

**EXPLORING EMPLOYEES' SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN
ORGANISATION: A DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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DECLARATION

I, SHANYA REUBEN, hereby declare that unless specifically indicated to the contrary, this dissertation is the result of my own work. Furthermore, I declare that the material contained in the thesis has not been submitted to this or any other university in partial fulfilment or fulfilment of the requirements for another degree.

Shanya Reuben

March 2013

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ABSTRACT

The contoured logic of apartheid in South Africa constructed racial, economic, social and political segregation, the consequences of which are still experienced today. In an attempt to alter the demographic weighting of disadvantage, the South African government has made concerted efforts to 'deracialise' South Africa most notably through Affirmative Action (AA) measures. Subjective, contextualised approaches to AA have received little attention both locally and internationally. This study aimed to explore AA from a social constructionist orientation with a focus on Potter and Wetherell's discursive psychology. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data from 17 participants. The sample included both male (5) and female (12) participants and representation from all major race groups in South Africa. The findings illustrate how participants engage in discursive devices that rationalise a racial order of competence. The discourses also reflected polarised views of affirmative action. By and large, Black participants maintain that racial inequality still exists. White participants, on the other hand, continue to feel marginalised and discriminated against, by the policy. Furthermore, the results identify the various flavours in which redress can be realised. As new knowledge, the study also suggests that despite the negative experiences associated with AA, participants were generally in favour of the principles embedded within the policy. Ultimately this study suggests that AA continues to be a controversial subject which traverses many segments of life.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Rationale for the study	1
1.2 The research aims	5
1.3 An overview of the research study	6
CHAPTER TWO.....	10
LITERATURE STUDY.....	10
2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Defining Affirmative Action	14
2.3 The Beginnings of Affirmative Action	20
2.4 A Historical Backdrop of South Africa: From Segregation to Democracy	22
2.5 Legislation	28
2.6 Affirmative Action – Some International Perspectives	32
2.7 The South African Affirmative Action Debate: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly	39
Arguments for Affirmative Action	42
Arguments Against Affirmative Action	54
Concluding Remarks on Affirmative Action: Moving beyond the realist perspective	67
2.8 Discursive studies and AA	70
2.9 Conclusion to the Literature Review	75
CHAPTER THREE	78
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	78
3.1 Introduction	78
3.2 From realism to social constructionism	79
3.3 Conceptualising discourse	86
3.4 Discourse as a method of enquiry	91
3.5 Discursive Psychology	95
3.6 Conclusion	100
CHAPTER FOUR.....	101
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	101
4.1. Introduction	101
4.2. The research aims	102
4.3. The qualitative research approach	102
4.4. The research philosophy and paradigm: ontological and epistemological dimensions.	104
4.5. The use of case study design	108
4.6. Target population, access and sampling	113
4.7. Data collection technique	118
4.8. Data collection	121
4.9. The data analysis	126
4.10. Analysis	133
4.11. Validation	135

4.12.	Interpretive perspective	135
4.13.	Ethical considerations	138
4.14.	Reflexivity	140
4.15.	Conclusion	142
CHAPTER FIVE		144
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION		144
5.1.	Introduction	144
5.2.	Breakdown of the findings	146
5.3.	The Rhetoric of Othering	147
5.4.	Research findings	149
	Theme One: Constructing Racial Hierarchies of Skill	149
	Theme Two: Polarised constructions of Affirmative Action	158
	Theme Three - The Fantasy of Affirmative Action	175
	Theme Four - Renegotiating Change	186
CHAPTER SIX		201
CONCLUSION		201
6.1	Introduction	201
6.2	Rationale	201
6.3	The research aims	202
6.4	The literature review	203
6.5	The Theoretical Framework	204
6.6	The methodology	204
6.7	The findings	205
6.8	Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research	213
6.9	The theoretical, methodological and practical value of study	216
REFERENCE LIST AND APPENDICES		219
	Reference List	219
	Appendices	235
	Appendix A: Request to Conduct Research	235
	Appendix B: Letter of Acceptance to Conduct Research	236
	Appendix C: Biographical Questionnaire	237
	Appendix D: Interview Schedule	238
	Appendix E: Informed Consent Form	240

List of Figures

Figure 1: Unemployment rate by population group. Quarterly Labour Force Survey – Quarter 4, 2012.	60
Figure 2: Breakdown of the findings	146

List of Tables

Table 1: Occupational levels for 2011 - 2012 (%), gender and population group	62
Table 2: Percentage supporting different forms of Affirmative Action (2003 – 2009)	65
Table 3: Company X Profile	114
Table 4: Demographic Details of Participants	118

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for the study

The contoured logic of apartheid in South Africa constructed racial, economic, social and political segregation. Years later, democratic South Africa is still characteristic of massive social and economic inequalities which are based largely on racial lines (Franchi, 2003). Indeed, transformation in South Africa has been profound, society has been desegregated and inequality has been deracialised, “however, old patterns of inequality and segregation persist and new patterns have emerged that continue to be structured around race” (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011, p. 21). In an attempt to undo these historic injustices the South African government has made concerted efforts to ‘deracialise’ South Africa politically, economically and socially, most notably through the use of Affirmative Action (AA) measures within the labour market. The rationale behind this is that AA, through policies of preferential treatment, provides a platform from which to change the demographic weighting of disadvantage in South Africa.

Affirmative Action (AA) is described as a “range of governmental and private initiatives that offer preferential treatment to members of designated racial or ethnic groups... usually as a means of compensating them for the effects of past and present discrimination” (Swain, 1996, p.1). In principal, these initiatives seem fair, especially given the historic discrimination previously faced by Black South Africans. In addressing

historic discrimination, AA within the employment sector is an area which is receiving much attention in South Africa. AA initiatives are heavily encouraged both at the legislative level as well as at the level of the organisation.

Although theoretically sound at a policy level, the practice of AA remains, to a large extent contentious, causing fear and frustration for many who see AA as a threat rather than an inclusive policy. Arguments both for and against AA ensue (Gloppen, 1997; Tummala, 1999; Kelbaugh, 2003; Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994; Human, Bluen & Davies, 1999; Sachs, 1992; Cohen & Sterba, 2003; Adam, 2000; Sono & Werner, 2004). This ambivalent opposition to AA suggests the importance of exploring the extent to which employees embrace AA in the workplace, especially given that South Africa is a relatively new democracy with much of its inclusive policies still in its infancy.

Most notable in the debate surrounding AA is that it provides a platform to critically engage with the embodied nature of prejudice that stems from everyday practices. Unfortunately, although there has been a burgeoning of empirical literature on the subject; research in this field focuses mostly on attitudinal perspectives of AA. For long, far less research has considered how people themselves frame, and conceptualise AA. As a result, AA is often explored from traditional theoretical and methodological approaches which shed only limited light on the multiple, shifting meanings that may be attached to AA. Such traditional approaches are 'realist' because they seek to understand pre-existing attitudinal functions and structures (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) in the absence of contextual specificity. Durrheim and Dixon (2005) describe this approach as impoverished realism in that the world is "stripped of its particularity and nuance" (p.

448). In response to this, many researchers have taken the ‘discursive’ turn to focus on research that is qualitative, and anti-realist. As a result, there has been, of recent, a strong movement towards understanding AA within social psychology, and more specifically, from the tradition of discursive psychology – a social constructionist approach which views language as a dynamic form of social practice which gives expression to subjective psychological realities. Discursive studies have largely contributed to research on language and discrimination, specifically within the field of social psychology. Collectively, much of the research that characterises this type of work has identified the ways in which ‘talk’ functions in rationalising existing social inequalities and, at the same time, in denying prejudice (Augustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005; Franchi, 2003; Stevens, 2003; Duncan, 2003; Kravitz, Harrison & Turner; 1996). It is from this perspective, and within this frame of thinking, that the current study is located. The current research is important for at least four reasons.

Firstly, there is relative lack of research that qualitatively examines AA in South Africa, even less from within the discursive tradition. Furthermore, much of the research in this area tends to be one sided in that it is largely focused on the perceptions of White South Africans. Given the pervasiveness of negativity surrounding AA, this research sought to give expression to peoples subjective realities on the issue. In other words this research has explored how our everyday practices function contextually to give meaning to social and psychological life, specifically related to the ways in which we frame, and conceptualise our experiences of AA.

A second reason for this research was to expand on the existing knowledge, from a South African perspective, that considers the ways in which ‘talk’ can function in producing and sustaining systems of historic privilege. Given South Africa’s unique socio-political terrain, there is a need to critically engage with AA from a perspective with which to locate forms of ‘meaning’ within the broader social and cultural context which informs subjective realities (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Burr, 1995; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Few researchers have approached AA from this perspective (Augustinos et al., 2005; Franchi, 2003; Stevens, 2003; Duncan, 2003; Kravitz et al., 1996). In addressing this gap, I adopted a social constructionist perspective with specific emphasis on Potter and Wetherell’s discursive psychology. Essentially, my reasoning here is based on the assumption that given its political past; issues of ‘advantage’ and ‘marginalisation’ are a prevalent feature of South African living. Thus in addressing this, I use discourse, as a method of enquiry to critically engage with articulated productions of AA in South Africa in way that is appreciative of its rich socio-political history.

A third reason for this research is that most AA related research from the discursive tradition seems to draw from related studies of race and race relations with fewer studies looking at AA specifically (Augustinos & Every, 2007; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005; van Dijk, 1997; Barker, 1981).

Fourthly, and equally important is to consider that most studies in this area, regardless of the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted, consider AA in polarised terms – people either support or oppose AA in the abstract (Reyna, Tucker, Korfmacher & Henry,

2005). The current study is interested in the more complex picture, particularly in relation to what people think about the policy conceptually as opposed to exclusively looking at their more practical experience of AA. In other words, this research endeavours to contribute new knowledge, specifically from the South African context, regarding the value, or lack thereof, associated with the principles embedded in AA policies. Furthermore, most studies fall short of examining how people actually feel about the policy, and importantly, whether experience of AA converge with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy.

1.2 The research aims

Given the above mentioned reasons for undertaking this study, the main objective was to explore employee's social constructions of AA in a South African organisation. In doing so, this study had two main aims:

1. The first aim was to critically analyse the discourses around AA produced by employees within in a racially diverse, privately owned South African organisation.
2. The second aim was to explore the constructions of AA by historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged employees in this organisation.

In achieving these aims I investigated the discursive resources and rhetorical arguments that employees used in talking about their perceptions and experiences of AA.

1.3 An overview of the research study

This research is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one deals with the introduction to this research.

Chapter two deals with the literature study. I frame the literature study by commenting that apartheid South Africa constructed racial, economic, social and political segregation, the consequences of which are still experienced today. In response to this, the South African government has implemented AA as a policy of preferential treatment, to provide a platform from which to change the demographic weighting of disadvantage in South Africa. Throughout this chapter, I emphasise how AA continues to raise questions around equality and fairness within South Africa, specifically among those who feel prejudiced by the policy.

The literature review begins with a thorough review of AA – specifically in relation to the way in which it is conceptualised and subsequently defined. A detailed historical backdrop of South Africa’s political history is also presented. This backdrop spans from the inception of discrimination to the country’s eventual arrival at political democracy (De Beer, 1982; Madi, 1993; Thaver, 2006; Twyman, 2001; Herdholdt & Marx, 1999). AA, from a legislative perspective, is covered. This chapter looks at some international perspectives of AA. Specifically, I focus on the cases of Sri Lanka, Malaysia and India, either because of their relevance to the South African experience or because of the lessons that can be learnt. The literature review covers, in detail, AA within South Africa. In this section I present arguments for the promotion of AA primarily as they relate to

issues of, for example, compensatory justice (Gloppen, 1997; Tummala, 1999; Kelbaugh, 2003; Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994). Arguments opposing AA are visited. For example, some of these arguments view AA as morally wrong (Cohen & Sterba, 2003; Adam, 2000; Sono & Werner, 2004), as inherently discriminatory (Kenny, 1995) and among other things, as corrupt (Mbeki, 2008; Guest, 2004; Kovacevic, 2007). The literature review draws extensively on studies undertaken in the discursive paradigm. Throughout the literature review, I highlight the importance of drawing on and accounting for historical and cultural specificity, particularly from a social constructionist orientation.

In Chapter Three I address fully this study's theoretical framework which discusses in detail the social constructionist paradigm which informs this research. To restate, this study is interested in exploring employees' social constructions of AA. A large part of this interest stems from the reasoning that AA provides a platform to critically engage with the embodied nature of prejudice that stems from everyday practices - something that traditional methodological approaches find difficult to do. Thus, this chapter functions mainly to present the value in approaching AA research from the social constructionist orientation. In doing so, this chapter is set up in the following way: By way of introduction the beginning sections of this chapter orientate the reader to the social constructionist paradigm, with specific reference to the work of Vivienne Burr (1995). Reference to other dominant writers in the field is also made. This chapter emphasises some of the fundamental concepts

that are important to this orientation, specifically on language and its role in social action and social construction.

Of importance, I critically explore the ways in which we view our world and show how the ‘truths’ we assign to it are circulated within discourse. Thus, following a discussion of social constructionism, the chapter then moves on to broadly conceptualise and define discourse. More specifically, it discusses Potter and Wetherell’s discursive psychology in detail – the approach to discourse that my study specifically draws on. Competing, yet related approaches to discourse are also covered. The discursive method of inquiry proved ideal as a tool with which to study the pervasive, recurring patterns of talk which function to justify and rationalise historic privilege and the reproduction of social inequality.

Chapter four outlines, step by step, the methods and procedures employed in this study. I outline my research aims, discuss the study’s methodological orientation and some of the terminology used in social constructionist research. The study’s target population, sampling issues and data collection techniques and procedures are also presented in detail. I also discuss how my data was transcribed, coded and analysed, mostly according to Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) guidelines to analysing discourse. I conclude this chapter with issues of data validation, ethical considerations and my personal reflections on conducting this research.

I deal with my findings and interpretation together in Chapter Five. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to alert the reader about the contents and the structure of the chapter. There are four main findings (Themes) in this chapter. As an overall finding, I discuss firstly the rhetoric of ‘othering’ as it relates to each of the themes that are subsequently presented. The findings, by and large, point to the idea that AA continues to be a contentious, controversial issue which traverses many segments of life. The accounts presented throughout the findings chapter illustrate the massive permutations and complexities that exist within any discourse.

The summary and conclusions to the study as well as the limitations and recommendations for future studies is presented in Chapter Six.

A full reference list and the appendices referred to in the study is presented after chapter 6.

This chapter has provided an overview of the current study. It has provided the rationale for the current study as well as the main aims of the research. A detailed overview was also presented in terms of what the reader should expect in each of the chapters which follows.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in the chapter one, this chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding AA in South Africa.

Despite the obvious need for AA, the policy continues to raise questions around equality and fairness within South Africa, specifically among those who feel prejudiced by the policy. AA presents itself as a complex and intricate area which poses a real threat for many South Africans. Empirically there has been a burgeoning of literature on the subject, particularly from an attitudinal perspective. For long, far less research has considered how people themselves frame, and conceptualise AA. AA is often explored from traditional theoretical and methodological approaches which often shed only limited light on the multiple, shifting meanings attached to AA. Traditional approaches are referred to as being 'realist' because they view pre-existing attitudinal functions and structures (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) without necessarily looking at contextual specificity. Durrheim and Dixon (2005) describe this approach as impoverished realism in that an understanding of world is 'stripped of its particularity'.

Of recent however, there has been a strong movement towards understanding AA within social psychology and more specifically from the tradition of discursive psychology. The

idea here is to look at the ambivalent and flexible nature of language – and in the context of this study – to assess everyday reproductions of social inequality. In other words I examine in this study how our ‘talk’ functions contextually to give meaning to social and psychological life, specifically related to the ways in which we frame, and conceptualise our experiences of AA.

The literature review that follows provides a detailed account of the empirical evidence on AA. Against this backdrop, I then attempt to identify the criticisms levelled against the ways in which we currently study and experience AA and in doing so I subsequently locate the current study within the discursive paradigm which is covered in Chapter Three. Essentially, I argue for the appreciation of lived experience as an approach to better understand the complexities inherent in AA. The following paragraphs briefly outline the order, and content, to follow in this chapter.

As a conceptual introduction to AA, the literature review begins with a thorough review of AA – specifically in relation to the way in which it is conceptualised and subsequently defined. I discuss how, as a concept, AA has evolved over time and the controversies surrounding its definition.

Secondly, I provide a detailed historical backdrop of South Africa’s political history. This section details the inception of discriminatory practices in South Africa, its evolution to the practice of apartheid and, finally, to the country’s eventual arrival at political

democracy (De Beer, 1982; Madi, 1993; Thaver, 2006; Twyman, 2001; Herdholdt & Marx, 1999).

Thirdly I discuss AA from a legislative perspective – this is discussed in relation to AA as a policy which aims to curtail the social reproduction of unequal relations of power in South African society.

The fourth part to this chapter looks at some international perspectives of AA. The reasons behind including international perspectives on AA include, among other things, to illustrate that AA is ‘problematically experienced’ all over the world and is not, as commonly believed, a uniquely South Africa problem. The inclusion of these perspectives also does well to show the complexity and multiple forms which AA has taken all over the world (Kennedy – Durbourdieu, 2006).

Fifthly, emphasis is placed on AA in the South African context. Here I draw on the multiplicity of contentions around AA in South Africa in relation to the complexities surrounding it. In this section I present arguments for the promotion of AA primarily as they relate to issues of, for example, compensatory justice (Gloppen, 1997; Tummala, 1999; Kelbaugh, 2003; Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994) and the promotion of democracy (Human, Bluen & Davies, 1999; Sachs, 1992). Arguments opposing AA are also visited. For example, some of these arguments view AA as morally wrong (Cohen & Sterba, 2003; Adam, 2000; Sono & Werner, 2004), as inherently discriminatory discrimination (Kenny, 1995) and among other things, as corrupt (Mbeki, 2008; Guest, 2004;

Kovacevic, 2007). The presentation of these arguments achieves two main goals. Firstly, I highlight the current empirical evidence available on AA, both in South Africa as well as internationally. Secondly, and more importantly, I use these arguments as a backdrop to locate the current study – most notably to argue for a perspective that provides a platform from which to critically engage with the concept of AA in a way that is appreciative of its distinct, rich socio-political history. This approach (Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) discursive psychology perspective) is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

In the sixth part of this section, I draw extensively on studies in the discursive paradigm. I highlight throughout this section the importance of research in the social construction orientation. I do this for a few reasons. Firstly, by drawing on studies that have used the constructionist tradition (from a discursive psychology perspective in particular) I emphasise the importance of considering how everyday practices function contextually to give meaning to social and psychological life, specifically related to the ways in which we frame, and conceptualise our experiences of AA. Secondly, I emphasise that there is a relative lack of research that adopts the discursive tradition in the South African context, and those studies which do adopt this approach seem to draw from related studies of race and race relations as opposed to AA alone. Importantly, I also emphasise the importance of the current study – particularly in relation to the new knowledge it may contribute. Discussed earlier, this study is interested in what people think about AA conceptually as opposed to exclusively looking at their practical experience of AA. In other words, I endeavour to contribute new knowledge, from the South African context, regarding the value, or lack thereof, associated with the principles embedded in AA policies.

In the conclusion section of this chapter, I draw some conclusions about the arguments visited and summarise the content of the chapter.

2.2 Defining Affirmative Action

The concept and meaning of AA has evolved immensely over time. At its inception, AA was used as a tool in an attempt to eradicate discrimination. Although still embodying this principle, contemporary notions of AA are more embedded within principles of *managing diversity*. Definitions of AA have been at the forefront of debate for many years, and as a result, AA has been described from a range of perspectives over the years. An illustrative example of this point comes from the work of Kennedy-Dubourdieu (2006) who states that the policy of AA has been labelled as Affirmative Action, Protective Discrimination, Compensatory Discrimination, Preferential Treatment, Reverse Discrimination and, among others, Multiculturalism – all of which point to the argument that AA is not a popular policy which is mutually accepted by all. The concept of AA remains an intricate one that is still debated the world over. AA action holds different meanings for different people, most notably in relation to who ultimately ‘benefits’ from the policy. Attempts to develop one specific, all encompassing definition of AA remain a difficult task.

There are many definitions of AA and although numerous, most definitions generally reflect labour market policy that is aimed at correcting past imbalances that are a direct result of historic discrimination (Sono & Werner, 2004). Put more specifically, AA

measures generally focus on anti-discriminatory measures related to issues of “race, colour, sex, language, religion, political means, national extraction, social origins, property or birth...” (Motileng, 2004, p. 9).

Most people however, understand AA at a superficial level by generally narrowing the parameters of AA to that of providing opportunities for people of colour and women. Indeed, the scope of AA is far reaching and, as discussed above, can include many other factors. Answering the question then of ‘who benefits from AA’ is generally located in how AA is defined (Goga, 2000). Human, Bluen and Davies (1999) reiterate the same point by suggesting that much of the confusion and speculation related to AA and employment equity is as a result of people talking about the policy without actually first finding out what it is all about. Similarly Kennedy-Dubourdieu (2008) suggests, on discussing AA terminology, that although people think they are discussing the same thing, they are in fact not. In support of this, the author further states that, “Since then, it [AA] has picked up all sorts of connotations...we now find a blurring between what is described as ‘affirmative action’, ‘equal opportunities’ or ‘equity’ programmes” (p. 3).

Also commenting on the controversies related to the definition of AA, Herbert (1994) describes AA as a topic of unending debate where resistance stems from whether or not the term ‘affirmative action’ should even be adopted, as opposed to other titles such as ‘Black advancement’ and among others, ‘career development programmes’.

Indeed, the concept of AA is confusing for many, and, the confusion is to be expected. As stated by Gloppen (1997), even though AA encompasses differential treatment, the policy

itself is essentially based on the principles of equal rights and anti-discrimination which, for many people, seems almost, if not completely, contradictory. Franchi (2003) notes this contradiction by suggesting that AA is continually polarised as both a sign of hope and economic justice for the majority and, on the other end, a sense of personal and collective loss from the economic minority.

Without a doubt, AA remains a very emotive topic, guaranteed to stir up emotions and evoke reactions both among those who support the policy and those who do not. Arguably, one of the first challenges in the AA debate arises in relation to how AA should be conceptualised. How the concept is defined is crucial in that it dictates to how the policy is implemented and more importantly, on who ‘benefits’ from it. Aptly put, Kennedy-Dubourdieu states that, “Words matter in this debate and they should be called into question regularly” (p. 3).

Although, as discussed earlier, definitions of AA generally reflect labour market policy that is aimed at correcting past imbalances which are as a direct result of discrimination, there are numerous variations to the ways in which AA is defined, some of which is presented below.

Many of the popular definitions of AA touch on, to a large extent, the notion of redress and the ‘righting’ of historical and/or present injustices. For example, Adele (1996, p. 6 in Motileng, 2004) describes AA as, “...a means of correcting historical injustices and as an attempt to work from there to eventually creating level playing fields where everyone

can compete, based upon equal access to education, training and other opportunities formerly restricted to the White minority population”. Similarly, with a focus on past discrimination, Sachs (1992, p. 11) defines AA as “...special treatment to favour language, cultural, religious and educational rights of formerly oppressed groups, and any moves to overcome the disadvantages imposed by past gender and race discrimination...” Bacchi states that AA is “...a range of programmes directed towards targeted groups to redress their inequality” (1996, p. 15).

Many definitions also focus on creating opportunities for *designated groups* of people. For example, Riggio (2009, p. 119) describes AA as, “the voluntary development of policies which try to ensure that jobs are made available to qualified individuals regardless of sex, age, or ethnic background”. Similarly, Charlton and van Niekerk describe AA as the “...overcoming of barriers and access to opportunity in general, and equal employment opportunity in particular – primarily with respect to the integration of Black people and females into managerial positions” (1994, p. 3). In a related definition, Ezorsky (1991) states that the purpose of AA is to reduce institutional racism and to progress Black people toward the goal of occupational integration.

Definitions also meet around AA as a means to foster *economic prosperity*. For example, Thomas (1992) describes AA as a pro-active development tool that can mobilise latent resources in order to stimulate overall development. Charlton and van Niekerk state that “the upgrading of people skills, then, is simply a matter of pragmatic business sense...(p.

14) and that, according to entrepreneurs, "...affirmative action is only partly to do with politics and everything to do with sound economic sense (p. 14)".

As this review of definitions depicts, finding one specific definition of AA is difficult. The inability to find one specific definition is not in itself a bad thing; rather, it should be viewed positively as it allows for flexibility in the development of definitions that are suitable, relevant and appropriate to the specific needs of "target group" members. In other words, users of AA can ensure that policies are culturally, politically and economically relevant in a way that provides the best possible outcomes.

As seen from the list of definitions above, AA is a multifaceted concept that can be defined in many ways, from numerous viewpoints and with varying focal points. Herholdt and Marx (1999) conducted a detailed analysis of definitions related to AA. Their study revealed that most definitions of AA fit into one or more of five broad categories which, in brief, include emphasis on equality, historical injustices, empowerment, development of the disadvantaged and the management of diversity. Using these categories, Herholdt and Marx (1999) developed their own definition of AA which they define as, "...processes applied by organisations to enhance equity, correct past discrimination, and develop and empower members of disadvantaged groups to create a diverse yet effective workforce which will strive to achieve organisational goals" (p. 14). This definition of AA proved appropriate for the current study as it is broad enough to cover AA policies primarily from the perspective of race (which is the focus of the current study), as opposed to other perspectives such as, for example, gender and disability.

Equally fraught with debate is unearthing the different *meanings* attached to AA. *Defining* AA theoretically is arguably only half the battle. Explaining explicitly what AA *means* is the other, and significantly more complex, half of the battle. This point about *what AA means* and the debate surrounding it is emphasised by Mandela (1991 in Adams, 1993) who says that, “To millions, Affirmative Action is a beacon of positive expectation. To others it is an alarming spectre which is viewed as a threat to their personal security and a menace to the integrity of public life” (p. 1). Skedvold and Mann (1996) echo a similar sentiment in their assertion that, “Many supporters view affirmative action as a milestone, many opponents see it as a millstone, and many others regard it as both or either...” (p. 1). This contradiction is at the forefront of many discussions around the true meaning of AA, which, from a research perspective, remains limited particularly in the case of South Africa.

Exactly what people mean when they speak about AA is an important point to consider. In their paper, Haley and Jims (2006) note this importance by suggesting that people’s interpretations reinforce their pre-existing attitudes and at the same time act as filters for new information. Thus, when studying AA, it is vitally important to uncover exactly what it is that people understand by it.

So far, this review has focused on the different ways in which AA is defined. Generating an understanding of AA, its intentions and practices from a historical context that is socially relevant and contextually specific is a starting point to the ways in which

employees perceive AA and may well contribute to how we manage and intervene in the polarity of experiences related to AA. The next section looks at the history of AA. A brief account of the origins of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa is also presented.

2.3 The Beginnings of Affirmative Action

Kennedy-Dubourdieu (2006) states that although many people agree that there is indeed a need for equality and equal representation in societies, debate around *how* best to achieve this equality often occurs. AA is thought, by some, to be at least one way of achieving such equality, particularly for minority groups within the employment sector. Kennedy-Dubourdieu (2006) argues that AA is one of the great innovations of social policy which has been set-up and implemented in many parts of the world with the United States designated as the prime mover for the policy, during the second half of the twentieth century. Since its inception, AA has influenced the policies of organisations throughout the world, particularly in societies where discrimination is experienced (Herholdt & Marx, 1999).

The term *Affirmative Action* was first introduced by United States President J. F Kennedy in 1961 as a response to the prevalence of racial discrimination (Wingrove, 1995 in Motileng, 2004). Specifically, Lindsay (1997) explains that President Kennedy's call for AA programmes was to compensate African Americans for the 250 years of oppression brought on by slavery as well as the 100 ensuing years of institutionalised governmental, societal and cultural discrimination. The idea behind this redress was to therefore 'level the playing field' (Lindsay, 1997).

President Kennedy, later that year, called for the establishment of the *Committee for Equal Employment Opportunities* which was tasked with ending all forms of discrimination in employment. The committee ensured that federal contractors adhered to the request to ensure that job applicants were treated equally regardless of race, colour, religion, sex or national origin (Wilcher, 2003). Here, for the first time in a country plagued by religious, racial and ethnic discrimination and tensions, the promotion of AA marked a move towards addressing these concerns. The overall aim was to create equal opportunities in employment.

Three years later in 1964, the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* was signed into law. The Act made discrimination illegal and established equal employment opportunities for all Americans (Kivel, 1997). Shortly after this, in 1965, President L. H Johnson mandated the goals of AA and enforced the Act which required all government contractors to expand job opportunities for minority groups.

At its starting point, AA was a policy that focused on redressing institutional discrimination on American policies, procedures and decisions that, although where not explicitly discriminatory, presented limited opportunities for people of colour. AA today however, is aimed at addressing economic and political discrimination against any group of people that are underrepresented and/or discriminated against (Kivel, 1997). Today, many nations around the world have adopted the practice of AA and have modified their policies to their local needs. Thus, from its early beginnings in the United States, AA is now practiced and legislated in many countries throughout the Americas, Asia, Europe

and Africa, in an endeavour to create equal opportunities and to redress social inequalities for disadvantaged groups.

2.4 A Historical Backdrop of South Africa: From Segregation to Democracy

A starting point to managing South Africa's democracy is arguably in understanding and confronting the apartheid regime. Thaver (1996) supports this argument by suggesting that confronting the complexities steeped within apartheid's hierarchy of opportunity remains a challenge for AA strategies. Given this, the following section first engages with literature on the history of segregation and apartheid in South Africa and then with the legislative vehicles of democracy that followed the 1994 democratic election.

Discrimination in South African society dates back to as early as the 15th century during the early colonisation period when Portuguese colonists regularly visited South Africa. By the early 1700's many of the indigenous inhabitants were dispossessed and incorporated into the colonial economy as servants (Burger, 2010).

Along with evangelicalism which was brought to the Cape by Protestant missionaries came the guarantee of equal civil rights for people of colour through what was known as Ordinance 50 of 1828 and ultimately the emancipation of slavery, which was introduced in 1834. By the mid-1800s, British settlers arrived in Natal. They called for imperial expansion in support of their trading enterprises. At the same time, the original colonists, the Boers, were extending White occupation to other parts of South Africa in what was known as the Great Trek (Burger, 2010). Confrontation between the Boers and the British was inevitable. The Anglo-Boer War began in 1889 when the British did not adhere to the ultimatum of the Boers to withdraw from their regions. The war ended in 1902 with

British victory. The British, although winning the war, promised eventual limited self-governance to the Boers in a quest to reconcile the Afrikaner-English relationship. This relationship united South Africa under a single government which deliberately excluded Blacks.

Reddy (2010) explains that regardless of the cultural and political differences between the British and the Afrikaners, they established themselves as a 'White community' and "in consciousness, ideology, and culture, saw themselves as separate and different from Africans, Coloureds, and Indians" (p. 1). This period marked the beginning of what would eventually be known as the apartheid era.

The policy of racial segregation was first formalised in 1910 through laws which curtailed the rights of the Black majority. Thaver (2006) explains how, through the Native Land Act of 1913, the size of land for the Black majority was limited to thirteen percent. 'Coloured's' however, were allowed to be part of the common voter's roll because they were seen as resembling Europeans in almost every way other than colour (Thaver, 2006). Thaver explains how the struggles between the colonised and the colonisers were marked by preferential policies that were only beneficial to a select section of the population. This, Thaver emphasises, "...occurred both at the exclusion and further marginalisation of the Black category" (p. 154).

When, in 1948, the Nationalist Party came into power, it immediately secured preferential socio-economic and cultural policies for White South Africans. Under the leadership of President D.F Malan, the policy of apartheid was institutionalised

(Twyman, 2001). The policy systematically divided society into racial groups through the development of Acts where Blacks, Indians and Coloureds were marginalised politically, socially and economically.

Twyman (2001) explains the four basic ideas that comprised the core of the apartheid policy. The first idea was that South African people should be segregated into four racial groups, each with its own cultural identity. Secondly, Whites, who were seen as the 'civilised race,' would be entitled to absolute control over the country. Thirdly, White interests would prevail and dominate over Black interests. Lastly, the White racial group would form a single nation, with the Afrikaans and English-speaking people, while Black Africans would belong to several distinct nations so as to ensure that the White nation was the largest, and therefore most dominant, group in the country.

Twyman (2001) elaborates on the goals of apartheid. She states that the ultimate goal of apartheid was to ensure White economic independence with less reliance on African labour. The apartheid government also endeavoured to ensure that White farmers would always have a supply of Black labour that was "disciplined and cheap" (p. 4). With regard to employment prospects, the government legislatively ensured that Whites were always given priority over Blacks which resulted in massive employment inequity.

Engineering a society that would be strictly segregated by class, race and gender came in the form of legislation and a battery of laws that was strictly enforced. It is important to note that apartheid's legislation sought to segregate people among all spheres of life in both the public and private domains. Some of the key legislation in the formation of

apartheid included, among others, the *Population Registration Act No 30 of 1950* which required people to be identified as one of four racial groups, the *Immorality Act* which made mixed race relationships illegal and punishable by law, the *Group Areas Act of 1950* which separated living areas according to ones race, the *Bantu Education Act* which provided inferior education for non-White South Africans and, the *Pass Laws Act of 1952* which required all Black South Africans over the age of 16 to carry a ‘pass book’ at all times.

Given the gross injustices imposed by the apartheid regime, international pressures against the South African government began to mount. Internal unrest also began to increase. Indeed, by the late 1970’s, the apartheid regime was becoming more and more criticised and undesirable, both locally and internationally. This period marked the beginning of some movement towards attaining democracy within South African society.

Arguably, South Africa’s first introduction to AA, from the perspective of Black advancement, was in 1978 when the Sullivan Code of Conduct was imposed on South African organisations by the United States. This Code of Conduct was developed by Reverend Sullivan of the Zion Baptist Church in an aim to reduce the racial injustices associated with the apartheid dispensation. The Code of Conduct outlined six dimensions of desirable behaviour to which signatory companies had to comply with (Herdholdt & Marx, 1999). These dimensions included the desegregation of races in all eating, recreational and work facilities; equal and fair employment practices for all employees; equal pay for all employees doing equal or comparable work; the initiation and development of training programmes to prepare Blacks for supervisory, clerical and

technical jobs; increasing the number of Blacks and other non-Whites in management and supervisory positions; and, improving the quality of employees' lives outside the work environment (Herholdt & Marx, 1999, p. 3).

These dimensions were not wholly adhered to by South Africa and as a result, Reverend Sullivan requested that the United States impose sanctions on South Africa. Consequently, all American companies closed their operations in South Africa (Herholdt & Marx, 1999). Although the Sullivan Code was not successful, most would agree that it played an important role in 'getting the ball rolling' by highlighting to the world the massive injustices that were experienced by Black people in South Africa during the formal apartheid years (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999).

The 1980's according to De Beer (1982) marked a progression toward *Black advancement*. By the mid-eighties, AA once again gained impetus in the South African private sector as a result of international pressure, the legalisation of Black trade unions and political changes. De Beer describes this period as the breakdown of Apartheid where negotiations with Black political leaders were in full force. By this stage, much of the restrictions that separated races in the workplace were removed. Non-White residents were now viewed as permanent residents in urban areas and mixed marriages were legalised. However, once the political crisis seemed under control and international pressure reduced, AA once again lost its momentum (Madi, 1993). By early 1990 however, as Madi (1993) explains, following the banning of political organisations and the release of political leaders, intense AA activities had re-emerged, this time with more

zeal. The need for AA in South Africa by 1990 became an increasing reality for most South Africans as change was imminent.

Thaver (2006) explains that the accumulation of discriminatory factors and exploitation had, by the 1990's, resulted in a society that was highly stratified along race, gender and class lines. Tensions, international pressures, economic and trade embargoes eventually led to the demise of apartheid where, after negotiations had taken place, the first democratic election was permitted in South Africa. The newly elected government of 1994 mobilised quickly to redress historic injustices in, as stated by Thaver (2006), "...the interest of creating a non-discriminatory and equitable society" (p. 157). A large part in securing this redress was through the development and subsequent implementation of appropriate legislation most notably in the form of the South African Constitution and the Employment Equity Act. From a policy perspective, there is a significant amount of information related the development of AA related policy, policy implementation, and among other things, policy analysis. Given that the current research is in interested in the ways in which 'talk' functions contextually to give meaning to social and psychological life, specifically related to the ways in which we frame, and conceptualise our experiences of AA, I give less attention to policy related issues. Rather, my emphasis is on uncovering peoples lived, socially constructed experiences of AA. Given this line of reasoning, the following section provides only a brief account of AA legislation, and importantly also, the reasoning behind its development.

2.5 Legislation

In this section I first discuss the need for creating employment equity in the South African workplace particularly as a backdrop to understanding some of the provisions of AA related legislation. I then discuss the legislation.

Creating equal workplace opportunities was, and remains, a burgeoning necessity in South Africa. The political environment in apartheid South Africa was very unique. Although minority groups the world over have faced discrimination and marginalisation, the case of South was unique in that it was the majority who suffered these injustices. Black South Africans were victims of injustice and were discriminated against in all spheres (politically, socially, economically, academically) of life. As Twyman (2001) states, the devastating consequences of apartheid's racist policies are found in almost every statistical category regarding Blacks in South Africa.

Expecting that Black South Africans could compete on an equal footing in the workplace soon after democracy was realised is unrealistic. Black South Africans were systematically discriminated against, received inferior education, lived largely in poverty and had little access to essential services. Creating opportunities then, as promoted by the Employment Equity Act, for those that were previously disadvantaged is a necessary provision. Human et al. (1999) provide a valuable contribution in their argument that AA is necessary in order to curtail the social reproduction of existing relations of power. The argument here is that the elite, in many western countries, have tended to reproduce themselves, which, in other words means that over generations, most of the poor remain

poor and most of the rich stay rich. Thus, "...little will change if we accept the principles of so-called 'equal opportunities' in the absence of affirmative action" (p. 20).

The principles embedded within workplace redress are clear: it aims to generate equity and is a measure which is 'corrective' in nature. Often however, people judge the policy superficially and in relation to 'what they think it is' rather than 'what it actually is' which runs a risk of denying the real value that is inherent in the principles of the policy. From a legislative perspective, the South African government has made considerable efforts to address these concerns. The following paragraphs discuss legislation.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, was approved by the Constitutional Court on 4 December 1996 and was implemented on 4 February 1997. The Constitution is the supreme or highest level of law of a country and no other law or government action can supersede or contravene the provisions of the Constitution. South Africa's Constitution is seen as one of the most progressive constitutions in the world and enjoys international acclaim (Department of Labour, 2009).

The Constitution seeks to address many of the historical injustices faced by South Africans during the apartheid regime. The Constitution sets forth the achievement of equality, prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic or social origin and allows for the creation of legislation to advance persons who were previously disadvantaged (Twyman, 2001). **The Bill of Rights** (Chapter 2 of the Constitution) is "...a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom" (South African

Constitution, 1996). Perhaps one of the most important pieces of legislation that is directly related to AA and which is applicable to all other sectors is that of the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 (Thaver, 2006).

The ultimate goal and purpose of the **Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998** is to create equity and non-discrimination in the workplace.

In its preamble, the Act recognises that “as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory laws and practices, there are disparities in employment, occupation and income within the national labour market; and that those disparities create such pronounced disadvantages for certain categories of people that they cannot be redressed simply by repealing discriminatory laws” (Employment Equity Act, 1998, p.1).

Chapter 2 of the Employment Equity Act outlines two important measures to creating equality in the workplace. Firstly, the Act states the need to promote equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination. Secondly, the Act outlines the importance of implementing AA measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups and to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce.

Chapter 3 of the Employment Equity Act outlines measures necessary to ensure equitable representation within the workforce. Specifically the Act outlines the measures that should be taken by employers in enforcing AA. The Act stipulate that AA measures are measures intended to ensure that suitably qualified employees from designated groups have equal employment opportunity and are equitably represented in all occupational

categories and levels of the workforce. It is important to note that the Employment Equity Act impacts employment policies in all sectors of South Africa's economy. At the workplace, this means that the Act impacts on recruitment procedures, advertising and selection, appointments, job classifications and job grading, remuneration and performance evaluation systems, among others (Nel, 2006). As such, the Act is critical tool for curbing employment discrimination in South African workplaces.

Literature often fails to explore the underlying values (such as egalitarianism, freedom and equality) of AA. This is where the contention lies. There are those who vehemently shoot down any measure that is AA related stating that it is morally unfair and prejudiced against those who are not previously disadvantaged. Others support the policy stating that such measures are necessary to undo the gross injustices of the apartheid regime. Needless to say, this argument will not be resolved any time soon, if at all. The moral, social, economic and political impact of AA remains favourable in the eyes of some and unfair in the eyes of others. Importantly, this contention is a worldwide phenomenon with many countries battling around similar issues. AA is a legislative requirement in South Africa, it is a certainty and it is not up for negotiation. How we manage and interpret it is however what is important. Even after eighteen years of democracy, South Africans still struggle with the transition to racial integration. AA is met with both practical and ideological hurdles that stem from all spheres of the growing democracy. The contentions surrounding AA is discussed in considerable detail later in this literature review.

At this point, AA has been defined, visited historically and engaged with legislatively. Against this backdrop, attention is moved to a brief review of AA from an international perspective, both in terms of its successes and failures.

2.6 Affirmative Action – Some International Perspectives

AA in South Africa, unlike in most parts of the world, is used to redress historic injustices that were imposed on a majority. Elsewhere, minority groups faced discrimination. Sono and Werner (2004) discuss how a report of the commission to investigate the development of labour market policy revealed that, in relation to equal opportunities and AA, South Africa differs substantially from the rest of the world. Nevertheless, some important lessons can be learnt from nations who have used the policy successfully. International experiences, regardless of the context in which AA is applied, does to some extent “reveal the complexity and multiplicity of form this policy has taken on in different parts of the globe” (Kennedy-Dubourdieu, 2006, p. 7).

According to the 2005 Global Rights Report, racism and discrimination exists all around the world. As in the case of South Africa, racial discrimination across the world results in negative consequences which include, among other things, marginalisation, the denial of cultural rights, unequal access to education and workplace inequality. Interestingly, AA particularly from the perspective of South African, is often portrayed as a uniquely South African problem and as unnecessary for various reasons including political cronyism (Kovacevic, 2007), violated entitlement (Gafta, 1998 as cited in Thomas, 2002), and among other things, as a policy which perpetuates apartheid-like systems (DeCapua, 2010). Although South Africans are beginning to change their language on race, there is

still much evidence to support the very negative association made between race and competence (Franchi, 2003) which ultimately portrays AA as troublesome. The point of including international perspectives of AA in this section is to challenge this very assumption – in other words, I want to show how the very issues faced by South Africans regarding AA is not unique to the South African context. These issues are also experienced internationally. There are two specific reasons for this for including international perspectives on AA in this review.

Firstly, in South Africa, AA is almost always seen as a race based policy with most studies focusing on the ways in which people understand, and experience AA depending on their position (i.e.: either benefitting or not benefitting from the policy according to ones race). AA is much more than this. The policy, as discussed earlier, is designed to correct historic injustices in terms of gender, disability, social disadvantage, aboriginal peoples, and among other things, national groups (Sabbagh, 2004). Race is only one of these factors. The goal is to essentially counter deeply entrenched social practices that “reproduce group-structured inequality even in the absence of intentional discrimination” (Sabbagh, 2004, p. 1).

Inequality manifests from a range of factors. And while race seems to dominate on the South African front other factors requiring preferential treatment tend to feature much more on the international scene. Understanding this then, provides a different perspective on the nature of AA and the subsequent implementation of it. Sowell (2004) illustrates this point by suggesting that most people consider AA in terms of the *theory* of AA. He

adds that little attention is afforded to what actually occurs as a result of its implementation. In South Africa, it can be argued that the *theory* of AA is seen purely as a race based policy when in fact, the policy also draws on other issues such as gender and disability. Indeed, factors unrelated to race seem to dominate more on the international scene. For example, in India, preferential treatment is afforded to the *untouchables* in an attempt to overcome the caste system (Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994; Deshpande, 2006). Another example is the case of Sri Lanka where AA was designed to address university admission processes (Sowell, 2004) among all Sri Lankans, meaning that race was not considered. In Northern Ireland, religious factors are considered where the Catholic minority are favoured through preferential policies (Sabbagh, 2004).

Part of the reason then, for including international perspectives is to therefore illustrate the expanse of AA to more than just race. The aim here is develop some level of departure from the idea that AA is inherently problematic in South Africa while still acknowledging its national uniqueness – AA is larger than race preference. Preferential treatment has existed in other countries with different histories and traditions (Sowell, 2004). Some international perspectives are discussed later in this review.

The second reason for the review on international perspectives to showcase the successes of AA around the world. AA is generally portrayed as problematic which draw on arguments of discrimination (Tummala, 1999), stigmatisation (Adam, 2000), inequality (Cohen & Sterba, 2003) and among other things, corruption (Guest, 2004). The polarity of AA as a zero-sum game should be revisited. While there are some unavoidable

cons to preferential treatment, there are also many positive outcomes of the policy, many of which often go unnoticed. AA does work. Thus, the second reason for discussing international cases of AA is to highlight the merits of AA noted in other countries. Many countries, for example the United States, Canada, Britain, Northern Ireland, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka and Australia have implemented the policy of AA, each with its own successes and failures. However, only four country's experiences of AA are selected and discussed here – the cases of Sri Lanka, Malaysia and, India either because of its relevance to the South African experience (the case of Malaysia where the minority was favoured historically) or because of the successes which I wish to highlight.

Thus, to summarise, the cases discussed below serve to illustrate two points. Firstly, I wish to illustrate other factors beyond race which feature in AA policies around the world. The second reason is to showcase the benefits of AA from international perspectives. The overall point of this section then, is based on Sowell's (2004) argument that considering international perspectives on group preferences and quotas allows us to examine arguments which a larger and more varied sample of evidence.

In Sri Lanka AA was first practiced in the 1970's and was designed to address university admission processes. In their review, Charlton and van Niekerk (1994) argue that, by and large, Sri Lanka's AA programmes have been successful and have positively impacted on the overall quality of life for rural communities. The positive impact was seen in the drastic drop in infant mortality rates, the increase of life span comparable to industrialised countries and in the increase in literacy levels among the historically oppressed.

Malaysia is another good example that showcases the benefits of AA measures. The case of Malaysia is perhaps best related to the case of South Africa in that AA measures were implemented in favour of the Malay majority. Malaysia has a population of approximately 23 million and is one of the more prosperous countries in Asia (Sowell, 2004). AA was implemented in Malaysia after the minority Chinese government and the Malay majority set up a comprehensive plan to implement AA while still maintaining their economic standards (Charlton & Herholdt, 1994). Hookway (2010) explains that the reason for introducing race-based preferences for ethnic Malays during the 1970's was to help them get on an equal footing with ethnic-Chinese and ethnic-Indian locals, who were in many regards 'better-off' socially and economically. Proponents of the policy state that it has provided stability in the racially and religiously diverse nation of Malaysia. Despite the fact that statistics show that approximately only 5% of Malays have benefited from AA policies, Sowell (2004) explains that, in many respects, Malaysia has had one of the most successful programmes of AA where "success is defined solely in terms of the relative advancement of the designated beneficiary group..." (p. 75). On the contrary however, opponents of the policy state that the policy has hindered Malaysia's global competitiveness and, as suggested by Schuman (2010) "...bred resentment among minorities, distorted the economy and undermined the concept of a single Malaysian identity" (p. 1). Another country in which AA has proven to be controversial is India.

India is the world's largest multi-ethnic, socially fragmented society (Sowell, 2004). India has more than one hundred different languages and hundreds of dialects. Sowell

states that the need for AA in India was very significant as, “India is also cross cut by strong caste, religious, regional and ethnic divisions – expressed in a wide range of ways, from radically different lifestyles to bloodshed in the streets” (2004, p. 23). At the time of independence in India in 1947, there were two programmes that were conceived off in an attempt to transform Indian society. The first was AA or Positive Discrimination (the preferred terminology used in India), and the second was a large scale land reform programme. Overall, AA has been relatively successful in India as it focused on the most discriminated against in society, most notably the untouchables (Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994).

Charlton and van Niekerk (1994) make an important point by stating that India’s most arresting mistake was related to the use of mechanical and numerical quotas. The negative consequence here is that Indians began to see that it was obviously beneficial to be disadvantaged socially or educationally as they would qualify for relief. This of course resulted in a policy that did not sufficiently serve the best interests of the truly needy. Similarly, Sowell (2004) suggests that benefits go disproportionately to those individuals who are most fortunate rather than those who are most in need. Sowell states that it is difficult to deny that India has only produced minimal benefits to those who are most needy of them. Deshpande (2006) lends to this argument by stating that there still remains a debate around whether AA is in fact necessary in India. He further outlines arguments put forward by opponents to India’s AA practices by stating that, “arguments against affirmative action in principle are essentially meritocratic and the implicit belief

is that labour markets and other social institutions reward merit and efficiency, if allowed to function without hindrance in the form of affirmative action” (p. 71).

As can be noted from the discussions above, AA is not a distinctly South African ‘problem’. Furthermore, AA policies vary substantially across the globe in terms of their intended beneficiaries and the programmes involved, all of which extend far beyond race as a factor alone. AA, although often portrayed negatively, has been experienced positively on the interation scene. Some of these cases above, bear witness to this.

To restate, this study had two aims. The first aim was to critically analyse the discourses around AA produced by the study’s participants. The second aim was to explore the ways in which both historically advantaged and disadvantaged participants construct the concept of AA. In order to situate the discussion that follows (based on the arguments for and against AA) I have, at this point conceptualised AA. The review thus far has defined AA, presented a historical backdrop of discriminatory practice in South Africa and discussed the legislation that has been developed as a response to historic disadvantage. A brief account of AA practices from an international perspective has been presented, particularly in relation to some international failures and successes. Importantly, this review, thus far, functions in illustrating the complex and composite nature of AA which points to the fact that AA is ‘troublesome’ everywhere and is not a distinctly South African issue.

The next part of this review is a starting point to achieving the afore mentioned aims of this study. It explores some of the ‘common’ suppositions in the AA debate. This part of the review has two important functions, particularly in relation to where the current study is located in AA research.

Firstly, the sections that follow attempt to provide a complete picture of AA related research, particularly from the quantitative, realist perspective – this section is valuable in that it identifies some of the trends in current AA related research. Apart from describing the current AA ‘camps’, this section also functions in highlighting the need to consider phenomena (in this case AA) by looking at the local pragmatics and orientations of peoples talk. Secondly, drawing from this, support for approaching AA from the discursive perspective is rallied, and discussed in detail. I do not deal with AA discursively in this section – my aim rather is to merely present the thematic patterns of AA and later, show how approaching it discursively might enhance what we know about the concept. In a later section, I look at some research which is approached from the discursive tradition. In the next chapter, social constructionism as the study’s theoretical framework is discussed.

2.7 The South African Affirmative Action Debate: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

South African policy on democratisation, specifically within workplace settings, is positively recognised around the world. From a *theoretical*, point of view, AA makes sense – it seeks to redress past injustices, create workplace equality, remove unfair discrimination and create equal opportunities for all. *Practically* however, the

implementation and the subsequent experience of AA in the workplace have come under scrutiny. Fuelling this debate is the distinct polarisation of attitudes toward AA practices which arguably originate from historical deprivation, political ideology and a sense of personal and collective loss (Franchi, 2003).

AA, despite being around for many years, is still a fervently contested and controversial subject. Kennedy-Dubourdieu (2006, p. 2) states that AA remains a social policy that “engenders an inflamed debate and opinion polls consistently reveal that practically everyone has an opinion on the subject, even though there is a great deal of confusion over what the policy actually entails...”. AA for many employees is seen only as a compromise that, in itself, perpetuates the discrimination it seeks to address.

Researching AA is popular among scholars and academics. Numerous researchers, both locally in South Africa and internationally, have conducted research into the area of AA most of which, at least to some extent, visit the ongoing debate as to whether AA is ‘good’, ‘bad’, or ‘somewhere-in-between’. Bentley and Habib (2008) reflected the thoughts of many South Africans when they stated that South Africa's democracy is faced with the political dilemma of how to address historical injustices while, at the same time, being able to build a single national identity and promote economic growth and development. Expressions of fear, racial tension and discrimination are equally met with expressions of democracy, freedom and equalising opportunities in South African organisations. Romano (2007) suggests that while many South Africans claim to be in favour of AA, AA policies are still generating considerable amounts of criticism. As a result efforts to integrate the country's historically disadvantaged into the labour force have been met with practical and ideological barriers from all areas of society.

Theoretically, AA makes sense particularly if one considers its aims to foster redress, workplace equality and among other things, equal opportunities (Kennedy-Dubourdieu, 2006). Practically, AA is experienced controversially where the policy is either embraced enthusiastically as a policy of reform or debunked as a system of discrimination. AA is spate with disagreement and debate – this contention is discussed in detail, below.

In the sections to follow both arguments for and against AA have been grouped into themes and are discussed as such. After having conducted a comprehensive review of the literature relating to AA, I categorised arguments into the themes which I felt are reflective and representative, of the literature visited, particularly in relation to ‘common’ knowledge about AA. I conclude this review by showing how most of the studies in the area of AA fail to adopt discursive methodologies and in doing so, conceal the ways in which historic privilege and unequal power relations continue to manifest in South African society. This section functions in highlighting the need to consider AA from within its cultural and historical context. I also highlight, where appropriate, the lack of emphasis on AA from a policy perspective with particular reference to South Africa’s context. The motivation for the discursive turn is made briefly in this section. I also show how the real value embedded in AA measures is often concealed because people often comment on what they ‘think’ rather than what really ‘is’. To begin, I first look at the arguments in support of AA.

Arguments for Affirmative Action

The aim of this section is to draw on a range of literature that highlights the arguments in support of AA. Generally speaking, many of these arguments are generally framed around corrective measures which are seen as necessary given years of institutionalised discrimination. Further, it is often argued that the concessions made by AA measures are small as compared to the opportunities still enjoyed by dominant groups (Harris & Merida, 1995).

One argument often drawn on in favour of AA is related to AA's impact on global competitiveness. Historically, as a result of apartheid, South Africa's opportunities to compete globally were limited as a result of sanctions and other restrictions imposed on the country. Attaining democracy in 1994 meant that South Africa is now entitled to compete globally. However, due to past economic and political choices and attitudes (Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994) and high unemployment rates and limited industrial action (Ogden, 1996), among other things, South Africa has faced many difficulties in its ability to compete globally.

According to the World Competitiveness Report (2010-2011), South Africa came in at the 54th position among 133 countries in 2010. In a response to this, Thomas (2002) argues that equity legislation can play an important role in improving South Africa's overall ability to successfully compete within the global economy. Specifically, Thomas states that employment equity legislation will change the composition of the workforce as the future workforce is one that is productive and contributes towards the country's global success. Thomas continues, "...it is this new workforce, characterised by an array

of diverse groups, that needs to be leveraged for competitive advantage in the quest to combine the best management practices employed successfully elsewhere in the world with the strengths that are unique in the people of South Africa” (2002, p. 3). Many other authors have also documented the benefits to business, locally and internationally, which are associated with employee diversity. Thus, AA measures, if implemented correctly, can serve well in diversifying the workplace and ultimately increasing the country’s overall competitiveness internationally. Critically though, the extent to which AA outcomes (in terms of diversifying organisations) impacts competitiveness is questionable given a range of other factors that may well contribute to South Africa’s development. Perhaps most related to this point is that, as noted above, AA is “...simply good business...” (McFarlin et al., 1999, p.2) and is “...only partly to do with politics and everything to do with sound economic sense” (Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994, p. 14).

Perhaps one of the most positive benefits associated with AA is the fact that it promotes workplace diversity which has been shown to be valuable, particularly from a business perspective. Diversity and its associated benefits is a popular topic among researchers. Many authors have explored the benefits of promoting a diverse workplace (for example, Mobley & Payne, 1992; Nottage, 2003; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999; Lockwood, 2010; Lencioni, 2010; Lee & Juergens, 2008; Espinoza, 2007).

Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) highlight the importance of appreciating the strategic business reasons for implementing AA measures, most notably in the form of the resultant workplace diversity. For example, the authors state that diversity taps into skills that were previously unavailable, enhances company creativity and problem-solving,

helps in a quick response to market changes, promotes exclusivity and commitment to quality, enhances flexibility and adaptability and enhances team performance, among other things.

In his article *Turning Diversity into a Competitive Advantage*, Espinoza (2007) outlines seven reasons related to how diversity can provide a competitive advantage. Among some of these reasons is that diversity opens up market opportunities; it provides people with better and varied ideas; and that diversity initiatives positively impacts the bottom line.

Other researchers have also showed the benefits of a diverse workplace. Schueffel and Istria (2006) in their study draw on the success of Proctor & Gamble, an organisation which has created a lasting competitive edge. On decision making, Lencioni (2010) remarks that on a practical level, people with differing perspectives, backgrounds and skills are usually better at making decisions and in finding more creative solutions. Selko remarks that, “Far from being just another feel-good initiative, diversity in the workforce has become a competitive advantage...” (p. 1) and Donovan (2008) suggests that diversity “...brings new voices and perspectives into the strategy dialogue...and stimulates a wider range of creative decision alternatives” (p. 1). Indeed, as can be seen from this review, diversity initiatives, as promoted by AA as per the Employment Equity Act are critical mechanisms in improving business which is “...simply good business...” (McFarlin et al., 1999, p. 2).

Despite AA often been characterised negatively, various pieces of research have documented the very real successes of AA in South African organisations. An

appropriate way to assess the effectiveness of AA initiatives is to examine whether the workplace is more equitable, racially representative and whether it provides equal employment opportunities. Despite it being 18 years into democracy and 16 years after the formal implementation of AA measures in South African workplaces, AA still dominates as one of the most controversial topics around. This section is dedicated to looking at some positive outcomes associated with AA, specifically in supporting the argument that, to some extent, AA is working in SA.

Another way of testing whether AA is becoming more accepted as a measure of redress is to assess whether race is still an issue for South Africans. According to a survey discussed in a 2006 article published in the Economist, approximately 60% of South Africans reported that they felt that race relations was actually improving. The article also drew on another study by Markinor (a polling company) which conducted research on what South Africans thought government should prioritise. While issues such as HIV/AIDS, joblessness and crime were prioritised, issues of racism and AA did not feature.

Similarly, Roberts, Weir-Smith and Reddy (2010) recently commented on reactions of the South African public to AA. Their review draws from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) which is conducted yearly by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC). The survey revealed that nationally, there is broad support for AA. Roberts et al. (2010) further reported that over the 2003-2009 period adults who agree or strongly agree with racial and gender-based AA ranged between 60-70%. In their concluding remarks, Roberts et al. (2010) state that, "Preliminary findings from this study

demonstrate that attitudes to race and gender-based affirmative action in employment were favourable on aggregate over the last decade” (p. 2).

Some recent studies have also outlined some of the successes of AA, especially as it relates to employment, poverty and inequality. Burger and Jafta (2010) reviewed the different legislative aspects of AA. They argue that if AA has been successful, the result would manifest in an improvement of access to employment and the narrowing of racial and gender wage gaps, particularly among designated groups. In doing so, the authors assessed labour changes since the enactment of AA. Their results, although not overwhelmingly convincing, did show that Black men and women both saw a slight decrease in their unemployment rates. In another study, Maisonnave, Decaluwe and Chitiga (2009) used a computable general equilibrium model to enable them to measure the impact of AA in South Africa, particularly on the issues of employment, poverty and inequality. Overall, their results showed that AA, as a policy, was encouraging regarding unemployment and poverty reduction and that unemployment rates were on the decline.

It is also suggested that another way in which to assess AA success or a lack thereof, is to evaluate the extent to which organisations meet Employment Equity requirements. Mittner (1998) comments that though few organisations initially greeted the Employment Equity Act (1998) with enthusiasm, research has shown that many companies have made good strides towards compiling and implementing plans related to equity. Drawing on a FSA-Contact study, Mittner comments that 95% of all survey respondents in 1998 had some form of AA policy in place as compared to 58% in 1993. The study also indicated a decline in the percentage of people who reported declining standards associated with

AA from 24% in 1993 to 18% in 1998. The survey also revealed an increase in Black representation at different employment levels from 1995 to 1998 (senior management (4.8 – 11.5%), middle management (9.7% - 21.3%), and low skilled employees (81.8 – 89.5%).

The fact that AA is working in South Africa is also apparent by exploring some of the country's top organisations which have used AA successfully. McFarlin et al. (1999) comment on some high-performing South African companies that have appeared to implement AA successfully. Spoornet for example, has spent millions of rands in an endeavour to identify and subsequently develop 'high-potential' Black employees in the hope that they can move quickly to managerial positions (Gaylin, 1996 in McFarlin et al., 1999). Another example of a company effectively using AA is that of SABMiller. The company, writes Nottage (2003), has a strong focus on workers and over the past 30 years has supported Black advancement programmes. Previously disadvantaged South Africans have an impressive representation at the company, especially when compared to other companies. The Asian/Black/previously disadvantage grouping comprises 98% on the shop-floor; about 70% at first line middle management, about 37% at senior management and 22% at the executive level (Nottage, 2003). According to NEDLAC's annual report (2008-2009), some of the top companies in South Africa with impressive Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) profiles (where Black employees represent more than 80% of the organisation) include, among others, Hosken Consolidated Investments Ltd Financial Services; Nedbank Group Ltd Financial Services; Kelly Group Ltd. Support Services and GIJIMA AST GROUP Ltd.

AA measures are clearly being implemented in South African organisations – the review above clearly depicts this - perceptions are changing, unemployment is reducing and organisations are becoming racially representative – the extent to which these changes are happening is however questionable and often begs the question about whether the change is happening quickly enough, and at a large enough scale. I visit these arguments at a later stage. Furthermore, this review depicts numerically the racial and demographic transition of some South African workplace, with little to say about how people themselves conceptualise and subsequently experience the policy.

Another argument in support of AA for many South Africans is that ‘it’s the right thing to do’, that apartheid was cruel and malicious and that as a moral imperative, something has to be done to correct apartheid wrongs. As Tummala (1999) explains, damage done by historical discrimination either through custom, tradition or deliberate public policy, should be undone and due compensation should be extended to them. Reyna et al. (2005) frames this argument as the levelling of the playing field. Two important theories are worth discussing here. Firstly, Gloppen (1997) explains how, according to the *level playing field theory*, AA is needed to create conditions of equal opportunities. The idea here is that the basic rules which regulate society should be such that all people are given equal opportunities not only when competing for positions but also “...in pursuing what they regard as ‘the good’ in life” (p. 83). The *level playing field theory* is therefore a ‘forward-looking’ theory in that it considers how society can influence the distribution on resources and opportunities (Gloppen, 1997).

Related, but also different in some respects is what Gloppen (1997) refers to as the *theory of compensatory justice*. Much research (Brunswick, 2008; Kelbaugh, 2003; Kershner, 1999) has been conducted in the area of compensatory justice, both in terms of positive and negative perspectives. Simply put, Gloppen explains that the history of South Africa has created gross inequality and action should be taken to rectify this. This in other words can be understood as *compensation*. Either way, both theories provide strong support for the moral imperatives behind AA. These principles around compensation, justice, and moral good are clearly drawn from a place emphasising redress rather than discrimination.

An interesting point to raise here is to look at the concept of ‘framing’. A considerable amount of research has shown that the ways in which people view AA is often in relation to how the term AA is actually framed (Bobo & Kleugel, 1993; Fine, 1992). Thus, framing AA positively – for example as ‘levelling’, ‘compensatory’ or as ‘opportunity-enhancing’ (Bobo & Kleugel, 1993) is likely to illicit positive views. I make this point here only briefly. It is important because it critically challenges the ways in which literature is presented, particularly in relation to ‘pre-packaged’ conceptualisations of AA. I expand on this point later in this chapter and in specific relation to discursive approaches to research.

Another argument supporting AA is its potential to promote democracy. Despite having attained democracy, South Africa is still one of world’s most unequal societies with a huge divide between the rich and the poor; and between apartheid’s advantaged and disadvantaged. Put differently, there is much that needs to be done in order to equalise

South African society economically and socially. The argument put forward here is that AA as a measure to address workplace inequalities can be seen as an important tool for promoting democracy, not just at the workplace, but also within society. Before I discuss this point, I first present evidence related to South Africa's unequal society as a backdrop to the arguments that follow.

Numerous authors have commented on the devastating consequence of apartheid on South African society (Commeey, 2007; McFarlin, Coster & Mogale-Pretorious, 1999; Mutume, 1998; Segwati, 1998; Twyman, 2001; Visagie, 1997; Dugger, 2010; Lindsay, 1997; Thomas, 2002). From the perspective of employment, the 1996 South African Census reported a 42.5 % unemployment rate of Black South Africans, as compared to 4.6 % for Whites. By 1997, 3 years after reaching political democracy, approximately 40 % of Black South Africans were unemployed (Chenault, 1997 in McFarlin, et al., 1999). Although showing some improvement by 2010, the 2010 Labour Force survey indicates that Black South Africans constituted 29.5% of the unemployed, Coloureds 22.5%, Indians, 10.1% and Whites 6.4%.

In South Africa, from an economic point, almost all of the poor are Black. In 1998 some estimates were that Black South Africans constituted 95 % of the country's poor (Matume, 1998). By early 2000, poverty was still largely concentrated among Black South Africans where 61 % of Blacks were estimated to be poor as compared to 38 % of Coloureds, 5 % of Indians and 1% of Whites (Twyman, 2001). More recent estimates from Statistics South Africa, specifically from the Income and Expenditure Survey of

Households (IES) (2005/06) and the General Household Survey (2006) showed that living conditions and access to services among different population groups were markedly different. Many of the poor were from rural areas, and the incidence of poverty among Black South Africans was massively higher than White South Africans.

These statistics provide an insightful presentation of the huge disparities within South African society where overall quality of life continues to be racialised. In summation then, as argued by Durrheim et al. (2011), these statistics point to the fact that transformation has had mixed effects on the racial legacy of inequality in South Africa. The argument that follows proposes that AA, if used effectively, can in some ways assist in the levelling of society, specifically related to the disparities discussed above.

Charlton and van Niekerk (1994) make an interesting observation in the relationship between AA and democracy. Their argument is, in summary, that AA can be used as a vehicle for democracy. They suggest that just as AA is dependent on a growth economy, so too is democracy threatened by both unemployment and poverty. In other words, in order to address the massive inequalities within employment, as discussed above, the “...conscious levelling of the playing fields needs to occur – through training, equal access to perks and remuneration...” for equality and opportunity to become a reality (p. xxiii). The authors argue that organisations function within the broader socio-political context and that change within an organisation can ultimately lead to change within society at large and that through commitment to AA, organisations could help lay the foundations for democracy in South Africa.

Sachs (1992) also draws on the idea that AA can be used as a tool for democracy. He states that AA is an activity that can eliminate the effects of apartheid in an endeavour to create a society where everyone has an equal chance to “get on in life” (p. 43). Sachs expands this idea by stating that in the broad sense, AA emphasises social, educational and welfare rights. AA, as Sachs understands it, is an extending list of entitlements to nutrition, education, health, employment and shelter. He likens this argument to the notion of equal opportunities where everyone has ‘equal starting-off points’. Indeed, granting Sachs’ conception of AA, it can thus be seen as an important mechanism towards advancing democracy, not just at the workplace, but more importantly, within society at large. Again, Sachs conception of the policy draws on the real value imbedded in the policy.

Human et al. (1999) make a related argument by acknowledging the positive impact that AA can have on the broader development of South Africa as a country. The authors make a very important point in their argument that disparities within society (such as those discussed above), are a result of an intersection between race, gender and class and that, without intervention, things are likely to remain the same. To think that ‘all will be equal’ just because the laws of the country have changed is wishful thinking. Laws and institutions cannot guarantee the effectiveness of anti-apartheid laws (Sachs, 1992) alone, something ‘more’ is needed. As emphasised by Gloppen (1997), inequalities replicate themselves from generation to generation. Thus, without deliberate attempts to address

these issues, arguably through policies of preferential treatment, changing inequality in South Africa will remain a near impossible task.

At this point, the literature has dealt with some of the positive outcomes associated with the implementation of AA. In the next section, I look at the other side of the argument. First however, a few important points need to be raised here. Evidenced by these discussions, AA in South African is positively recognised and has proven successful in some arenas. Much of the literature in this area tends to look at the impact that AA has had in arguably abstract terms. Little attention is paid to how people personally experience the policy and more specifically, how the policy impacts social and psychological life. Secondly, much of the ideas discussed above come from methodological approaches that do not always appreciate the social and cultural context which informs subjective realities. Importantly most studies fall short of examining how people actually feel about the policy, and importantly, whether experience of AA converge with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy. These points are important in that they inform the methodological approach which this study undertakes.

In the next section, I discuss some of the common arguments opposing AA. The other side is quite contradictory, where AA is experienced controversially and sometimes debunked as a system of discrimination.

Arguments Against Affirmative Action

In this section, I deal with some opposition to AA. The focus in section is largely to do with the ‘common’ assumptions and beliefs which oppose AA. As in the previous section, I do not deal with the issue discursively here – my aim rather is to present the thematic patterns of AA available in the literature and later, show how approaching it discursively might enhance what we know about the concept.

AA for many is seen as a system that is discriminatory. Tummala (1999), for example, states that AA is reverse discrimination in that effort to undo previous discrimination perpetuates discrimination even though it is now being practiced on a different group. Furthermore, there are psychological and social arguments that preference would lead to self-denigration and among other things, defensive behaviour among those who are less likely to benefit from AA. In their research, Cohen and Sterba (2003) assert that, as a principal of morality, ‘equals’ should be treated equally and that race preference is morally wrong. In another article, Adam (2000) found that AA in South Africa promotes the stigmatisation of minority groups, particularly Blacks, by implying that they can not compete on an equal basis with other dominant groups. Furthermore, Adam states that, as a result of AA, Blacks and women become victims in that they suffer from lowering self-esteem and as patronised targets of state policy. Human (1993) maintains that AA is a complex and controversial subject which has left many both confused and unsure about what AA is and what it is meant to achieve. AA has been described as political cronyism (Kovacevic, 2007) and as only beneficial to a small elite (Guest, 2004).

Some commentary has been made on the scope of AA. Thomas (2002) comments that Employment Equity legislation in South Africa has been met with criticism from business leaders, particularly from a strategic perspective. Dickman (1998, in Thomas, 2002) argues that the over-regulation of the labour market will result in a decrease in overseas investment and a reduction of entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, the costs to government, as well as to taxpayers, are increased as a result of the administration needed to monitor and enforce legal structures. Gramby-Sobukwe (2002) highlights that given that the majority of the population will be ‘preferred’ and therefore offered preferential treatment, the policy and its undertakings are likely to be a costly affair. Another concern highlights Thomas is that due to a skills shortage, some sectors might make Black skills more expensive thus reducing incentive for expansion and investment. Furthermore, indirect costs may feature as a result of poor hiring decisions in the aim of meeting targets (Gafta, 1998 in Thomas, 2002), and could lead to, among certain groups, a sense of violated entitlement.

Another common view is related to efforts to bring about redress – typically in relation to bringing about real, sustainable change. Arguably, one of the most difficult things to do in post apartheid South Africa is to create a political and social landscape that is completely different to that of the apartheid era. Unfortunately, the legacy of apartheid continues, its devastating effects are still felt today and trying to move beyond it is a long, developmental processes. McFarlin et al. (1999) lend to this idea in their discussion of the impact that European colonisation had on the country, especially in relation to South Africa’s management practices. These practices, they argue, have been dominated and dictated by rationalism, individualism and autocracy, very different to the communal

philosophies held by Eastern and African cultures. In short, they argue, White South African managers pushed a largely third world workforce into accepting first world value systems which essentially, "...ignored local cultural values"(p. 2). In a related argument, a review of Kanya's Adams book *In the Colour of Business: Managing Diversity in South Africa* depicts race-based AA as being complicated by the apartheid legacy. Adam argues that race-based AA may in fact lead to the reinforcing of race and class contradictions. Adam argues also that, many people suspect that AA will be a continuation of discriminatory practice in that it will be used as "...an excuse for the African National Congress (ANC) to institutionalise nepotism and preferential treatment for Blacks..." (Gramby-Sobukwe, 2002, p. 1). Interestingly, Adam notes that AA in South Africa is contradictory as on the one hand, government opposes the policies that characterised apartheid and yet, on the other hand, AA policies rely on racial group policies to rectify the distortions of apartheid.

This idea of democracy as continuing the legacy of apartheid is also noted in a 2006 article published in the Economist. The article draws on the ironies related to the policy of AA by suggesting that some fear that the ANC is perpetuating the very apartheid-era that the country is trying to overcome. Moving beyond apartheid, in its truest sense, is seemingly difficult in South Africa. One way to do so is to move forward, not backwards. Mallet (2000) makes an exemplary remark on this point in reference to Bantu Holimisa's (the leader of the United Democratic Movement) accusations of Black politicians and intellectuals who 'whine' about the country's history of apartheid where there is a "...tendency to shun responsibility and apportion blame for failure to a historical past" (p.

1). DeCapua (2010) lends to the idea related to the perpetuation of the apartheid legacy. He adds that despite the end of apartheid, there is still a large gap in health care spending where the provinces where most of the Whites live, are still receiving the most funding. DeCapua (2010) draws on the work of Dr. David Stuckler who found that in South Africa, regions that were historically disadvantaged are in the same position today. Stuckler adds, "The South African government can act to break what has become a vicious cycle in which the gap between the richest and poorest parts of the country is widening" (p. 1). Stuckler also suggested that current pro-poor policies were seemingly "...insufficient to counteract historical inequalities or to prevent them from worsening further" (p. 1). Similarly, for Burgis (2008) South Africa has failed in overcoming the privations of apartheid and in many sectors, apartheid-era monopolies are still at large. Many other authors have studied South Africa's fragile stability and its difficulty in moving beyond the legacy of apartheid (Klasen, 2002; Nyanto, 2006; Beall, Gelb & Hassim, 2005).

Zelnick (1996 in Sono & Werner, 2004) presents a series of arguments related to why he feels AA is a policy which discriminates. He argues that AA is a racially discriminatory practice against other non-favoured groups and against Whites. He maintains that the policy favours the less qualified and that while it does increase Black enrolment at universities and expand the pool of Black entrepreneurs, it has failed to bring significant employment, educational or income benefits to those who are most in need. AA, Zelnick argues, has taken the focus away from the real problems and real causes of concern for

Black people, that the policy is counter-productive and that it legitimises stigmas and racial stereotypes (Zelnick, 1996 in Sono & Werner, 2004).

A lot of criticism that has been levelled against AA suggests that little change has occurred. In an aptly titled chapter of their book, *The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same*, Charlton and van Niekerk (2004) argue that throughout the ages, and since the advent of AA, there have always been problems. The authors uncover the historic failures of AA programmes, the tendency to introduce quick-fix changes and the tendency to ignore the real attitudes that are embedded in inequality. It is these issues, and others, that contribute to ‘things staying the same’. Related to this argument, Kenny (1995), argues that racism in South Africa is still rampant and that racism comes in the form of AA because “South Africa is now being governed in the same bad way that it was under White rule” (p. 1). Kenny has, in a series of papers, made many arguments against AA, particularly as it relates to the perpetuation of discriminatory practices. In an article titled *Majority Misrule*, Kenny (2004) comments that the “...hopes in the dying days of apartheid that soon at last we would judge a man on his worth and not his race have been dashed completely. We are now forced by law, under pain of huge penalties, to judge men by their skin colour” (p. 1). Kenny (2004, 2001) argues that there is an alarming continuity between the apartheid’s National Party (NP) and the ANC where both parties displayed strong socialist instincts before coming into power but, once in power, displayed a corporatist or fascist approach. Further, he adds, both parties believe in an all powerful state which must control all aspects of life and both are “obsessed with race, their all-consuming ideology” (p. 1). His argument comes in light of the country’s preferential policies where employers are compelled to state the race of their employees

and to submit a plan that indicates how organisational racial proportions will change. Kenny also challenges the government's BEE policies for producing "...an elite of Black frontiers, who drive Mercedes and live in mansions, who become very rich not by producing wealth but by bestowing political patronage" (p. 1).

Another controversy rests on the argument that things have not changed much because democratic South Africa fails to address the needs of the masses. Instead, it has created a new small Black elite which seem to take the biggest piece of the economic redistribution cake, ultimately resulting in massive inequalities among the rich and the poor (Commeey, 2007; Mbeki, 2008; Nyanto, 2006; Guest, 2004, Vorster, 2005). In a related argument, Kovacevic (2007) presents some compelling arguments related to the much criticised BEE policy which, in her opinion, functions in perpetuating a small Black elite, leaving the masses unattended to. Kovacevic extends her argument by drawing on the fact that in 2003, 60% of empowerment deals (amounting to R25.3 billion) went to companies of only two Black businessmen. Guest (2004) adds to this argument in his comment that Black people who have been empowered in South Africa have largely been senior members of the ANC. He adds that the poor have grown poorer and that approximately half of all Black people in South Africa are jobless. He makes an interesting argument against AA in that redistribution has shifted not from the rich to the poor, as in the traditional sense, but unconventionally from White to Black. Guest argues that perhaps one of the most sinister results of South Africa's racial laws is the masking of political cronyism where those who have made fortunes through political connections actually believe that they are assisting in de-racialising the economy.

From an economic point, little has changed and where change has occurred, it is generally experienced by a small elite. For example, Commey (2007) argues that while South Africa in 2006 was listed in the top three countries that produced dollar millionaires, its unemployment figures stood at a shocking 39%. Half of the country's Black population still live below the international poverty level, and the proportion of the Black poor has risen from 50.3% in 1996 to 62.4% in 2002 (Commey, 2007). Only 5% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) is owned by the 80% Black population and that only 27% of Blacks were in top management positions (Commey, 2007). As discussed above, many opponents to the policy contest that AA has brought on little significant change and that the employment picture in South Africa remains bleak. Presented below are tables with information related to employment in South Africa.

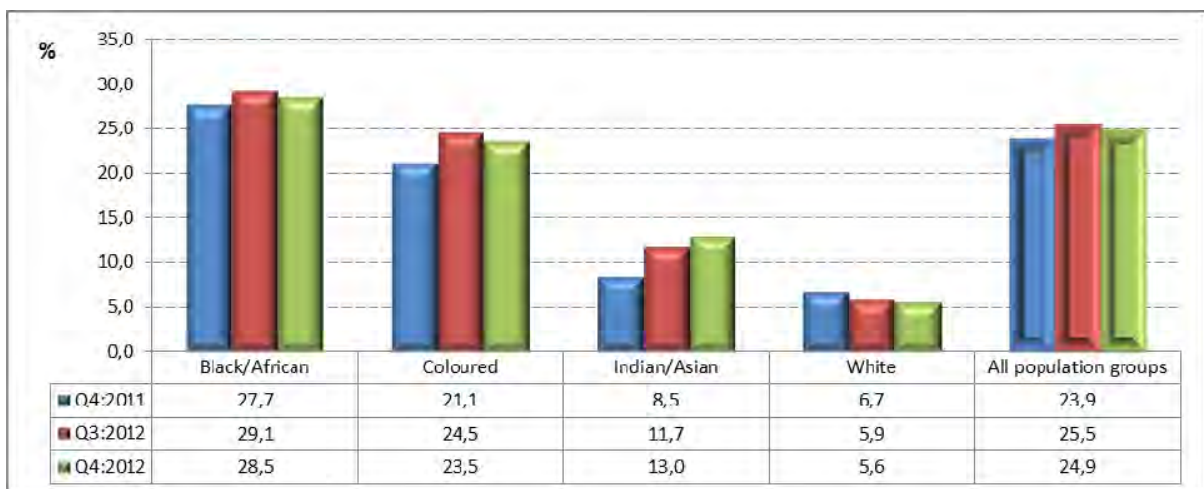


Figure 1. Unemployment rate by population group. Quarterly Labour Force Survey – Quarter 4, 2012. Statistics South Africa.

As indicated in Figure 1 above, unemployment is the highest among Black Africans. This has increased slightly from Quarter 2 2011 (27.7 %) to 28.5 % in Quarter 4, 2012. White

South Africans display the lowest unemployment rates over the same period with a decrease in unemployment from 6.7 % in Quarter 4 2011 to 5.6 % in Quarter 4 2012. The year-on-year comparisons show an increase in unemployment among Black Africans, Coloured and Indian/Asian population groups, while it showed a decrease among the white population group.

Thus, despite 19 years of democracy, little has changed in relation to employment prospects for Black South Africans, despite legislative efforts, most notably in the form of employment equity (through measures like AA), to address workplace inequalities. One must therefore question the extent to which South Africa has managed to, as expressed in the Employment Equity Act, achieve a diverse workforce which represents our people. Another key concern surrounding the efficacy of AA initiatives is the extent to which, from a managerial and skilled perspective, Black South Africans are provided opportunities to progress up the corporate ladder. Many authors have commented on this (Herdhold & Marx, 1999; Mittner, 1998; Nottage, 2003; Commey, 2007; Mbeki, 2008). The next table is adapted from employment equity statistical trends for large organisations collected and processed by the Department of Labour (2005). This is the most recent employment equity data currently available from the Department of Labour.

Table 1

Occupational levels for 2011 - 2012 (%), gender and population group

Group	Male				Female			
	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Black	Coloured	Indian	White
Top Management	13	3.3	5.9	55.2	5.5	1.5	1.6	10.2
Senior Management	14.5	4.6	6.8	43.9	7.3	2.4	2.8	15.2
Skilled	29.9	5.9	3.4	13.3	27.1	5.6	2.8	10.7
Unskilled	52.8	5.2	0.7	0.7	31.3	5.2	0.4	0.3

* Summarised from the 2011 – 2012 Commission for Employment Equity Report

As indicated in Table 1, above, it is clear that White employees (both male and female) accounted for the largest proportion of top management (male = 55.2% and female = 10.2%) and senior management (male = 43.9% and female = 15.2%) positions in 2011 – 2012 period. A similar trend is noted for skilled labour. Black employees (both males and females) comprised the largest proportion of unskilled labour (male = 52.8% and female = 31.3%). Again, the following data begs the question of whether AA practices, particularly from the perspective of Black advancement, are meeting its targets. Evidence, as illustrated, suggests not. The data presented in Figure 1 and Table 1 support the arguments, discussed above. Indeed, although progress in the development of Black South Africans, especially as it relates to AA, is being made; the rate at which change is taking place is far too slow at best, and completely unimpressive, at the worst suggesting that ‘not much has changed’. This, among other reasons is perhaps why people perceive AA negatively, and at times, fear the policy.

Visagie (1997) argues that democracy has evoked both fears and hope for South Africans particularly as they relate to the shape that the new South Africa will take. He argues that managing change will require the changing of attitudes and behaviours. Sewati (1998) states that Whites see AA as the new policy of reverse discrimination and coin slogans such as “the White male is an endangered species”. Mtume (1998) writes that the realities of transformation are becoming more apparent where Whites are concerned about the impact that AA will have and where Blacks still see Whites as enjoying the ‘fruits of apartheid’. These contradictories in how people perceive AA is an age old debate – and is likely to remain one.

Adam (2002) provides a valuable contribution by stating that AA can in fact stigmatise beneficiaries of preferential policies by implying that, “they simply cannot compete on an equal basis with dominant groups, especially Asians and Whites. Moreover, the shadow cast by preferential treatment is feared to be pervasive, hovering over Blacks who have attained positions without the aid of affirmative action...” (p. 1). Adam notes that beneficiaries of AA may end up questioning their self-worth and may wonder whether it was their own merit that contributed to their success or whether they were successful as a result of their race or sex. Adam states that, while there is no research that has been done on the psychological impact of AA appointees, she believes that it is women and Blacks who suffer the most, as a result of low self-esteem and as a result of being ‘patronised targets of state largesse’.

Chen and Kleiner (1996) ask an important question about *who the real victim is* when it comes to AA. The authors present an interesting argument that suggests that minority (or

as in the case of South Africa, majority) groups, the actual beneficiaries of AA, are actually the victims. They expand this argument by posing another important question: *Does affirmative action protect minorities or does it deny or doubt minorities' true abilities?* The argument here is that if a minority is hired because an employer picked the most qualified application, and not as a result of AA, many minorities feel that they have to continuously prove their worth to others in an attempt to show that they are indeed capable. Furthermore, minorities are perpetually reminded of their differences from family, friends, and from preferential policy. Adding to this, Chen and Kleiner (1996) state that as a second source of discrimination, minorities have to deal with comments, rumours and gossip from non-minority peers. For example, “we need a Black in our department”. As a result, minorities are losing the confidence they once had in themselves. On the other hand however, the authors state that White males also face discrimination and constantly think that they are being robbed by minorities. The result, they argue, is intensified inter-group resentment between AA beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Chen and Kleiner (1996, p. 3) provide a suitable answer to their question – “Everybody is the victim of discrimination”.

In South Africa's case, it is argued that perceptions of AA are changing very slowly. There is still a large disparity in perceptions of AA among the race groups. This point indicates that, despite many years into its implementation; AA is still seen as a threat to many and as a policy which is unfavorable to non-intended beneficiaries. Related to this argument, Roberts et al. (2010) examined the reactions of South Africans to AA, the factors that influence their perceptions and whether or not their perceptions have change over the years. As a rationale to their study, the authors write that nearly 12 years since

the Act was implemented, there is still an element of disappointment, disillusion and frustration on the issue of transformation. Another concern for the authors was that AA is seemingly only benefiting middle class South Africans and certain elite classes, leaving the masses still vulnerable. Data for a survey conducted was sourced from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), a survey which is conducted annually by the HSRC since 2003. The survey comprises nationally representative probability samples of adults in South Africa (ages 16 years and older) who live in private households. The sample sizes for each round of the survey were: 2003 included 4980 participants; 2004 (5583); 2005 (2884); 2006 (2939); 2007 (3164); 2008 (3321) and 2009 (3305) participants. Table 2 below highlights the main findings of the study.

Table 2

Percentage supporting different forms of Affirmative Action (2003 – 2009)

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
“There should be preferential hiring and promotion of Black South African in employment”							
Black	79	80	73	76	78	76	76
Coloured	24	25	21	18	34	44	26
Indian	31	25	16	26	27	36	21
White	15	13	13	16	19	18	22

* Adapted from HSCR Review Volume 8 (3), 2010, p.1.

Table 2 shows that the evaluation of AA was significantly more positive among AA beneficiaries than those who are not intended beneficiaries of the policy. As a result, Black participants held the highest support of race-based AA. Overall, Black respondents tended to support race-based AA up to four-six times more than that of White participants

across the period 2003 - 2009. The authors suggest an element of self-interest which can be a reason for more positive evaluations among designated beneficiary groups. Ultimately, the study succeeds in illustrating the massive polarity in the perceptions of AA among the different race groups.

Another controversial argument against AA is argued from the point of ethical and moral principles. The argument here, for opponents to the policy, is that AA is in principle both morally and ethically wrong in that advantaging one group of people ultimately results in the disadvantaging of another group and that AA, as a whole, violates the principle of equality. Previous studies (Hudkins, 2009; Mathews, 2001) have examined AA from a moral and ethical perspective and have presented the challenges associated with AA.

In her Book title *Racism and Justice*, Gertrude Ezorsky presents an insightful chapter on the moral perspective of AA. She examines a range of arguments put forward by opponents of AA, some of which will now be discussed. Ezorsky (1991) draws on a comment made by Steel (1990 in Ezorsky, 1991) which states that, “Suffering can be endured and overcome, it can not be repaid. To think otherwise is to prolong the suffering” (p. 76). In other words, opponents of AA would argue that to compensate those who were previously disadvantaged is actually counterproductive in that others (the previously advantaged) suffer at the expense of those who benefit from AA. Related to this idea of compensation, Ezorsky draws on the work of Blackstone (1997) who, from a moral perspective debunks the system of AA when it comes to affluent Blacks who enjoy the benefits associated with AA. He argues this because he believes firstly, that Blacks who are born into better-off families have not suffered from discrimination and that,

secondly, preference that benefits ‘better-off Blacks’ at the expense of non-Blacks is unjust. Another concern, Ezorsky writes, is related to the violation of rights of employers who, according to AA, are denied the right to hire who they wish to. Furthermore, according to some philosophers, Ezorsky explains, that in as much as the social goal for preferential treatment is attractive and desirable, the moral cost is too high. The result, then, is a burden imposed on Whites who’s rights to equal treatment is violated.

Concluding Remarks on Affirmative Action: Moving beyond the realist perspective

AA, as I have shown, continues to raise questions around equality and fairness within South African organisations. The polarisation of experiences of AA indicates the need to explore the extent to which employees experience AA in the workplace, especially given that South Africa is a relatively new democracy with many of its policies still in its infancy. Noted earlier, this distinction of AA as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is an ongoing debate. The question of whether or not to adopt AA initiatives is the wrong question to ask. The implementation of AA policy and practice is a legislative certainty in South African organisations; it is not up for negotiation or debate. The question however remains on how best to manage it in a way that is meaningful and effective. AA is indeed a complex and intricate area which poses a real threat for many South Africans. At the same time, for others, AA is seen as a policy which rightfully promotes equality and racial integration. As a result, the workplace runs the risk of becoming a hostile environment where employees express concerns of unfairness. Interestingly then, and contrary to its intention, AA might in itself become part of a system which may increase racial tension and demote integration.

The polarity of experiences related to AA as a zero-sum game is arguably unavoidable within workplace talk. *How* we understand the factors that contribute to the ways in which employees perceive AA may well contribute to how we manage and intervene in these debates. The *how* part of approaching this problem area is critically important.

To restate, this study had two aims. The first aim was to critically analyse the discourses around AA produced by the study's participants. The second aim was to explore the ways in which both historically advantaged and disadvantaged participants construct the concept of AA. As a starting point to achieving these aims the sections above have presented the factions in the AA debate. Largely, these factions were presented as either supporting or opposing AA, for various reasons. In short, arguments supporting AA were centered on moral obligation, the promotion of democracy and as a mechanism to advance the economy. Arguments opposing the policy featured strategic concerns, the perpetuation of discrimination and among other things, the inability of the current government to effect sustainable change. Having outlined these two factions to AA, I wish to emphasise where my study fits into these debates, and importantly, how it achieves the aforementioned aims. Put simply, the current study moves away from a quantitative, realist approach to studying AA. The arguments that follow offer some reasons for this move. It is important to note that the following section draws on the discursive paradigm, without having first conceptualised social constructionism, and in particular, discursive psychology. The positioning of these arguments here is merely to

illustrate an alternative, and in this case, the preferred approach to exploring AA. The social constructionist approach is fully dealt with in the next chapter.

At this point, I present a few reasons for approaching AA discursively:

Firstly, as noted earlier, much of the research on AA stems from the quantitative, realist perspective. As such, it does little to study the embodied nature of, for example, inequality. It does not provide the kind of detailed qualitative analysis needed to understand the everyday institutional reproduction of racial difference and discrimination (Augustinos & Every, 2007). Rather, much of the available research on AA only provides a technical account of the actual psychological states, processes and entities that underpin action (Potter, 2005). Noted earlier, realist/traditional approaches seek to understand ‘things’ in the absence of the context in which they are embedded within. This study’s interest however, is to consider participants’ practical and situated constructions, terms, orientations and displays (Potter, 2005) of AA. It is particularly interested in viewing language as a dynamic form of social practice which gives expression to subjective psychological realities.

Secondly, my interest in the discursive nature of prejudice is also important because it expands what we currently know about AA. Most studies in this area consider AA in polarised terms – people either support or reject AA in the abstract (Reyna et al., 2005). My interest is in relation to what people think about the policy conceptually as opposed to exclusively looking at their more practical experience of AA. In other words, my study attempts to contribute new knowledge, from the South African context, regarding the

value, or lack thereof, associated with the principles embedded in AA policies. Furthermore most studies fall short of examining how people actually feel about the policy, and importantly, whether experience of AA converge with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy.

Having contextualised AA and outlined some of the challenges of traditional ways of approaching AA research, I now look at AA from the discursive perspective. I cover discursive psychology fully in Chapter Three from a theoretical perspective. In this section, I look at some studies which have adopted this perspective. It is important to note that much of the knowledge from the discursive tradition in the area of AA seems to draw from related studies of race and race relations with fewer studies looking at AA specifically (Augustinos & Every, 2007; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005; van Dijk, 1997; Barker, 1981). The following section now addresses AA from the discursive perspective. My aim here is largely to illustrate the ways in which historic privilege and unequal power relations continue to manifest in South African society through everyday language use.

2.8 Discursive studies and AA

Noted above, there has been an increase in literature on the contemporary language of race and prejudice (Augustinos, 2007). For example, in her research on discourse analysis as social construction, Ainsworth (2000) concludes that the integrated use of discourse analytic methods can lead to more complex understandings of both the processes related to social construction as well as its implications. Other examples include studies done by Ravishi and Phillips (1998), Fetzer (2008) and, among others, Belin (2008). However,

there have been only a few previous studies specifically on AA that have been undertaken in the discursive tradition both internationally and in South Africa (for example, Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1992; Augustinos et al., 2005; Franchi, 2002). Most research focuses on race and race relations, prejudice and among other things, modern racism – all largely focused on identifying the pervasive repertoires and devices that are used by people to justify social inequalities. Apart from the content however, these related studies are particularly useful in that they illustrate how languages use performs social actions which construct varying versions of the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Some studies are highlighted below.

Wetherell, Stiven and Potter's (1987) study which focused on university student's talk related to employment opportunity and gender is one of the earlier, and very influential, studies within the discursive paradigm. In their study, the authors were interested in exploring student views of the status of employment opportunities for women. They were specifically interested in studying the ideologies surrounding the reproduction of gender inequality. The study revealed contradictory repertoires at play which functioned in justifying existing gender inequalities in both the work and home sphere. In particular findings illustrated a conflict between students on the one hand supporting equal opportunities and on the other hand, emphasising the factors supposedly limiting those opportunities. These limiting factors were presented as practical constraints – for example – participants drew comments about how women bearing children and the subsequent rearing of children, posed challenges to their progression. Importantly Wetherell et al. (1987) demonstrated how this type of talk constructed 'unequal egalitarianism' which

both appreciates equality and at the same time justifies the limitations in not achieving it. Social change, pertaining specifically to the women's ability to progress, was seen as the responsibility of the women and in her ability to prove her equivalence.

Drawing on Potter and Wetherell's very influential study in 1987, we once again note contradictory repertoires at play. The authors found that Pakeha (White New Zealanders) often legitimised their opposition to affirmative action measures for the Maori (Native New Zealanders) by drawing on discourses of meritocracy and 'togetherness'. The meritocratic discourse, argued the authors, functioned in portraying AA as problematic in that it defied the principles of meritocracy where individuals should be rewarded based on merit. Secondly, the togetherness discourse functioned in portraying AA as destructive in that preferential treatment could result in disharmony among those who benefit and those who do not benefit from preferential treatment. On the whole, the study showed how participants constructed AA as problematic because it did not adhere to the principles of justice and fairness. Later in 1992, the authors went on to study an analysis of 'race', again with New Zealanders. Expanding on their earlier study, the authors found that Pakeha participants drew on a range of egalitarian principles (such as fairness and freedom) in an attempt to justify existing unequal social relations among the two groups. The authors highlight that these discourses were presented as being rhetorically self-sufficient. For example, some statements made were "everybody should be treated equally", and "everyone can succeed if they try hard enough" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 177).

In a study of a similar nature, Augustinos et al. (2005) conducted a study among Australian undergraduate students in an attempt to study race relations in Australia. Their analysis built on previous studies in the discursive tradition on AA with a particular interest in illustrating how participants drew on resources to construct AA as largely problematic. In doing so, their research presented a discursive analysis of conversations produced from focus groups discussions on race, disadvantage and AA. The findings of the study suggest that opposition to AA tended to be justified by liberal –egalitarian principles and self-sufficient arguments such as everyone should be treated equally. Furthermore, the authors also found a meritocratic discourse at play which identified merit as being most important regarding entry into tertiary education. The study also showed how participants’ talk was constructed and put together in a manner that ‘presented’ speakers as fair and reasonable. The authors discuss how contradictory discourses are reflective of competing values and how the language of the ‘new racism’ is framed by ideological dilemmas and ambivalence (Augustinos et al., 2005).

In a case study of symbolic racism, Franchi (2003) critically analyses the discourses produced by 33 employees in a training workshop which was designed to address issues of racialised conflict and to promote intercultural sensitivity. The findings revealed that race continues to feature in the ways to process information about the ‘self’ and ‘other’. The study also suggested that while South Africans have changed their language on race, their assumptions about ‘racial symmetry’ still feature, albeit in more subtle forms. Furthermore, the findings highlight that participants who opposed AA generally constructed AA beneficiaries as ‘inferior’ in a way that functioned to legitimate the

maintenance of White participants' status and power. Franchi also found the use of temporal markers such as 'now' and 'in the older days' functioned in delegitimising AA practices which, by default, emphasised the 'legitimacy' of the past. In both instances, AA is constructed as troublesome which inadvertently presented the historic status quo as justifiable.

Although all the studies presented in this section do not directly deal with AA per se, they are useful in showing how language can be used in producing and sustaining systems of historic privilege, social inequality and among other things, gender inequality. Indeed, attitudes towards AA are not unrelated to the context in which they occur. In other words, AA attitudes do not exist in a social vacuum rather, "they tend to reflect, and be affected by, the norms and values of both the broader society and the organisational settings in which they occur" (Franchi, 2003, p. 160). South Africa then, given its post-apartheid context very much contributes to the ways in which people talk about, and feel about, AA. Everyday language practices functions is producing and reproducing relations of power and exploitation (Augustinos et al., 2005; Franchi, 2003; Duncan, 2001). Essentially, the discourses constructed in talk from the above discussed studies show in many ways that AA continues to be constructed 'problematically' by participants – particularly those who do not benefit from policies of preferential treatment.

This section has drawn from the previous arguments made regarding the factions in the AA debate. Against this discussion, I made the argument that the way in which traditional psychology approaches AA is realist in its orientation, and thus inappropriate. I argued

for a kind of detailed, qualitative approach to studying the everyday use of language as a dynamic form of social practice which gives expression to subjective psychological realities. In the previous section, I provided a synopsis of research undertaken in the discursive tradition, some of which pertains directly to AA, and others with related subject matter. My overall aim in the presentation of these studies was to showcase the ways in which historic privilege and unequal power relations continue to manifest in South African society through everyday language use. Furthermore, these studies show that the discursive tradition is useful to gauge what people think about the policy conceptually as opposed to exclusively looking at their more practical experience of AA. I use this line of thinking to locate my study, particularly with the intension of showing how the current study can contribute new knowledge from the South African context, regarding the value associated with the principles embedded in AA policies. Importantly, the discursive orientation also allows for an evaluation of whether the experience of AA converges with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy. The discursive tradition is discussed fully in the next chapter.

2.9 Conclusion to the Literature Review

In the first section, AA was defined as a concept with particular emphasis on the principles embodied in AA practices. AA was also shown to be a multifaceted concept which was defined in many ways, from numerous viewpoints and with varying focal points. The different meanings attached to the concept were also considered. The beginnings of AA were also discussed in this chapter. Specifically, I discussed how AA is seen as one of the great innovations of social policy where the United States was the prime mover for the policy, during the second half of the twentieth century.

I also presented a comprehensive review of South African history from segregation and early colonisation in the 1700's to its eventual democracy in 1994. Discussing South Africa's political history provided a backdrop for movement towards creating equal opportunities and early Black advancement. AA as a measure of redress was discussed from a legislative perspective. In doing so, the South African Constitution and the Employment Equity Act were discussed. This section reiterated the importance of employment equity, notably through AA measures, in creating opportunities for historically disadvantaged people in order to curtail the social reproduction of existing power relations in society.

The literature review also included a review of some international perspectives of AA. Three country's experiences of AA were selected and discussed (Sri Lanka, Malaysia and India) either because of its relevance to the South African experience or because of the lessons that could be drawn. Importantly, this section showed the complex and composite nature of AA which points to the fact that AA is 'troublesome' everywhere and is not a distinctly South African issue. The next section that was discussed was based on the hypothesis that although AA is theoretically sound, in practice it is experienced controversially where the policy is either embraced enthusiastically as a policy of reform or debunked as a system of discrimination. Both sides of this argument were discussed in detail, each of which drew on a range of studies, practical concerns and ideological perspectives. In concluding this section, I illustrated that AA continues to raise questions around equality and fairness within South Africa. AA was described as a complex and

intricate area which poses a real threat for many South Africans. In the next section, I presented some studies on AA in particular, and in related areas, within the discursive tradition. I used this section to highlight the merits of the discursive tradition as well as to situate my study within existing AA research.

The next chapter deals with the study's theoretical framework.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier, this study adopts a social constructionist orientation, and specifically, from within the discursive psychology orientation. In this chapter I highlight some important points in an attempt to orientate the reader to the discursive tradition adopted. This first part of this chapter begins with an introduction to social constructionism specifically in relation to the early beginnings of social constructionism. Social constructionism is conceptualised here by specifically drawing on some of the dominant writers in the field. The chapter also emphasises some of the fundamental concepts that are important to this orientation, specifically on language and its role in social action and social construction.

The assumptions of social constructionism and the emphasis which the approach places on language, is also presented. Of importance, I critically explore the ways in which we view our world and the ways in which the ‘truths’ we assign to it are circulated within discourse. Thus, following a discussion of social constructionism, the chapter then moves on to broadly conceptualise discourse - an excellent tool with which to study the pervasive, recurring patterns of talk which function in rationalising historic privilege and the reproduction of social inequality. I discuss briefly the different discourse analytic approaches and then, in detail, the specific approach that I adopt in this study – Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) discursive psychology. Throughout this review, I illustratively elaborate on concepts by drawing on AA related studies within the discursive tradition.

3.2 From realism to social constructionism

In the sections to follow, a ‘critique’ is levelled on mainstream psychology and the ‘traditional’, positivist methods employed in doing research. Some important points need to be raised here.

First, the reason behind ‘critiquing’ mainstream psychology is show an appreciation for an alternative approach to research. The argument here is not to disqualify mainstream psychology but rather to emphasise the benefits associated interpretive research, particularly within the social sciences. The aim here is to go beyond the assumption that everyone has an ‘essential’ core. It is to offer an appreciation of subjectivity and context.

Secondly, the criticisms levelled in this section do not suggest that mainstream psychology is no longer needed but rather that there is limited room for quantitative research for analyses requiring rich, detailed information. Mainstream psychology remains essential to experimental research and hypothesis testing where there is a belief that what is studied consists of a stable, unchanging external environment (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2006). In such cases, the researcher can adopt “an objective and detached epistemological stance towards that reality, and can employ a methodology that relies on control and manipulation of reality” (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2006). However, from an ontological perspective, if internal reality is viewed as subjective and socially constructed then a researcher, as in the case of the current study, must consider paradigms which adopt intersubjective or interactional epistemological stances towards reality.

In the next section then, and against this backdrop, attention is turned to the move from realism to social constructionism.

Social constructionism was first made popular in 1966 with Peter. L. Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Berger and Luckmann, both involved in the discipline of sociology argued that everything we know, including taken-for-granted knowledge and common sense are created and sustained through social practices and social interaction. These ideas put forward by Berger and Luckmann were at the time very different to the claims of mainstream psychology which largely saw behaviour as being influenced by an objective truth and internal mental states (Parker, 1990). Mainstream psychology, being essentialist and realist in nature, proclaimed the existence of an 'essential' core within people which can be identified and explained (Gough & McFadden, 2001). It accepts that people have an essential, inherent, identifiable nature.

In one of the earlier challenges to this view, Gergen's 1973 article, *Social Psychology as History*, began to challenge the view that social psychology was purely scientific in nature. Gergen articulated this concern by suggesting that the theories of social psychology were products of historical and cultural circumstances and should therefore also be viewed critically (Gergen, 1973). Social constructionism challenged this view by presenting itself as *anti-essentialist* in rejecting the view that people have an essential, inherent, identifiable nature (Burr, 2003; Alvesson, 2002; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). By the 1980's, social constructionism had a firm footing within critical psychological

thought – it became known largely as a theoretical orientation which underpinned approaches that began offering radical and critical alternatives to social psychology and other disciplines in the social sciences (Burr, 1995). Since then, there have been many who have contributed to the field of social constructionism (Gergen, 1985, Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Alvesson, 2002; Gough & Mcfadden, 2001; Harre,1993; Nightingale & Cromby,1999; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1987; Parker, 2002; Luckmann & Berger,1966; Burr, 1995, 2003). Both within and outside the field of psychology, the social constructionist orientation became known as a multidisciplinary approach in that it was influenced by intellectuals such as Foucault and Derrida and had its own intellectual roots within social psychology.

In contrast to realist assumptions, the social constructionist orientation was concerned with the nature of knowledge, how knowledge is acquired and about how knowledge is connected to notions of what we consider to be real and true. Being based on relativism, social constructionism began challenging established notions of truth - it rejected the idea that an external world can exist independently of the way in which we represent it (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). In other words, social constructionism argues that we do not have any access to an objective reality but that in trying to describe reality, we actually create a particular version of it (Alvesson, 2005). Reality then is filtered through the language that is used and the subsequent perspective that is adopted (Alvesson, 2005).

Language, and the way we use it, is a most significant feature of social constructionism. Virtually all social constructionists agree on the importance of language in social

constructions (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Parker, 1992; Alvesson, 2002; Billig, 2001). Put simply, social constructionism advocates that when we use language, or *discourses*, we actually create the world in which we live (Burr, 1995), and “that the very nature of ourselves as people, our thoughts, feelings and experiences, are all the result of language” (p. 33). Language is much more than a form of communication; it is a system of representation (Hall, 2001). Given this importance of language, I attempt to identify, in the following paragraphs, how language contributes to our social constructions of the world.

Burr (1995) explains that a realist view would suggest that language is a ‘bag of labels’ which we choose from when we want to describe something. In other words, people use language (labels) to express something either inside them (for example, a feeling or an emotion) or something in the world (for example, a book or a tree). This contradicts the social constructionist view which sees the person as being constructed through language. In other words, language itself provides a way of structuring experiences of ourselves and the world and as such, we should be careful to view language as nothing more than, “a clear, pure medium through which our thoughts and feelings can be made available to others...” (Burr, 1995, p. 34). Language is not something that is passive. In contrast, it is “the substance of social action” (Sherrard, 1991, p. 171). Language then exists (in the form of words, labels, categories etc.) and people subscribe, and relate to, language (by structuring their understandings according to these words, labels and/or categories) which then determines their experiences (one’s view of reality).

Apart from the interpersonal exchange that occurs in language use, social constructionism also emphasizes context because “the terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). In other words, the context in which ‘talk’ occurs is important because words are culturally, historically and ideologically based (Parker, 1992). Put simply, the way in which we understand the world can not be divorced from the context in which words are used. For example, Pincus (2003) speaks about the ways in which ‘reverse discrimination’ might be understood by White South Africans. He argues that the concept is more than just a description but rather, is “a socially constructed, ideological package that contains an entire set of conservative attitudes about the state of race and gender relations today” (p. 37). In other words, the way in which the concept is understood is in relation to history, for example – historic privilege. Another example is to draw on the work of Augustinos et al. (2005). The authors found that the non indigenous participants in their study, when talking about AA, drew on the principles of meritocracy, equality and individualism which are ultimately based on western liberal thinking– again, indicating how ‘understanding’ is located within cultural, historic and ideological contexts. Related to language and context discussed above, social constructionism has at its core a set of assumptions that are, as Burr (1995, p. 2) states, “things you would absolutely have to believe in order to be a social constructionist”. I discuss these assumptions briefly.

The first assumption of social constructionism is its *critical approach towards taken-for-granted knowledge*. Social constructionism stands in direct opposition to the traditional

view that “the nature of the world can be revealed by observation, and that what exists is what we perceive to exist” (Burr, 2001, p. 3). In contrast, social constructionism maintains that our understandings of the world and that everything we see as taken-for-granted and/or fixed is in fact socially derived and socially maintained. Further, social constructionism warns that we become cautious of the assumptions about the world because “the categories that we as human beings apprehend of the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions” (p. 3). For example, just because people are placed in different race groups (Black, Indian, Coloured, White) does not mean that there is any real fundamental difference between them and that it is the division itself (that is, the ‘labels’ of Black, Indian, Coloured, White) that creates the difference.

Secondly, since people are historical and cultural beings, the ways in which people understand and represent the world, are *historically and culturally specific*. Burr highlights that the categories and concepts we use are also therefore historically and culturally specific. Our understandings of the world and the ‘things’ in the world depend on *where* (culturally) and *when* (historically) in the world one lives. For example, Allport (1924, in Burr, 1995) explains how racial disharmony was seen as being a result of the basic inferiority of Black people’s personality. Indeed, in today’s climate, this would be seen as outwardly racist yet at the time, this idea was seen as plausible, especially in relation to ideas of White supremacy and Black inferiority.

The third assumption is that *knowledge is sustained by social processes*. This social process occurs when we interact socially by talking and writing amongst ourselves and it

is through this process that we construct reality. Thus unlike in traditional science, knowledge and meaning-making is not found ‘within’ a person (internal states) but rather, it is found in an interaction ‘between’ people (Burr, 1995; Billig, 2001).

Lastly, a fourth assumption is that *knowledge and social action go together*. Language is not something that is passive. In contrast, it is “the substance of social action” (Sherrard, 1991, p. 171). Burr draws on the Temperance Movement to illustrate this point. Before the Temperance Movement drunks were seen as completely responsible for their behaviour and were blameworthy (social construction) and as a result, a typical response would be, for example imprisonment (social action). However, in today’s society, alcoholics are not seen as completely responsible for their actions as they are victims of an illness/drug addiction (social construction) and a typical response here would be medical assistance and, for example, psychological treatment (social action).

To summarise, I have at this point conceptualised social constructionism, its focus on both language and context as well as the key assumptions of the approach. To restate, the current study is interested in exploring employees’ social constructions of AA. A large part of this interest, as noted above, stems from the reasoning that AA, as a critical subject matter, provides a platform to critically engage with the embodied nature of prejudice that might stem from everyday practices. Social constructionism, with its emphasis on cultural and historical specificity proves ideal for this task.

To summarise, social constructionism can be understood as “a broad perspective which locates meaning within social/linguistic processes, emphasises a critique of ‘common sense’ and highlights the plurality of constructions or interpretations” (Gough & McFadden, 2001, p. 231). It is “a theoretical orientation which to a greater or lesser extent underpins all these newer approaches ... which are currently offering radical and critical alternatives in psychology and social psychology...” (Burr, 1995, p. 1). There are many different approaches to studying social phenomena within the social constructionist orientation. Mentioned earlier, the specific approach which I adopt is Potter and Wetherell’s discursive psychology – an approach which falls under the social constructionist orientation. I discuss this approach in the next section of this chapter.

3.3 Conceptualising discourse

The link between social constructionism, discussed in the preceding sections, and discursive research is clear (Gergen, 1994; Harre & Gillet, 1994; Burr, 1995). Both argue for the social construction of attitudes, social groups and identities and at the same time, both approaches reject the assumption that human behaviour and attitudes can be understood through cognitive processes (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Furthermore, both social constructionists and discourse analysts seek to understand psychological processes as social activities. Both approaches view attitudes as products of social interaction as opposed to stable dispositions (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Many authors have supported the idea that the assumptions of social constructionism are aligned to discourse analytic thought through the view that language and social action go together (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1987; Parker, 2002). Discussed earlier, this part of the chapter

focuses on Potter and Wetherell's discursive psychology approach. Firstly however, I discuss discourse as a concept and then discursive psychology as a method of inquiry.

So far, the use of the word 'discourse' in this chapter has been used by and large to refer to talk-in-interaction. However, the word discourse can vary considerably among the different approaches to discourse analysis, for example, between Faucauldian discourse analysis and discursive psychology. What is perhaps most notable within Faucauldian discourse analysis is the emphasis on power relationships and the relationship between power and language (Wooffitt, 2005).

Despite the broad similarities between the approaches, for example, the critical stance taken towards traditional psychology (Wooffitt, 2005), there are also significant differences among the various perspectives. Despite the nebulous nature surrounding the term discourse, some consensus does exist. Parker (2002) suggests that discourse comprises the many ways in which "meaning is relayed through culture..." (p. 123) and that the word 'discourse' is used "because our conception of language is much wider than a simple psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic one" (p. 123). Grillo (2005), in his definition, explains discourse as mirroring the social positions which the agent occupies in the social field. Wood and Kroger (2000) use the term discourse simply to imply all spoken and written forms of language as social practice. Put succinctly, Phillips and Jorgensen state that discourse is "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world..." (p. 1). Potter and Wetherell settle on a simple view that discourse covers "all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kind" (1987, p. 7). Discourse, then, can be understood as any naturally occurring interaction talk or text

that people produce in their everyday lives (Edwards, 2005). Discourses produce particular version of events (Burr, 1995), “.... each with a different story to tell about the *object* in question...” (p. 48). I use two examples to illustrate this point. An ‘AA as morally correct’ discourse is thought of as a policy that rightfully provides opportunities to those who were unfairly discriminated against historically. The policy then, from this discourse, may be viewed as beneficial to the country - economically, socially and politically. Within this discourse then, AA is seen as a policy that is morally correct and strategically necessary. Drawing on this discourse, people in their talk may say things like, ‘AA is the right thing to do’, or, ‘if it wasn’t for AA, South Africa would be a cruel, unfair place to live in’. Textually, a magazine supporting such a discourse will present information related to the current success of AA both locally and internationally.

Another very different discourse of the same object (AA) could be constructed to present ‘AA as a reverse discrimination’ discourse. In this discourse, AA may be thought of as being unethical as it favours one group at the expense of other groups. It may also be viewed as discriminatory, unfair and wrong. A newspaper article representing this discourse would, for example, present interview excerpts from a disgruntled White man or by describing how AA has failed in many other countries. This discourse might lead people to say things such, ‘it’s pointless staying in South Africa if you are not Black’, or ‘I had nothing to do personally with apartheid so why should I be victimised?’ The above two examples represent two discourses on one particular object – there are many others that could be constructed on this issue. The point here, as Burr (1995) explains is that many discourses (in the form of what is written, said or otherwise) can surround any one

object and each discourse aims to represent it in a very different way. “Each discourse brings different aspects into focus, raises different issues for consideration, and has different implications for what we should do” (p. 49).

Because discursive psychology (discussed later) is different from other approaches to discourse, the way in which discourse itself is conceptualised is different. There are important, and unique, features to discourse within the discursive psychology tradition (Edwards & Potter, 2001; Potter, 2003).

Firstly, in mainstream psychology, language is presumed to be secondary to our thoughts and intentions (McLaughlin, 2009) – within discursive psychology however, language as discourse is seen as “talk and texts as parts of social practices” (Potter, 1996, p. 105). Discourse then is seen as primary and important in that it brings forth our mental states. Discourse in this sense shifts human thinking from the inner realm of the mind to the public, discursive realm of talk (Edwards, 1997; Gergen, 2003).

Secondly, discourse is contextually bound or as Hepburn and Potter (2003) suggest, discourse is ‘situated’ because it is a function of its positioning and social setting (Edwards & Potter, 2001). A third important feature is that discourse is seen as constructed. In other words, emphasis is placed on how individuals might create versions of reality as opposed to how reality is actually discovered (Bysouth, 2007). Discourse can be constructed in relation to the words, analogies and narratives that are available to us. The focus here is on the constructive nature of descriptions as opposed to any thing that

may exist beyond these descriptions (Edwards, 1997). Furthermore, the constructions of these discourses are tailored to a particular context in a particular stream of talk (Edwards, 2005; Potter & Edwards, 1992). Another feature of discourse is that it is an action medium. When we, for example, through discourse construct something, we are at the same time performing a social action – for example – in doing so, we may be challenging a view point or apportioning blame (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Discourse then, and particularly in the ways in which we deploy it, can function in producing and reproducing relations of power, dominance, and exploitation (Augustinos et al., 2005). And, at the same time, discourses can function to legitimise current social practices (van Dijk, 1993). For example, in their study on gender and employment opportunities, Wetherell, Steven and Potter (1987) found that participant's constructions of a meritocratic discourse actually functioned in justifying existing gender inequalities. In another study, Wetherell and Potter (1989) showed how White New Zealanders, through the construction of a togetherness discourse, justified their opposition to AA. In other words, because of its potential to cause disharmony (contrary to their constructed togetherness discourse), AA was consequently constructed as problematic. Others (for example, Duncan, 2001; Franchi, 2003) similarly illustrate the discursive strategies used to legitimise historic privilege. My point of reference here is to highlight the potential for discourse to function in justifying disadvantage and legitimising existing social relations – thus proving valuable for the purposes of the current study.

At this point I have broadly conceptualised the social constructionist orientation as the theoretical framework for the current study. I have also conceptualised discourse broadly and then specifically in relation to Potter and Wetherell's discursive psychology – the approach to discourse analysis that I adopt. In the next section, I focus on discursive psychology in detail. Firstly however, I discuss some alternate approaches to discourse.

3.4 Discourse as a method of enquiry

The 'turn to language' (Wetherell, 2007) has become increasingly popular especially in the last 30 years. Discursive psychology provides an excellent platform for detailed qualitative research which is interested in studying how discourse is used as a resource in everyday talk to justify, for example, social inequality. A considerable amount of studies have adopted discursive psychology as its method of inquiry particularly around issues of race and racism, disadvantage and discrimination (for example - Franchi, 2005; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2000; Wetherell et al., 1987; van Dijk, 1993; 1997; Augustinos & Every, 2007; Durrheim, Boettiger, Essack, Maarschalk & Ranchod, 2007; Duncan, 2007; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005).

There have however been fewer studies looking at AA directly (Augustinos et al., 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1989, 1992) and even less so in the South African context (Franchi, 2007; Durrheim et al., 2007). In the following paragraphs I detail discursive psychology as a valuable approach to research. Most of the literature presented in this section draws heavily from the work of Edwards and Potter (1992), Potter (2005) and Potter and Wetherell (1987).

Without wanting to gloss over discursive studies, a few general comments can be made. Discursive studies provide an excellent approach to engage in detailed, qualitative research on the reproduction and justification of social inequalities. Discursive studies have significantly contributed to the work on language and discrimination within the field of social psychology – and also in its role of performing social actions such as blaming, justifying and rationalising (Augustinos et al., 2007). Discursive research is valuable in showing how discourse functions to justify personal opinions and criticise counter arguments (Billig, 1996). Importantly, discursive research is interested in how participants express themselves in occasioned instances of talk (Potter, 2003). Such approaches reject the traditional cognitivist paradigm. Discourse itself is seen as the proper topic for research (Wooffit, 2005). Wooffit argues that there is a range of discursive psychological studies to the approach. For example, Ian Parker’s critical discourse analysis, although drawing heavily on theorists like Foucault, Marx and Derrida, is often referred to as a form of discursive psychology (Wooffitt, 2005; Parker, 1997).

Critical discourse analysis sees language as a social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, in Wodak & Meyer, 2001) and considers the context in which language is used as crucial. A major area of interest here is in the relationship between language and power (Parker, 2002; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This approach is largely concerned with how social and political inequalities are reproduced through discourse (Wooffit, 2005). This approach is also interested in linking linguistic features to social, political and economic structures (Wooffit, 2005). Critical discourse analysis is interested in the dynamics of power,

knowledge and ideology and their influence is on discursive processes (Hardy & Phillips, 2002). Critical studies are common in discourse analysis which is, in part, as a result of the “influence of Foucault’s work, which has led to a body of research on the disciplinary effects of discourse and the relationship between power and knowledge” (2002, p. 20). Another key focus area of critical discourse analysis is found in the preference of conducting analysis which is text orientated. Unfortunately, critical discourse analysis generally neglects social psychological aspects – such as the construction of groups and on specific instances of social interaction (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002).

Another approach to discourse is found in Harre’s work – Harre is also associated with the discursive approach in that he emphasises that linguistic discourse is part of an on-going social process (Wooffitt, 2005). Overall Harre’s work is important in that it challenges much of the assumptions of mainstream psychology but because of its use of logical analysis, it is not fully grounded in the discursive perspective (Wooffitt, 2005). Billig’s rhetorical psychological approach is also to some extent steeped in the discursive perspective (for example – he rejects that talk merely expresses inner thoughts).

Discursive psychology however, is unique in the discursive tradition – it is an approach that treats psychology as an object *in and for interaction* (Potter, 2005). Psychology in this context represents a non-cognitive form of social psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). “...psychology is understood as a part of discourse, as a feature of practices in a range of settings” (Potter, 2005, p. 739). Despite discursive psychologists, in the main, agreeing on the essential assumptions of the discursive tradition – as outlined above,

there is some disagreement on how to create a balance between larger patterns of meaning in society; and meaning within specific contexts. As a result, three main ‘strands’ exist within discursive psychology, each with its own ideas on how best to achieve this balance. The first strand, discussed earlier, is the poststructuralist perspective which is built on Foucault’s ideas on discourse, power and the subject (Wooffitt, 2005; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Here, emphasis is placed on people’s understandings of the world as being created and changed in specific discourses. Secondly, the Interactionist perspective is based on conversation analysis and ethnomethodology which considers how social organisation is produced through speech and interaction. Lastly, there is a perspective which combines both the poststructuralist and the Interactionist perspective. Although each of these strands holds their own merit they also have been criticised in some regard. For example, Wetherell (1998, in Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002) suggests that the poststructuralist perspective fails to account for peoples situated language and that conversational analysis, within the second strand, neglects the wider social and ideological consequences of language use (Billig, 1999a, b; Wetherell, 1998; in Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002).

The third approach, however, is very much in line with the work of Potter and Wetherell’s approach to discursive psychology and it is within this ‘strand’ that my study is located. Essentially, Potter and Wetherell’s perspective takes interest in what people do with their talk and on the discursive resources that they use in these practices (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Proving ideal for this study, their perspective considers the role of everyday talk in relation power and social practice (Billig, 1999; Wetherell, 1998).

3.5 Discursive Psychology

Discursive psychology first featured as a challenge to the cognitivist paradigm within social psychology. Social Psychology traditionally sought to explain social action as a consequence of cognitive processes such as thinking, perception and reasoning – a ‘method of thinking’ opposed by discourse analysts (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter & Gergen, 1989; Willig, 1999). As a critique to these assumptions then, discursive psychology arose as an alternative and as a paradigmatic challenge to cognitivism. Discursive psychology is conceptualised as a perspective involving the radical rethinking of concepts and as having a focus on psychological themes. The core idea behind discursive psychology emerged from Potter and Wetherell’s book *Discourse and Social Psychology* which served as a critique of Social Psychology’s emphasis on the cognitivist approach. The term discursive psychology was first used by Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards in 1992 to indicate that discursive psychology was more than a methodological shift – it served in the reconstruction of central topics within psychology such as attribution and memory (Wood & Kroger, 2002), and represented a major shift from studying social action as a consequence of cognitive practices. As it stands, discourse analysis has become one of the most important social constructionist approaches within the field of social psychology (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002) specifically in relation to the unique way in which it views human thinking (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Gergen, 1994). To generalise, discursive psychology has at its core three major areas of interest – the investigation of how psychological categories are used in everyday life, how psychological ‘business’ is managed and a critique of traditional psychological topics (Edwards, 2005). Potter

presents in his article *Discourse & Society* a depiction of discursive psychology themes (Potter, 2005). In this article, Potter describes discursive psychology as “... analytically focused on the way psychological phenomena are practical, accountable, situated, embodied and displayed” (p. 739).

By *practical*, the focus is on exploring what people do in their everyday lives as opposed to the more “abstract and esoteric formulations that are the domain of studies of such things as cognition, memory and perceptions” (Bysouth, 2007, p. 119) – in other words, the emphasis here is a highly empirical approach to study the psychological in its naturally occurring psychological activities (Bysouth, 2007).

Regarding *accountability*, Potter (2005) suggests that a large part of the way psychology is woven in everyday practice is through the focus on accountability. Importantly, Potter poses the question of how people are constructed as sites of responsibility. Put simply, regarding accountability, Durrheim et al. (2011) suggests that every occasion for reciting a discourse is also an occasion for potential shame – the context of the discourse deployed shapes the discourse itself which may take on the character of the context. Illustrating this concept, he writes how a simple ‘good morning’ may be seen as outwardly disrespectful in the aftermath of a tragedy yet in a different context – it may take on a different meaning. In all these uses, the user is accountable – the speaker “may need to explain why they used that expression...” (p. 103).

The *situated* association with discursive psychology comes primarily from its most defining feature – that is, that which distinguishes it from other discourse analytic

approaches (Bysouth, 2007). Psychology, within discursive psychology is *situated* in three senses (Potter, 2005). Firstly, psychological concerns, orientations and categories are explored as being embedded within interaction. Secondly these concerns, orientations and categories are rhetorically orientated in that “...the construction of a particular evaluation...may be built to counter an alternative” (Billig, 1996 in Potter, 2005, p. 4). Lastly, these concerns, orientations and categories are situated institutionally in the practice of, for example, family chat (Potter, 2005).

In discursive psychology *embodiment* comes from the situated constructions of the body, through unfolding of talk and through the video analysis of embodied interaction – all of which treat orientations and constructions as analytic resources (Potter, 2005). The idea here is to consider the embodiment from participants’ own constructions and orientations.

Lastly, psychology in discursive psychology is *displayed* in that it is viewed as being displayed in talk and interaction. In drawing on Sack’s project for understanding interaction, Potter states that mind, intentions, understandings etc. do not lie behind talk – rather, they are key features which are visible within the talk (Potter, 2005). Indeed, this emphasis of the importance of language/talk notes a fundamental shift from traditional psychology which views language “...as the conduit for transporting thoughts between minds” (p. 741). Given these features of discursive psychology, Potter (2005) writes that “DP is not an alternative analytic approach to the topic of cognition. It is a thoroughgoing re-specification of cognition in particular and psychology more generally” (p. 742).

To restate, psychology within discursive psychology is seen as practical, accountable, situated, embodied and displayed. Apart from this view of psychology, discursive psychology as an approach has its own theoretical underpinnings and methodological principles – these are addressed below.

A key feature of discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) is in relation to the view of discourse as '*interpretive repertoires*'. Interpretive repertoires are flexible resources that are used within social interaction. Specifically, the authors define an interpretive repertoire as “recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena” (1987, p. 149). Although similar in many ways to how *discourse* is conceptualised, the authors prefer the term interpretive repertoire instead of the term discourse as it emphasises that language use is both flexible and dynamic. They do however sometimes use the word interchangeably in their research. Repertoires provide resources that people use to present their own version of reality which ultimately functions to “work ideologically to support forms of social organisation based on unequal relations of power” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 107).

Another key feature of discursive psychology is noted on the premise that the individual dynamically interacts with the social world. As such, discursive psychology views *minds*, *selves* and *identities* as being formed and reshaped in social interaction (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Gergen (1994) illustrates this point by saying that consciousness, the mind and the self are in every way, *social*. For example, Gergen argues that the *self* comprises cultural narratives and discourses which place people in certain social

categories (1994). Regarding identity, Potter and Wetherell see identity as being both a product of discourse and at the same time, as a resource for achieving social actions (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). In other words, people are seen both as *products* of discourses and as *producers* of them. The concept of the *rhetorical organisation* is also key to discursive psychology. In particular, emphasis is placed on how text and talk are orientated toward social action where *utterances* are seen as *occasioned* (context-bound) because their meaning is based on context (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Language is therefore seen as *indexical* because any word's meaning is completely dependent on the context in which it is used (Potter, 1996). Importantly, Potter (1996) also emphasises the ways in which *reified* and *ironized* discourses function. While reified discourses refer to the ways in which concepts become treated as 'factual' things, ironized discourses function to counter the effect of reified discourses (by presenting them as less factual). In summary then, discursive psychology can be defined as language which is used in everyday text and talk, and is a "dynamic form of social practice which constructs the social world, individual selves and identity" (Potter, 1996, p. 118). Discourse is understood as giving expression to subjective psychological realities. As such, people's claims about psychological states should be treated as social, discursive activities. Discourse is viewed as situated language and people use talk rhetorically to orientate text and talk towards social action. Furthermore, utterances are seen as context bound or as 'occasioned' in that their meanings are contingent on a specific context. Language is seen as constituting both the conscious and the unconscious.

As illustrated, the tradition of discursive psychology as an approach which views language as a dynamic form of social practice is appropriate for studying how ‘talk’ functions in rationalising existing social inequalities and, at the same time, in denying prejudice (Augustinos et al., 2005; Franchi, 2003; Stevens, 2003; Duncan, 2003; Kravitz et al., 1996). It is from this perspective, and against this line of thinking, that I find this approach to discourse as appropriate as a theoretical framework. Furthermore, apart from the obvious reason of either benefiting, or not benefiting, from AA, there seems to be other unexplored and ostensibly important reasons as to why these understandings of AA are so fundamentally different – especially in South Africa where disadvantage was historically experienced by a majority rather than a minority group – approaching this concern discursively seems to hold merit. Furthermore, stated in my rationale, I wish to engage in the more complex picture, particularly in relation to what people think about the policy conceptually as opposed to exclusively looking at their more practical experience of AA. In other words, this research endeavours to contribute new knowledge, particularly from the South African context, regarding the value, or lack thereof, associated with the principles embedded in AA policies – again, approaching this discursively seems worthwhile.

3.6 Conclusion

In summary then, this study uses Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) discursive psychology as its theoretical framework, most importantly because of its emphasis on language and its role in social process. This chapter has discussed, in detail, social constructionism, and specifically discursive psychology as an approach to analysing discourse. The next chapter deals with the study’s methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

Having discussed both the literature surrounding AA and the theoretical framework which this study adopts, this chapter will now consider the methods which the current study adopted in undertaking the research. In the previous chapters I highlighted the ambivalence around AA. Specifically I highlighted the importance of social constructionist orientations to research most notably in its view of language as a dynamic form of social practice. Presented earlier was also the argument that the discursive tradition is valuable to explore the manner in which language functions in rationalising existing social inequalities. To restate, this study was interested in exploring employees' social constructions of AA in a South African organisation. Following in the discursive trend, this study's methodological approach provided an opportunity to critically engage with articulated productions of AA in a South African organisation in way that is appreciative of its rich socio-political history.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an accurate step by step description of the methods and procedures used in this study. The research procedures undertaken followed from Potter and Wetherell's guidelines to studying discourse. Specifically, and in detail, this chapter details the research aims, the research approach used, the research sample, the collection of data, and the analysis of the data. In the last part of this chapter I also look at ethical issue and issues of reflexivity.

4.2. The research aims

Discussed earlier, the title of this study is “Exploring employees’ social constructions of affirmative action in a South African organisation: a discursive perspective”. This study had two aims. The first aim was to critically analyse the discourses around AA produced by employees within in a racially diverse privately owned South African organisation. The second aim was to explore the constructions of AA by historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged employees in this organisation. In doing so, I investigated the discursive resources and rhetorical arguments that employees used in talking about their experiences and perceptions of AA.

4.3. The qualitative research approach

To restate, this study is informed by a social constructionist orientation, a qualitative approach which advocates that knowledge and reality are produced by social processes. As such, this study is embedded within a qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research, particularly within social research is said to be indispensable (Straus, 1987) as the approach allows the researcher to gain valuable insight into people’s attitudes, values, behaviours, motivations and experiences. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow the researcher to share in the understandings of others and to explore how people give meaning to their daily lives (Berg, 1998) something particularly important to the current study given my interest in exploring the varying perceptions and experiences of employees related to AA.

Many authors have discussed the benefits of, and thus preference for, qualitative research especially within the social sciences (Burr, 2003; Silverman, 2000; Weinberg, 2002; Babbie, 2007). Given that social constructionism operates from a critical perspective, placing high value on historical and cultural specificity, and questions critically the nature of social processes and social action, an approach allowing for the narration of experience, and the subsequent interpretation of such experiences, is needed. Thus, this study makes use of the qualitative approach. Qualitative research is based on interpretivism (Strauss, 1987; Silverman, 2000; Weinberg, 2002). It is also exploratory and inductive in nature (Trochim, 2006). More accurately, Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research as "... an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p. 15). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as involving an interpretive, naturalist approach to its subject matter.

There are four dominant features of qualitative research (Pratt, 2005). Firstly, qualitative research is focused on *natural settings* in that it is interested in lived experiences. Thus, no artificial experiments are set up and the researcher endeavours to make as few assumptions as possible before the commencement of the research. Secondly, qualitative research has a specific interest in *meanings, perspectives* and *understandings*, as experienced subjectively by participants. Another feature of the qualitative approach relates to its concern with *process*, which, in other words, is a focus on how things happen. Fourthly, qualitative research is concerned with *inductive analysis* and *grounded theory* which seeks to generate theory from the data.

4.4. The research philosophy and paradigm: ontological and epistemological dimensions.

Durrheim and Terre Blanche (2006) explain that there are three broad areas of research paradigms. These include the positivist, constructionist and interpretative paradigms. Put simply, a paradigm can be explained as a “systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology” (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2006, p. 6). The authors also note that while researchers often remain largely within one paradigm when conducting research, it is possible, as in the current study, to draw on more than one paradigm. Although the current study is situated within both the interpretive and constructionist paradigms, it largely draws from the interpretive paradigm. Both these paradigms are discussed below.

The **constructionist paradigm** to the social and human sciences is derived from the epistemological impact of postmodernism, specifically from the frontal attack against universalist truth claims (Durrheim & Terre Blanch, 2006). Ontologically, constructionist research emphasises that anything, and everything we regard as reality is socially constructed. The nature of reality must be studied in relation to both discourse and power. From an epistemological perspective, the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known is described as ‘suspicious’, and ‘political’. In other words, a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge is essential. From a methodological perspective, research methods such as deconstruction, textual analysis and discourse analysis are often employed (Durrheim & Terre Blanch, 2006).

The **interpretive social science** approach (ISS) ontological stance is that internal reality is based on subjective experience. From an epistemological perspective interpretive research considers the researcher as ‘empathetic’ or as having observer subjectivity. The beginnings of ISS stem from the work of German sociologist Max Weber (1864 – 1920) and German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey (1833 – 1911) (Neuman, 1997). Dilthey’s contribution to ISS came in the stems from his work titled *Einleitung in die Geisteswissen-shaften* (Introduction to the Human Social Sciences) which was written in 1883. Dilthey argued that there were two types of science. One type of science was what he called *Naturwissenschaft* which was based on abstract explanation. A second type of science, he argued, was *Geisteswissenschaft* which emphasised understanding of the everyday lived experience of people in particular historical contexts (Neuman, 1997). Similar to Dilthey’s argument, Weber argued for the studying of meaningful social action or, in other words, the study of social action with a purpose. Weber felt that we should study the motives that give shape to internal feelings which guide our behaviours (Neuman, 1997). Put simply, ISS advocates that the meaning of human creations, words, actions and experiences are made available through the context in which they occur (Bleicher, 1980, in Terre Blanch & Durrheim, 1999). Neuman (1997) provides a succinct practical summary of what it means to be an ISS researcher by answering a series of research related questions. These are discussed briefly.

In answering the question “Why should one conduct social science research?” Neuman explains that its goal is to develop an understanding of social life and to discover how people themselves construct meaning. The researcher, he explains, shares in the feelings

and/or interpretations of the subjects under study as it occurs through the subjects eyes. Interpretive researchers are interested in meaningful social action as opposed to the external behaviour of people. Social action, he explains, is the action which people attach their own meanings to – it is an activity with a purpose. Secondly, Neuman reflects on the basic nature of social reality. In ISS, social reality is largely about what people see it as – it is not something waiting to be discovered. Social life is based on how people experience it and on the meaning they attach to it – it is fluid and fragile. Put simply, Neuman (1997) describes social reality as consisting of people who develop meaning and interpretation through daily social action. As an answer to the question on the basic nature of human beings, Neuman (1997) suggests that interpretive researchers are particularly concerned with what actions mean to those who are actually engaged in them. Creating meaning then, is only what people perceive it to be and as a result, no alternative set of meaning is more true or superior to others. Neuman also comments on the relationship between common sense and science. Unlike in positivist research which views common sense as inferior, interpretive researchers maintain that common sense is an essential source of information to understand human beings. Common sense is used daily by people to organise and explain events in everyday living. Regarding the constituents of an explanation of social reality, Neuman explains that interpretive theory is interested in the description and interpretation of the ways in which people conduct their lives. ISS is thus ideographic and inductive. It provides the reader with a feel of someone else's social reality through revealing the meanings, values, rules etc. that people use in their everyday lives.

In another question, Neuman (1997) questions how one determines if an explanation is true or false. He answers by saying that in ISS, anything is true as long as it makes sense to those under study and at the same time, if it is able to provide others with an understanding of the reality of those being studied. Lastly, Neuman (1997) discusses the social and political values which enter into science. He explains that unlike in positivism which calls for the total removal of values, ISS calls for the researchers own personal reflection and feelings as part of the process of the research. In other words, the research needs to empathise and share in the social and political values of the subjects under study. Put perhaps most simply, and in conclusion, Neuman describes ISS as concerned with the empathetic understanding of feelings and world views as opposed to testing laws of human behaviour (Neuman, 1997).

In summary then, the current study adopts both the constructionist and interpretive paradigm. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of these paradigms, as discussed above, provided a platform from which to engage with peoples subjective experiences around what is real form them and how we make sense of their experiences. The adoption of these paradigms was essential to understanding the social, historical and political lens that follows from South Africa's turbulent history. This paradigm also proved very beneficial in understanding the complexities within a particular organisation and the culture it holds. The analysis thus ensued from the perspective that allowed for the interpretation of meanings which are conveyed by social actors through their symbolic constructions.

As is gathered from the discussions above, this study is interested in understanding, among other things, both the ‘how’ and ‘why’ around participants’ constructions. It is also ascertained that the contextual conditions around participant constructions are also essential to consider. Yin (2003) states that in cases such as these, a case study design should be employed. This is discussed in the next section.

4.5. The use of case study design

I adopt a case study design in this study. A case study is one of many ways of conducting research within the social sciences. It is described as an in-depth investigation of an individual, group or community. Babbie (2010) states that a case study focuses on some social phenomena and that its main purpose may be descriptive. Put more precisely, Yin defines a case study research method as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (1984, p. 23). In the context of this study, the case study was design was chosen to represent the particular organisation which was used to collect data in the current study. This is important if we are to consider Yin’s (2005) guidance around context. The context of this study, I argue, is deeply embedded in the culture, climate and among other things, the theoretical and practical understandings of AA from the organisations perspective.

Yin (2009) specifies a set of three conditions for which must be met in order to consider a case study design. I considered each of these for the current study. Firstly, Yin (2009) suggest that a case study is a useful design when the research questions include words

like ‘who’, ‘why’, ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘how’. Given that the current study was largely interested in exploring the discursive resources and rhetorical arguments that employees used in talking about their experiences and perceptions of AA, questions of ‘who’, ‘why’, ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘how’ were very necessary.

Secondly, Yin (2009) notes that a case study design will only work if there is no need for having to control behaviour. Again, given that my intentions were to explore *how* and *why* things happen within various contextual realities (Anderson, 1993), without any intervention from my side, the case study design proved ideal.

A last condition for Yin (2009) is that a case study design must focus on a contemporary event or events – which in the case of the current study are the experience of AA. In other words, the phenomena under study should be current rather than a historical event. Again, this condition proved ideal for the AA, a contemporary issue which continues to be debated around the world.

Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest that from the onset the research must decide on the *type* of case study that he or she wishes to use. The authors state that the type of case is guided by the overall purpose of the research. In other words – one should consider whether one is describing a case, exploring a case or comparing cases. There are many types of cases (exploratory, descriptive, intrinsic etc.). In the current study I chose to use a descriptive case study in that it “is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred” (Yin, 2003, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548).

Noor (2008) cautions that case studies have been criticised by some as lacking in scientific rigour and generalisability. However, despite these criticisms, case studies, if used appropriately within the right context, prove to be a useful tool in sourcing rich information which is contextually relevant. Yin provides a useful set of steps to be followed to address tests for research design – all of which were considered in the current study. The first test is construct validity – here Yin (2009) advises that among other things, multiple sources of evidence are used as well as getting key informants to review the draft case study report. Although, due to the sensitive nature of the current study, I did not get key informants to review a draft, I did consider other sources of data including the organisations policy documents, reviews and on-line reports. I also ensured that the interviews targeted all levels of the organisation including top management.

A second concern for Yin (2009) is with regard to internal validity. Here Yin advises the use of pattern matching or explanation building during the analysis of data. Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that when looking for patterns it is important to look at data in many divergent ways. She suggests looking at within group similarities coupled with intergroup differences. Thus, when analysing the data in the current study, I ensured that this was considered before “leaping to conclusions based on limited data (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973, as cited in Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 540).

Baxter and Jack (2008) draw on a range of recommendations to consider when conducting case study research. Some of these issues are discussed below with specific relation to how these recommendations were followed in the current study.

Firstly, the hallmark of good case study research is to use a range of data sources so as to increase the credibility of the data (Yin, 2009; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Some of these sources can include, for example, interviews, archival records, observations, and physical artefacts. In the current study, although most of the information was sourced from the interview material, I also made use of other sources. I looked the organisations policy documents and other on-line material related to the organisation, its functions and its clients. I also ensure that my interview data was sourced from participants across all levels of the organisation including top management.

Secondly, Yin (2009) and Stake (1995, as cited in Baxter and Jack, 2008) note the importance of organising data on a database so as to improve the reliability of the case study. In doing so I ensure that all date, including my personal reflections and notes, interview data, and audio recordings were tracked and organised on secure database.

Thirdly, it is suggested that data analysis and data collection occur concurrently (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I followed the recommendation of Stake (1995, as cited in Baxter and Jack, 2008) who emphasises categorical aggregation and direct interpretation as a form of analysis. This is explained in detail later on under the section of data analysis.

A fourth, important consideration is the strategies that need to be adopted to assure trustworthiness in case study research. There are five basic foundations which should be followed in order to achieve trustworthiness – all of which have been met in the current study. Firstly, the case study research questions must be clearly written and articulated. Secondly, the case study design (in this case – a descriptive case study) must be appropriate for the research question/s. Thirdly, purposeful sampling strategies must be applied. Fourthly, data must be collected and managed systematically. And lastly, the data should be analysed properly.

Apart from trustworthiness, case study research should also ensure that strategies for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are also met. However, in the case where a discursive study is undertaken, these criteria are considered under a different, yet related, classification of ‘validation’ as informed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). This is discussed later in the chapter under the section of validation.

To summarise then, the current study adopts a descriptive case study design. The current study meets the three conditions of Yin (2009) which include the use of research questions of ‘who’, ‘why’, ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘how’, the lack of need for control of behaviour and lastly, the need to focus on a contemporary event/phenomena. Issues around validity and reliability were also considered. I also followed strictly the recommendations of Baxter and Jack (2008) and Yin (2009) when employing case study research. Lastly, the current study has both considered and met the criteria for ensuring trustworthiness. The next section discusses the research philosophy and paradigm

4.6. Target population, access and sampling

Target population

The research sample was drawn from a large, racially representative national, privately owned organisation within the retail sector (hereafter referred to as Company X). Company X is a South African Information and Communications Technology (ICT) company. The organisation, with nearly 3200 employees, has gained much recognition and is a partner to a considerable client base in both the private and public sectors. The organisation was considered appropriate for this study in terms of its racial composition as it is ranked among the top Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) ICT organisations in South Africa. The organisation employs nearly 44 % of its workforce from historically disadvantaged groups and its Board comprises 50% Black executives. Table 3 below illustrates the company's profile.

Table 3

Company X Profile

Overview of Company X Services

Areas of Specialisation	Systems integration Enterprise resource planning Human capital management Distributed computing services Hosting services
Industries Served	Mining Sector Public Sector Financial Sector Manufacturing Sector Hospitality Sector
BEE Empowerment Initiatives	Equity Ownership (Black equity ownership of 46%) Management Control (56% of Board is Black) Employment Equity (45 % of all employees are Black) Preferential Procurement (69.5 % of all procurement is from Black suppliers) Skills Development

Having found Company X as ideal for the purposes of this study, I took various steps in gaining access to the company. As first contact, I provided a detailed letter outlining the aims of my study to the Human Resources Manager of Company X (see appendix A). The letter included my intentions, what participation would involve, the methods that would be employed in the study, and issues of confidentiality and anonymity.

The Human Resources Manager subsequently invited me to meet with her to discuss the prospect of allowing me access to the company. At the meeting, I once again explained my intentions and provided a comprehensive overview of what participation in the study would involve. The Human Resources Manager later took up the request with senior management and later informed me that I was granted access. A formal letter was later sent to me by the Human Resources Manager which confirmed that I was allowed to conduct my study at the Company X (see appendix B).

Sampling

Company X operates throughout South Africa and has branches nationwide. The sample however was drawn from the company's KwaZulu Natal division. I required a racially representative sample for this study. Therefore, when selecting participants to participate in the study, I ensured that, where possible, there was representation of the 4 dominant race groups in South Africa (Black African, White, Indian and Coloured). Other demographic requirements for participation in the study were also considered. I also, where possible, ensured that the sample included representation of males and females, various job levels and different levels of experience. Purposive sampling was thus used in the current study.

Babbie (2010) describes purposive sampling as “A type of non-probability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (p. 193). Purposive sampling was thus appropriate as only participants whom who I felt would provide the most relevant information were invited to participate in the study, on the basis of meeting specific demographic requirements.

The sample comprised of 17 participants from a population of approximately 98 employees. Unlike in quantitative research which is concerned with statistical accuracy, constructionist, exploratory and interpretive approaches do not generally use large samples. The researcher may choose a few information-rich cases when collecting data (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2006). Furthermore, a small sample size such as this was

considered sufficient in light of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) remark that, when analysing discourse, the focus of interest is on language use and that discursive patterns can be created by just a few. For Potter and Wetherell, sample size when analysing discourse is not an issue – what is more important however is the ability to provide a detailed description of the nature of the material being studied. The sample of 17 participants was also considered to be large enough and diverse enough, to, as discussed by Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) and Potter and Wetherell (1987), access different and varied discursive practices.

A database containing the contact details and demographic details of all employees in Company X was emailed to me by the Company's Human Resources Manager. I sorted the database by race and then proceeded to select participants, as per the above discussed criteria, who I thought would be appropriate for participation in this study. This process resulted in a list of approximately 30 potential participants. When compiling this list, I used race, organisational position and gender as criteria. Given that this is a case study, I tried as best as possible to ensure that the list was representative of the entire organisation. I included employees from all four race groups with roughly equal numbers from each race group. The list had equal numbers of male and female employees and included employees from different organisational work levels. Another criteria also followed was that, as requested by the company's human resources' manager, that only participants based at the company, and not on the client site, be contacted. This list of potential participants was then sent to the Human Resources Manager who sent out an email to those identified on the list. The email stated that employees should expect to be

contacted by Shanya Reuben, a PhD student for participation in her study. After sending off the email to potential participants, I proceeded to contact each potential participant telephonically. The following was discussed with each person contacted:

- I introduced myself;
- The intention of the study, and the research aims, were stated in brief;
- I explained what participation would involve; and,
- I explained that confidentiality and anonymity would be assured.

If the employee was unwilling to participate, he/she was thanked for time and removed from the list. If the employee agreed to participate I discussed a date and time to hold the interview at the participant's convenience and provided the participant with a confirmatory email a day prior to the scheduled interview.

Table 5, below provides a description of the research participants who participated in the current study. In total, six of the participants were Black, four were White, three were Coloured and four were Indian. The sample comprised both female (n = 12) and male (n = 5). Although my initial list consisted of equal numbers of male and female employees, when contacted, female employees were more willing to participate in the study. As a result, my sample had more females than males. Years working at Company X ranged between 1 and 18 years with an average of 7.2 years. Participants were sourced from all levels of the company ranging from the Regional Executive Manager to administrators and call co-coordinators. All participants could converse in English even though English was not necessarily their first language.

Table 4

Demographic Details of Participants

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Years at Company</i>	<i>Highest Qualification</i>	<i>English as first language</i>
Participant 1	Black	Female	Call coordinator	3	A +	No
Participant 2	Black	Female	Personal Assistant	1	Diploma	No
Participant 3	Black	Male	Field Service Engineer	5	Diploma	No
Participant 4	Black	Female	Call coordinator	3	Matric	No
Participant 5	Black	Male	Field Service Engineer	3	MCSA	No
Participant 6	Black	Female	Administrator	12	Matric	No
Participant 7	White	Female	Programme Manager	10	PMP	No
Participant 8	White	Female	Financial Manager	11	Honours	No
Participant 9	White	Female	Business Administrator	9	Matric	No
Participant 10	White	Female	Project Administrator	1	Short Course	No
Participant 11	Coloured	Female	Regional HR Manager	14	MDP	Yes
Participant 12	Coloured	Male	Project Coordinator	9	Diploma	Yes
Participant 13	Coloured	Male	Field Service Engineer	2	Diploma	Yes
Participant 14	Indian	Male	Regional Executive Manager	9	MDP	Yes
Participant 15	Indian	Female	Supervisor	18	Matric	Yes
Participant 16	Indian	Female	Regional Logistics Manager	5	Diploma	Yes
Participant 17	Indian	Female	Supervising Administrator	9	Matric	Yes

4.7. Data collection technique

It is important to restate, although covered fully in the theoretical framework, that discourse analysts are not interested in the processes which take place in reality or in an individual's mind but rather, the interest is how different versions of truth are constructed (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Thus when interviewing, there is the assumption that the

resultant conversation arises from pre-existing resources and therefore results in different versions of 'truth'. I used semi-structured interviews to collect the data in this study. As in the case of interpretative methodologies, discourse analysts use interviews when collecting data and favour contexts which pose minimal disturbance to the natural setting (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). Discourse analysts consider the interview as an avenue from which linguistic patterns can arise, thus proving ideal for the purposes of this study. The appropriateness and value of teaming qualitative interviews with constructionist studies are noted by many authors (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Weinberg, 2002). For example, Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) state that when conducting interpretive research, perhaps one of the most common methods used for data collection is the interviews. Further, they elaborate that constructionist approaches view the interview as an area where linguistic patterns (metaphors, arguments, stories) can come to the fore.

Babbie (2010) describes qualitative interviewing as being based on a set of topics to be discussed in depth as opposed to standardised questions. Further, Babbie explains that an interview involves the interaction between an interviewer and a respondent where the interviewer has some general plan of inquiry which includes the topics to be covered. An interview is therefore flexible and continuous (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Interviews are also useful in that they provide an opportunity to really understand how people think and feel. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) describe interviewing as a mechanism for generating empirical data about the social world by asking participants to talk about their lives. Interviews, they argue, are both conversational and interactional in nature. Broadly

speaking then, an interview can be thought of as a conversational partnership (Ulin, 2002) where meaning is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interview, as a form of data collection, allows the researcher room for active intervention (Potter & Wetherell, 1998). Rabionet (2011) describes qualitative interviewing as a powerful tool which is able to capture the voices and the ways that people use to make meaning of their experiences, which, in the case of the current study, proved to be ideal.

There are many forms of interviews (unstructured, structured, semi-structured etc.) within qualitative interviewing. I used semi-structured interviews. Unlike with structured interviews where a set list of questions is asked in a specific, predetermined order, semi-structured interviews allowed for more flexibility and creativity in the interview process. Semi-structured interviews allow for the expansion of questions in order to explore responses in depth, to ask additional questions as well as to follow up on any interesting responses that might be generated in the interview (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are extremely popular within the discursive psychology tradition particularly because it allows participants the opportunity to influence the direction of the interview. This allows the researcher to study the discursive patterns that are constructed by participants through the use of specific discursive resources (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). The development of the interview schedule and the interview process that I followed is discussed later in this chapter.

4.8. Data collection

Before starting the interview, I completed a biographical questionnaire (see Appendix C) with each participant in order to capture their biographical details. The following information was recorded for each participant. The information collected included participant gender, race, organisational position, the number of years that they have been employed by Company X and their highest level of qualification.

Discussed earlier, I approached this study from Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discursive psychology approach. Thus, the development of the interview discussion questions was guided by discourse analytic theory (see Appendix D), particularly based on the guidelines presented by Potter and Wetherell (1998), for doing discursive analysis. Importantly, the aim of a discourse analyst is very different to the aim of someone conducting research from a positivist perspective. As such, the interview questions need to be developed in a way that fits into these aims. For example, unlike with traditional interviewing, *consistency of responses* is not as important to discourse analysts as in the case of traditional, orthodox social research. The aim of discourse analysis is not to identify regular patterns of language use as accounted for through consistency, but instead, discourse analysts wish to create an engaging site where the respondent's interpretative resources are explored fully (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Potter and Mulkey (1985, as cited in Potter & Wetherell, 1985) suggest that the interview should be interventionist in nature and the formal procedures that generally restrict variation in traditional interviews should be excluded. In other words, and in doing so, I

tried to create interpretative contexts through interview questions in a way “that the connections between the interviewee’s accounting practices and variations in functional context become clear” (p. 164).

Potter and Wetherell also state the importance of ensuring the construction of a detailed schedule which details the questions to be asked, the probes as well as any follow up questions which should be asked should a particular response be presented. They also comment on the challenges related to achieving the interview schedule. Specifically, they advocate for an interview which both covers a range of topics but is at the same time open-ended enough to allow the participant to speak about their views in a relatively naturalistic exchange. Another guideline by Potter and Wetherell (1987) is the importance of acknowledging that the interview is not merely a research instrument but, more importantly, it should be seen as a conversational encounter whereby the questions posed are as important as the respondent’s answers. In other words, care should be taken when constructing interview questions in that the questions have a constructive nature – they are not passive or neutral. In summary then, and as advised by Potter and Wetherell’s set of guidelines, I ensured that, when developing my interview questions, the above mentioned guidelines were strictly followed.

Looking more specifically at the content contained within the interview questions, I drew largely from discursive psychology as the study’s theoretical framework, and therefore developed questions that focused on among other things, a critical engagement with historical and cultural specificity. The interview questions were constructed in a manner

that allowed for conversation between participants and myself. Questions were also therefore general in nature. The questions were open-ended and tapped into areas related to AA both from a theoretical and practical point. Essentially, the main aim underpinning the interview questions was to explore employees' discourses around AA and to be able to study some theoretical questions about the ways in which employees perceive, and subsequently experience, AA. The interview schedule (see Appendix D) consisted of 8 main, open-ended questions:

- each of which had a series of sub-questions which acted as probes;
- which sought to discursively explore participants conceptual understanding of AA and of constructs related to AA;
- which sought to explore participants practical experience of AA and of constructs related to AA; and,
- which encouraged narratives of lived experiences.

All interviews were conducted by myself. Before presenting myself for an interview, I sent each interviewee an email reminder and where necessary, a telephone call (if the participant could not be reached by email or if no email reply was received). The reminder served to confirm the time/date of the interview as well as the venue for the interview. In the event that a participant could no longer keep to the agreed upon interview appointment, I rescheduled the interview at the convenience of the participant.

The venue for most of the interviews (14 interviews) took place at a discussion room at Company X. The room was quiet, presented no outside interference such as noise

disturbances and was very private. The door was kept closed during interviews. The other 3 interviews took place at different venues. The Regional Human Resources Manager and the Regional Executive Manager were interviewed in their own offices. Both offices were quiet, and no outside interference was noted. Their doors were kept closed throughout the duration of the interviews. One other participant, a Field Service Engineer, was interviewed on the site of one of Company X's clients. The interview took place in a boardroom on the site. No outside interference was noticed and the boardroom door was kept closed at all times. All interviews were digitally recorded.

Each interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis. The following procedure was followed for each interview: once having arrived at Company X, I announced my arrival for the interview to the company's receptionist who then called the participant and asked him/her to meet me in the discussion room. Once the participant arrived in the discussion room, I formally introduced myself to the participant and thanked him/her for agreeing to participate in the study. I then discussed with the participant what my study was about, my general aims and objectives (as indicated on the informed consent form) and the fact that the study was required for the completion of a Doctoral degree at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. I then went through, in detail, the informed consent form (see appendix E) with the participant which explained the participant's right to withdraw from the study, issues of anonymity and confidentiality and, among other things, the fact that the interview would be recorded. I discuss each of these ethical considerations fully in section 4.11. Having gone through the consent form, if agreed upon, the participant was then asked to sign the consent form which indicated his/her consent to both being

interviewed as well as to having the interview recorded. The interview began firstly with a series of biographical questions (see Appendix C). Following the completion of the biographical questions, I then proceeded with the interview as per my interview schedule. Upon completion, I thanked the participant and asked him/her whether he/she had any other questions, concerns and/or additions to contribute.

In conducting each interview, I ensured that I followed the guidelines presented by numerous researchers for attaining high quality qualitative data. For example, the as recommended by Seidman (1991, in Terre Blanch & Kelly,1999) I avoided leading questions, always asked open-ended questions and allowed for thoughtfulness. I also, as encouraged by Potter and Wetherell (1985), tried my best to emphasise informal conversations and exchanges through the use of narratives and participants 'lived' or actual experiences at their workplace. Similarly, Devault (1999) maintains that when conducting interviews, we need to speak in ways that create spaces for respondents to present their accounts which are embedded in the realities of their lives.

Another consideration was taken from Wetherell et al. (2001) who emphasise the importance of *reflexivity* when conducting social research which suggests the need to be self aware and the ability of the researcher to step back and evaluate how his/her presence influences the situation. In doing so I realised that participant talk was obviously 'researcher provoked' (Augustinos et al., 2005) and was therefore careful to acknowledge that the nature of my research is not 'naturalistic'. In other words, as the researcher, my presence functioned in making me a co-producer of the talk that was relayed. I discuss

fully the concept of reflexivity, as it pertains to my role in this study, at the end of this chapter.

4.9. The data analysis

The entire research process, from the development of the research questions to the transcription and analysis of the data was conducted using discursive psychology as the interpretive tool. The analysis of the data was done primarily from guidelines to analysing discourse as outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Phillips and Jorgensen (2002). I discuss each of these sections in turn.

Transcription

As discussed earlier, discourse analysts operate from the assumption that, when interviewing, reality is co-constructed by both the interviewer and the interviewee. In other words, the interviewer is not to be taken as a neutral, objective and/or passive participant in the process (Potter, 1996; Wetherell et al., 2006). This point is best illustrated by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) who state that meaning making is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. What this suggests is that when transcribing the interviews, capturing the interviewers talk is as important as the responses generated from the interviewee. Potter and Wetherell caution against the assumption that transcription is nothing more than putting words down on paper. Rather, they describe the process as a constructive and conventional activity (1987). The specificity on how detailed a transcription should be, remains nebulous. For example, while much research has been conducted on the intonational features (such as accounting for the tones used in conversation) of discourse (Brazil, 1981; Jefferson, 1985; Kreckel,

1981, 1982, as cited in Potter and Wetherell, 1987), Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that for many research questions, such detail is not essential.

With these guidelines in mind, all 17 interviews were transcribed to Microsoft Word documents. All interviews were transcribed verbatim (both my dialogue as the interviewer and that of the participant). The interviews were transcribed using simplified notation. The reason for this is that I was interested in identifying broad discursive patterns, and, unlike for the purposes of critical discourse analysis, I was not interested in doing a microlinguistic analysis which requires very detailed, and specific notations. Potter and Wetherell suggest that using fine details of timing and intonation are not crucial for some types of research projects. My interviews were transcribed word for word and in a manner that showed how participant's responses were, to some extent, a result of the way in which I interpreted what participants said (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). A research assistant assisted me with the transcription of the interview material. I worked very closely with the research assistant at all stages of the transcription process. I provided clear guidelines to her and spent many hours verifying and checking a "draft printout against the tape" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). All errors were fed back to the research assistant for corrections. I also conducted a series of edits on the transcripts. From a practical point, Potter and Wetherell (1987) recommend that the transcripts should be printed out clearly, using a readable font and double line spacing so as to facilitate easy reading when studying the transcripts. Collectively then, all 17 interviews were converted into approximately 150 pages of text.

Coding

As stated by Potter and Wetherell (1987), the goal of coding is to convert a large body of discourse into manageable chunks. As a starting point, I read and reread the transcripts (electronically) many times over, in order to identify some emerging and dominant themes. While reading through them, I highlighted important parts and inserted comments where ‘dominant’ ideas arose. After having read through the transcripts, I then uploaded all the transcripts to Nvivo 8 which is an electronic software package for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio and video data. Nvivo 8 is very useful where deep levels of analysis are required. The following is a summary of how I coded my data using Nvivo.

Firstly, I read each interview individually on Nvivo. While reading through each one, I began coding text extracts into ‘nodes’ (node is the terminology used in Nvivo – it has the same meaning as ‘theme’). Each new interview read either resulted in the creation of new nodes/themes or was coded into existing nodes/themes. I followed Potter and Wetherell’s advice and coded as inclusively as possible – in other words, even borderline cases which are vague were coded initially. If found to be inappropriate later, I removed these cases. Potter and Wetherell explain that emerging themes should be coded and when an overall understanding of the theme is realised, the researcher can go back and look for related examples. This is where some themes are discarded and new ones may be created (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I followed this logic. After having coded all interviews, I then combined nodes/themes, where necessary, into larger, related nodes/themes. I then visited, and revisited the coded data many times over to ensure this

was done as accurately as possible. As guided by Potter and Wetherell (1987) the classifications/themes or as in this case, the nodes, used should be related to the questions that the research seeks to answer. I kept this in mind throughout the coding procedure. At this point, I have discussed the issue of coding in a general sense. In the section below, I discuss specifically, step by step, the manner in which I arrived at the discourses constructed in the current study.

As mentioned earlier, many ‘nodes’ or dominant ideas began to feature as I repeatedly read through transcripts. After approximately 7 readings of transcripts on the Nvivo software, my preliminary analysis yielded 33 nodes, each with either related to other nodes, or completely different. For example, the nodes ‘AA as acceptance’ and ‘AA as fair’ are related whereas the nodes ‘AA as disempowering’ and ‘positive outlooks’ present very different ideas on the same construct. The following nodes were yielded:

1. AA as a balancing act
2. AA as acceptance
3. AA as disempowering
4. AA as a game
5. AA as an excuse
6. AA perpetuates differences
7. AA as a threat to identity
8. Being comfortable with oneself
9. Conditions imposed by AA
10. AA as contradictory (fair but unfair)

11. Effort does not equal outcome
12. Misunderstood diversity
13. AA as an emotional rollercoaster
14. AA as fair
15. Association of knowledge of AA and work position
16. We are more similar than dissimilar
17. Painful memories
18. Positive outlooks
19. Power
20. Redress of society
21. Rolling with the punches
22. Sense of family
23. AA sound as theory but practically mismanaged
24. Stories/narratives of unfair treatment
25. Inclusivity: family relations
26. Inclusivity: religious beliefs
27. The bottom line: money issues
28. The good old days
29. AA as unfair
30. Us versus them
31. We can do it on our own
32. What is AA?
33. Importance of AA

There were many instances where one source (quotation/reference) was coded under more than one node. For example, the quotation “AA makes me realise that, as a black person, I am different to others” – can be coded under two different, yet related, nodes. For example, this may be coded under:

Node 1: AA is disempowering

Node 2: AA perpetuates differences.

Each node that was constructed can be understood in relation to its importance or ‘dominance’ by interpreting the number of sources and references noted in the node. Sources refer to the number of participants. For example, 5 sources means that 5 different participants are quoted in the node. References refer to the number of quotations included in the node. For example, 1 source (participant) can have 5 references. In other words, 1 source can refer to the same idea on various occasions in the interview. Thus, a node may have few sources, but many references. The number of sources (participants) and references (actual quotations) were very helpful in determining the relative importance attached to each ‘idea’.

After this preliminary analysis, I synthesised and condensed the 33 nodes into 7 ‘families’. In other words, related nodes were combined to form larger ‘families’ of ideas. The numbers indicated in each family refer to the number of the node included in that family. The 7 families are:

AA is a means to an end
1, 2, 4, 14, 18, 20, 27, 33

AA means appreciating and accepting diversity
2, 8, 12, 16, 18, 22, 31

AA solidifies differences, threatens identity and is innately unfair
3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 17, 23, 27, 32

AA dis-empowers intended beneficiaries
3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 19, 29

Us versus them – an existential crisis
3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 15, 21, 24, 32

Who needs policy – change should be natural
9, 16, 25, 26, 27, 31, 33

Family and religious beliefs
22, 25, 26

These 7 families were then used to construct 4 main themes/discourses. These included:

Theme One: Constructing Racial Hierarchies of Skill
AA solidifies differences, threatens identity and is innately unfair
AA dis-empowers intended beneficiaries

Theme Two: Polarised constructions of Affirmative Action
AA means appreciating and accepting diversity
AA dis-empowers intended beneficiaries

Theme Three - The Fantasy of Affirmative Action
Us versus them – an existential crisis
Family and religious beliefs

Theme Four - Renegotiating Change
Family and religious beliefs
Who needs policy – change should be natural

4.10. Analysis

In chapter three I mentioned that discourse is both a theoretical perspective as well as a methodological/interpretive approach. I discussed in detail the conceptual aspects of discourse in chapter three. I now discuss discourse as an interpretive tool.

An important point to remember when analysing discourse is not to categorise people but rather to identify the discursive practices through which such categories are created (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). In other words, when analysing my data, I aimed to tease out the social significance and consequences (Potter & Wetherell, 1992) of particular discourses/interpretive repertoires. In their example, Potter and Wetherell showed how, for example, a discourse of egalitarianism can function in legitimising discrimination against New Zealand Maoris.

When analysing the data, I constantly asked myself, in each reading, the following two questions: why am I reading this passage in this way? And what features produce this reading? (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Analysis comprises two important and related phases both of which I followed very carefully. In the first phase, I searched the data for patterns. The patterns were either in the form of *variability* (where participant accounts differed) or in the form of *consistency* (where participant accounts were shared). In the second phase, I then addressed the issue *function* and *consequence* in relation to the themes identified in phase one. Essentially, the assumption is that people's talk fulfils many functions which give rise to different effects. Therefore, I formed hypotheses about these effects and supported it with linguistic evidence (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Once

having completed these two phases, I proceeded in developing a synopsis of my findings which would later inform the discussion of my findings.

There are some comments that should be made around the way in which data is analysed, and subsequently interpreted in the discursive tradition (Gilbert & Mulkey, 1984; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Firstly, as a central feature of discursive psychology, discourse, and in this context, interview material, are not to be approached as representations of mental states or actual events – rather, it depends on the broader discursive system in which it is embedded in (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). In other words, when analysing my data, I was interested in the range of discourses that participants used, in different contexts, to justify their own accounts. Secondly, throughout the analysis phase, I came across ‘inconsistencies’ in the extracts. For example, a participant would at times contradict an earlier statement made. I used such ‘inconsistencies’ to explain how talk is context dependent because, after all, inconsistencies within discourse analysis are not seen as problematic. Another comment can be made around the ways in which participants positioned themselves, particularly in instances which seemed contradictory. For example, a participant in one instance could position himself as supportive of company policies and then in another instance as been against attempts of redress. I welcomed this kind of contradiction because discourse analysis presents people as multidimensional since they use different resources to move between different resources, depending on the context (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Having analysed my findings at this point, I then went on to validate my findings.

4.11. Validation

There are four important techniques to validate research findings, all of which were used in this study (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Firstly, I ensured *coherence*. In doing so, I showed how my research claims formed coherent discourses and where necessary, I explored the exceptions or findings outside dominant patterns in detail. Secondly, in accounting for *participant's orientation* I was careful to engage with talk in a manner that reflected participant's understandings as opposed to abstract dictionary meanings. Thirdly, I looked at whether my analysis led to the emergence of *new problems* in that the development of new problems provides further confirmation that linguistic resources are being used as hypothesised. Lastly, I ensured *fruitfulness* of the analysis. Here the focus is on the ability of the analytical framework to make sense of new kinds of discourse that emerge. In summary, Potter and Wetherell remark that these four techniques allows for the stringent evaluation of any claim. I used all four techniques in validating my findings and research claims. In the next section, I briefly touch on the interpretive perspective that my research findings stem from. Part of the reason for this is to re-introduce some of the arguments made in this study's theoretical framework, particularly as a backdrop to the research findings that follow in the next chapter.

4.12. Interpretive perspective

In the next chapter, I engage with my research findings. However, as a backdrop to my discussion, I present here a brief commentary on the interpretative perspective from which my findings are derived. Discussed extensively in the methodology and in the

literature, discursive psychology involves a radical rethinking of concepts and an appreciation for the socio-historical terrain which informs subjective realities (Billig, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Given this then, issues of, for example, privilege and preservation, discrimination and inferiority can not be divorced from South Africa's history. Similar to the work of Wetherell (2003), I attempt to "locate the forms of making sense...within more global accounts...in the broader social and cultural context" (p. 12). Wetherell (2003) argues for this kind of approach to discourse in that, interviews, apart from being specific social productions, draw on routine, consensual resources that go beyond the local context and invariably connect local talk with discursive history. Thus, the interpretation of the data in the current study is consequently presented through the social, historical and political lens that follows from South Africa's turbulent history. The analysis thus ensued from a qualitative framework that studied "the meanings conveyed by social actors through their symbolic constructions... and attempts to reveal their ideological significance" (Stevens, 2003, p. 194). Taking a lead then from social constructionist thought, this study acknowledges the importance of accounting for everyday language practices particularly in relation to the ways in which language reproduces and sustains relations of dominance, exploitation and power.

Importantly, I acknowledge that my point of departure, specifically from the socio-political terrain, provides a particular *version of truth* – as Riggins (1997) suggests – all representation and dramatisations of events are *polysemic* in that they are "ambiguous

and unstable in meaning – as well as a mix of ‘truth’ and ‘fiction...all of which both exceed and shortchange ‘reality’...and do not faithfully reflect reality like mirrors” (p. 2). Given this, I interpreted my data in a manner that allowed me to draw on broader ideological patterns and inferences that prevail within the *text* – specifically as a tool with which to study reproductions of racism and ideology (Van Dijk, 1991, in Stevens, 2003). Stevens (2003) provides a comprehensive review (for example, Van Dijk, 1984; Essed, 1991; Rattansi, 1992; Duncan, 2003; Nathoo, 1997) on the popularity surrounding race and ideology research and attributes this trend to an expanding literature base on signification (attribution meaning).

An important point to make is that I proceed from an analytical framework which is based on the “discursive resources that are available within an inequitable society” (Augustinos et al., 2005, p. 318) – and not on constructions of the ‘racist’ or ‘prejudiced’. In other words, I was not interested in classifying people into categories but rather, I attempt to demonstrate that arguments against AA are gelled together by discursive resources that legitimise inequality.

It is important to also stress that the discourses presented in this study are not necessarily generalisable beyond the temporal space in which they were produced and should therefore not be seen to represent, as Duncan (2003) notes, “the broader social groups in which the producers of these discourses were located...” or “...make definitive assertions about the discourses of broader groups of people at different points in time...” (p. 141).

In other words, the findings that follow are located with a socio-political perspective and are presented in a manner that employs “critical reflexivity” from which to draw on, and engage with the ideological consequences of language use (Billig, 1999; Wetherell, 1998), and the ways in which social organisation is based on unequal relations of power (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Ultimately, the findings in this study provide a platform from which to critically engage with articulated productions of AA in South Africa in way that is appreciative of its rich socio-political history.

4.13. Ethical considerations

In this section I discuss the ethical precautions that I took in this study. These precautions are based on Terre Blanche and Durrheim’s (1999) ethical guidelines for research, and Willig’s (1999) review of applied discourse analysis. The concept of reflexivity is also discussed.

Attaining consent from participants should be both voluntary and informed. Terre Blanch and Durrheim (1999) state that research participants should receive a full, uncomplicated and clear explanation of what is expected of them. They should be able to make an informed choice about whether or not they volunteer to be part of the study. I addressed the issue of consent at two different points in the research. In the first instance, I explained the issue of informed consent in detail to potential participants telephonically when inviting them to participate in my study. I explained in detail that participation is completely voluntary and that there would be no repercussions should they chose not to participate in the study. I explained fully what participation would involve as well as the nature, and implications of the research. At this point, the potential participant either

volunteered to participate or told me that they were not interested. The second time in which the issue of consent was raised was at each respective interview. Here, I again went through in detail with each participant what consenting to participate in my study would involve. I also stressed that he/she could leave the interview at anytime and that should the need arise; they were more than welcome to contact me after the interview for clarification etc. If the person was still willing to participate, he/she then signed the informed consent form (see appendix E).

The informed consent form also highlighted the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. In assuring anonymity I explained that my research report would in no way make use of any participants' name. I also explained that I would use pseudonyms when quoting. I also ensured that all data is confidential and that the only people who would have direct access to the data would be myself as the researcher and my two research supervisors. Terre Blanch and Durrheim (1999) also stress that participants need to be told how data would be recorded, stored and processed, all of which I discussed with participants.

I also tried my best to eliminate any content from interview extracts that could be used to identify people. For example, most participants seemed to know each other (as they often referred to other employees in their interviews) so by using information such as job title or discussing specific, unique events, participants could be identified. I avoided quoting this kind of information.

In one particular interview, a participant was notably uneasy and seemed to avoid my questioning. Her responses at first seemed to function in a way that would secure her employment in the company. Only later in the interview did she say to me that she thought I was acting on behalf of the company's human resources department. I reassured her that I was not and again explained that I was a student and that no one in the company would have access to this information. In hindsight, I realise that this caused the participant a lot of distress but by the end of the interview I felt confident that I had managed to diffuse the situation, and alleviate her anxieties.

4.14. Reflexivity

Although I discussed reflexivity briefly earlier on in this chapter, I find it important to once again draw on this important consideration especially in relation to my personal experiences in this study. Many writers deliberate on the issue of reflexivity (Parker, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Burr, 1995; Sherrard, 1991). The idea here is that the discursive analyst provides only one particular version of an event and as such, any discursive analysis must allow for other potentially equally valid interpretations (Burr, 1995). This point is directly related to Sherrard's (1991) concern that discourse analysts fail to consider their own part being played when conducting interviews. The interviewer is therefore a co-producer of knowledge in such instances. In a related point, Willig (1999) suggests that as researchers, and thus as someone in a position of power, we are in a position to reshape people's subjectivities through discourse which, in some ways, function as a form of manipulation. This point was very important for me as the researcher for a few reasons.

Willig (2001) notes that researchers need to have a reflexive awareness of the problematic status of one's knowledge claims and the discourses used in their construction. Willig (2001) states that as researchers we 'author' rather than discover knowledge. Thus, my level of interpretation is only possible interpretation and may not represent an accurate reflection of 'reality'.

Another important consideration comes in the form of personal reflexivity. This involves the research looking into the ways in which his/her values, experiences, interests, beliefs and among other things, political commitments may have shaped the outcomes of the research (Willig, 2001). For example, the fact that I am an Indian may influence my interpretations around issues of, for example, what I see as culturally acceptable. The fact that I am Christian may also influence what I interpret as 'right living' or morally correct. Although I have made many concerted efforts to remain neutral when interpreting my data, the ways in which my involvement with the study acts and informs the research can not be avoided (Willig, 2001).

Another point worth discussing comes is in the form of my interaction with participants in interviews. As an Indian, I felt that two of the Indian participants were more at 'ease' when talking with me and related to me differently as did other participants. In some ways, I felt that these participants 'assumed' that I could relate to their experiences and therefore had shared experiences because: firstly, I am Indian and secondly, because as a 'non White' South African, I too should be affected by disadvantage.

Another important point that I considered relates to ‘my reading’ and thus my interpretation of the research findings which presents only one version of reality (Burr, 1995). Having read extensively in the area of discursive research, being female and being positioned as ‘historically disadvantaged’ could potentially have influenced the ways in which I interpreted my findings. I often felt challenged in trying to remain ‘neutral’ at all times. I dealt with this by reminding myself that I am producing only one version of events which does not claim to represent reality. Furthermore, my subjectivity in the research process should not be considered as problematic in that this influence is an identified and accepted feature of discourse analysis. After all, as Burr (1995) suggests, the researcher should privilege her own reading in that she produces an alternate, and thus valuable, form of knowledge through the use of theories and methods.

4.15. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined, step by step, the methods employed in this study. I have outlined my research aims and clearly defined the qualitative approach that this study departs from, specifically as it relates to social constructionist research.

I have also in detail discussed this study’s target population, the sampling issues and the procedures used in gaining access to the organisation used. Detailed information related to the study’s data collection technique and procedure was presented. I also discussed how the data was transcribed, coded and analysed, mostly according to Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) guidelines to analysing discourse. Issues of data validation were

briefly visited and a commentary on the interpretive perspective I employed in this study was presented.

The chapter ends with the ethical considerations that were followed in the research as well as my personal reflections, in the form of reflexivity, in the research process. In the next chapter I discuss my research findings. Given the qualitative nature of this study, I present my findings and discuss these findings, together in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed in detail the current study's methodology. In this chapter I discuss both the analysis of the data collected and well as its interpretation and subsequent discussion,

To restate, this study had two aims. The first aim was to critically analyse the discourses around AA produced by employees within in a racially diverse privately owned South African organisation. The second aim was to explore the ways in which historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged employees in this organisation constructed AA. In doing so, I investigated the discursive resources and rhetorical arguments that participants used in talking about their experiences and perceptions of AA.

Discussed extensively in the literature, South Africa has both historically and at present, come under much scrutiny when it comes to its political, social and economic environment. It is not unexpected then that the policy of AA, in a response to the discriminatory practices of the apartheid regime, would come under similar scrutiny. It was therefore unsurprising when varied, and often, competing discourses relating to participant's experiences and perceptions of AA emerged from the interview material.

On the whole, the findings suggest that *race* and *race talk* is a dominant and prevailing feature within South African living – particularly in response to talking about AA.

Practically all of the accounts from research participants were in some way steeped in the rhetoric of race and within apartheid's legacy of racialisation. Participant's subjective meanings and representations of AA discursively drew on discourses of race and racialisation; discourses which are informed by both history and culture. Furthermore, experiences and perceptions of AA were similar among participants within race groups yet radically different between race groups in most of the findings. The delineation of experiences by race is interpreted in this study as occurring as a result of *Othering*. It is against this discursive practice of othering that the findings of the current study are interpreted and presented. It is important to note here that throughout each finding, participants, by and large, agreed on the principles of AA yet at the same time dialectally criticised their experience of it. In other words, the policy itself was not questioned but was seen as having value. This finding is particularly important in that provides a point of discussion around my stated interest – specifically as it relates to the contribution of new knowledge. Stated earlier, my interest was in relation to what people think about the policy conceptually as opposed to exclusively looking at their more practical experience of AA. In other words, I attempted to contribute new knowledge, particularly from the South African context, regarding the value, or lack thereof, associated with the principles embedded in AA policies. My interest was articulated here because I found that most studies only focus on policy issues. Further, these findings, I hypothesised, would also allow me to explore whether experiences of AA converge with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy. I discuss this issue at a later stage.

To restate, the overall objective of this study was to explore participant's discourses on AA in a South African organisation. As such, the findings are presented in relation to four main themes –each of which emerged out of participants' talk of AA. All four themes were, to some extent, based on the process of othering. Before I discuss the process of othering, I present illustratively the breakdown of my findings. A full, detailed breakdown of how each theme/discourse was constructed was covered in the methodology chapter. A succinct breakdown is as follows:

5.2. Breakdown of the findings

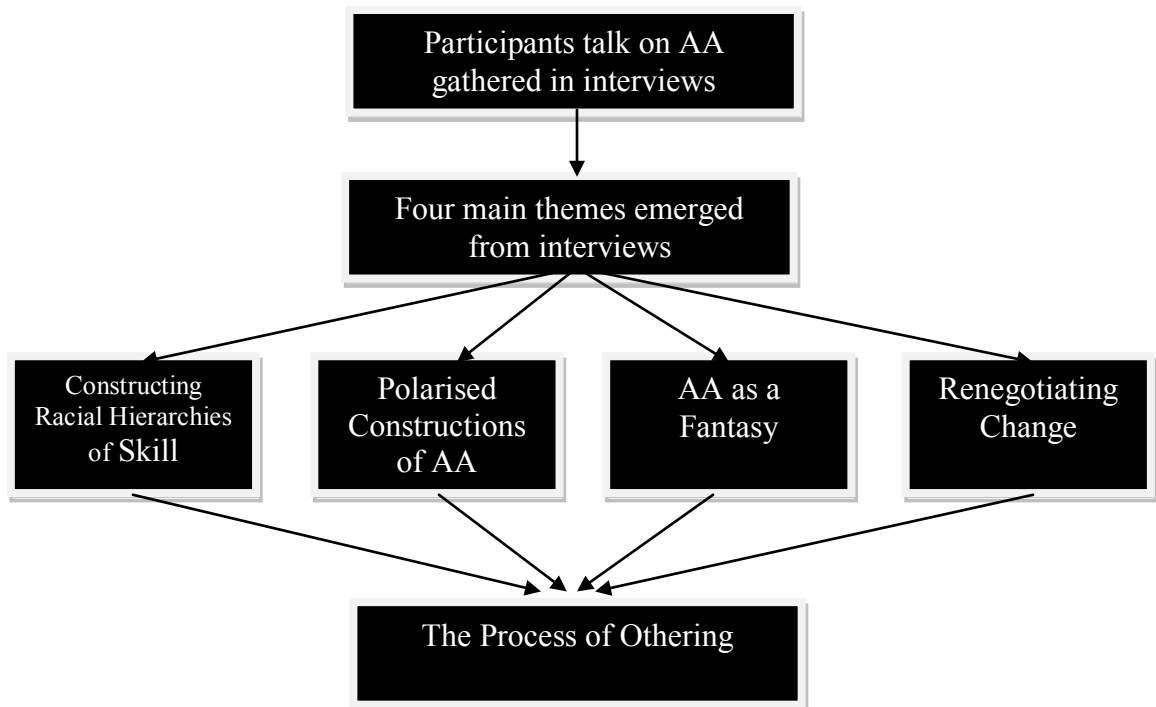


Figure 2. Breakdown of the findings.

As a starting point, the concept of otherness is discussed.

5.3. The Rhetoric of Othering

The Rhetoric of Othering (Riggins, 1997) provides a comprehensive evaluation of othering, particularly in relation to the ways in which it marginalises minorities, perpetuates prejudice and ‘legitimises’ inequalities. Put most simply, othering, then, is a set of discursive practices which polarises people into one of two categories: the *self* or the *other* where one group (*self*) is dominant over the *othered* group. The constructed other is usually situated in a “range of positions within a system of difference” (Riggins, 1997, p. 4). As a result, this *us and them* polarisation serves in reinforcing positions of supremacy (for self) and subordination for the constructed *other*.

In this study I found that this rhetoric of othering was very much at play among participants. Although othering is not performed explicitly (as it was during the apartheid regime), I suggest that the process of othering is still manifest in South Africa, albeit through more implicit, ‘disguised’ forms.

My findings also suggest that despite South Africa’s impressive constitution and progressive policies aimed at redressing South African society, the delineation of people into categories of *others* are still evident and is manifest in ways that seem socially acceptable. The evidence suggests that the construction of the other is particularly important in understanding the ways in which people understand and experience AA in a South African organisation – as they occur through attempts to, whether implicitly or explicitly, perpetuate systems of historic privilege.

As a most salient point, I suggest that participants do not necessarily explicitly, or outwardly function in constructing positions of the self and the other, rather, participants serve as vectors of an historic institutionalised system that still serves in the perpetuation and (re)production of historic privilege. This consideration is most notable in reference to discursive psychological thought, which draws from social constructionism. Put succinctly, social constructionism suggests that in understanding power inequalities in society, an examination of the discursive practices that attempt to create and uphold certain forms of social life, is required (Burr, 1995).

The findings presented below depart from the discursive tradition, particularly from Potter and Wetherell's discursive psychology. As such, my analysis accounts for 'situated activity' (Wetherell, 2007) which considers the importance of context in meaning making. It is also important to note that in addition having interpreted the findings in the discursive tradition; I was also able to critically engage with the research data to study the implied inferences that underlie talk.

Each of the four themes is based on the rhetoric of othering and is interpreted and discussed in response to the ways in which this process mediates experiences of race and racialisation in the lives of the participants. Other studies (Mushtaq, 2001; Brewer, 2007; Grove & Zwi, 2005; Duncan, 2003; Franchi, 2003) draw on the theory of othering in an attempt to illustrate the ways in which it serves in legitimising a dominant culture, at the expense of another (illegitimately constructed) culture. The first theme, Constructing Racial Hierarchies of Skill, is now presented.

5.4. Research findings

I wish to make two comments here. Firstly, I use the word ‘discourse’ as opposed to ‘interpretive repertoire’ in my discussion. Although Potter and Wetherell (1987) prefer the term interpretive repertoire, they use the words interchangeably. I take the word ‘discourse’ to have the same meaning as ‘interpretive repertoire’ - referring to flexible resources used in social interaction. The second comment is that my findings have been arranged thematically and within each theme I discuss the discourses at play.

Theme One: Constructing Racial Hierarchies of Skill

This theme is based on the finding that despite government’s efforts to correct historic injustice through policies of redress, racial stereotyping remains embedded within South African society. In this case, the *construction racial hierarchies of skill* is explored – an illegitimate belief that Whites are intellectually, and otherwise, superior to non-Whites.

Historically under apartheid, Black South Africans were classified as intellectually inferior and as “not to be trained above certain forms of labour” (Seohatse, 2011) – Blacks were described as “hewers of wood and drawers of water” (Gale, 2009), and, elsewhere as “too lazy and ignorant to support themselves” (Coleman, 1971 in Durrheim, 2011). These crude and obviously racist remarks functioned in constructing discourses around Black incompetence and produced unequal power relations. Naturally then, Black *others* were systematically presented as unequal to the White *self*. Expressing attitudes and thoughts of this kind functioned also in confirming existing power relations (Billig, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The important point here is that such discourses become

entrenched in society, in everyday practices and in life in general. It is argued that these ‘embedded discourses’ are presented as ‘taken-for-grantedness’ (Fozdar, 2008) and continue to circle South African living, in arguably more subtle and covert manner (Augustinos & Every, 2007).

These racist ways of constructing Black South Africans are still embodied in everyday practices. It is argued that through every day talk, people, whether voluntarily or unwillingly, discursively draw on resources that function in sustaining historical privilege and ideas about inferiority and superiority (Franchi, 2003; Augustinos et al., 2005; Duncan, 2003; Purba, 2010, Foster, 2009). Durrheim et al. (2011) argues this point well by suggesting that, “It is from these regulated practices – our activities – that these forms of social life and racialised subjectivities emerge to constitute race trouble” (p. 26).

Extract 1 below illustrates the ways in which discursive strategies are used to reinforce stereotypes about *othered* groups of people. In this particular extract, we see a discourse of Black incompetence at play.

Extract 1

W: Yes once again you get the right man for the job, and if you train them and they still can't do it, then you've got to look at another thing and say okay your limits are there... maybe you not even interested in admin. I can go and put you in practical, something more practical. Give something for the guy who can also enjoy it and enjoy the benefits of going further, not just put him in a place where he is totally silly and not because he is stupid, but because that's just not his, his path. I mean I know of an instance of a person that's actually put in a position - out of choice I mean - not by force but they just cannot do the job, and of course they get nailed all the time and not getting proper increases etc.

Because they can't actually, actually do the job. It's not their line, so yes it is, but if a guy cannot do it or he is not happy, move him to where he is happy and develop him from there [White Female].

In extract 1, W's talk functions in dichotomising competency and skill on racial lines. Firstly, W's reference to getting "*the right man for the job*" indirectly infers that currently, the Black employee in question is not the "right person for the job". The speaker's emphasis on situating such employees within more *practical* jobs serves in reinforcing stereotypes around competency along racial lines, suggesting that Black employees may be more suited to the "easier" or more "practical" types of jobs. In many ways, the speaker is also revisiting and legitimising historic constructions of inferiority, where Black employees would typically be found in positions requiring lower levels of skill. This idea contributes to the ideology of racialised competence to the extent that it 'normalises' the idea that Blacks are inappropriately suited to some types of work. Notice how W also credentialises (Fozdar, 2008) and softens her formulation (Edwards, 2000) about placing people in "*practical*" jobs by presenting it as something good for the person concerned ("*who can also enjoy it and enjoy the benefits of going further*").

The speaker's choice of words "*where he is totally silly*" presents 'him' as almost helpless in certain positions to the extent that he or she is not able to acquire the necessary skills to get the job done. The speaker's words "*not because he is stupid but because that's just not his, his path*" functions in a contradictory manner to neutralise her previous comment. This suggests two things. Firstly by asserting that he [the Black employee] is not stupid, the speaker attempts to position herself as someone who does not

support the idea that Black employees are *silly* (or incompetent) by virtue of their colour. Secondly, the speaker validates and reiterates the positioning of herself as someone ‘fair’ by suggesting that the reason for the employee’s incompetence is because it is not “*his path*” [and would therefore be disadvantageous to him] rather than along lines of racial stereotyping about incompetence. It can be said here that the speaker is using anti-racist talk as a device to defend her position as someone who is concerned. This mix of racist and anti-racist talk is what Fleras (1998) refers to as a duelling discourse. Arguably, the speaker is engaging in devices that present otherwise negative views as reasonable and at the same time protects the speaker from charges of racism and prejudice (Augustinos & Every, 2007).

W’s remark that “*they get nailed all the time*” suggests that Black incompetency is not an exception but rather, is something that is frequent. This comment is presented almost as a *truth* and as a *matter of factness*, arguably as support for her position. W also comments that the Black employee who “*can not do it [the job]*” should be moved to a place where he is “*happy*” and “*develop him from there*”. This discourse implies, although not directly, something about the trainability of Black employees. Importantly, as discussed in the literature, there is an identified lack of skill among Black employees (Chenault, 1997 in McFarlin, Coster & Mogale-Pretorious, 1999; Segwati, 1998, Herdhold & Marx, 1999; Mittner, 1998; Nottage, 2003; Commey, 2007; Mbeki, 2008). The lack of skill is particularly as a result of poor schooling in pre-democratic South Africa thus propelling some of the aims of the Employment Equity Act (Employment Equity Act, 1998, 2) which promotes reasonable accommodation, training and development for people from

designated groups. Despite these ‘legal’ accommodations there is still ‘reservation’ from people.

Moving back to W’s comment above, two points require attention. Firstly, there is the inference that Black employees are just not suited to some types of jobs and should therefore be moved, arguably to ‘simpler’ jobs that would make them “*happy*”- the speakers failure to address issues of training for people “*who can not do it*” immediately disqualifies Black employees from certain types of jobs. Secondly, in moving someone into a position where he is “*happy*” and to a position where he can be “developed” polarises employees along “racially re-traced lines” (Franchi, 2003) in manner that legitimises White status and power and the exclusion and stigmatisation of Black employees (Franchi, 2003).

Discursive devices used in talk, as in the case of W, function in reinforcing stereotypes on the racial hierarchy of competency, and in doing so, consequently brings into question, and undermines, the efficacy of AA measures and directives – which by default, through a process of inversion (Duncan, 2003) is constructed as a system that encourages Black incompetence. Put simply, by undermining and discrediting AA ‘candidates’, AA as a system of redress is simultaneously constructed as problematic. Of importance, notice that as a ‘practice’ AA is presented as problematic and not necessarily in relation to the actual principles of the policy – I make this point here only to highlight it – I address it in more detail, later.

Of particular importance, much of the talk in the current study often resulted in an illegitimate association being made between AA and incompetence suggesting that they are inordinately linked in many ways. This imagined association was evident from both groups – those who were seen as benefiting from AA practices, and those who were seen as ‘disadvantaged’ by the policy. An important point here is that the construction of skill on racial lines is not only re-enforced through talk by White participants but also internalised as ‘true’ or ‘evident’ by Black participants. Some supporting extracts are visited below.

Extract 2

M: How are you empowering him, you make him lazy, you make him think that you now just got the job because of the colour of your skin, whereas you actually need to study very hard as you know. It is hard studies. It is a lot of sacrifices, and that is the way how you climb the ladder, but we are really not doing those people a favour and you know they will bring their children up like that as well....[White Female]

Notice how M begins her argument with a rhetorical question which she immediately answers for herself. M’s answer also functions as a duelling discourse (Augustinos & Every, 2007). On the one hand, M constructs AA as a system that makes people “*lazy*” and on the other, AA is seen as a system that encourages self-doubt and personal insecurity (“...*you make him think that you now just got the job because of the colour of your skin...*”). In both instances, constructing AA in this manner functions in discrediting it as a legitimate system.

There is an immediate assumption that the Black employee in question is actually

unqualified or incompetent because he actually got the job based on the “*colour of your [his] skin*”. This kind of talk neglects the possibility that the employee in question may well in fact be skilled, competent and be Black, all at the same time. Again, this reinforces an unjustified association between colour and skill which also functions in re-enforcing historic stereotypes about race and skill. The speaker’s inferences about race/skill associations further supports her implied message that Black employees are actually unsuited and unqualified for the job because you “*actually need to study very hard*” (suggesting that the Black employee has not in fact studied, or studied hard) and as such, has undeservingly gained from [unfair] AA practices. The perceptions and misconceptions surrounding AA in South Africa has been dealt with in the literature (Visagie, 1997; Mtume, 1998; Adam, 2002; Weir-Smith & Reddy; 2010).

M’s talk in extract 2 also constructs Black employees as “*lazy*” (or as having the propensity to be lazy), as not working hard and, indirectly, as not able to undertake studying successfully (“*It’s hard studies*”). M’s statement, “*they will bring their children up like that...*” reinforces racial stereotypes about parenting and constructs a particular “uniqueness” about Black people (*they*) and the way in which they bring up their children – this talk functions in two ways. First, describing Black employees using the word *lazy* functions as a naming tactic (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) which is a common sense device used to articulate racist discourse (Fozdor, 2008). Secondly, the [negative] outcomes of AA is construed as far reaching, expanding beyond the workplace and as a possible contributor, or facilitator of, poor parenting (“*they will bring their children up like that as well*”).

Extract 3

N: I've had to work hard to get where I am at now you know what I mean, why must I just give it all up...that in a company that if you are going to employ somebody you must employ them on qualifications, experience and if they deserve the job then they must get the job you know. Nowadays they don't look at it like that. They don't [White Female].

Extract 3 above reinforces the perceived association between colour and skill and although not stated explicitly, is enacting a kind of *laissez-faire racism* (Bobo, Kleugel & Smith, 1997) – an ideology that supports democracy but opposes the principle of AA. Considering her emphasis on the importance of “*qualifications and experience*”, N's talk implies that when it comes to AA practices, things such as qualifications and experience are *not* taken into consideration, thereby questioning the authenticity of AA as an initiative of redress and, arguably by default, implying that Black employees are inexperienced and unqualified as a rule, rather than as an exception. Her talk portrays a sentiment of disappointment and again, neglects the possibility that an employee can be qualified, experienced and Black. This kind of talk once again functions in perpetuating stereotypes about race and skill suggesting that some race groups are more likely to be highly skilled, than others – this idea is presented again in extract 4, by M who overlooks the possibility that a person can be offered preferential treatment based on race and skill.

Extract 4

M: But yes, it is because there's some they ya, you get employed because of your colour of your skin or because you fit the profile.... [White Female]

The talk drawn from the extracts above provides a means to engage with the broader challenges related to AA, both in terms of how it is understood and how it is experienced.

The analyses shows that despite concerted attempts to enact political and social redress both from a governmental and organisational perspective, “many Whites see redress as an instance of a wider pattern of victimisation” (Durrheim et al., 2011), and many Blacks continue to feel marginalised and stigmatised. AA, addressed in the literature, continues to generate controversy (Cohen & Sterba, 2003; DeCapua, 2010; Charlton & van Niekerk, 2004; Herdhold & Marx, 1999; Mittner, 1998; Nottage, 2003). Durrheim et al. (2011), expand on this argument by stating that stereotypes about Black incompetence and corruption are part of a perennial discourse regarding the inability of Black people to govern in Africa. The emphasis here is thus seen as being shifted away from AA measures per se. Emphasis rather, is placed on the person, who has been constructed as the problem.

Participants, whether through experience, opinion or otherwise, continue to engage with the rhetoric of othering (Riggins, 1998) particularly in relation to the ways in which their talk marginalises employees, perpetuates prejudice and ‘legitimises’ inequalities – specifically along racial lines. Racial stereotypes around competency and skill continue to emerge through talk and make illegitimate claims about what is true, what is constructed or what is imagined. Participants, seen above, engage in multiple discursive devices and rhetorical arguments that function in rationalising a racial order of competence which not only implicitly defends historic ideologies around White supremacy but perhaps more importantly, it inversely functions in undermining and disqualifying AA as a system that is inherently problematic. Potter and Wetherell (1987) understand this dynamic as a resource that people use in presenting their version of the world – Importantly also, is to

consider that history, most notably in the form of apartheid South Africa, continues to inform the ways in which ‘things occur’ and how we construct the *self* and the *other*.

To say this is to keep with the writings of Burr (1995) who insists that, in adopting social constructionism, we take a critical stance towards that which we take for granted because the ways in which the world is understood is inordinately tied into history and culture. Utterances, after all, are context bound (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Addressed in Chapter Two, discourse is seen as primary in that it brings forward our mental states – it shifts thinking from the inner mind to the discursive realm of talk (Edwards, 1997; Gergen, 1993). Furthermore, talk functions as a form of social practice which constructs the social world. The extracts above were therefore interpreted with this in mind.

There is an ongoing debate surrounding the viability of AA where South Africa's democracy is faced with the political dilemma of how to address historical injustices while, at the same time, being able to build a single national identity and promote economic growth and development (Bentley & Habib, 2008; Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999; McFarlin et al., 1999). This has resulted in both practical and ideological challenges for South Africa. The polarisation and construal of AA as a system that is problematic on the one hand, and as necessary, and therefore legitimate, on the other hand, is the basis of theme two. I hypothesise that this split occurs as a result of credentialising the policy theoretically, and disqualifying it practically. I discuss this in the next theme.

Theme Two: Polarised constructions of Affirmative Action

South Africans are often reminded of past injustices and; and the same time, experience

present prejudice, in some form or the other. Within this reality, many South Africans find themselves renegotiating and (re)constructing discourses around race and race relations often in the form of two broad dichotomies - people are either defending or defenceless, perpetrators or victims, Black or White, privileged or unprivileged. By discursively analysing the ways in which people talk about such things, we subsequently give expression to our subjective psychological realities (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Discussed at length in the literature, AA makes sense theoretically – practically however, it is experienced controversially, either embraced enthusiastically as a policy of reform or debunked as a system of discrimination (Romano, 2007; Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994; Sachs, 1992). Historically, and at present, nations around the world are presented with challenges when it comes to policies of preferential treatment (Sowell, 2004; Schuman, 2010; Charlton & van Niekerk, 1994; Deshpande, 2006). The argument is generally based on the fact that some groups are ‘advantaged’ at the expense of other groups who feel ‘marginalised’. Franchi (2003) describes these competing discourses about AA as both hope and macro-justice for the majority and personal and collective loss for a dominant minority. On the one hand, much of the debate and support **for** AA is centered on the premise that, unless deliberate measures of redress are adopted, things are likely to remain the same (Sachs, 1992; Gloppen, 1997; Human et al., 1999). AA is thus seen as a moral imperative (Tummala, 1999) and as a device to create conditions of equal opportunity (Gloppen, 1997). On the other hand, many other authors draw on South Africa’s fragile stability and its difficulty in moving beyond the legacy of apartheid (Klasen, 2002; Nyanto, 2006; Beall, Gelb & Hassim, 2005). AA is thus portrayed as a system that perpetuates discrimination and functions in creating new Black elite

(Commeey, 2007; Mbeki, 2008; Nyanto, 2006; Guest, 2004, Vorster, 2005). These different versions of how people perceive AA is an age old debate – and is likely to remain one. These contradictions, covered extensively in the literature, are now visited practically, particularly as they relate to participants talk.

I suggest, from my findings, that this contradiction occurs both among groups as well as within the individual. In other words, over and above the obvious tension between the ‘advantaged’ and the ‘disadvantaged’, individuals themselves have conflicting feelings about preferential policies. My findings suggest that this contention arises because while people generally support in principle the values embedded in policies of redress, they disqualify it practically. This finding is particularly important in relation to my interest, stated earlier, in what people think about the policy conceptually. In other words, this finding contributes to new understandings, particularly from the South African context, regarding the perceived value associated with the principles embedded in AA policies. Interestingly however, the findings also show that while participants support the policy, they are at the same time opposed to its practical implementation – in other words, experiences of AA diverge with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy. To illustrate this argument, I analyse some extracts. I first present some positive arguments in support of AA.

Extract 5

S: It is, as I said before to even things out, that’s why we even have the BEE structures, as many Black people...we all want a big piece of the cake, that we have, so in order for that

to happen, a structure needs to be built. Positions need to be given to certain people, just to make everything equal. It will take years, but eventually I think we will get there.

S: We exchange things now. Okay you had better quality of life, now let me have it. Its, it's just [Black, Male].

S's retort constructs AA as a system that is necessary and as a means to a specific end (*to even things out*). S's construction also lends to the organising function of AA which can facilitate the dividing of a *big piece of cake* [benefits of AA]. S reiterates the importance (and thus legitimacy) of AA by saying that *positions need to be given to certain people, just to make things equal*. S, by commenting that AA is necessary in ensuring equality thus also implies that currently, things are not equal in South Africa. Discussions on the inequality of South African society was covered fully in the literature (Kenny, 2004; Commey, 2007; Guest, 2004). In closing his argument, S's position on AA is clear [AA is necessary and legitimate] and its future is portrayed optimistically (*...eventually I think we will get there*). Clearly, this talk constructs AA as principally sound.

S's talk about 'evening things out' supports some of the arguments presented in the literature. For example, Human et al. (1999) describe AA as necessary to curtail the social reproduction of existing relations of power. The argument here is that the elite tend to reproduce their power over generations resulting in the rich staying rich and poor staying poor. In other words, "little will change if we accept the principles of so-called 'equal opportunities' in the absence of affirmative action" (Human, et al., 1999, p. 20). Drawing again from the literature, S's talk of 'evening things out' also lends to Gloppen's (1997) *level the playing field theory* which considers how society should

influence the distribution of resources and opportunities so that people may pursue “what they regard as the good in life” (p. 83). Extract 5 also shows how S approaches AA as a compensatory model and as an exchange system. There is a sentiment of reversal here where previously advantaged people must surrender their historic privilege to the historically disadvantaged (*you had better quality of life, now let me have it*). S acknowledges current changes (*we exchange things now*).

Notice again, in extract 6 below, an emphasis being put on the levelling out of the playing field (*balance things out*), and creating equivalence. This is quite contrary to popular constructions of AA as discriminatory and inequitable. T2’s articulation has a compensatory sentiment to it in that Black people need to be given opportunities (*to rise*) in that they were previously denied (*they were suppressed*). T2’s talk draws on arguments on compensatory justice which, broadly speaking, suggests that given the history of South Africa and inequality, action (compensatory action) should be taken to rectify this (Kershner, 1999; Gloppen, 1997).

Extract 6

T2: Well, uh, I’ll say. I think they are trying to give Black people the chance to, to rise to be in positions, which I think, before they were suppressed too and ja just try to um balance things out... [Black, Male]

In a similar fashion, T in extract 7 below portrays AA as a developmental approach by acknowledging that if things are not done properly, then people are set up for failure. T constructs AA as a *process* which should involve training, development and mentoring. This construction implies two things. Firstly, having stated the need for training (*give*

them the basic tools), T is implying that currently there are Black employees in positions which they are ill equipped for. Secondly, T, similar to S above, acknowledges that if certain structures (training) are put in place, AA can work well.

Extract 7

T: it's not just about stigma - if you aren't capable of doing those roles and responsibilities, all we've done is set people up for failure, so all I'm trying to say is we need to empower the people... not actually empower them [but] give them the basic tools, from that perspective and have a proper mentoring path to getting there... [Indian, Male]

T's talk here draws on the argument that empowering people in the workplace requires deliberate, concerted efforts which target training, development and mentoring. The literature is clear that 'quick-fix changes' will not work (Charlton & van Niekerk, 2004). His talk also suggests that the needs of "only" a new small Black elite are currently considered (Commey, 2007; Mbeki, 2008; Nyanto, 2006; Guest, 2004, Vorster, 2005; Kovacevic, 2007). As a result, many Black employees are placed in positions which they are untrained for which, as T suggests, *sets people up for failure*. The repercussions of this are concerning – especially when people begin to question their worth and lose confidence which can ultimately have deleterious effects on the lives of the *othered* group (Adam, 2002; Chen & Kleiner, 1996).

Notice how T's comment on empowering people is voiced. He begins by saying that people need to be empowered (*we need to empower the people*)... and then immediately 'corrects' his view (*not actually empower them but...*) thus suggesting that being 'empowered' goes beyond a position – but rather, it is realised in the person's ability to

get things done. In other words, T is acknowledging that Black employees do get placed into positions without the relevant requirements – this T suggests – is *not* empowering, but rather, counter-productive. Functioning in credentialising his comment, T's emphasis on training and mentoring is presented as an instrument with which to empower people.

The talk presented above discursively constructs AA as necessary, as important and, by default, as legitimate. In this way then, AA is constructed as a device to overcome discrimination which is also necessary for further development (Parker & Christiansen, 1997). Two important points need to be emphasised here.

Firstly, critical engagement with this text suggests that support for AA implies a need for it, arguably because little change has occurred – thus questioning the credibility of AA. Mallet (2000) dealt with this argument by drawing on Bantu Holimisa's accusations of Black politicians and intellectuals who 'whine' about the country's history of apartheid where there is a "...tendency to shun responsibility and apportion blame for failure to a historical past" (p. 1). This statement constructs AA as illegitimate. Burgis (2008) also suggests the inability of AA to bring about real change in his statement that South Africa has failed in overcoming the privations of apartheid and that, in many sectors, apartheid-era monopolies are still at large. South Africa, according to Kenny (1995), "... is now being governed in the same bad way that it was under White rule" (p. 1) and has produced "...an elite of Black frontiers, who drive Mercedes and live in mansions, who become very rich not by producing wealth but by bestowing political patronage" (p. 1). These accounts thus construct AA as disappointing in its attempts at redress. This

argument is discussed in greater detail later on.

Secondly, it is fairly safe to suggest that people who are more likely to benefit from AA measures would generally be more in favour of the policy as opposed to those who are less likely to gain from it. Meaning and social action are constructed and subsequently enacted on historical and cultural grounds. In other words, attitudes towards AA do not exist in a social vacuum, rather, “they tend to reflect and be affected by, the norms and values of both the broader society and the organisational settings in which they occur: (Franchi, 2003, p. 160). Kravitz, Harrison and Turner (1996, in Franchi, 2003), found that AA was more positively evaluated by those who had previously experienced discrimination and more negatively evaluated by those who were historically privileged – the same was found in the current study. Kravitz et al. (1996) account for this perspective in terms of perceived deprivation, underlying views about race and, among other things, demographic status.

Thus, with reference to cultural and historic specificity and the arguments presented above, attitudes of AA from an oppositional perspective are presented below. Importantly, as discussed in the preceding theme, the current study is not interested in classifying people into categories of racism and prejudice but instead wishes to demonstrate that arguments against AA are drawn together by discursive resources that legitimise inequality – an offshoot which functions in maintaining and reproducing inequalities. In other words, talk is oriented towards social action (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

N: So I just feel that it's just gone too far now you know they must just get on with it I don't care who's in power it doesn't matter to me and I mean I grew up my father worked very, very hard to be where he was. He worked very, very hard, you know and I'm feeling now that the Blacks...they not, they not, they not willing to work to get what they would like to have [White, Female].

In Extract 8, N constructs AA initiatives/redress as impermanent and as having a beginning and an end (...*it's just gone too far now...they must just get on with it...*). This suggests two things. Firstly, N is, in calling for an *end* to such practices; by default suggesting that AA is currently problematic (hence they just need to *get on with it*). Secondly, her utterance of it [redress] having *gone too far* implies that redress in South Africa functions from a point of wrongness, and as operating outside an idealised norm or acceptable standard.

Later, notice how N positions herself as someone who is not racist, who is perhaps neutral and who is not opposed to answering to those who are currently in power (*I don't care who's in power, it doesn't matter to me...*). This neutral position that she adopts serves to counter and neutralise her previous report about AA needing to end (*it's gone too far*). N's talk in this extract constructs AA as problematic. Many studies engage with AA similarly where AA is viewed as structurally flawed and as inherently problematic (Tummala, 1999; Cohen & Sterba; 2003; Adam, 2000). AA has also been described as political cronyism (Kovacevic, 2007) and as only beneficial to a "small elite" (Guest, 2004). N further defends and credentialises this neutral position by implying that her *father worked very hard*. This comment brings some important points to light. Firstly, N

uses the point that her father worked hard as discursive device to negate the stereotype that all White people had it easy and that historic privilege was perhaps not as appealing as it sounded. Durrheim et al. (2011) describes how Whites in present day South Africa are generally stereotyped as racist and if not done so directly, there is always an impending suspicion of being potentially racist. This places White South Africans in a difficult situation often resulting in them seeking out ways to disassociate themselves from the racism of the past and engage in refrains like ‘forget about the past and focus on the future’ and let ‘bygones be bygones’ (Durrheim et al., 2011). As a consequence, Whites experience a ‘loss of guaranteed legitimacy’ (Steyn, 2001).

In a second point, N, by suggesting that her father was hard working and later, that *they* [Black people] *are not willing to work*, N constructs a discourse which implies some assumptions around the relationship between race and work ethic. Arguably, N’s talk functions in presenting governments efforts of redress as problematic and as an illegitimate system that rewards in the absence of effort (*they not they not willing to work to get want they would like to have*). Again, and as noted in theme one, emphasis is shifted away from AA as a measure of redress. The emphasis is relocated to construct the person as holding the problem (in this case – work ethic), rather than the policy of AA itself.

Extract 9

N: ...when you speak about preferential I, I, I, it should be equal to everyone. Everyone should have equal [rights] - we should stop looking in the past and move forward. I don’t

care who's in government. As long as they do justice because there's more poverty now, there's more uh, there's more unemployment, all the promises that they made [to] the rural Black ignorant people - okay and I'm not talking [about] generalising Black people. Okay. They are not getting what they were promised all those many years ago. It's all about power, it's all about who can make the most money and there's corruption – if, I think that our country is in a worse state now than it was, twenty years ago [White, Female].

N's talk in some way functions in removing Blacks from their past experience by ignoring their obvious experiences of exploitation and discrimination (*stop looking in the past*). In a similar argument, Clayton (1996) suggests when talk around reverse discrimination is used, it wrongfully presents people as competing on a 'level playing field' and at the same time, misrepresents historic disadvantage as being eradicated. N makes use of temporal markers (then and now/past and present). Her stating that South Africa is in a worse state now implies that it was better *then* [during apartheid].

Notice how N then immediately positions herself as neutral (and arguably as not being against political reform) because she does not *care who's in government*. N, from this position of neutrality, then goes on to construct AA as problematic (*more poverty, more unemployment, corruption*). Talking from a constructed neutral position, N's version of the 'state of things' in South Africa, is presented as a fair and 'obvious' conclusion. Notice that N's vivid and detailed description (*more poverty, more unemployment, corruption*) of the state of things, adds to the 'facticity' (Potter & Wetherell, 1992) of her account and therefore functions in credentialising her account. The facticity of the account is thus reified.

To critically engage with N's experiences regarding the state of the country, is important – specifically as it relates to issues of *Troubling Whiteness* (Durrheim et al., 2011). Changes in South Africa have made life for White South Africans difficult in some respects. Whites are constantly viewed suspiciously as being racist and are implicitly disqualified from “being full citizens of the new non-racial South Africa” (p. 45) - their history of privilege remains deeply discrediting, forming “the foundation for what has become known as White guilt” (p. 47). In supporting this argument, many of the White participants, although done only indirectly, defended previous entitlements in a manner that positioned them as privileged, but as still deserving, in that they did not actively engage in racist behaviour but were rather passive recipients of historic privilege. Furthermore, White South Africans experience voicelessness and disempowerment (Durrheim et al., 2011). This idea of troubling Whiteness is evident in slogans and constructions such as “the White male is an endangered species” (Sewati, 1998), and the “pale male” syndrome. As implied by N's talk, White South Africans experience a sense of displacement and disempowerment within democratic South Africa – arguably as a result of preferential policies which consider the needs, and progression, of the Blacks as priority. AA then as driving these initiatives, is constructed as inherently problematic.

Extract 10

Shanya: ...So you walking down the road, I tap you on the shoulder and I say R, Affirmative Action, What are some of the things that come immediately to mind?

R: I don't like it very much, because it feels to me, it's just reverse racism and secondly when I look at it, I think you know it is right to help the people develop, but you don't help the people develop by pushing them into [a] position. I am one, two hundred percent

for it to educate the people properly, train them properly and then get them into [a] position, but affirmative action as it is currently, you know. It is just reverse racism, that's all [White, Female].

Shanya: Very interesting, what I'm getting from you, I don't know I could be wrong but, conceptually or theoretically affirmative action makes sense right, but procedurally, the way in which it's done is incorrect.

R: Correct, yes, yes and I think it should never ever be a forced thing. It is should be a natural thing, for me you know there's hardly any racism, I mean I'm not looking at this one and say you are that, and you are that. We are working together very nicely, but as soon as the law comes in it you know it's unnatural, and you put people in positions that you know are not qualified for it, so those people suffer, and then people who work hard or have worked hard. You know they just don't get those positions.

R is very clear on the point that she is opposed to the practice of AA (*I don't like it*). In fact, R constructs AA as reverse racism [or the reverse of apartheid]. Inherent in this construction then, if AA is seen as reversed apartheid – the only difference being in the reversing of the historically oppressed to positions of oppressors. Put plainly, AA is constructed as problematic. Notice then how almost immediately, R positions herself as being someone fair, who is willing to help people (*I am one, two hundred per cent for it to educate the people...*) – R is engaging in a counter argumentation (Fozdar, 2008) which functions to inoculate the speaker from being portrayed as prejudiced or racist (Edwards, 2000).

Later, R calls into question the ways in which AA is practiced. Some important points

need to be made about this. Firstly, R draws on the comment made by the interviewer that although conceptually sound, the problem surrounding AA may be in the ways in which it is practiced. This is an important point in that knowledge is co-produced by both parties in a conversation (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). Still on this point, it is once again evident that, because R sees the policy as conceptually sound, this functions as an acknowledgment of the benefits, and value, inherent in the policy. This point is particularly important in that it shows how, at times; participants may shift their emphasis between policy and person. The result here is that the beneficiary and his /her incompetence is presented as being the problem. The policy itself is constructed as just and necessary and shows some appreciation for the values embedded within it.

The second point illustrates a paradoxical construction of AA as being both a good thing and a bad thing – which suggests that a duelling discourse (Fleras, 1998) is at play. In agreeing with the interviewer, R constructs AA as something that is conceptually sound – which infers that, at least in principle, AA is morally correct. However, on the other hand, R immediately constructs AA as something *unnatural* and as something that is forced (*it should never be a forced thing*). This contradiction again points to the perception that AA is, to some extent, problematic. R validates this idea of AA as problematic (and as even harmful to those it seeks to benefit) by implying that, as a result of AA [a system which wrongfully places unqualified people in positions] *those people* [Black employees], *suffer*. Again, as I stated earlier, I suggest that this contradiction occurs as a result of internal conflict. Here R is actively credentialising the policy theoretically on the one hand, and disqualifying it practically, on the other.

Constructing AA as problematic, as in R's case, has been discussed in detail in the literature review. For example, Visagie (1997) argues that democracy has evoked both fears and hope for South Africans particularly as they related to the shape that the new South Africa will take. In a related argument, Mtume (1998) also draws on the problematic nature of AA by suggesting that the realities of transformation are becoming more apparent where Whites are concerned about the impact that AA will have and where Blacks still see Whites as enjoying the 'fruits of apartheid'. Similarly, Adam (2002) suggests that AA can in fact stigmatise minorities, and render AA beneficiaries as 'patronised targets of state largesse'. Chen and Kleiner (1996) suggest that White males also face discrimination and constantly think that they are being robbed, all of which result in intensified inter-group resentment between where "everybody is the victim of discrimination" (1993, p. 3). W's talk below also constructs AA as problematic.

Extract 11

W: ... a lot of the people [they] actually take, well what I've heard, I don't know of anything particular myself but, have you heard, they are made a silent partner, they take the gardener and they put their name there, just to have that status, meanwhile the guy doesn't know who, what or how [White, Female].

Notice how in extract 11, W distances herself from talk which is seen to be implicitly racist by saying that "*well what I've heard, I don't know of anything particular myself*". In her rendition of *things she's heard*, W draws on discourse that suggests at least 2 things. Firstly, this comment implies that AA is a system that is flawed (or problematic) given that an obviously unqualified person (*gardener*) can be put into positions of power.

Secondly, this idea of a *silent partner* draws on discourses of nepotism and illegitimate hiring practices where people are hired just to get the “numbers right”- and thus portraying AA as a system that can be manipulated or stage managed and as a system of political cronyism (Kovacevic, 2007).

Both support for and arguments opposing AA, presented above, mobilise discursive resources to justify different versions, or constructions, of AA. Some important points are worth considering here. Firstly, practically all of the positive reflections of AA were from historically disadvantaged participants. This is understandable given that attitudes towards AA “tend to reflect and be affected by, the norms and values of both the broader society and the organisational settings in which they occur (Franchi, 2003, p. 160). Arguably, an alternate explanation here would come in the form of Potter and Wetherell’s (1992) suggestion that people use a range of liberal and egalitarian arguments (such as freedom, and equal opportunities), all of which are key to western democracies, to justify personal positions. For example, Augustinos et al. (2005) notes that while these liberal principles can be mobilised to justify change in addressing disadvantage it can also be used in other contexts to justify existing social relations. In the same way, participants in the current study, both previously advantaged and disadvantaged, drew on principles of fairness and equality etc. – each however, having used them in ways that support and justify their own accounts.

Secondly, although both groups drew on the problems associated with AA, albeit to varying extents, the way in which AA’s future was envisioned was presented contradictorily. I observed a polarisation of AA into either *open-ended and optimistic*

(historically disadvantaged accounts) or as *closed-ended and pessimistic* (historically advantaged accounts), both however still in lieu of the problems associated with AA. Essentially, the sentiment here is one that departs from the view of AA as unnecessary and problematic to AA as necessary and only *sometimes* problematic. Both these views emphasise problems in the implementation, rather than in the actual principles of the policy.

A third important point is to reiterate that opposition to AA is not to be construed as racist or prejudiced (Augustinos et al., 2005) but rather, it is to be considered in the ways in which discursive resources are implicitly drawn together to justify inequality and in so doing, legitimise and maintain historic privileges and power. Potter and Wetherell (1992) make this point by suggesting that the repertoires people use, function ideologically to form social organisation based on unequal power relations. By default then, AA is constructed as inherently dysfunctional in its exercise of racial redress within contemporary South Africa.

Fourthly, I suggest that at times, as seen in the talk presented above, participants shift their emphasis between policy and person. In other words, the problems associated with AA is sometimes shifted to exist within the individual (who is *lazy* or *unqualified*). This argument in some ways shows some appreciation for the policy itself and the values embedded within it. The problem is then located in 'practice' and in the person. This reintroduces the process of othering.

AA and the experience of it is complex. The arguments presented here suggests that South Africans, particularly those who oppose AA, must realise that change is developmental and in order to structurally undo the disproportions of the past, concerted time and effort is required – quick fixes will not suffice. In the interim, AA surfaces for many as an exclusionary policy, whether previously disadvantaged or not, which reserves the fruits of redress for the constructed ‘other’. AA then remains an unrealised fantasy, at best, and at worst, a perpetuation of the very regime it hoped to overcome – I now address these concerns in the next theme – The Fantasy of AA.

Theme Three - The Fantasy of Affirmative Action

The harsh reality in South Africa is that despite its liberal policies on democracy and wide spread efforts to truly engage with racial reform, many South Africans who are labelled as currently ‘advantaged’ seldom see the fruits of the benefits associated with the policy of AA.

For example, as reviewed in the literature, Burgis (2008) notes that South Africa has failed in overcoming the privations of apartheid and in many sectors, apartheid-era monopolies are still at large (2010). Also discussed in the literature, Kenny (1995) argues that racism in South Africa is still rampant and that “South Africa is now being governed in the same bad way that it was under White rule” (p. 1). Many authors have commented on South Africa’s fragile stability and its difficulty in moving beyond the legacy of apartheid (Klasen, 2002; Nyanto, 2006; Beall, Gelb & Hassim, 2005).

For many, South Africa is still a place governed by race trouble and limited opportunities. This huge inconsistency between what is framed theoretically in policy and between practical experiences is worrying amid the huge investments made politically, socially and economically to effect change in South Africa. Findings in the current study also suggest that there is a skewed emphasis in that AA is viewed extensively from one position - research in this area often portrays AA as providing opportunities for the historically disadvantaged, “and of impending threat of personal and collective loss for an economically dominant minority” (Franchi, 2003, p. 160), rather than from the perspective of the relatively stable dominant minority and the still, disillusioned majority.

Extracts from the data show this sentiment of disappointment and racial asymmetry among Black employees who feel that little has happened to improve their position within South African society and that by and large, AA is nothing more than a fantasy.

Extract12

S2: I think it's important to have affirmative action, it helps some people like me, it helped me so it can help the others too, I'm not the person who always complains, I don't complain, to me everything is like if it doesn't go right this time, like okay, just forget, let me just try this side I don't complain [Black, Female].

S2 highlights the importance of having AA measures. She constructs AA as a helpful mechanism, and as a tool that can help one progress. Clearly, S2 constructs AA as sound, in principle. S2's emphasis on the point that she does not complain, suggests that there is in fact something to complain about - but that it not in her best interest to bring it up (*just forget*). S2 positions herself quite evidently as someone who is non-confrontational and

who is accepting in an almost complacent manner. Her repeated emphasis on not complaining and as being accepting, relayed a notion of powerlessness and as almost being held 'hostage' by the position that she has been given. This of course implies something about the way in which AA is practiced.

Extract 13

T1: Oh yes there is, there was, an incident that happened here at work, where I had a fight with an Indian lady. I had, I don't know whether my perception was wrong but, that's what I had in my mind at that time because I was, I was not wrong and she was, because our manager, was an Indian lady, I think she took her part, for me, it was unfair and I saw it as a racist. So I think, I mean the racist thing, it's not finished and it will never be [Black, Female].

Notice how T1 in extract 13 clearly construes resolution of a disagreement/argument at work, as being settled in a race-related (wrongful) manner. T1's description of this speaks clearly about the very real acts of racism that are still occurring in South African workplaces. In fact, T1 expresses a sentiment of frustration and even disillusionment in her view that racism will never end (*it [the end of racism] will never be*). Later, in extract 14 below, T1 reiterates with an almost full degree of certainty that Black people will always be disadvantaged. This point raises some issues. Firstly, T1's candidness around the 'permanency' of racism (*we were always disadvantaged and it's like we going to be like this forever*) suggests a 'normalising' (Fozdar, 2003) or accepting of the current state of affairs. The second point here is illustrative of the obvious (whether perceived or actual) experiences of race trouble and inequality despite progressive policies aimed at countering such problems.

Extract 14

T1: it's [AA] still alive, maybe they not like doing it physically, but really everybody can tell because if you can talk to [an] Indian person, [they] will tell you the same thing. If you talk to the Whites, will tell, but I think the Black people, we were always disadvantaged and it's like we [are] going to be like this forever [Black, Female].

An important point here comes in the form of the process of othering. The *self* is often presented as being homogenous and superior in comparison to the *other* who is presented as fragmented or inferior (Duncan, 2003; Miles, 1989; Riggins, 1997). Van Dijk (1987) makes an important point in arguing that in the process of othering, the othered group becomes quite aware of their marginalisation and their lack of power. Characteristically then, this can be seen from T1's talk where she presents Black people as being disadvantaged currently as well as in the future – Black people are thus portrayed as powerless, quite characteristic of the othered position.

Another important issue to address here is to reiterate what was presented in the introduction section regarding the positioning of self and other. I argued that participants did not explicitly construct positions of the self and the other, rather, the participants served as carriers of an historic institutionalised system that still functions in the (re)production of historic privilege. The way they talk about AA creates dynamic forms of social practice which discursively construct the social worlds (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002).

Later in extract 15, T1 draws on a discourse of AA as theoretically sound but practically unachievable and in doing do, once again addresses the lack of adequate redress in her

workplace. Again, I emphasise the polarisation of AA as problematic on the one hand, and as legitimate, on the other hand.

Extract 15

T1: ...because they are not following the law or the word affirmative action, they, the word is there, but they are not making use of it, it's just something they are saying not practising. So there is no justice.

T1, although classified as previously disadvantaged, does not in any way see herself as benefitting from AA. In fact, T1's account suggests that race-based preference is aligned to the historically privileged, rather than the historically disadvantaged. T1's experiences, despite the implementation of AA measures, corroborate with other studies where it was also found that minority (previously disadvantaged in this case) groups were more likely to have experienced organisational discrimination (Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley, 1990; Adam, 2002; Jones 1986) – arguably because AA policies have the tendency to introduce quick-fix changes and ignore the real attitudes that are embedded in equality, often resulting in 'things staying the same' (Charlton & van Niekerk, 2004). T1, in addressing both the theoretical and practical ends of AA, implicitly calls into question some important challenges noted in the policy. Most notably, these challenges are recognised in the failure of AA measures to filter down to the majority – instead, the policy has been described by some as a mechanism for progressing a small Black elite at the expense of the poor (Commeey, 2007; Mbeki, 2008; Nyanto, 2006; Guest, 2004,

Vorster, 2005). Despite it being constructed as inefficient in practice, T1 is positively acknowledging to some extent the values embedded within the policy.

Extract 16

M2: I think nothing's changed really, there's still affirmative action because the Whites are still there. They're still there on that top level and how do you bring them to the same level as us? What do you have to do? You have to fire them? No I don't think so...

Shanya: So as a, as a non White person, do you think you have been given any preferential treatment?

M2: No.

Shanya: You don't, you haven't seen that not over a while as an employee?

M2: Yeah not at all. Well I am in a position now where I had a manager, he's been retrenched I have been given all of his work with no pay rise while we've got a normal increase, but had it been if I was a another White that's taken his place I promise you, salary would have been the first thing that was, would have been sorted [Indian, Female].

In the extract above, M2 constructs AA paradoxically as beneficial for White people in that *they are still there on that top level*. In doing so, M2 renegotiates the 'real' purpose of AA through her lived experience as something that maintains historic privilege rather than as benefiting a target group. M2 reifies this sentiment, as a "matter of factness" later in this dialogue when she confirms that she has never (*not at all*) received preferential treatment. She still positions White people as being in power (*top level*) and, by default, positions herself as being in a lower (inferior) position; again calling into questions the extent to which redress has *actually* been effected in South Africa. M2 questions the possibility of being on par with White employees and simultaneously denounces this possibility which in some way offers a sentiment of helplessness and a forced acceptance

of the way in which things currently are. M2 discursively draws on historic privilege particularly in relation to effort and reward whereby she states that if a White person were to take up the position in question, they would have been better remunerated. M2's talk suggests two things. Firstly, when it comes to a White person, there is a sense of urgency about getting things (like salaries) sorted out and secondly; there is almost a privilege or advantage when it comes to being White regarding remuneration. Again, as I suggested earlier, note how M2 shifts policy implications to relocate them within the individual. I suggest that in engaging in this kind of talk, M2 is discursively constructing her version of 'White people' as having 'special' features. This is a good example of illustrating Potter and Wetherell's argument that discourse gives expression to subjective, rather than factual, realities. This point also shows how, through discursive practices, people are both products and producers of knowledge.

Another important point is the way in which M2 draws on discursive resources to portray her 'version of reality' as a matter-of-factness and as voicing a majority view (Fozdar, 2008). M2's comment that "*salary would have been the first thing*" suggests two things: firstly,

Her use of the words "*let's [let us] put it that way*" also implied to some degree that M2 identified in some way with me, as the interviewer – probably because I am also Indian. Her tone, and relative ease surrounding the way in which she conversed with me suggested that firstly, I as the interviewer should feel the same as a 'victimised Indian' and that secondly, her ideas surrounding White "domination" extend beyond her personal

opinion to a more collective idea. I analysed this dynamic in the methodology chapter, with specific relation to the concept of reflexivity.

M2's talk here, as in the case of T2 and S2 above, draws on the cultural resources that people call on for telling their patch of the world (Wetherell, 2003) – which in this case speaks to their lived experience of continued inequity in post apartheid South Africa. Critical engagement, from a social constructionist perspective (Burr 1995, 2001), with this point calls into question the extent to which M2's rationalisation of, for example, race-based pay reflects 'things that happen' in her workplace. The answer to this question is not important – what is however, is to understand the 'embeddedness' of a historically constructed racialised divide (whether real or apparent) that M2 faces in the workplace - which arguably functions in maintaining and reproducing patterns of advantage and disadvantage – ultimately though, AA remains an unrealised fantasy for M2.

Stigmatisation of AA beneficiaries is an area that has been well researched (e.g. Heilman, Block & Lucus, 1992; Steele, 1990; Durrheim et al., 2011, David, 2003). David (2003) describes AA related stigmatisation as occurring when the appraisal of a beneficiary's performance is more negative than it would be if race and gender were not considered – often resulting in self-stigmatisation (Durrheim et al., 2011), self-doubt and imagined incompetence among AA beneficiaries. Extract 17, 18 and 19 below, call to attention the experience of race-based stigmatisation as related by participants.

Extract 17

N2: It doesn't matter what potential you have, you will always be seen as a Black person...
[Black, Female].

Extract 18

T1: So they do not trust us. I mean other nations do not trust us as Black people, that we know everything, we can be qualified, we can be like having everything that's required to the company, but because of my colour... [Black, Female].

Extract 19

N2: I started seeing things around me that are happening around me, I started to realise that you know what, it's not what I think it is, it's only that nation [White] and nothing else, can't touch that [Black, Female].

Some points are worthy of discussion here. Firstly, the extracts above illustrate a form of self-stigmatisation, whereby the participants 'internalise' popular stereotypes about race and competence (N2: *doesn't matter what potential you have...seen as a Black person*; T1: *having everything that required...but because of my colour*) – rather than them being explicitly labelled as such. Discussed in the preceding theme, I suggested that in this process of othering, not only does the in-group perpetuate illegitimate stereotypes through discourse, but also, such talk results in the out-group internalising and either accepting or rejecting these discourses (Duncan, 2003; Miles, 1989). Participants talk was thus illustrative of the ways in which the other is situated in a “range of positions within a system of difference” (Riggins, 1997, p. 4). This essentially functions in reinforcing positions of marginalisation for the constructed *other*. In a similar manner, Connor (1999) explains how in the process of othering, the *self* seeks a position of ‘centeredness’ and in doing so, undermines attempts of the *othered* group to gain positive self-representation. Secondly, this “stigma of incompetence” (David, 2003) is experienced, and related by participants, even in the absence of being an AA beneficiary. As reflected in the extracts above, participants often claim that they receive little to no personal gain from AA

measures. In other words, I am suggesting that stigmatisation transpires in a nexus of both race and position.

An important third point draws on the wider social and political implications that can be drawn from such talk – particularly in the ways in which stigmas are produced, reproduced and maintained with society. Described fittingly, Durrheim et al. (2011) comment that race stereotypes “ continue to circulate in explicit and implicit criticism of the activities, policies and ideas of Black people...Racial stereotypes about Black incompetence...are part of a long –standing discourse about the inability of Black people to govern in Africa” (Durrheim et al., 2011, p. 32).

T1 in extract 18 above clearly distinguishes herself from other *nations*. Interestingly, despite AA legislation classifying non-Whites (Indians, Coloured and Blacks) as previously disadvantaged and therefore as *beneficiaries* of AA, the speaker makes a clear distinction that she belongs to particular (Black) group. This is an important point as it is telling of the current discourses available and the lack of real integration, despite aggressive policies targeting integration. In her construction of *Black people* T2 provides a critical lens through which to examine some of the race based constructions that are available regarding the character (*trust*) and qualities of Black South Africans. Later in her interview, T1 remarked:

Extract 20

T1: You feel very de-motivated you, you feel like even resigning [from] that company but you [are] thinking anyway which, you know whichever company I am going to go to its

going to be the same. It's something that's happening in South Africa, so there's nothing you can do but to live [with] that [Black, Female].

T1: You know because I'm Black. I, I, they [are] not even imagining myself sitting on the higher chair. It's, it's not working Shanya. I can tell you it's not working, and I don't think it will ever work.

T1's talk here, by default, depicts AA as a measure that has not personally benefitted her and as such – as an unrealised fantasy. Her talk presents a sense of disappointment which calls to attention the deeply embedded nature of race related issues, particularly from the perspective of Black South Africans. This point also calls for an acknowledgment of the potential deleterious effects that racism (whether actual or perceived) can have on AA beneficiaries.

I have, in this theme, showed how participants, despite being classified as AA beneficiaries, seldom see themselves as advantaged in the workplace. Contrary to this, they view themselves as still largely disadvantaged because *things really have not changed*, for them. Some important points can be drawn from the above discussions.

Firstly, from a social constructionist perspective, we need to be cautious about our assumptions of the world in that categories which we apprehend to the world may not necessarily reflect real divisions (Burr, 1995). In other words, it must be noted that, whether perceived or actual, the participants quoted above, present their “patch of the world” (Wetherell, 2003) from a perspective of being discriminated against. There is almost a sense of ‘internalised inferiority’ (N2: *doesn't matter what potential you*

have...seen as a Black person; T1: having everything that required...but because of my colour) by Black participants. Arguably, this kind of talk is sustained by social processes. Thus, as a second comment, rather than making any remark about the current ‘state of affairs’ within Organisation X regarding equity and redress, I demonstrated how discursive resources are used to ‘normalise’ inequality and in doing so, how discourse functions in reproducing these inequalities.

An interesting observation here is that Black participants still see the problems associated with AA as imposed by White people. Seldom is blame apportioned to the new government in power. Some reasons for this could be that Black participants still see positions of power being filled by Whites in their organisations or that they choose not to question the current government in power. Interestingly, gauged from the preceding theme, Black participants continue to view AA as theoretically, and principally sound even though they do not consider themselves benefitting from it in practice. This point again suggests that people positively articulate, and embrace, the value located within AA as a policy of redress. As a last comment here I emphasise again, whether perceived or not, Black participants do not see themselves as benefitting from AA. This calls for a more sophisticated examination of policies of redress in that Black participant’s talk is heavily laced with nuances of race trouble, underrepresentation and powerlessness.

Theme Four - Renegotiating Change

Durrheim et al. (2011) state that although usually seen as a problem among Black people, racism is troubling for all race groups where the challenge for “advantaged groups in a

racist world is to live in dignity and humility while maintaining the benefits of privilege acquired at the expense of exploited others” (p. 44). Privileged groups always face the threat of being classified or stereotyped as racist which “is baggage from the past that cannot be shaken off...if you are White there is always impending suspicion of your potential racism” (p. 45). Living in the new South Africa is thus fraught with challenges of both genuinely defending the ‘self’ and appreciating the ‘other’.

As a response to these challenges, I argue that many new discourses have been created, shared and enacted in the spirit of fulfilling important social and moral obligations, particularly as they relate to issues of tolerance and acceptance. Unlike the preceding themes which drew heavily on participant’s talk in response to their experiences and perceptions of AA – the discourses presented in this theme depart from a sentiment of moral responsibility, in the absence of a said policy, yet as still having been produced within the context of AA. It thus draws on notions of ‘shared responsibility’ and the moral obligations participants felt in effecting change. The distinct notion of “differentness” (Duncan, 2003) noted in preceding themes, particularly in relation to the process of othering, was shown to function in reproducing systems of privilege and inversely, discrediting systems of preferential treatment. The ways in which the ‘other’ is both constructed and engaged with is notably different in this theme. This finding is noteworthy especially if we examine it from the role of discourse. Discussed in the methodology chapter, discourse was described as something which is constructed. In other words, emphasis is placed on how individuals might create versions of reality as opposed to how reality is actually discovered. Furthermore, discourse is an action

medium – in other words, when we construct a discourse we are at the same time performing a social action. Thus, when reconstructing the ‘other’ participants are performing particular social actions. For example, in this theme, in a ‘new’ articulation of the ‘other’, participants are challenging current social norms around the ways in which we interact with each other. At the same time, participants are articulating new appropriate forms of interaction. They are discounting certain behaviours, and credentialising others. Some important issues are worth considering here.

By way of introducing this theme, I provide an overview. Two main discourses are presented in this theme. The first discourse features *constructions of sameness*, which seek to bridge the gap between the self and the other. The second discourse draws on *moral obligations and shared responsibilities* which look at renegotiating change to proceed at a grass roots level which would effect more *natural* forms of regulation in the labour market. Each of these discourses is discussed later, in turn – first however, I consider some points regarding the context in which these discourses are interpreted.

Discourses are time specific and they can not be interpreted void of the influence that history and culture poses on them – people therefore voice their “patch of the world” (Wetherell, 2003) from different subject positions by using a range of discursive resources, which can sometimes provide contradictory and competing accounts. In the preceding themes I highlighted that despite participants challenging the way in which AA is implemented, they seldom implied an inherent dysfunction in the principles (fairness, equality etc.) of the policy. In other words, my findings implied that from a theoretical

perspective, participants saw value in the policy. I have also shown how participants' sometimes shifted emphasis from 'policy problems' to relocate them as 'people problems'. And, in the discussion that will follow, I will show how participants can have different views about the same thing, in different contexts. The overall point here is that language is indexical and discourse is a 'situated' activity. As noted by Venn (1999), a person may respond very differently to a particular ideology at different times and in different situations. This point is important as an explanation for competing discourses presented by participants in this, and preceding, themes. As an alternate explanation, Burr (1995) in addressing the link between social constructionism and discourse affirms that a variety of different discourses exist, "each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing the world" (p. 48).

Discursive constructions of *sameness, moral obligations and shared responsibilities* can be interpreted in at least two ways. On the one hand, the sentiments expressed by participants suggest that people have truly made efforts to effect reform and acceptance, particularly when it comes to racial tolerance and inclusivity. These accounts are considered as sincere and genuine.

From another, more critical perspective which informs the interpretive perspective of this study, I suggest that these constructions might, through a process of inversion, re-invite negative sentiments about the viability of preferential treatment by providing an alternative, and more 'acceptable' way of doing things. Of course, these constructions could also be interpreted as an attempt to create some semblance between 'self-

preservation’ and ‘concern for the common good’. In other words, the construction of an alternative refracts an opposing version of what ‘currently is’ – in this case, AA. Perhaps, as a more conservative perspective, constructions of *sameness, moral obligations and shared responsibilities* emphasise attempts of acknowledging similarities between the *self* and *other*.

The discourses presented below present a ‘pleasant’ retreat from the prominence of race-related talk. These discourses focus on two things mainly, both of which have nothing to do with the policy of AA directly – firstly, participants present ‘narratives’ of cross-racial friendships and about acceptance of the *other* by focusing on the similarities of people. Secondly, sentiments of moral obligations and shared responsibilities are presented in suggestions of ‘legitimate’ forms of social, and not labour market, redress. Extracts pertaining to these discourses are presented below.

Constructing sameness

Extract 21

R: Kakoota was his name and we were really good friends and it was because he was also a Christian and I said to him you know what Kakoota, we people are so stupid, because we just look at the colour of the skin, the skin is so thin you know, what is underneath the skin and what is - you know - it’s just the colour of the skin, we are so stupid, we are so stupid to let that guide us, I am looking deeper, for me it is important what is inside a person, the character of a person, his values and if his values are the same as mine, then he becomes my friend and my brother and my neighbour and my sister [White, Female].

R in this dialogue is seen as presenting a sincere appreciation for her friend. Clearly, the speaker constructs her relationship with her friend [Black friend] as genuine because they *were really good friends* and they had things in common (*he was also a Christian*). R reinforces this relationship (togetherness) by speaking in the collective (*we are so stupid*) and also perhaps suggesting that the imagined differences between them go both ways. R identifies commonalities that she shares with Kakoota that extend beyond race (such as character, values, and Christian beliefs).

Similarly, extract 22 below depicts M as being comfortable with living in the new South Africa which involves her associating with people from different race groups.

Extract 22

M: Yes, I think it's so interesting I've made wonderful friends [who are] Indian and I've got a Black friend and I studied with them, now I'm a project manager and I made friends with a CEO of a Black empowered company and if you listen to what they do and you sit in class and you listen to them they've got the same basic needs [as] us, they want the same for their children. We are all just human beings, we are basically, deep down, we are all the same [White, Female].

M's emphasis of having made friends with an Indian person and a Black person does acknowledge, or in some way, suggest that this is not how things were historically or that this is not common/popular practice in South African society. Although rhetorically self-sufficient (Wetherell, 2003) M acknowledges that people of other race groups have the

same basic needs and desires that she does and, by default, they are all the same. M expresses as sentiment of solidarity here, and a sense of shared identity.

N below discusses how her son genuinely appreciates friendships with friends from outside his race group.

Extract 23

N: Like I said, and everyone's equal, but he doesn't even see White or Black or Indian - it doesn't matter. He says my friend, you know my friend, you know and then he will give me the name you know. So he doesn't even see the colour and I firmly believe that, that it's, it has a lot to do with how you bring up your family, the way you see things, I love the culture here in Durban [White, Female].

These extracts above present a sincere appreciation of friendships outside one's own race group. These accounts by White participants function in a way that *invites* previously disadvantaged people (other) into their worlds because after all, much of the differences between them are imagined or perceived. The findings here are elaborated on later, first however, a second discourse below, is presented.

Moral obligation and shared responsibility

The extracts that follow depict a sense of moral obligation and responsibility to engage with efforts to bring about social redress in a meaningful way. Essentially, this discourse looks at renegotiating change to proceed at a grass roots level which could result in more

natural forms of labour market regulation. This idea is related to what Franchi (2003) sees as pre-labour discrimination which she describes as the maintenance of historical disadvantage through unequal access to assets, economic opportunity and among other things, resource development. Furthermore, the Employment Equity Act only addresses problems in the formal labour market. Thus, unless efforts to redress social inequalities are considered, “pre-labour discrimination will continue to produce unequal outcomes in the labour market” (p. 158).

Extract 24

M: ... but because of circumstances they haven't got running water they haven't got the infrastructure, how can they expect a child growing up without electricity to be able to study or who is hungry, you know, to excel or to have the brain power so it's a sad situation... [White, Female].

M's talk here suggests that attempting redress at the stage of employment is unfruitful. The argument here draws from comments made earlier on in the interview regarding people who are placed in employment without having the necessary skills. M provides a solution to this problem by suggesting that social redress in terms of infrastructure and resources (*running water and electricity*), and in reducing poverty (*who is hungry*) need to be ensured so that children can *excel* and therefore have better opportunities later on in the labour market. T, below draws on the same idea.

Extract 25

T: Education is very fundamental around it, uhm, if 60 percent of our population cannot afford basic education, or actually forget about basic education, does not have running water, how can we say that, yes everything was fair for 15 years odd, when they don't have the money to have to buy a loaf of bread.

In extract 26 below, P also draws on the importance of effecting redress from a social, and not necessarily, labour market, level.

Extract 25

P: ... I mean without an education, without my skills, they got [a] zero chance, like any other person for that matter; you've got [a] zero chance of getting out in the workplace, so if you got people [and] you believe they have the potential, you need to groom them, and the only way to groom them is by like educating them...[Indian, Female].

P echoes a similar idea by suggesting that if people are educated; it improves their chances of entering into the workplace and being able to compete on an equal footing. S below emphasises again the importance of education in noting that historically, Black people were provided inferior education. He notes the significant difference between Black and White levels of education (*we are trying to catch up with the White people*) and suggests that in the future, Black people will be able to compete on an equal footing because of increased opportunities – this however, takes time (*the next 20 years from now*).

Extract 27

S: It goes back to education, the type of education that Black people, especially Black people, were given, it's totally different from the Whites and as we are trying to catch with the White people, they moved to a better standard. Most of them left and went to the U.K, Australia, wherever and it will take forever, but the generation that is growing up right now, our younger brothers, they have the opportunity when it comes to their time to rule the country - things will be much better. So we are talking about the next 20 years from now [Black, Male].

In this discussion I am suggesting that many contradictory repertoires and complex permutations (Cohen, 1999, Venn, 1999; Burr, 1995) exist in the accounts of participants, arguably in an attempt to create new (legitimate) forms of acceptance or, as ways of denying the potential of being seen as opposed to redress. Many interpretations are embodied in the extracts of both of these discourses. These accounts can be interpreted as suggestive of a sense of moral responsibility, particularly from the point of those who were previously advantaged. These accounts of acceptance, evidenced from cross-racial friendships and open-mindedness, relay a sentiment of being able to effect change in the absence of formalised policy.

Whether looking at similarities between people or drawing on discourse of moral and social responsibilities, suggestions of social redress are noted. The literature review provided much evidence of the successes related to South Africa's new dispensation. For example, a 2006 article published in the Economist revealed that approximately 60% of South Africans reported that they felt that race relations were improving. Similarly,

Roberts et al. (2010), drawing on the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), revealed favourable reactions of the South African public to AA. Others have noted the benefits associated with embracing diversity in the country (Sono & Werner, 2006; Schueffel & Istaria, 2006; Mobley & Payne, 1992; Nottage, 2003; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999; Lockwood, 2010; Lencioni, 2010).

I will elaborate on two points here – firstly, the discursive patterns portrayed in the above accounts imply a sentiment of wanting change because it's the right thing to do, because people are innately good or because it comes naturally. Literature available on enacting change on moral grounds is available (Tummala, 1999; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). A second, and perhaps more critical way of looking at it, points to considering the sentiment of 'doing it on my own' as a function to discredit the already implemented policies of AA as unnatural or as forced through vignettes of 'cross-racial friendships'. Either way, regardless of the potential for implicit nuances of resistance and opposition, these experiences are taken as showing, to some extent, the various flavours in which redress can be realised. The process of othering (Riggins, 1999, Duncan, 2003), also takes on complex permutations (Cohen, 1999) where rather than emphasising perceived or imagined differences, attempts to locate the self as similar to the constructed other, are made. Ideally then, this discourse sits neatly within what South Africans term *Ubuntu* (Forster, 2006; Coughlan, 2006; Tutu, 1999). Ubuntu is an ethical concept of Southern African origin which emphasises people's relations with, and dependence on each other.

Arguably, renditions of the accounts presented throughout the findings chapter illustrate the massive complexities and intricacies that exist within any discourses which are systems of meaning and ways of presenting ourselves and our social world (Burr, 1995). After all, discourses are context bound. Practically all of the accounts from research participants were in some way steeped in the rhetoric of race and within apartheid's legacy of racialisation. Participant's subjective meanings and representations of AA discursively drew on discourses of race and racialisation; discourses which are informed by both history and culture.

The point here is that discourse analysis provides an excellent analytical framework to draw on the discursive resources that are available within an inequitable society – rather than to call on constructions of the 'racist' and 'prejudiced' or as 'morally responsibly' and 'accepting' . I put forward that the institutionalised prejudices of the past and structures that continue to reproduce prejudice, provide stages of which we must perform on. The ways however, in which we perform, is very much rooted in and embedded within historic and cultural practices which gives rise to and is sustained by, particular social practices.

At this point, this theme as well as the preceding themes, have brought some important considerations to the fore.

Firstly, the results indicate that AA continues to be a controversial issue which traverses many segments of life. It is more likely to be rejected by those who are less likely to

benefit from it and more likely to be accepted by its intended beneficiaries. AA, as policy, is portrayed dialectally as problematic and at the same time, as not really benefiting those who were historically disadvantaged. A second point to note is in relation to how policy requirements are viewed. In other words, the findings point to a distinct polarisation between legislative impositions (the policy of AA) and the ‘need’ to effect change through moral obligation and shared responsibility. A third point to consider is in relation to the ways in which the other is viewed. Earlier, the findings showed how the self was presented as markedly different from the other. Later, the findings showed some contradiction in this construction – particularly in relation to the ways in which articulated discourses perform certain actions. Put simply, the constructed ‘other’ is sometimes, as seen in this theme, re-constructed in terms of perceived similarities and at other times, functions dialectically to produce clear categories of self and other. Another important finding again suggests the salient role of discourse and its role of positioning and creating different versions of reality. Illustrative of this point is the ways in which people used “talk” to produce and reproduce, either knowingly or implicitly, to sustain systems of historic privilege. I have also noted that even though participants used talk to sustain historic privilege, it should not necessarily be seen as amounting to racism. It is also very important to acknowledge that although participants challenge the ways in which AA is implemented, they also note the value inherent in the principles of the policy. This point is important for two reasons. Firstly, as most AA related studies, regardless of the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted, consider AA in polarized terms – people either support or oppose AA in the abstract. As a response to this, this finding has articulated what people really think about the policy.

In other words, this finding contributes to new understandings, particularly from the South African context, regarding the value associated with the principles embedded in AA policies. Secondly, the findings suggest that the experience of AA diverges with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy.

To summarise, the interpretive perspective used in the current study adopted a discursive psychological perspective which involves a radical rethinking of concepts and an appreciation for the socio-historical terrain which informs subjective realities (Billig, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Thus, the findings were, using discourse analysis, interpreted critically and presented through the social, historical and political lens that accounts for South Africa's turbulent history. Using a social constructionist theoretical framework, I interpreted my findings from a perspective that acknowledged the importance of history, culture and everyday language practices, particularly in relation to the ways in which participants' discourses could potentially function in (re)producing and sustaining relations of dominance, exploitation and power within a South African organisation. Specifically, I used Potter and Wetherell's discursive psychology as a method of enquiry.

I have also emphasised throughout that my point of departure provides only a particular *version of truth*. Furthermore, given my emphasis on this socio-political domain, I engaged with my findings in a way that allowed for critical reflexivity so as to study the ideological consequences of language use and the ways in which social organisation can

produce unequal power relations. In the next chapter I summarise my findings and make some conclusions.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the entire research project. The first two sections represent the rationale and main aims of the current study. Attention is also afforded to the literature review and the theoretical framework that was adopted in the study. A brief section on the study's methodology is also included. A detailed review of the research findings is presented along with some broad conclusions. The final section looks at the theoretical, methodological and practical value of the study as well as the limitations of the study. Recommendations for future studies are also presented here.

6.2 Rationale

This study was essentially conducted in an attempt to explore the discourses surrounding AA among employees in a Durban based organisation. In addressing historic discrimination, AA within the employment sector is an area which is receiving much attention in South Africa. AA initiatives are heavily encouraged both at the legislative and organisational levels. Although theoretically sound at a policy level, the practice of AA remains controversial. The ambivalent opposition to AA suggests the importance of exploring the extent to which employees embrace AA in the workplace, especially given that South Africa is a relatively new democracy with much of its inclusive policies still in its infancy.

Discourse allows for the critical engagement with the embodied nature of prejudice that stems from everyday practices. Unfortunately, little research has considered how people themselves frame, and conceptualise AA. Traditional approaches to studying AA, I argued, are primarily from the positivist perspective and lack contextual specificity. As a response to this, more recent research follows in the discursive tradition. Discursive studies have largely contributed to research on language and discrimination, specifically within the field of social psychology. The reasons behind conducting this research are articulated by four important points. Firstly, I emphasised that there is a relative lack of qualitative studies on AA in South Africa, and even less within the discursive tradition. The second and related reason for this research was to expand on the existing knowledge, from a South African perspective, that consider the ways in which ‘talk’ can function in producing and sustaining systems of historic privilege. A third motivation for conducting a study steeped in the discursive tradition was because much of the knowledge from the discursive tradition seem to stem from related studies of race and race relations with fewer studies looking at AA specifically. Fourthly, this research endeavoured to contribute new knowledge, particularly from the South African context, regarding the value, or lack of value, associated with the principles embedded in AA policies. I argued that research in this area fell short of examining how people actually feel about the policy, and importantly, whether or not experiences of AA converge with the value people place on the principles embedded in the policy.

6.3 The research aims

This study’s main objective was to explore AA from a social constructionist perspective.

This study had two specific aims. The first aim was to critically analyse the discourses

around AA produced by employees within a racially diverse, privately owned, South African organisation. The second aim was to explore the constructions of AA by historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged employees in this organisation.

In achieving these aims I investigated the discursive resources and rhetorical arguments that employees used in talking about their experiences and perceptions of AA.

6.4 The literature review

I dealt with the literature study in Chapter Two. I framed the literature study by commenting that apartheid South Africa constructed racial, economic, social and political segregation, the consequences of which are still experienced today. Throughout the chapter, emphasis was placed on how AA continues to raise questions around equality and fairness within South Africa. The literature review began with a thorough review of AA – specifically in relation to the way in which it is conceptualised and subsequently defined. A detailed historical backdrop of South Africa’s political history was presented – specifically from the inception of discrimination to the country’s arrival at political democracy. AA from a legislative perspective was also covered. This chapter also looked at some international perspectives of AA. Arguments were presented for the promotion of, and opposition to, AA. Lastly, this chapter concluded by presenting studies in the discursive paradigm. Throughout the literature review, an emphasis was placed on drawing on, and accounting for, historical and cultural specificity, particularly from the social constructionist orientation.

6.5 The Theoretical Framework

Chapter Three fully addressed this study's theoretical framework which explored in detail the social constructionist paradigm which informed the research. This chapter articulated the value in approaching AA research from the social constructionist orientation. By way of introduction the beginning sections of this chapter orientated the reader to the social constructionist paradigm. The chapter also critically explored the ways in which we view our world and the 'truths' we assign to it as articulated within our discourses. This review also broadly conceptualised and defined discourse. More specifically, it discussed Potter and Wetherell's Discursive Psychology in detail – the approach to discourse that was used. Competing, yet related approaches to discourse were also covered. I also showed how the discursive method of inquiry proved ideal as a tool to study the pervasive, recurring patterns of talk which function to justify and rationalise historic privilege and the reproduction of social inequality.

6.6 The methodology

Chapter four outlined, step by step, the methods and procedures employed in this study. I outlined my research aims, discussed the study's orientation and some of the terminology used in social constructionist research. The study's target population, sampling issues and data collection techniques and procedures were presented in detail. I discussed how my data was transcribed, coded and analysed, mostly according to Potter and Wetherell's (1987) guidelines for analysing discourse. I concluded this chapter with issues of data

validation, ethical considerations and my personal reflections on conducting this research. I also presented some of the limitations of the current study.

6.7 The findings

The findings, by and large, pointed to the idea that AA continues to be a contentious, controversial issue which traverses many segments of life. The accounts presented throughout the findings chapter illustrated the massive permutations and complexities that exist within discourses. In this study, I explored the potential for participants' discourses to function in (re)producing and sustaining relations of dominance, exploitation and power within a South African organisation. In other words, I engaged with my findings in a manner that allowed for critical reflexivity to study the ideological consequences of language use.

Essentially, this study, without drawing generalisable conclusions, claims to provide a platform with which to critically engage with articulated productions of AA in a South African organisation in a manner that is appreciative of its rich socio-political history. I have made concerted efforts to understand the implied inferences that underlined participants' talk in a way that meaningfully portrayed their experiences and perceptions of AA.

The current study found that, despite South Africa's impressive constitution and progressive policies aimed at labour market redress and integration, the polarisation of people into categories of the *self* and the *other* is still evident, albeit in more sociably

acceptable forms. The findings also showed that examining the construction of the other was particularly important to understanding the ways in which participants' understood and experienced AA. The rhetoric of othering also illustrated how participants potentially, whether implicitly or explicitly, perpetuate systems of historic privilege through talk. Importantly, the findings also suggest that despite negative experiences of AA, participants are generally in support of AA regarding the inherent value they see in it. In other words, throughout the findings, participants discursively credentialised the policy theoretically on the one hand, and disqualified the ways in which it is practiced, on the other. I highlight this finding, as it suggests new ways in which to explore AA within South African work places.

Based on this rhetoric of othering – four themes emerged from the data. The first theme (*Constructing Racial Hierarchies of Skill*) was based on the finding that despite government's efforts to correct historic injustice through policies of redress, racial stereotyping still features in ways that construct racial hierarchies of skill – specifically through an illegitimate 'belief' that Whites are intellectually, and otherwise, superior to non-Whites. Overall, this theme illustrated the way in which participants talk had the potential to marginalise employees and 'legitimise' inequalities – specifically along racial lines. Also noted in theme one was the practice of shifting away from AA measures as a policy and locating the 'problem' within the person. Again, this points to the argument that while participants see value in the policy, they disagree with how the policy is practiced.

The discussions that ensued showed also how participants engaged in multiple discursive devices that functioned in rationalising a racial order of competence which not only implicitly defended historic ideologies around White supremacy but perhaps more importantly, it inversely functioned in undermining AA as a system that is inherently problematic. This construal of AA as problematic, formed the basis for the second theme.

The second theme (*Polarised Constructions of AA*) engaged with participant arguments both for, and opposed to, AA. Participants did this by mobilising and drawing on discursive resources with which to justify different versions, or constructions, of AA. The findings here indicated that practically all of the positive reflections of AA were from historically disadvantaged people which was noted as understandable given that positive attitudes towards AA are likely to occur by those who are more likely to benefit from the policy – furthermore, it was argued that people use a range of liberal and egalitarian arguments (such as freedom, and equal opportunities) to justify personal positions. In the same way, although historically advantaged participants, in opposing the policy, also drew on liberal and egalitarian principles – they used these principles in ways that supported and justified their own accounts. Another key finding in this theme was that both groups (historically disadvantaged and advantaged) drew on the problems associated with AA. Albeit to varying extents, both groups depicted the future of AA as conflicting. I found a polarisation of AA into either being *open-ended and optimistic* (historically disadvantaged accounts) or as *closed-ended and pessimistic* (historically advantaged accounts). I concluded this argument by showing that these contradictions point to a

depiction of AA as unnecessary and problematic on the one hand, and, on the other hand, AA as necessary and only *sometimes* problematic.

On the whole, despite support for AA based on its principles, participants used the practice of the policy as support for presenting AA as exclusionary both for White participants who felt marginalised and by Black participants who argue that they seldom enjoy the fruits of redress. Particularly for Black participants, AA was depicted as an unrealised fantasy, at best, and at worst, as a perpetuation of the very regime it claims to have overcome – this point was expanded on in the next theme.

Theme Three (AA as a Fantasy) showed how participants, despite being classified as AA beneficiaries, seldom saw themselves as advantaged in the workplace. Contrary to this, they viewed themselves as still largely disadvantaged. This theme focused on the ways that participants presented their “patch of the world” from their perspective of being discriminated against. A sense of ‘internalised inferiority’ by Black participants was noted. In discussing this finding, I remained cautious about assuming that participant’s reflections accurately reflected the state of affairs in Organisation X. I instead, rather than making any remark about the current state of affairs within Organisation X regarding redress, attempted to demonstrate how discursive resources are used to ‘normalise’ inequality and in doing so, how discourse in itself may function in maintaining inequalities. Throughout this theme, Black participant’s talk was heavily laced with nuances of race trouble, underrepresentation and powerlessness. Again, throughout this theme, AA was noted to be, at least, conceptually sound.

Theme four (*Renegotiating Change*) provided somewhat of a response to the challenges surrounding AA, noted in the preceding themes. As illustrated, many new discourses were found to have been created, shared and enacted in the spirit of fulfilling important social and moral obligations, particularly as they relate to issues of tolerance and acceptance. The findings in this chapter drew on notions of shared responsibility and the moral obligations that participants used in effecting change. The ways in which the ‘other’ was both constructed and engaged with was notably different in this theme. The first discourse featured *constructions of sameness*, which looked at the practices that participants drew on in order to bridge the gap between the self and the other. The second discourse drew on *moral obligations and shared responsibilities* which looked at renegotiating change to proceed at a grass roots level, and from a social, rather than labour market, perspective. Having engaged critically with the discourses in this theme, I acknowledged the varying ways in which to interpret these discourses which considered efforts of reform on moral grounds, attempts at promoting both ‘self-preservation’ and ‘concern for the common good’ and, more critically, inadvertent attempts of disqualifying the practice of AA. Essentially, theme four, regardless of the potential for implicit nuances of resistance, showed the various flavours in which redress, tolerance and inclusivity can be realised. The process of othering in this theme was seen in attempts to locate the self as similar to the constructed other – which was argued as characteristic of the concept of *Ubuntu* - an ethical concept of Southern African origin which emphasises people’s relations with, and dependence on, each other.

Having summarised the findings of each theme, some broad conclusions are drawn.

Perhaps most obvious, both the literature and the findings in the current study point to the idea that AA is complex. It is more likely to be rejected by those who are less likely to benefit from it and more likely to be accepted by its intended beneficiaries. AA, as policy, is portrayed dialectally as problematic and at the same time, as not really benefiting those who were historically disadvantaged.

There is also a significant polarisation between legislative impositions (as in the policy of AA) and the ‘need’ to effect change through moral obligation and shared responsibility. In other words, as noted in the literature, and in the current study, there is a sentiment of wanting to effect redress, but wanting to do it in the absence of a policy. Related to this, while people are likely to support the egalitarian principles and conceptual grounding of AA, the policy itself is often resisted when practically imposed. This finding points to a divergence between noting value in the policy on the one hand, and on the other hand, rejecting its implementation.

It was also found that the constructed ‘other’ is sometimes re-constructed in terms of perceived similarities and at other times, it functions dialectically to produce clear categories of self and other. This point supported the idea that firstly, the complexities and intricacies of talk often present a variety of different discourse, “each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing the world” (Burr, 1995, p. 48). Secondly, discourses are time specific and they can not be interpreted void of the influence that history and culture pose on them – people therefore voice their

“patch of the world” from different subject positions which can sometimes provide contradictory and competing accounts.

Another important point is to acknowledge that people use talk, whether or not knowingly, to produce and sustain systems of historic privilege. In other words, it is suggested that people do not necessarily explicitly, or outwardly construct positions of the self and the other; rather, people serve as vectors of a historic institutionalised system that still serves in the perpetuation and (re)production of historic privilege and power.

This study also suggests that using “talk” to sustain historic privilege does not necessarily amount to racism but rather, it reflects the multiple alternatives that are available within any discourse. I have attempted to show that opposition to AA is not necessarily an act of prejudice but rather, it is to be considered in the ways in which discursive resources are implicitly drawn together to justify inequality

The accounts presented throughout the findings chapter illustrate the massive permutations that exist within discourse. Practically all of the accounts from the participants were, to some extent, steeped in the rhetoric of race. Furthermore, a very salient point is acknowledged in the finding that participants are generally in favour of the principles embedded in the policy – an important finding which contributes new knowledge to what we already know about AA.

To restate, this study had two aims. The first aim was to critically analyse the discourses around AA produced by the study's participants. The second aim was to explore the ways in which both historically advantaged and disadvantaged participants construct the concept of AA. The findings on the whole point to the idea that AA is complex. Our talking about AA is a dynamic social practice which expresses our psychological, social and historical realities. When we talk about the policy we invariably function in perpetuating the practices which we wish to dispel. As a starting point, exploring complex phenomena, such as policies of preferential treatment, from the discursive orientation allows us to critically analyse what we know, or rather, what we *think* we know about the policy. Moreover, it aids us in becoming acutely aware of the potential to change things by looking more critically at language, and the way we use it.

In conclusion, this study has shown that discourse analysis provides an analytical framework to draw on the discursive resources that are available within an inequitable society. The findings also suggest that the institutionalised prejudices of the past continue to reproduce inequality and in doing so, provide platforms on which people must perform on. The ways however, in which people 'perform' can be renegotiated, and subsequently reversed, by engaging with the complexities noted above. This however, as articulated by one participant, may take a long time...

I think they try I don't know I always say it won't be in my time, maybe when I'm an old man if God spares me and I live to 70 or 80 then it will be

totally multiracial, everybody will be free to mix and mingle, maybe then, I don't know, maybe...

6.8 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

Although inherent in the nature of qualitative research, I feel that my presence in the interview had the potential to elicit information to the extent that the participants felt comfortable with me. This point became particularly important to me when I perceived Indian participants as being more forth coming with information.

Although 17 interviews were sufficient for the purposes of this study, a larger study would have allowed for alternative, and possibly more varied, perspectives on AA. The findings highlight the importance of exploring social constructions in context. This study contextualised the findings particularly within the context of South Africa. It is thus recommend that future research consider in greater detail the culture of the organisation. In as much as discourses are embedded within socio-historical contexts, the culture of the organisation, including its values, norms and assumptions, may well contribute to the ways in which people both perceive and experience AA.

Another concern is raised in relation to what Willig (2001) refers to as epistemological reflexivity. This form of reflexivity requires us to engage with questions around the research design employed and among other things, the content and nature of the research questions. Essentially, this type of reflexivity allows us to think about the assumptions that we have made about the world and helps us think about the implications of these

assumptions on the research findings. This is an important point to consider in future studies.

The role of language in discourse is distinct – in fact, discourse is considered ‘situated’ language. Given this, I feel that had all participants been interviewed in their first language, the responses might have been different. Some of my participants spoke English only as a second language which could have impacted on their responses, or their ability to express themselves in a language other than their mother tongue. Furthermore, given that I, as the researcher, might be ‘culturally’ different to participants, I may have misinterpreted their accounts because of being culturally unfamiliar with their talk. In the following paragraphs I thus highlight some of the criticisms levelled against using discourse analysis in intercultural research.

Broadly speaking, if language represents a system of meaning that attempts to reflect versions of reality, then it is plausible to suggest that the ability to construct a particular version of reality is based on the extent to which one can express themselves through language. For example, in the current study, a participant whose mother tongue is Afrikaans would perhaps have described an instance when she felt discriminated against in Afrikaans somewhat differently than she did in English. This point can be related to what Blommaert (2005) refers to as ‘voice’. Blommaert used the term ‘voice’ to mean the ways in which people make, or fail to make, themselves understood. Related to this point is the concept of *orders of indexicality*. Blommaert explains how not everyone has access to these orders of indexicality because they are unequally distributed through society and

as a result, it affects one's ability to deploy communicative resources (Blommaert, 2005). She suggests that 'voice' then, is the ability for semiotic mobility – something usually associated with “...the most prestigious linguistic resources...” (for example, 'world languages' such as English) (Blommaert, 2005, p. 69). An obvious solution to this problem would have been to conduct interviews in participant's mother tongues and then translate into English for analysis. However, translation of data in discursive studies represents challenges of their own in that meaning may be lost or miss-translated.

Blommaert (2005) explains how errors of interpretation occur by associating locally valid functions on to transnational flows. She draws on a previous study which looked at the narratives of asylum seekers. She noted how Belgian officials often dismissed the anecdotal sub-narratives of the asylum seekers as unimportant. For the asylum seekers however, such narratives contained important contextual information without which their narratives would be misunderstood. On this point Blommaert comments that although carrying their shape with them, discourses lose their meaning and value when they travel across the globe. Although not globally diverse in the current study, participants did indeed represent a multicultural society. My participants included Black, White, Coloured and Indian participants of various socio-economic backgrounds and among other things, language groups. It is plausible that I dismissed important information simply because I was unfamiliar with the context in which it was embedded.

Given these limitations, I recommend that related studies consider exploring the benefits, and/or appropriateness of conducting interviews in participant's home language.

Although the points highlighted above do represent some limitations to the current study, my decision to conduct interviews in English is not entirely problematic. A range of studies (for example, Potter & Wetherell (1987); Franchi, 2003; Duncan, 2001; Potter & Wetherell, 1992) in the discursive tradition have been undertaken where interviews were in English among participants who did not necessarily speak English as their mother tongue.

6.9 The theoretical, methodological and practical value of study

As its theoretical framework, the current study adopted the social constructionist approach with a particular focus on discursive psychology. The use of this approach adds to the existing body of knowledge around the usefulness of critically engaging with the embodied nature of prejudice that stem from everyday practice. There are few documented studies in South Africa which adopted social constructionism as an approach using diverse samples. Thus, the current study has shown that it is useful to adopt a social constructionist approach within the South African context, particularly when questioning taken-for-granted knowledge and trying to understand phenomena which are historically and socially specific. The study's methodology highlights the real value in studying context in meaning making and in studying implied inferences that underlie talk.

From a methodological perspective the current study has offered a contribution to the methods that can be used to qualitatively explore subjective, contextualised experiences of AA. The interpretative approach provided an opportunity to engage with AA as a

construct in a manner which allowed for the reflection of subjective experiences. This point is especially important since subjective, contextualised approaches to AA have received little attention both locally and internationally. Practically all of AA related research is located within the positivist paradigm. This study has also contributed the nature of the relationship between researcher and the phenomena under study, particularly as a result of the researcher's awareness around issues of reflexivity. Another methodological contribution comes in the form of the challenges presented in discursive research, particularly when conducting research outside of participant's mother tongue. Future studies should consider collecting data in the first language of participants.

Lastly, this study can potential offer some practical value to the area of AA. Firstly, the findings may contribute to the discipline of industrial psychology, particularly in the ways in which policies around preferential treatment are conceptualised, and subsequently implemented within organisations. This study offers a unique perspective of how people both understand and experience AA. This knowledge may well contribute to the ways in which organisational policy documents are conceptualised so that attempts may be taken to move beyond the very things that serve to perpetuate inequality within the workplace. The findings in the current study also call for attention to paid towards ensuring that organisational culture functions to create an environment which challenges the negative associations of AA in a constructive way. The findings also highlight the possibility for other organisations to condier that, despite their impressive policies of inclusion and transformation, there may exist a disjuncture between the intensions of the organisation on the one hand, and the experiences of employees on the other. The study

also highlights the various flavours in which redress can be realised. Lastly, as new knowledge, the study shows that despite the negative experiences associated with AA, participants, by and large, generally favour the principles embedded within the policy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFERENCE LIST AND APPENDICES

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Appendices

Appendix A: Request to Conduct Research

Human Resources Directorate

22 January 2010

Re: Request to use GijimaAst as a sample organisation in a PhD study at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Shanya Reuben and I am currently a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Psychology. I am currently completing a PhD in the area of Affirmative Action within the South African context. Affirmative Action policies are a legislative requirement in South African organisations and, although nearly 16 years after its implementation in South Africa, many employees and employers still have mixed feelings regarding the positive features of the policy. I am particularly interested in understanding the experiences of employees regarding Affirmative Action as well as some of the reasons (constructs) that give rise to some of these feelings.

Part of my research involves gaining data from a sample organisation. Given Gijima's impressive BEE profile, I am very interested in carrying out my research at Gijima and humbly request access to Gijima as the sample organisation. My study would include voluntary participation and the information gathered will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and under the strictest research procedures. The data collection period would be brief with minimum inconvenience to the organisation. A brief outline of the study and the implications for the sample organisation is listed below:

1. **Research Topic:** Exploring the social constructions of employees of Affirmative Action in a South African organisation: A discursive perspective.
2. **Research Method:** I am interested in conducting one-on-one interviews on a selection of employees. Each interview should last, at most 40 minutes long.
3. **Ethics:** ALL information will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and only shared with the Gijima management.

I am willing to provide any other information that you might require on the research. I am also willing to come in, at your convenience, and discuss with you, the intended outcomes of the study and the potential benefits to your organisation if you participate in this study. I would be ever so grateful if you would consider my request to use Gijima as a sample organisation. I strongly believe that the information generated from the study will be especially useful for your organisation in terms of understanding the experiences of employees related to Affirmative Action in the new South Africa.

You are also free to contact my Research Supervisor, Dr Thandi Magojo on 031 260 2547/1034 or email at magojo@ukzn.ac.za.

Looking forward to a favourable response.

Kindest Regards,

Mrs. Shanya Reuben
School of Psychology
University of KwaZulu Natal

Appendix B: Letter of Acceptance to Conduct Research



GijimaAst

09 March 2010

School of Psychology
The University of KwaZulu-Natal
King George V Avenue
Glenwood
Durban

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Letter of Acceptance for Research to be conducted at GijimaAst

This letter is to confirm that Mrs. Shanya Reuben from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Psychology, has been granted permission to conduct her research at GijimaAst for her doctoral study.

Please contact me should you need any other information,

Regards,



Michelle Bowers
Snr HR Consultant
East Coast Region

Date: 09/03/10

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PO Box 10629, Centurion, 0046, South Africa > 47 Landmarks Avenue, Kosmosdal, Samrand, South Africa > Tel: +27 12 675 5000 > Fax: +27 12 675 5400 > www.gijima.com
Directors: R.W. Gumede (Chairman)*, P.J. Bogoshi (Chief Executive Officer), C.J.H. Ferreira (Chief Financial Officer), N.J. Dlamini*, M. Macdonald*, J.E. Miller*, A.E.B. Mthembu*,
L.B.R. Mthembu+, J.C.L. van der Walt*, *Non Executive. Company Secretary: H.M. Smith GijimaAst Holdings (Pty) Ltd trading as GijimaAst, Reg No: 1998/021835/07

Appendix C: Biographical Questionnaire

Name	
Date	
Gender	
Race	
Position at company	
Years working at company	
Highest qualification	

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

1. Affirmative Action is a legislative requirement within South African organisations. What do you understand by the concept *Affirmative Action*? What does Affirmative Action mean to you?
2. Part of the reason for implementing the Affirmative Action policy is to create greater opportunities for employees who, under the apartheid era, were discriminated against on the basis of race. What do you think about the ‘preferential’ treatment endorsed by the Affirmative Action policy?
 - a. What does fairness/unfairness mean to you? / How do you understand fairness/unfairness?
 - b. How does your understanding of fairness/unfairness make you feel?
 - c. Can you tell me about any experience that made you feel that you were treated unfairly?
3. How do you understand the reasons for the need to implement Affirmative Action?
 - a. Do you think it is important for our country?
 - b. Do you think there are other ways to achieve what Affirmative Action seeks to achieve?
 - c. What does diversity mean to you?
4. The Employment Equity Act states that, in implementing Affirmative Action practices, measures to promote workplace *diversity* should be promoted at organisations. What do you think about this?
 - a. What does diversity mean to you? (if not addressed in 3c)
 - b. What does equal opportunity mean to you?
 - c. Do you think that promoting diversity within the workplace is important for organisations?
5. This organisation is described as one that is focused on diversity, that seeks to ensure effective participation of black employees, through black economic empowerment and that seeks to eradicate all forms of workplace discrimination. What is your experience of Affirmative Action in this organization?
6. How do you understand “power”?
 - a. Do you think power and Affirmative Action are related in any way?
 - b. How is power exercised in this organisation?
 - c. How does this make you feel?
7. What does the concept “Justice” mean to you?
 - a. Do you think that Affirmative Action is just?
 - b. How do you think Affirmative Action can be made just OR what would make Affirmative Action less just?

8. A metaphor can be described as an analogy between two concepts or ideas. For example, South Africa, as a nation, has been described metaphorically as a *rainbow nation*. I want you to provide metaphors for the following concepts:
- a. Affirmative Action
 - b. Diversity
 - c. Your workplace
 - d. Power
 - e. Justice

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant

Thank you for participating in this research project. You will need to be aware of the following information before you consent to be interviewed:

1. I, Shanya Reuben, am conducting this research for my PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN);
2. The project is about studying the different perspectives that employees have regarding the policy of affirmative action, in South Africa;
3. You will at all times remain completely anonymous and will be identified within the research by a pseudonym;
4. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will be made available in full only to my research supervisors (Dr Thandi Magojo and Professor Anna Meyer-Weitz);
5. Excerpts of the interview may be used in the research write-up, in academic presentations and/or publications, always excluding any information that could reveal your identity;
6. During the interview you are free to speak as long as you want to and ask any questions at any time;
7. you may choose to withdraw from the process at any time;
8. The interview will be recorded. You have the right to review the tape and transcription of the interview and make changes, corrections and comments should you wish to;
9. You are entitled to a copy of the interview and transcript;
10. If for any reason you find that during or after the interview you feel that you need emotional assistance as a result of confronting issues discussed, please contact the researcher for assistance.

I _____ consent to being interviewed by Shanya Reuben for her study titled *Exploring employees' social constructions of Affirmative Action in a South African organisation: A discursive perspective*. I also acknowledge and fully understand the information discussed, above.

Full Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____