***How to sign out:*** Once you have finished on the group, you can simply exit the group as you might any window on the internet by clicking the red 'x' in the most extreme top right corner of your screen. However, you may wish to sign out of the group first, especially if you share the computer you are using with others, as they might be able to access the community if they use the internet after you. To sign out go to the top right corner of the screen where you will see your profile image (or lack there of). To the right of this will be a small downward pointing arrow. Click on this and it will give you the option to sign out (again on the right side of the window), which you click. It is preferable, for the sake of all participants' confidentiality that you sign out if there is a risk of someone else accessing the group.

Good luck and see you on the group soon!

## **Appendix 4: Researcher contributions**

*(Please note, there may be only slight differences between the contributions used for each group, they are largely the same).*

### **Group A: Researcher contribution 1**

Hello everyone!

Thank you all for your thoughtful, candid and interesting contributions – now it's my turn!

Sorry for my delay in posting.

I wanted to reflect on my own relationship with the domestic worker my family employs and describe how researching this topic academically has forced me to challenge some of my assumptions around this relationship. Please comment and reflect like you would for any of the other contributions and particularly reflect on whether these issues have significance in your own relationships. Tomorrow I will share some extracts from journal articles to continue the discussion from today.

Thandi has been in my family's employ since before I was born so I've known her for my entire life. I still remember phoning her when I was 5 to tell her that my brother had been born and that she was the only one who had guessed correctly that he would be a boy. She is a reliable, hardworking employee who takes immense pride in doing her job well and I can honestly say that she is a role model for me in terms of putting my all into my work and really doing the best I can, whatever task is at hand.

However, since beginning my Master's I have had to do a lot of research on both white racial identity and the relationship between domestic worker and employer (where the employer is white and where the employer is black) and this has forced me to reflect critically on my relationship and the domestic worker/employer relationship generally.

A concept that hit home the most for me was that of paternalism. Paternalism is when a relationship takes on a 'parent/child' like power dynamic – where one individual is not only tangibly more powerful but is also seen as intellectually, socially and morally superior while the other has limited power and is viewed as inferior. Some of the research I read suggested

that this is the exact character of the relationship between employer and domestic worker in South Africa (and also, surprisingly, in some contexts abroad). This dynamic serves a purpose as when workers and employers operate within this kind of meaning system, they are able to justify the exploitative nature of this relationship, because now the employer is doing the worker a favour and the worker really needs that favour. The employer no longer needs to worry that the worker is doing rather menial, often unpleasant labour for a low wage, which frees up the employer from these tedious duties. Furthermore, the employer is able to bestow 'help' upon the worker if and when they choose and this is viewed as benevolent, rather than a poor substitute for good wage. So this meaning system works to justify and maintain the status quo of a kind of class hierarchy and keep domestic workers marginalised.

As I was reading about this I could literally see myself performing the very actions they were talking about, providing Thandi with extras to alleviate guilt and talking down to her. I realised that I operate in this way without even knowing it! What I considered being thoughtful or necessary helping was actually power in operation, me bestowing acts of kindness to manage my advantaged position, avoiding looking her in the eye as an equal and acknowledging my unjust position. And worse, I realised Thandi colludes with me in this because if she is a good worker or behaves in the correct ways – she gets those perks. I saw in action how Thandi had found ways to make use of this dynamic to her advantage, pandering to my guilt, acting dumb and manipulating situations (sometimes in not so subtle ways) to manage her working relationship and access resources she needed. She may not be paid a good salary but she knows the system well enough to work it to her advantage. I found this quite a wonderful realisation to make because it reminded me that people are people everywhere no matter the context – and Thandi is really my equal. We both 'work it' every day of our lives, granted in different arenas.

So this really got me questioning the functioning of this relationship as I felt like I even when I was trying to be nice – I couldn't be nice. How can employers and workers find a way to escape these patterns of behaviour, so clearly the product of our history? Apartheid has been gone for most of my life – why does it linger on in me? Interestingly, black employers have very similar relationships with black domestic workers to white employers. The only difference is that the worker often views them as a somewhat less legitimate authority figure,

compared to a white employer (interesting!) For myself, I am trying to question my behaviour around Thandi more, treat her as an equal even when it is uncomfortable for her and myself. But of course, the ultimate change would be a higher salary for all domestic workers and fewer 'extras' – a more traditional employer/employee relationship. Again, I feel this change might be uncomfortable for both parties – and ultimately may well result in fewer domestic workers being employed and so is problematic in that way. How do we escape these oppressive roles?

### **Group A: Researcher contribution 2**

Hello everyone,

Today I am sharing a couple of extracts on the topic of white racial identity. This field of research is fairly new in comparison to theorising around 'blackness', and this is seen to be because 'whiteness' has long been viewed as the normal human identity, and has not been considered a racial identity in its own right. When reading through the bits and pieces below, I would like to request that you reflect on your own white identity, how it impacts on your life positively and negatively, how it effects the way you relate and interact with others and how it may impact on your relationship with your domestic worker.

The first set of extracts is from Peggy McIntosh's 1988 article – "White privilege and Male privilege". This text was part of the first wave of academic reflection on 'whiteness' and compares invisible white privilege to invisible male privilege. (One might argue that neither of these privileges are that invisible!)

"As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage."

"I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege."

"I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is



like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.”

“... whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us.”

The next set of extracts are from Samantha Vice’s 2010 article “How do I live in this strange place?” This was written in the South African context whereas the extracts above were not.

“The problem in white South Africa is not just with being white, but being white South African. What then is it about South Africa that makes whiteness here feel morally different—or at least more charged—to whiteness elsewhere? For one, whites are a very small minority and one’s moral instincts recoil from the fact that wealth and privilege are distributed in so drastically skewed a way. For another, we are planted on one continent but brought up on the cultural influences and narratives of another; many older white South Africans still identify in some way with their English and European roots. At the same time, we have lived here for generations; we identify as South African at least because we “fit” the landscape and have a history here.”

“In short, white South Africans cannot unproblematically see themselves as fitting into or contributing much to the post-Apartheid narrative. There is a sense that we need to earn our place in a country and continent that is not simply ours.”

The final extract is from the 2011 book “Race Trouble” by Kevin Durrheim, Xoliswa Mtose and Lyndsay Brown. This was written in our immediate context of KwaZulu-Natal.

“The central stereotype associated with whiteness is racism. It is baggage from the past that cannot be shaken off. It does not matter who you are, this stereotype is immune to status, class, education, age or religion: if you are white there is always impending suspicion of your potential racism. For example, a white women named Delia, who works as a diversity trainer and transformation consultant to facilitate compliance with black economic empowerment

legislation, told Brown in 2008 how she was recently accused of being racist. She was in Steers – a burger take away outlet – ordering a hamburger for her son, and inadvertently walked up to a till to order without realising there was one queue feeding three tills. An Indian man confronted her, saying to her: ‘How dare you push your way to the front of the queue and go ahead of everyone else? We are not living in the past anymore. You can’t just push your way to the front of the queue anymore.’ Delia apologised profusely. He was still angry with her and she said to him that it was not the past anymore and perhaps he should think of leaving it behind and live in the present. She said afterwards that this incident reminded her once again of how ‘I need to be conscious of the implications of my white skin’. The man’s assumption that Delia was racist was automatic. It is this threat of being labelled a racist that sometimes disqualifies whites from being able to speak out freely. The perspective of privilege and possible racism that taints their opinions can disqualify their utterances. Indirectly and implicitly this also disqualifies them from being full citizens of the new non-racial South Africa.”

### **Group B: Researcher contribution 1**

Hello everyone!

We're still waiting for Rosemary to post but I thought I'd add my first post in the meantime - to keep things ticking over. Thank you all for your thoughtful, candid and interesting contributions so far!

For my first contribution, I wanted to reflect on my own relationship with the domestic worker my family employs and describe how researching this topic has forced me to challenge some of my assumptions around this relationship. You have brought up some of the issues I raise briefly already so I would like you to elaborate on your thoughts around these issues and reflect on the significance of these issues in your relationships.

Thandi has been in my family’s employ since before I was born so I’ve known her for my entire life. I still remember phoning her when I was 5 to tell her that my brother had been born and that she was the only one who had guessed correctly that he would be a boy. She is a reliable, hardworking employee who takes immense pride in doing her job well and I can honestly say

that she is a role model for me in terms of putting my all into my work and really doing the best I can, whatever task is at hand.

However, since beginning my Master's I have had to do a lot of research on both white racial identity and the relationship between domestic worker and employer (where the employer is white and where the employer is black) and this has forced me to reflect critically on my relationship and the domestic worker/employer relationship generally.

A concept that hit home the most for me was that of paternalism. Paternalism is when a relationship takes on a 'parent/child' like power dynamic – where one individual is not only tangibly more powerful but is also seen as intellectually, socially and morally superior while the other has limited power and is viewed as inferior. Some of the research I read suggested that this is the exact character of the relationship between employer and domestic worker in South Africa (and also, surprisingly, in some contexts abroad). This dynamic serves a purpose, as when workers and employers operate within this kind of meaning system, they are able to justify the exploitative nature of this relationship, because now the employer is doing the worker a favour and the worker really needs that favour. The employer no longer needs to worry that the worker is doing rather menial, often unpleasant labour for a low wage, which frees up the employer from these tedious duties. Furthermore, the employer is able to bestow 'help' upon the worker if and when they choose and this is viewed as benevolent, rather than a poor substitute for good wage. So this meaning system works to justify and maintain the status quo of a kind of class hierarchy and keep domestic workers marginalised.

As I was reading about this I could literally see myself performing the very actions they were talking about, providing Thandi with extras to alleviate guilt and talking down to her. I realised that I operate in this way without even knowing it! What I considered being thoughtful or necessary helping was actually power in operation, me bestowing acts of kindness to manage my advantaged position, avoiding looking her in the eye as an equal and acknowledging my unjust position. And worse, I realised Thandi colludes with me in this because if she is a good worker or behaves in the correct ways – she gets those perks. I saw in action how Thandi had found ways to make use of this dynamic to her advantage, pandering to my guilt, acting dumb and manipulating situations (sometimes in not so subtle ways) to manage her working

relationship and access resources she needed. She may not be paid a good salary but she knows the system well enough to work it to her advantage. I found this quite an awful but wonderful realisation to make because it reminded me that people are people everywhere no matter the context – and Thandi is really my equal. We both ‘work it’ every day of our lives to get what we need, granted in different arenas.

So this really got me questioning the functioning of this relationship as I felt like I even when I was trying to be nice – I couldn't be nice. How can employers and workers find a way to escape these patterns of behaviour, so clearly the product of our history? Apartheid has been gone for most of my life – why does it linger on in me? Interestingly, my research for a course earlier this year found that black employers have very similar relationships with black domestic workers to white employers. The only difference is that the worker often views them as a somewhat less legitimate authority figure, compared to a white employer (interesting!)

SO, I am trying to question my behaviour around Thandi more, treat her as an equal even when it is uncomfortable for her and myself. But of course, the ultimate change would be a higher salary for all domestic workers and fewer ‘extras’ – a more traditional employer/employee relationship, like Lucille spoke about. But again, I feel this change might be uncomfortable for both parties, as in a way both have learned to be very comfortable in this system. The worker as dependent but protected, the employer as the protector but also in possession of the power. And ultimately higher salaries may well result in fewer domestic workers being employed because fewer people can afford them and so is problematic in that way.

So how do we escape these oppressive roles?

### **Group B: Researcher contribution 2**

Hello everyone,

Thank you everyone for your contributions. Now that Rosemary has had a chance to post her contribution, I thought I'd add my second contribution. I also just wanted to remind you to

make sure that you comment on every contribution that has been made. All that is left to do after this contribution is the reflection which we can finish up tomorrow.

Today I am sharing a couple of extracts on the topic of white racial identity. This field of research is fairly new in comparison to theorising around 'blackness', and this is seen to be because 'whiteness' has long been viewed as the normal human identity (i.e. the hegemony of Westernised white identity), and has not been considered a racial identity in its own right. When reading through the bits and pieces below, I would like to request that you reflect on your own white identity, how it impacts on your life positively and negatively, how it effects the way you relate and interact with others and how it may impact on your relationship with your domestic worker. How do you experience being white in South Africa? Do you find yourself trying to avoid appearing racist all the time, for example? How do you see yourself fitting into the broader social context of South Africa? Or is this all a bit of a non-issue?

The first set of extracts is from Peggy McIntosh's 1988 article – "White privilege and Male privilege". This text was part of the first wave of academic reflection on 'whiteness' and compares invisible white privilege to invisible male privilege. (One might argue that neither of these privileges are that invisible!)

"As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage."

"I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege."

"I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks."

“... Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us.”

The next set of extracts are from Samantha Vice’s 2010 article “How do I live in this strange place?” This was written in the South African context whereas the extracts above were not.

“The problem in white South Africa is not just with being white, but being white South African. What then is it about South Africa that makes whiteness here feel morally different—or at least more charged—to whiteness elsewhere? For one, whites are a very small minority and one’s moral instincts recoil from the fact that wealth and privilege are distributed in so drastically skewed a way. For another, we are planted on one continent but brought up on the cultural influences and narratives of another; many older white South Africans still identify in some way with their English and European roots. At the same time, we have lived here for generations; we identify as South African at least because we “fit” the landscape and have a history here.”

“In short, white South Africans cannot unproblematically see themselves as fitting into or contributing much to the post-Apartheid narrative. There is a sense that we need to earn our place in a country and continent that is not simply ours.”

The final extract is from the 2011 book “Race Trouble” by Kevin Durrheim, Xoliswa Mtose and Lyndsay Brown. This was written in our immediate context of KwaZulu-Natal.

“The central stereotype associated with whiteness is racism. It is baggage from the past that cannot be shaken off. It does not matter who you are, this stereotype is immune to status, class, education, age or religion: if you are white there is always impending suspicion of your potential racism. For example, a white women named Delia, who works as a diversity trainer and transformation consultant to facilitate compliance with black economic empowerment legislation, told Brown in 2008 how she was recently accused of being racist. She was in Steers – a burger take away outlet – ordering a hamburger for her son, and inadvertently walked up to a till to order without realising there was one queue feeding three tills. An Indian man

confronted her, saying to her: 'How dare you push your way to the front of the queue and go ahead of everyone else? We are not living in the past anymore. You can't just push your way to the front of the queue anymore.' Delia apologised profusely. He was still angry with her and she said to him that it was not the past anymore and perhaps he should think of leaving it behind and live in the present. She said afterwards that this incident reminded her once again of how 'I need to be conscious of the implications of my white skin'. The man's assumption that Delia was racist was automatic. It is this threat of being labelled a racist that sometimes disqualifies whites from being able to speak out freely. The perspective of privilege and possible racism that taints their opinions can disqualify their utterances. Indirectly and implicitly this also disqualifies them from being full citizens of the new non-racial South Africa."

## Appendix 5: Ethics approval letter



22 May 2013

Ms Joanne Teresa Phyfer 212558479  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0372/013/013M  
Project title: 'Whiteness' as privilege: An investigation into the functioning of 'whiteness' as an absent standard among white female employers of domestic workers in contemporary South Africa.

Dear Ms Phyfer

**Expedited approval**

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.**

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Professor U Bob (Chair) and Dr S Singh (Deputy Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Kevin Durrheim  
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor D McCracken  
cc School Administrator: Mr Sibonelo Duma

**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
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