

**EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION
AND NEGOTIATION OF PROFESSIONALS FROM PREVIOUSLY
DISADVANTAGED GROUPS**

by
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The crest of the University of Pretoria is visible in the background, featuring a shield with a yellow and blue design, topped with a crown and a banner. The banner contains the Latin motto "AD DESTINATUM PERSEQUITUR".

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ABSTRACT

Research purpose: This study aimed to explore the professional identity construction of accountants from previously disadvantaged groups. The study considered the significance of context and the influence of whiteness and racial micro-aggressions on individual identity construction.

Motivation for this study: Little is known about the struggle that people from previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa have to go through to negotiate their professional identities. This study provided a platform for these individuals to share their journey in becoming a professional accountant and understanding the impact of context on their professional identity construction.

Research design, approach and method: The study followed a qualitative design, and a multiple case study method was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through a narrative lens to explore the individual stories of the participants' experiences. Non-probability purposive sampling was used. The sample consisted of five black professional accountants from previously disadvantaged groups. Data analysis took the form of individual case narratives followed by a thematic analysis across cases.

Main findings: The history of apartheid is still present in South African organisations today in the form of racial micro-aggression and whiteness which create barriers to the professional identity construction of people from previously disadvantaged groups. It was found that the following contexts influence identity construction: political, legislative, socio-economic, educational, organisational, professional, family and cultural contexts.

Practical Implications: Legislation such as BBEEE, AA and the EEA are in place to support the transformation agenda of South African organisations. However, in this study it became clear that legislation does not achieve its intended impact. If organisations do not start supporting professionals of colour, it will have a major impact on their skills and career development as well as on talent retention within organisations.

Value/Study contribution: The results could become a valuable resource for educational institutions, professional bodies and managers within organisations to enable them to eliminate the barriers of whiteness and micro-aggression and to support people from previously disadvantaged groups to construct positive professional identities.

Keywords: Identity, work identity, identity work, professional identity, micro-aggression, whiteness, context, racism, racial stigma.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the second semester last year one of my fellow students was seated in the lecture room waiting with the rest of the group for their new lecturer when a woman they hadn't seen before entered the room, stepped onto the podium and introduced herself. After a pause one of the students raised his hand and asked her whether she knew when the lecturer would arrive. At first she was puzzled, not understanding his meaning, but then she realised that because she was black the class had assumed that she was the lecturer's assistant rather than the lecturer.

When my friend told me about this I was shocked to find that even in the "new" South Africa, black professionals are seen as unworthy of their profession. This made me curious about the experiences of other black professionals in the workplace and if they are confronted with similar experiences of being made to feel unworthy and undeserving of their professional status simply because of their skin colour.

Work is an important part of our lives and who we are. It is a source of our identity. We have no choice but to work and we spend more time working than resting, sleeping or being with our families (Gini, 1998). Work becomes the foundation through which professional identity is constructed and it is an important source of self-realisation (Kirpal, 2006; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Slay and Smith (2011) point out that career success is associated with successful professional identity construction. Thus, preventing people from previously disadvantaged groups from constructing a sound professional identity can have a great impact on them and their profession and the people they serve.

Members of the groups that constitute the majority of our population represent a disproportionately small minority in the ranks of professional and managerial staff in

organisations (Adams, Van de Vijver, & De Bruin, 2012). They are forced to develop and maintain a positive identity in the face of prejudice and stereotypes in organisations structured primarily around whiteness (Leonard, 2010) and micro-aggression (Sue et al., 2007). Twenty-five years after the 1994 election, organisational conditions still reflect structural inequality in South Africa, and these form barriers to people of colour in their journey towards professionalism (Chipunza & Kabungaidze, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges that people from previously disadvantaged groups face in the construction of a professional identity. The literature will be drawn from existing studies on professional identity, whiteness, micro-aggression, context and studies exploring both identity and race.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The heart of every organisation is its people. They are the key element for delivering products or services, creating a profit and maintaining a competitive advantage in the industry (Pascal, 2004). In order to study how professionals from previously disadvantaged groups construct and negotiate their identity it is necessary to understand how they see themselves and why they behave as they do – in short, to explore their identity. Identity is not only influenced by the organisation, but also by the external environment, such as the economic and political conditions in the country in which the organisation exists (Crafford, Masombuka, Marx & Carey, 2018). South Africa is a country with challenging and complex dynamics such as structural inequality and economic marginalisation (Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, 2010). These dynamics present themselves in organisational and professional contexts, and to fully understand them one needs to understand the unique history of South Africa.

In 1948 the Afrikaner National Party won the election and apartheid was born. The aim of the party was to separate the white minority from the non-white majority through the implementation of racial separation which controlled the political, economic and social rights and activities of black people. To control their political power, black South Africans

were divided along tribal lines into homelands which were classified as separate 'nations', giving these people political rights only within their designated homeland (Raiford, 1979; South African History Online, 2015). Outside of their homelands, they were considered as foreigners, thus giving them no right to vote and removing them from the nation's political body. In addition, after forcibly removing black South Africans from their land in the rural areas, the land was sold at a low price to white farmers, in effect removing their right to own land within South Africa. To earn a living, they were forced to leave their families and live and work in separate cities (Smith, 2011). Movement between parts of South Africa was strictly regulated, however, and black people working within South Africa outside of their homelands were required to carry passbooks and if found without them were subject to arrest (Raiford, 1979; South African History Online, 2015).

Education was also separated, reserving access to good schools and education systems for white people only. This made it difficult for black people to compete to gain access to good universities. Job reservation laws reserved most of the skilled jobs for white people, restricting non-white people to lower and mid-level positions (Raiford, 1979; South African History Online, 2015). These restrictions in political, economic and social power placed black people at a disadvantage because they were given citizenship in the homelands to deny them citizenship in South Africa itself, which had a detrimental impact on their education and access to professional careers. This resulted in the existence of parallel economies, referred to as the first and second economy (Phillip, 2010). This shaped the context in which people from previously disadvantaged groups constructed their professional identities.

Post-1994 South Africa is still characterised by the first and second economies (Phillip, 2010). The second economy is characterised by underdevelopment, contributes little to the GDP, consists of a large part of our population, is structurally disconnected from both the first and global economy and is incapable of self-generated growth and development (Phillip, 2010). After the democratic election in 1994, these disadvantaged groups gained political freedom. Even though this gave them the choice and opportunity to become

professionals, their resources were limited. The structural conditions developed under apartheid have not changed and the apartheid shadow lingers (Booth & Vale, 1995).

The structural conditions have spilled over and informed the structures created in the meso or organisational context, resulting in the prevalence of whiteness and micro-aggressions within South African organisations (Steyn & Foster, 2008; Al Ariss, Ozbilgin, Tatli, & April, 2014). The diverse contexts of South African organisations may influence how people behave, feel, act, work and perceive things, thus influencing their professional identity construction. Sue (2010) and Sue, Lin and Rivera (2009) point out that black professionals in the workplace feel that to be successful in their profession means they have to endure racial micro-aggressions and call them coincidences because it is expected of them. Thus, even though being a professional offers prestige, it does not protect members of previously disadvantaged groups from negative treatment in the workplace. They internalise racial comments or actions towards them and adopt a minority identity out of fear of hostility, discrimination or losing the prestige that comes with their profession (Sue, 2010 & Sue, Lin & Rivera, 2009).

1.3. MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Little is known about the struggle that people from disadvantaged groups in South Africa have to negotiate their professional identities. A proper understanding of this process needs to include their experiences at home, in their communities, at school and university and finally in the organisations that employ them. As Bhattacharyya (2008) pointed out, identity construction is not a mere adoption of a role, but rather a life-long complex process that individuals go through to develop their identity within the different phases of their lives. Thus, developing a professional identity is influenced by numerous elements including education, group interaction and organisational socialisation and it is therefore important to explore identity within the various contexts of the individual's life.

In addition to the person's background and contexts of origin, the organisational context and organisational talk can either shape the individual through identification (Clarke,

Brown, & Hailey, 2009) or trigger dis-identification and the construction of alternative resistant identities (Alvesson & Robertson, 2015). This study aims to explore how these experiences influence the process of successful identity construction and negotiation. While most research on professional identity focuses on the identity construction process and the influence of the organisational context (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), very few studies focus on the influence of the home, the community and school during childhood and adolescence or the university on the young adult. The context of South African organisations includes racial stigma, structural inequality and racial micro-aggression that may impact negatively on the construction of professional identity. For example, racial micro-aggressions may create discriminatory barriers that are difficult for employees of colour to overcome (Rowe, 1990). In relation to this, Sue and Constantine (2010) maintain that employees from previously disadvantaged groups may perceive the work environment as non-inclusive and unhealthy because of the cold climate created by racial micro-aggression.

In addition to understanding the impact of whiteness and micro-aggression on professional identity construction, the researcher therefore also aims to explore the influence of contexts of origin and the organisation and the barriers they may create.

1.4. PURPOSE STATEMENT

The aim of this study is to explore the professional identity construction of accountants from previously disadvantaged groups in the light of the unique South African context. The study considers the significance of context and the influence of whiteness and racial micro-aggression on individual identity construction.

1.5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following research objectives have been set in accordance with the research purpose:

- to explore and explain professional identity, identity work, whiteness and micro-aggression as the key terms of the study
- to explore the contextual factors (micro, meso and macro) that shape the construction and negotiation of professional identity
- to explore how “whiteness” is experienced by previously disadvantaged professionals and in what ways it inhibits constructing and maintaining a positive professional identity
- to understand the nature and type of micro-aggressions experienced by these previously disadvantaged professionals and in what ways they inhibit constructing and maintaining a proactive professional identity.

1.6. ACADEMIC VALUE AND INTENDED CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

This study will add to existing research on professional identity which has not been widely explored in the South African context. It will examine the different struggles and challenges that accountants from previously disadvantaged groups face in constructing a positive professional identity. The study will offer unique insights into the South African context, taking into consideration its unusual history and dynamics. The study also provides a platform to explore the influence of racial micro-aggression and whiteness in professional identity construction.

The practical value of the study is twofold. Firstly, by understanding the context within which South African organisations function and the negative impact it has on people from previously disadvantaged groups, the findings of the study could be used to create a more accommodating and accessible environment for professionals from these groups. Secondly, an understanding of the strategies and tactics that accountants use to negotiate a positive professional identity could become a valuable resource for professionals in similar settings, enabling them to eliminate the barriers of whiteness and micro-aggression and in so doing to construct positive professional identities.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION – THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICA

As previously indicated, the South African apartheid worldview defined one's life and identity according to whether one was 'white', 'black', or some 'colour' in between. This 'identity' determined where one lived, went to school and worked and who one socialised with or married. Everyone was assigned to a 'race' category (Botha, 2009). The structure of apartheid continues to inform the context in which South Africans work and live today.

Structural inequalities, economic marginalisation, whiteness and racial micro-aggressions impact on the professional identity construction of members of previously disadvantaged groups and they are still faced every day with these challenges in the workplace.

This study focused on determining the effect of contexts at the micro, meso and macro levels that may have posed challenges and impacted on the professional identity construction of people of colour in South Africa. The micro level refers to the immediate environment of the individual, including self-perceptions and interactions with immediate friends and family members. The meso level refers to the social environment with which the individual interacts including school, work, organisation and university. The macro level refers to the external environment or context including the political, legal, economic, governmental and global environment (Crafford et al., 2018). These contexts influence the "scope of a person's identity work as it shapes their choice of goals and constrains their perception of reality by impacting what is possible and what not" (Crafford et al., 2018, p. 2).

This chapter provides a context for the various concepts relevant to the study, starting by defining identity and its underlying concepts, following this with a discussion of race and stigmatisation and concluding by explaining micro-aggression and whiteness.

2.2 IDENTITY

“Identity is viewed as central for issues of meaning, motivation, commitment, loyalty, logics of action and decision-making, stability and change, leadership, group and intergroup relations and organisational collaborations” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). It is also central to the concepts of work identity, identity work, and professional identity. But just what is identity per se?

McAdams (1999) defines identity as “the internalized and evolving story that results from a person’s selective appropriation of past, present and future”. Baumeister (1986) and Brown (2015) use the term identity for the meanings that individuals attach to themselves as they seek to answer questions such as: “How shall I relate to others?” “What shall I strive to become?” and “How will I make the basic decisions required to guide my life?” Identity is constructed and maintained through internal processes and social interaction as a person seeks to answer the question “who am I?” (Cerulo, 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Frequently, the meanings people attach to themselves are achieved from available discourses in the form of dialogues (Beech, Macintosh, & Mcinnes, 2008), narratives (Giddens, 1991) or dramaturgical performances (Goffman, 1967).

Karreman and Alvesson (2001) hold the view that one’s identity is not only different from other people’s identities, but is itself “a cultural construction, situated in a particular historical and cultural context” (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001, p. 62). An individual’s identity indicates a certain form of subjectivity that is usually positively associated with certain values and labels such as professional or leader (Knights & Willmott, 1992). These values and labels direct a person’s emotions, thoughts and actions in particular directions (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006).

These various notions of identity suggest that it is a continuous social process (Czarniawska, 1997) accomplished through the interweaving of different social and work-related classifications that allow people to find their place in their organisational and social environment (Burr, 1995). It can thus be said that identities are not simply chosen or allocated but are instead the effects of identity work (Mumby, 1997; Trethewey, 1999).

2.3 IDENTITY WORK

Integral to understanding identity is the process of identity work. The most long-standing articulation of the concept is Snow and Anderson's (1987) explanation of it as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (p. 1348). Elaborating on this is the popularly cited conception of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), who defined it as the process of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that is productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (p. 1165). People are continually refining themselves and renegotiating their personal identities by engaging in identity work as their work-related needs change and they need to realign their job with the situational demands that influenced their personal identity (Saayman & Crafford, 2011).

Identity work plays an important part in understanding and exploring identity construction within and outside the organisation (Brown, 2015). The different identities employees work on have an impact on their daily decision-making in organisations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and on their careers (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Other researchers stress that identity work occurs in the present but must be viewed and understood against an individual's total life course, and that identity creation in the present is strongly related to past selves and future anticipated selves (McAdams, 1993).

It seems that identity work is more essential, recurrent and intense in situations where strain, tension and changes are prominent, as these lead to feelings of confusion, uncertainty and self-doubt, which in turn may lead to a re-examination of the self (Brown, 2015). People are thus constantly involved in the process of identity work, adapting their identities when changes occur. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) propose the idea of becoming, arguing that identity work is a "fruitful approach emphasising dynamic aspects and on-going struggles around creating a sense of self" (p. 1164).

In organisations, identity can be constructed individually and in groups. The way in which these identities are constructed and the way they interact can have a great impact on the effectiveness of the organisation and on the lives of those involved in it (Beech et al., 2008).

Organisational contexts and social interaction should be understood as regulative to the extent that they provide inputs that in numerous ways affect identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The organisation and its core characteristics play an important part in organisational identity construction which, in turn, affects personal identity work (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) conceptualise identity processes as an interchange between: (a) self-identity, the individual's perception of self (Giddens, 1991), (b) identity work, actively creating a self-identity and (c) identity regulation, which refers to the regulative effects of organisational and social processes.

Identities in organisations are to an increasing extent viewed as fundamental to understanding processes of organising (Brown, 2001). Vince (1999) maintains that organisations have their own dynamic or culture that is created and recreated through the process of organising which, in turn, has an effect on the individuals in it. It follows that organisations are ever-changing and so are individual roles within the organisation. Employees thus need to constantly redefine their identities in order to accommodate and adapt to these changes. Organisations and individuals are better understood when viewed as evolving and becoming over time (Ashforth, 1998).

An occurrence that is dynamic is usually characterised by constant change, activity or progress, suggesting that identity work is dynamic in nature. Individuals are thus constantly involved in the process of identity work, adapting their identities when changes occur. In relation to this, the study by Beech et al. (2008) confirms that identity is dynamic and changeable over time. They argue that dynamic identity is intrinsically complex and is constantly constructed through social interaction. These interactive activities constitute identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and are fundamental to it.

Identity work is not only how people classify themselves and are classified by others, it is also concerned with how these classifications and portrayals become saturated with meaning and are taken as culturally-embedded. Meaning can be saturated when the individual's view of their identity is accepted, rejected, ignored or remain unrecognised by others. Therefore, judgement on identity is based on the reaction of others and therefore interaction is fundamental to identity work and consequently adds to its complexity (Beech et al., 2008). For example, police officers may view themselves as protectors of the public, whereas the public might have a different view, which causes them to revise their idea of their own identity. Identity work is fundamental to processes of socialization and essential to fully explain why a person does certain things (Ibarra, 1999).

2.4 WORK IDENTITY

Whereas personal identity aims to answer the question “who am I?” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), work identity aims to answer the question “Who am I at work”. Work identity is part of the self-concept and is structured by various other identities such as organisational, professional, social and individual that form the roles a person adopts at work and how they are lived out (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Lloyd, Roodt and Odendaal (2011, p. 13) define work identity as “a multi-identity, multi-faceted and multi-layered construction of the self (in which the self-concept fulfils a core, integrative function), that shapes the roles individuals are involved in, within their employment context”. Wallace (2002) views work identity as a person's sense of who he or she is, constituted through his or her positioning within the particular relations of power in the workplace.

The diverse means by which individuals craft their work identities may include the way they dress, their personal style, how they use humour and how they decorate their office to show others who they are (Ibarra, 1999). Ibarra (2003) characterises work identity in terms of working relationships, work activities, the individual side of work identity and the events that form us and have an impact on the person we become. It is important that individuals identify with their responsibilities, tasks, employers and co-workers (Buche,

2006). Thus, work identity is a combination of organisational, professional, managerial, personal and social identities (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Understanding work identity is key to understanding people at work.

2.5 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Slay and Smith (2011) define professional identity as “one’s professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences” (p. 85). Ibarra (1999) defines professional identity as “the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (p. 764). Kirpal (2006) claims that work plays a vital role in self-realisation and is an influential intermediate through which professional identity is constructed. Professional identity is an ongoing and multifaceted process that starts to develop from an individual’s early childhood years. This lays a potential foundation for establishing an identity at work, developing a projection of one’s self in the future, anticipating a career path and implementing a work-based logic (Cohen-Scali, 2003). Professional identity serves as a frame of reference from which one carries out a professional role, makes significant professional decisions and develops as a professional (Brott & Myers, 1999). The process of becoming a professional is complex as individuals need to acquire the knowledge and skills for professional practice and continually find new ways of defining themselves as professionals (Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012).

Professional identity can therefore be described as the way an individual perceives him or herself with regard to his or her profession. It is continuously created and recreated as the individual develops as a professional and interacts with others within the profession or organisational environment. It refers to a shared identity among different people from the same profession with shared characteristics that mark their profession. Identity construction has an impact not only on the work identity of individuals, but also on their professional identity. As previously indicated, work identity is structured by various other identities including professional identity.

Cohen-Scali (2003) state that professional identity construction occurs in two stages, namely socialisation for work and socialisation by work. The first occurs in the family domain and includes the school and broader social environment of which the professional individual is part. The latter occurs in the work domain when the individual enters the work environment. During this transition from school to the workplace identity transformation is experienced by the young professional, which makes them particularly sensitive to the influence of social interactions, including racial encounters.

Professional identity is a product of both self-perception and legitimisation or validation by others and is a factor of an individual's position and interactions within society and their interpretation of daily experiences (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010). As an individual's professional identity is validated, they receive an element of prestige that comes with privilege (Slay & Smith, 2011). However, in South Africa, members of previously disadvantaged groups may be given less privilege and prestige in their professional identity. For example, working in a male dominated organisation may influence how a female accountant views herself as a professional, which may be different if she worked in an organisation dominated by females or in an equally gendered organisation. Thus, Slay and Smith (2011) highlight the importance of considering context and organisational culture and its influence in professional identity construction. The magnitude of the impact and influence of racial stigma, whiteness and micro-aggression is dependent on culture and context.

The history of South Africa has generally led to a situation of privilege for white people and one of disadvantage for people of colour. Despite the democratically elected government's efforts and legislation to change this, the years of structural oppression pose significant challenges to people of colour in their journey towards becoming professionals. These challenges may include coming from a disadvantaged background characterised by poor schooling, low expectations from peers and parents and a lack of funding for tertiary studies (Cohen-Scali, 2003).

The consideration of professional identity construction is particularly important in this study as the researcher aimed to explore how people from previously disadvantaged groups negotiate a positive professional identity in the South African context. The researcher specifically focused on structural inequalities that affect the process of identity construction, including two important aspects of structural inequality, namely whiteness and racial micro-aggression.

2.6 RACISM, STIGMA AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The way people talk and act in terms of race, creates the reality of race (Grimes, 2001). Thus, rather than reflecting reality, race is socially constructed by means of action and discourse. In line with this, Frankenberg (1993) argues that the reality of race is changing, social and political rather than inherent and static. “Social and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories during a process called racial formation” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 60). Thus the meaning of race changes over time and place, which in turn shapes the political, economic and social classification of racial categories (Grimes, 2001). According to Jones (2000) race is only a “rough proxy” (p. 1212) for culture, socioeconomic status and genes, but captures the social classification of individuals in a race-conscious society. Thus, race is a social construct that captures the effects of racism and not a biological construct that reflects innate differences.

Race is not only an important societal issue, but also serves as a shaping factor in what is seen and not seen, who is heard and not heard (Grimes, 2001). In their article, Sue et al. (2007) outline the conclusions made by President Clinton’s Race Advisory Board (1998) where they state that racism is one of the most contentious forces of society, that racial legacies of the past continue to play a role in current practices and policies, creating inequality amongst minority and majority groups, that racial inequalities are so deeply ingrained in society that they are almost invisible, and lastly that white people are unaware of their advantages or that their attitudes and actions unintentionally discriminate against people of colour.

These conclusions highlight the importance of studying race and the role it plays in the construction of individual identity. Critical race theory and critical whiteness studies are also important related aspects to take note of.

In the 1960's scholars introduced a new approach to studying and understanding race, namely Critical Race Theory - CRT (Delgado, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT challenges the ways that race influences social structures, discourse and practices. Two of its themes are that the blindness approach will not eliminate racism and that racism is an issue not only within individuals but also within systems. CRT argues that race is part of every social interaction, even when the topic is not explicitly raised (Cotton, O'Neil, & Griffin, 2014).

Racism is defined as a deeply rooted ideology based on a belief in racial inferiority and superiority (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). It is displayed in broad societal actions including policies and practices, such as those entrenched in South Africa during apartheid, as well as through individual behaviours (Fernando, 2003).

According to Jones (2000) there are three levels of racism: institutionalised, personally mediated and internalised. Institutionalised racism refers to differential access to services, goods and opportunities by race. It is structural and embedded in institutions in the form of practice, custom and law. Institutionalised racism establishes itself in access to power, including differential access to resources, information and voice, and in material conditions, including access to sound housing, a clean environment, quality medical services and education. Institutionalised racism continues to persist due to contemporary structural factors that reflect historical injustices and it is because of institutionalised racism that there is an association between socioeconomic status and race. Institutionalised racism is the most fundamental of the three levels of racism and must be addressed for important change to occur. Once institutionalised racism is addressed, the other levels of racism would be "cured" over time (Jones, 2000).

Personally mediated racism refers to discrimination and prejudice, where discrimination refers to differential action towards different race groups and prejudice refers to differential assumptions about the intentions, motives and abilities of individuals according to their race. Personally mediated racism includes devaluation, lack of respect and suspicion, for example purse clutching, surprise at competence or delivering poor service (Jones, 2000).

Internalised racism occurs when members of stigmatised race groups accept negative stereotypes and messages about their intrinsic worth or abilities. It is characterised by failure to believe in themselves and in others in their race group, self-devaluation, helplessness, embracing whiteness, for example by using bleaching creams, rejection of ancestral culture or dropping out of school. Internalised racism is often unconscious and individuals justify the oppression of their race group and believe in their own inferiority. It is seen as a form of compliance that replicates inequality and suggests that the effects of racism are much broader and deeper than they seem (Pyke & Dang, 2003; Jones, 2000).

Society's growing disapproval of explicit forms of racism has brought more subtle, implicit forms of racism into existence, namely micro-aggression and whiteness.

2.7 MICRO-AGGRESSION

The term was first used by Pierce in 1970 and is defined as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are put downs" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66 as cited by Sue et al., 2007). Sue et al. (2007) define racial micro-aggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of colour" (p. 271). Micro-aggressions are often unconsciously delivered and may take the form of tone of voice, dismissive looks, gestures or subtle snubs. They are so automatic that they are frequently overlooked or dismissed, yet they have a detrimental life-altering effect on persons of colour (Franklin, 2004; Sue, 2004). Micro-aggressions are not limited to human

interactions; they may also be environmental in nature, for example in offices or schools. Almost all interracial encounters are prone to micro-aggressions.

Racial micro-aggressions are rooted in “aversive racism” or “implicit bias”. These types of racism are difficult to identify and address due to their subtle unnamed nature (Sue et al., 2007, p. 272). There is an increased need to classify and understand the dynamics of subtle racism otherwise it will remain invisible and become potentially harmful to the self-esteem and well-being of people of colour. Furthermore, it has been found that aversive racism may have significantly more influence on frustration, racial anger and self-esteem than other forms of racism (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, as cited in Sue et al., 2007).

Individuals accused of micro-aggression are often unaware that they engage in such communications during interaction with previously disadvantaged groups. Due to the invisible nature of aversive racism and micro-aggression, white people are unlikely to realise and confront their own influence in creating psychological dilemmas for minority or stigmatised groups, or their role in creating disparities in systems such as employment, education and health care (Sue et al., 2007), which ultimately may have a negative impact on the standard of living of people of colour.

2.7.1 FORMS OF MICRO-AGGRESSION

Sue et al. (2007) state that there are three forms of racial micro-aggressions, namely: micro-assault, micro-insult and micro-invalidation. Micro-assault refers to explicit verbal or non-verbal attacks meant to hurt an intended victim. They are usually conscious and explicit discriminatory actions and take the form of name-calling, avoidant behaviour or other related behaviours. They are usually expressed in private situations to ensure anonymity for the perpetrator.

Micro-insults are characterised by verbal and non-verbal communication that conveys rudeness or insensitivity or degrades an individual's racial identity or heritage. Micro-

insults frequently convey subtle hidden messages to people of colour. Examples are a white woman grabbing her bag when a black male or female walks by or a white person ensuring the car is locked at a traffic light when a black person walks by.

Micro-invalidation refers to communications that deny, exclude or reduce the thoughts, feelings or racial experiences of a person of colour. Micro-invalidation is closely aligned with whiteness in that both reflect white people's failure to realise or acknowledge the privileges or advantages associated with being white.

In an attempt to define a taxonomy of micro-aggressions, Sue et al. (2007) proposed a conceptual framework which will serve as a basis for explaining the concept throughout this paper. Their framework in Figure 1 below identifies nine themes of micro-aggressions related to the three main categories and explains their relationship to one another.

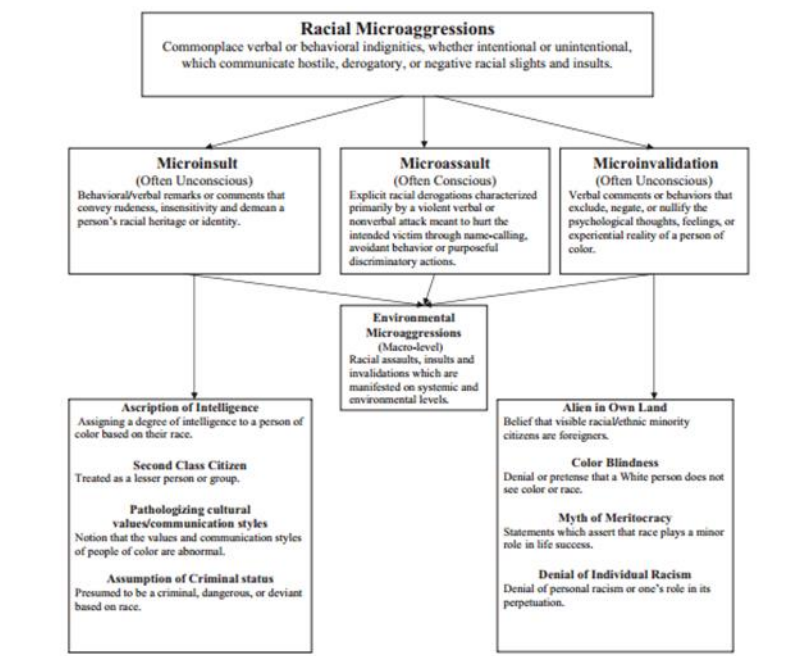


Figure 1 Categories of and relationships among racial micro-aggressions (Sue et al., 2007, p.278)

Micro-aggressions are not limited to individual or micro level, but can also be experienced on meso and macro levels in the broader environment through systematic assaults, implicit contextual insults and invalidation (Sue, 2010). The importance of considering

micro-aggression in this study was to investigate how members of previously disadvantaged groups negotiate a positive professional identity despite the micro-aggressions they experience in the micro, meso and macro environments.

2.8 WHITENESS

Whiteness is seen as a dominant structural feature of organisational and professional life. According to critical whiteness studies, the invisible normative standard or baseline against which others are compared is not neutral, but white. For example, when a person of colour is employed by an organisation, they are expected to adapt to the general practice of whiteness to be viewed as a professional. Furthermore, when whiteness is accepted as an “invisible norm”, individual differences are ignored and the assumptions and perceptions white people have of non-white people are accepted (Grimes, 2002; Cotton et al., 2014). Whiteness operates as the identity against which all other identities are measured (Carbado & Gulati, 2003). In relation to this, Nkomo (1992) points out that “The defining group for specifying the science of organisations has been white males. We have amassed a great deal of knowledge about the experience of only one group, yet we generalise our theories and concepts to all people” (p. 489). This points to the fact that studies in organisations have been conducted as if they were race neutral (Cotton et al., 2014). This is of specific relevance to this study as it aims to uncover the other point of view: the perceptions of those who do not form part of the dominant group.

White people are not “racially marked” and whiteness is not addressed. White people, their behaviour and their attributes are implicitly presented as more normal and important and thus automatically become the standard of comparison (Grimes, 2002; Cotton et al., 2014). The recognition of whiteness and understanding how it functions is critical to understanding the role of race in the workplace. As long as whiteness remains the invisible norm, the inequities present in the status quo will constantly be reinforced (Grimes, 2002). As Ashcraft and Allen (2003) put it, being professional is about performing whiteness.

There is a diverse scholarship on whiteness and no one definition of the concept (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). Whiteness is defined by Green, Sonn, and Matsebula (2007) as “the production and reproduction of dominance, as well as socially constructed normativity and privilege” (Al Ariss et al., 2014, p. 363). Grimes (2001) defines whiteness as a state of being prominently linked to power and privilege, and highlights its invisibility and assumed neutrality. In line with this, Moreton-Robinson (2006) states that whiteness is “the neutral and invisible norm against which other identities are measured and by which they are defined historically in socially and legally” (Al Ariss et al., 2014, p. 363).

Other scholars understand whiteness with reference to subjugation, exclusion and psychological identification, rather than something purely biological (Neely & Samura, 2011 & Chrobot-Mason, 2004 as cited in Al Ariss et al., 2014). Jay and Jones (2005) define whiteness as a deliberate system of inequalities in power and privilege that results from practices of discrimination. Whiteness is labelled by the blindness of white people as they fail to see the privileges and power that come from being white (Steyn & Foster, 2008; Leonard, 2010). Whiteness is ever-changing, unstable and not fixed; it is constituted in relation to other subject positions including gender, nationality and class (Leonard, 2010).

Grimes (2001) argues that whiteness should be viewed in the context in which it occurs. For example, it could be framed by skin colour in South Africa or by educational status and class privilege in India. The aim of studying whiteness is to unmask the various ways in which power relations in racial hierarchies remain invisible (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Nkomo, 1992; Steyn & Foster, 2008; Twine & Gallagher, 2008).

Ethnic privilege vested in whiteness is of key relevance in our diverse society in South Africa, and shapes processes, relationships, contexts and outcomes of work. It is encountered in management and leadership in the workplace, in the structuring of institutions and organisations and in numerous other situations (Al Ariss et al., 2014). Thus, while people of colour are dominant in South Africa, their representation in

managerial and professional positions remains low and for this reason whiteness is still relevant.

In their article, Al Ariss et al. (2014) highlight the need to examine whiteness in its past, present and potential future forms, and emphasise the relevance of place on the manifestation, value and significance of whiteness. They put forward a framework for studying whiteness at three levels: micro-individual that accounts for individual subjective experiences, meso-organisational that accounts for the role in the production and reproduction of whiteness that the workplace plays; and macro contextual that accounts for events that define social settings and thereby facilitate or limit ethnic privilege. This framework is outlined in Figure 2 below:

Key levels	Specific themes
History	Colonialist past, history of migration and anti-migration, of racism and diversity, past and present state of the production and reproduction of ethnic privileges
Space (geographical and social where intersectionalities occur)	Whiteness analyzed with respect to its context; recognition of how ethnic privileges do not remain confined in space, be it physical or symbolic, but rather transcend across borders between different industries, networks and organizations
Macro-context	Understanding how ethnic privileges are transposed between intersectional determinants including gender and sex, ethnicity, disabilities, age, social status. For examples, refer to the work on intersectionality and work-life issues by Özbilgin <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Organizational level	Legislative, political, legal frameworks at regional, national and international levels that institutionalize and spread ethnic privileges in employment, education and other fields both formally and informally; policies relating to discrimination and diversity
Individual level	Practices – both conscious and unconscious – and strategies in human resources management that serve to maintain ethnic privileges, discrimination and the power of Whiteness Individual or personal agency, strategy and experience such as work-life, of emigration/immigration, of the interplay between gender, ethnicity, religion, physical ability, age factors, of the connections between life in home and host countries

Figure 2 Key levels and themes in whiteness (Al Ariss et al., 2014, p.364)

Cook and Glass (2013) explored the context in which individuals from ethnic minorities achieve promotion to top leadership positions. Their findings indicate that race and ethnicity have a significant effect on promotion. When ethnic minority members are promoted to CEO in high performance organisations it is likely that when performance drops a white leader replaces the minority CEO. Thus, minority leaders are not given enough time and resources to prove their capacity as leaders.

Identity is closely aligned with language, place and culture and with local, national and family history and tradition and memories that create and sustain them. Identities are assigned to individuals by society and are assumed or rejected by behaviours adopted in daily life and by identification or dis-identification with a group or individual (Botha, 2009; Weedon, 2004). Garner (2012) states that the norms of whiteness are largely dictated by identification with a set of behaviours constituting respectability. This code of behaviours includes community orientation, civility, work ethic and self-sufficiency. He maintains that whiteness is also a paradigm for understanding the social world, which presupposes that being white is associated with a position of privilege. In line with this, Dwyer and Jones (2000) argue that whiteness is a particular way of valuing and knowing social life; it is an epistemology.

Another aspect of whiteness highlighted in the behaviour of white people is that they tend to avoid the subject of race whenever possible (Grimes, 2001). One way to transform our thinking of race is to understand and become aware of whiteness. Becoming aware of whiteness challenges the hidden assumption that white people do not have a race or are seen as the universal category. As Grimes (2001) points out, “when race is not considered, there is a presumption of whiteness – a monolithic perspective that avoids myriad interesting and important issues related to power” (p. 134). She adds that the assumptions made about people from different races affect the chances in life and standard of living for many individuals. Part of becoming aware of whiteness is interrogating it in order to critically reflect on whiteness, privilege and the implications of a race-centred society. The need for interrogation lies in the fact that each white individual plays some role in race relations and in the system of domination that continues to recreate these relations. Even though current members of society did not create the systems and structures, all people recreate the system every day. Thus, individuals continue to benefit or suffer from it (Grimes, 2001; Frankenberg, 1993).

There is nothing wrong with being white; skin colour in itself has no meaning; but the white privilege and dominance that have come from whiteness will persist as the problem

(Grimes, 2001). He contends that the meaning of white privilege is that even if most white people do not promote the idea that the white race is superior, they still benefit from many privileges. Whiteness became important during historical times as it protected whites from slavery, gave them access to jobs, protection under law and the right to vote (Grimes, 2001; Harris, 1993; Roediger, 1991). In terms of this study it is worth noting that whiteness became particularly important during apartheid, as being white gave protection from the strict laws that applied to other races.

An example of whiteness is that a white male driving an expensive car enjoys the privilege of not being stopped by the police, whereas black males often do not. Another is that middle class white females enjoy the privilege of not being followed by store personnel in a department store whereas black middle-class females do not (Grimes, 2001).

This study set out to understand what role whiteness played in the success with which certain accountants from previously disadvantaged groups, or races other than white, broke the barrier to entry in organisations to establish themselves as professionals in a society where the privileges of whiteness are associated with white skin colour. Professional life and management structures in South Africa are dominated by white people. In order to become an “ideal professional”, individuals therefore need to adapt to Eurocentric and culturally biased white norms and ways of doing (Reitman, 2006). Many of the formal and informal networks and professional associations are dominated by white people and are structured accordingly (Reitman, 2006; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). The implication is that white ways of thinking and doing are considered to be superior and determine how work should and should not be done (Grimes, 2001).

Although South African legislation, including the Employment Equity Act and Labour Relations Act, has been put in place to break down and overcome these barriers and challenges, diversity and equality in organisations remain extremely difficult to achieve. According to Steyn and Foster (2008) nothing has actually changed in South African systems and organisations, despite government efforts to control the labour market; the implementation of transformation initiatives is simply talk and no action. The white

minority is still “gatekeeping” organisations and preventing economic participation from the marginalised majority in South Africa.

In line with this, Walker (2005) argues that in South Africa apartheid ideology has led to apparently democratic forms of privileges and opportunities that are racially shaped by wealth, social class and gender. Thus, the very real legacy of structural oppression remains ignored and the assumption is made that democracy in itself is sufficient to break through the layers of inequality. A more effective way to overcome racial bias and the impact of whiteness would be to pay closer attention to race, gender and class contexts and to explore and investigate the power struggles in organisations as a result of these differences (Nkomo, 1992; Zanoni et al., 2010).

Although whiteness as a concept has been studied in South Africa, there is no evidence of research on the impact of whiteness on the construction and negotiation of professional identity. This study aims to contribute to filling this apparent gap in the literature.

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a theoretical overview of the relevant concepts of the study to provide a background for the findings. With this background in mind the reader will be able to understand how the challenges each of the participants faced within their various contexts influenced their identity construction. The methods used to collect and analyse the data are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 provided a detailed theoretical overview of the concepts relevant to the purpose and findings of the study. This chapter opens by explaining the perspective from which the study was conducted and describing the research design. An outline follows of the methods used to collect and analyse the data. The chapter deals finally with the trustworthiness of the research and the ethical considerations that were taken into account.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research study was conducted from a critical realist perspective in order to fully explore the influence of the multiple levels of context on professional identity. Critical realism has emerged as an alternative to positivist and interpretivist research. It combines a realist ontology with an interpretive epistemology, and states that although a real world exists, our knowledge is socially constructed (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011).

Reality is seen as being classified in three domains:

“the real, the actual and the empirical. The real consists of structures of objects, both physical and social, with capacities for behaviour called mechanisms. These mechanisms may (or may not) trigger events in the domain of the actual. In the third layer, these events may (or may not) be observed, in the empirical domain. Thus, structures are not deterministic, they enable and constrain events” (Archer, 1995 & Sayer, 2004, as cited in Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011, p. 2).

Thus, critical realism does not aim to investigate regularities at the level of events or to uncover general laws, but rather to explain and understand and describe the underlying mechanisms that produced these events (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011).

Critical realists propose that causal mechanisms, both natural and social, have the potential to act on the world to produce effects that may differ depending on the context (Elder-Vass, 2010). Thus, the critical realist paradigm was relevant to this study as it enabled the researcher to understand how these causal mechanisms “act on” and affect professional identity construction within the various contexts of the participants and support Coupland and Brown (2004) when they suggest that identities are influenced by social factors. Adding to this, the paradigm enabled the researcher to fully explore the social construction, whiteness, with the constructionist epistemology associated with critical realism as it produces causal effects due to the inertia associated with social structures (Elder-Vass, 2010). In line with the requirements of a critical realist study outlined by Bygstad and Munkvold (2011), this study aimed to develop knowledge and insight through investigating a limited number of cases and systematically analysing the various layers of reality.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A multiple case study research design was used in this study as the aim was to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the various motions an individual goes through in constructing and maintaining a professional identity in the context of South Africa. A research design can be described as a logical sequence that links the empirical data to the purpose of the study and ultimately to its conclusions. It is seen as the “blueprint” for the collection, measurement and analysis of data (De Vaus, 2001; Yin, 1994).

Yin (1984) defines case study research 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” (p. 23). Thus, a case study research design examines a person, place, event, phenomenon or other type of subject of analysis in order to extrapolate key themes and results to provide a means for understanding an important research problem with greater clarity.

In line with this, Hartley (2004) defines case study research as a detailed investigation of phenomena within their context over a period of time. The aim is to provide an analysis of the context and processes that highlight the theoretical issues being studied. Dyer and Wilkins (1991) state that the careful consideration of a particular case enables the researcher to gain a rich description and deep understanding of a particular setting and social scene which in turn leads to the identification of new theoretical relationships. A case study is done in conjunction with its context because it is important to understand how the context influences the phenomenon and how it, in turn, influences the context (Hartley, 2004).

In understanding how the various contexts of the participants influenced their identity and identity work, the researcher decided to conduct the multiple case studies through a narrative lens to explore the individual stories of the participants' experiences (Yin, 2009). People make sense of their lives and actions through the telling of their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993). Although there are various definitions and meanings attached to the narrative approach of case study research, a psychological or sociological approach to narratives was taken in this study, viewing narratives as "extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of a single or multiple research or therapeutic conversations" (Riessman, 2008 p. 6). The narratives were viewed and interpreted from an experience-centred approach, which focuses on the person. The narratives are assumed to represent the thoughts, feelings and events experienced by the person (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). The openness of the narrative approach, which offers no clear guidelines about suitable levels or sources at which narratives should be gathered and no clear methodological procedures (Squire et al., 2008) enabled the researcher to gain an in depth understanding of the participants' life stories and experiences.

The relevance of employing case study design is justified by the importance of context in the construction of professional identity. Firstly, case study design is driven by the complexity, particularity and primacy of a case and what can be learnt from it (Stake, 1995; 2005). Thus, the nature of the research design allowed the researcher to explore

the contextual factors at micro-, meso- and macro-levels that influenced professionals from previously disadvantaged groups in constructing their professional identities. Secondly, case study research allows context to be deliberately included to understand how it influenced and affected the development of a positive professional identity (Hartley, 2004). Lastly, studying a case in detail from a narrative approach enabled the researcher to see the stories come to life through the eyes of the participants, thus bringing their experiences and the influence of context together to understand how they construct and maintain a positive professional identity.

This study included multiple individual case studies. The aim was to make use of multiple sources of data including interviews, diary entries and additional documentation (Hartley, 2004). However, the participants are employed by professional organisations and work in the field of accounting. Because of their busy schedules they were unable to provide diary entries or additional documentation and could only set time aside for two interviews of about an hour each. The data will be kept in case it needs to be reassessed, for example if the researcher's interpretation is questioned (Hartley, 2004; Andrade, 2009).

3.4 SAMPLING

Maree (2010) defines sampling in qualitative research as the portion taken from a specific population and it typically entails the use of non-probability methods to obtain information and rich data. Due to the labour intensity of qualitative data collection, only a few participants are usually included (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

The researcher used non-probability purposive sampling to obtain a relevant sample. Purposive sampling is considered to be the most useful type of non-probability sampling and is commonly used in qualitative research. The researcher relies on his or her own experience and previous research to find a relevant sample and uses specific selection criteria to identify the most suitable participants (Wagner, Kawulich, & Garner, 2012). In this study, the researcher relied on social networks to obtain relevant participants based on their profession, race and prior work experience.

This study forms part of a larger study exploring the professional identity construction of three groups of professionals: engineers, industrial and organisational psychologists and accountants. The interest in this study was triggered by a story told by an accountant who faced the challenges of whiteness, racial stigma and micro-aggression in the context of a South African organisation. The reason for including participants from these groups is to develop contextual variation and enable the researchers to compare the identity construction of these groups and identify similarities and differences.

The unit of analysis for this case study was the professional in the context of the accountancy profession. The researcher identified five professional accountants from previously disadvantaged groups employed by organisations in Gauteng to participate in this study. The criteria for selection included that each participant should be registered at the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) and have some relevant work experience. From the available sample, the researcher chose to include five black participants – four females and one male. The reason for focusing on black individuals was because they were the most disadvantaged by the structures of apartheid and would provide rich information to add to the purpose of the study. It is important to note that the aim of the chosen sampling method was not to achieve generalisability or statistical representativeness, but rather to capture the richness of the sample population (Martinez-Dy, 2015). The sample size was adequate for the purpose of the study with its focus on collecting rich and in-depth data, which would not be possible if a large sample size had been chosen (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Accountants form part of a group of highly skilled and talented employees referred to as knowledge workers (Chipunza & Kabungaidze, 2012). Peter Drucker (1989), as cited by Chipunza & Kabungaidze, 2012), coined the term knowledge worker and referred to them as “employees with much-needed qualifications and the ability to acquire and apply theoretical and analytical knowledge” (p. 138). These professionals add value to an organisation and its processes and it is thus important for employers to continually find ways to attract and retain them. Other professionals who are classified as knowledge

workers include, among others, engineers, human resource specialists, industrial and organisational psychologists and information technology specialists (Crafford, Moerdyk, Nel, O'Niell, & Schlechter, 2007).

The South African history of inequality resulted in major skills shortages, especially in terms of knowledge workers, and a major challenge our country faces today is to compete globally for these workers (Chipunza & Kabungaidze, 2012). With reference to this specific study, South African organisations need to find ways to develop the skills of these workers and eliminate the barriers of whiteness and micro-aggression to provide them with the opportunity to progress in their professional careers.

SAICA believes in developing the skills of young previously disadvantaged people in South Africa. They developed a unique skills development training model that young previously disadvantaged unemployed accounting graduates can enrol in to gain practical accounting skills and experience that would allow them to become employable in the mainstream economy (SAICA, 2017). The Thuthuka Bursary Fund (TBF) places 250-300 fully bursaried black African and coloured students at selected universities in the B.Com Accounting education programmes who aspire to become chartered accountants (SAICA, Thuthuka Bursary Fund, 2017). Various other bursaries are awarded to accounting graduates by companies in South Africa including, among others, KPMG, PWC, Deloitte and Ernest and Young. Consistent with this is the research conducted by Chipunza and Kabungaidze (2012) stating that knowledge workers, specifically accountants and IT specialists, choose to work for organisations that invest in the development of skills and occupational advancement.

This endorses the relevance of studying the professional identity construction of accountants from previously disadvantaged groups in the context of South Africa. These individuals are offered numerous opportunities to enter the profession and become economically employable. However, despite their professional status they are confronted with challenges of whiteness and micro-aggression. By exploring racial stigma in this study, awareness and opportunity are provided to these individuals to construct positive

professional identities and establish themselves within the profession. In addition, South African organisations could potentially overcome challenges in skills shortages and enhance their ability to attract and retain knowledge workers.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

In line with the research design and based on the availability of the participants, the primary source of data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviews. According to Burgess (1982) in-depth or semi-structured interviews are one of the main methods of data collection used in qualitative research. Classic ethnographers such as Malinowski stress the importance of talking to people to grasp their point of view. The in-depth interview is often described as a form of conversation (Burgess, 1982; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Indeed, Sidney and Beatrice Webb describe the method of the interview as being 'conversation with a purpose' (Webb & Webb, 1932). As such it reproduces a fundamental process through which knowledge about the social world is constructed during normal human interaction (Rorty, 1980).

Semi-structured interviews are described as a moderately scheduled interviewing process with a set of predetermined interview questions. The researcher may deviate from the set of questions to gain more in-depth information by means of probing the interviewee to reveal more information (Niewenhuis, 2010a.). Working from a narrative perspective, the interviews were initially open-ended and centred around the question "tell me your story" which allowed the researcher to gather information about each participant's background, family setting and work history (Foldy, 2012). The researcher probed for more in-depth explanation where issues relating to the context of the individual and more specifically, to whiteness and micro-aggression needed to be clarified or explored in more detail. Researchers view narratives as "socially situated interactive performances" told for a specific purpose to a particular audience in a specific setting. (Chase, 2005 p. 657). Thus, in this study the researcher took the influence of the interview setting and the context in which the stories were told into account when analysing and interpreting the data (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Squire et al., 2008).

The justification for using semi-structured interviews as the method for data collection was that it offered the flexibility of unstructured interviews to obtain more detailed information when needed, yet provided the definite direction that structured interviews offer (Niewenhuis, 2010a.).

A version of the ten statements test was used to gather information on identities viewed as central to participants. The test entailed asking participants, in ten different ways, to answer the question “Who am I?” (Foldy, 2012). Participants were then asked to sort their answers into two different piles: those valued by themselves and those valued by their organisation. All interviews were audio-taped with the consent of the participants and transcribed for effective analysis. Throughout the study, the anonymity of both the organisations and the participants was ensured (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) and therefore only the original consent form is included in Appendix A to protect the identity of participants. A breakdown of the interview hours and transcripts is provided in Appendix B.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed in line with the narrative approach to case studies and with the goal of critical realism – to identify causal mechanisms. For this purpose, each interview was analysed as an individual data set with the aim of exploring the experiences of each individual in their various contexts as described to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the data analysis process, the researcher remained aware that each narrative had already been through a process of interpretation by the participants themselves (Freeman, 2002; Riessman, 2008). The data was analysed by classifying the relevant identity related experiences according to the contexts explored in this study, including the political, historical, family, cultural, religious, work organisation, occupational, professional, language and educational contexts. Examples of micro-aggression and whiteness were also identified in the participant narratives. Individual case narratives were then written to outline how these key contexts regulated each participant’s identity

and how, through engaging in identity work, they shaped or constructed a meaningful identity in each of these contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ochs, 1997).

In the process of telling the story, the narrator may focus selectively on certain details while overlooking issues the researcher may have considered to be important for the purpose of the study. Since the focus of the narratives relies on the narrator's ability to make a point, accuracy may be compromised (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004) and narratives may contain ambiguities, inconsistencies and imprecisions. However, the truth of stories in narrative research lies in meaning and not in accuracy or precision (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). In this study, any aspects of the narratives that were ambiguous or unclear to the researcher were referred back to the participants to clarify. The individual narratives outlining the key experiences of each participant as interpreted by the researcher are presented in Chapter 4. It is important to note that although data was discussed with the supervisor to determine the most likely interpretation, the interpretation presented is only one of possible interpretations (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004).

After the individual case narratives were written, a comparison across the cases was done to determine the regulatory role context plays in identity construction and negotiation.

3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF RESEARCH

A research study can be said to be trustworthy if it is reliable, honest and truthful. Trustworthiness is an essential concept in qualitative research (Niuwenhuis, 2010b.). Shenton (2004) concludes that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study. Schurink (2009) suggests that the researcher's theoretical approach, research strategy and methodology are the basis on which trustworthiness should be judged. It is thus the core concept that needs to be kept in focus throughout the study. Procedures that can assess trustworthiness must constantly be brought to the attention of the researcher. An audit trail is a viable means of establishing the trustworthiness of the findings (Schurink, 2009).

An audit trail is defined as a systematically maintained documentation process of all the courses of action taken and decisions made by the researcher (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). This process should reflect the interaction between the researcher and research participants and display what was discovered during the research process and how it was discovered (Schurink, 2009). In this study, the researcher included a detailed description of the number of participants, the key individuals involved in the process, their activities and schedules, the context, the perspectives and meanings and basic patterns of order and social rules (Altheide & Johnson, 1994).

To ensure the accurate representation of the professional identity construction of individuals from previously disadvantaged groups, the characteristics of trustworthy research were attended to throughout the research process and are discussed next, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

3.7.1 CREDIBILITY

According to Tracy (2010) credible reports are those that readers feel trustworthy enough to act on and make decisions in line with. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that credible findings make sense to the readers and the participants of the study and are an “authentic portrait” (p. 278) of the research intent. The authenticity of research findings in qualitative research is achieved when understanding emerges as a result of details in the descriptions of events, in the interpretation of these events, in the theoretical explanation of concepts and their meanings that may link to these interpretations and in the evaluation or judgments of the value of these meanings or actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Increased authenticity leads to increased credibility of the research findings.

Credibility was ensured in this study through detailed “context-rich” descriptions of the life stories of the participants and their identity construction (Geertz, 1973; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Bocher, 2000). This will enable the reader to make sense of and where relevant possibly relate with the stories of the participants.

In addition, areas of uncertainty were clarified with participants in follow-up interviews and narratives were sent to each participant to validate if they were a true reflection of their story (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.7.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998) or, as Miles and Huberman (1994) stated, how far the results can be transferred to other contexts or generalised. They define generalisability as a “connection-making” (p. 279) or synthesis of two or more studies of similar phenomena and suggest that careful interpretation enables generalisation between current studies (what is), planned studies (what may be) and future ideas (what could be).

To ensure transferability, the findings of this study include a thick description of each participant’s context to enable readers to determine whether results can be transferred to their own settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To determine whether the findings of this study are confirmatory of or congruent with prior theory, numerous articles were read to understand what other studies similar to this one have found and to determine the various contexts in which they examined identity construction (Kuhlthau, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The work of Cole (1991) and Gardner (1979) highlight the significance of communicating the limitations of the study and Miles and Huberman (1994) state the importance of defining the boundaries to generalisability of a study. In line with this, the limitations of this study are outlined in Chapter 5.

3.7.3 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability refers to the extent to which the research process is well documented, logical and audited (Schurink, 2009). As previously mentioned, the audit trail is an important strategy to ensure quality research as it allows for a study to be replicated and thus be viewed as dependable (Schurink, 2009). The advantage of using an audit trail is

that the interpretations of the researcher can be better understood and readers are informed about the involvement and role of the researcher within the research process.

In this study, the researcher kept a traceable audit trail, revealing aspects of herself and the research process, including detailed descriptions of the data collection methods and how the sample was decided upon. This procedure shows that the research was rigorously done and thus establishes the dependability, credibility and confirmability of the research findings (Seale, 1999 as cited by Schurink, 2009).

3.7.4 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability is the degree to which results can be confirmed or supported by others (Trochim, 2006). Measuring constructs objectively in qualitative research is much more difficult than it is in quantitative research. In qualitative research, the researcher has to rely on his or her own knowledge and opinions to interpret results. In this study results were discussed with the researcher's supervisor to determine the most likely or valid interpretation.

Furthermore, the researcher used various strategies in line with the quality standards outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), to ensure confirmability. These included providing a detailed description of the general methods and procedures followed, linking conclusions made with extracts of raw data, stating the reasons for making certain decisions in the research process, explaining how and why specific findings were derived and continuously being aware of personal biases and assumptions when interpreting the data. This may increase the reader's insight into the rationale for deductions.

3.8 RESEARCH ETHICS

Social research requires subjects to engage in a process in which they are often tasked to reveal experiences, thoughts and views that are close to their hearts and somewhat private (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Thus, it is particularly important for a qualitative study

to adhere to all ethical aspects, especially when the participation of other people is a requirement (Shaw, 2008). Ethical norms promote the aim of the research as they prohibit researchers from misrepresenting values essential to collaborative work and other important social values, such as human rights and social responsibility (Resnik, 2011).

Tracy (2010) distinguishes between procedural- and relational ethics. Procedural ethics are the ethical actions dictated by governing bodies, such as UP, HPCSA, and SIOPSA. These emphasise the importance of forestalling data misrepresentation. It is important to note that procedural ethics require research participants to give consent and understand that participation is voluntary; also that privacy needs to be guaranteed. Relational ethics, on the other hand, refers to the conscious and overt actions that reflect the researcher's respect for the respondents and their dignity.

In this study, the researcher complied with the basic ethical principles in qualitative research as depicted in the UP code of ethics. The data will only be used for the purpose of this particular study and will be safely secured for a period of five years after its completion (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) as stipulated in the Labour Relations Act of South Africa. The general principles as proposed by Punch (1986) were used as a guideline. These principles are largely related to the dignity and privacy of participants, the avoidance of harm and the confidentiality of research findings. The major principles are the following:

Impose no harm

The general ethical principle with regard to the participant is to impose no harm (Canada, 2011). It is unacceptable to treat persons solely as means (mere objects or things), because doing so fails to respect their intrinsic human dignity and thus impoverishes all of humanity.

In this research study, the researcher using pseudonyms in data analysis and the write-up to ensure that no harm came to the participants, their friends and family or their

relationships with others by (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Furthermore, the participants were treated with respect and humanity.

According to Kvale (1996) researchers need to pay careful attention to confidentiality and informed consent when conducting the interview, as this will enable them to establish trust and optimise the amount of in-depth information obtained. This was done by assuring the participants that participation was completely voluntary. Furthermore, participants were informed of their basic rights, including that they may withdraw their consent at any time or may refuse to answer any particular questions (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Disclosure of research intent

It is very important that the researchers inform the interviewee about the purpose of the research study. According to Punch (1986) a widely employed practice among interviewers is to use informed consent forms in which the subjects are informed that they are being researched and also about the nature of the research. In this study, the researcher ensured that the participants signed a consent form (Appendix A) informing them of the background and purpose of the study. Furthermore, permission to take a voice recording of the interviews was also obtained.

Right to privacy and confidentiality

As Bulmer (1982) suggests, "Identities, locations of individuals and places are concealed in published results, data collected are held in anonymized form, and all data are kept securely and confidentially" (p. 225). In cases where small numbers of interviewees are involved, the interviewer should design interview protocols, ensuring that the interviewee's personal details are kept secret. As previously mentioned, the researcher ensured anonymity and confidentiality during all stages of the research study.

Finally, the researcher ensured that the findings reported in this study represent the information given during the interviews and from other data sources. In other words, data

misrepresentation or falsification is not present in this report and the researcher made an effort to highlight important themes that emerged from the data in an ethical manner.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the various processes followed to obtain and analyse the data for this study and outlined how the trustworthiness of the data was ensured and ethical norms were complied with. Chapter 4 presents the individual narratives of the participants.

CHAPTER 4 PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The narratives of the participants are presented in this chapter. The narratives provide an outline of the participant's life story and highlight how whiteness and micro-aggression came into play. The focus is on exploring the influence of context on their life experiences and identity construction. Each participant has been given the alias of an animal that best represents their character *and their story*.

4.2 CASE 1 - THE HORSE

Majestic, amazing, bizarre – that's the horse in a nutshell, and it's also what makes it such a beautiful and noble creature – Double D. Trailers.

A horse gallops with his lungs, perseveres with his heart, and wins with his character – Federico Tesi.

Majestic, powerful, fun, outgoing and beautiful. Participant 1 struck the researcher as a dynamic woman with a strong character. Her circumstances do not define who she is; she sets high standards for herself and continues to persevere to achieve her goals. She is a sociable person who can have fun and enjoy spending time with family and friends. Although she comes across as tough, she is warm and caring. Based on these characteristics, Participant 1 was given the alias of a Horse. Horses are extremely intelligent, beautiful and strong; they are noble in character and bring comfort to others.

Horse was born in 1985 in Umtata, the capital of the former Transkei homeland. The town was "separated" from the rest of South Africa...*an island away from the rest of South Africa*. The town was governed by what was essentially a puppet black government. The discriminatory laws enforced in South Africa did not apply in the Transkei because it was nominally independent. It did not discriminate against the relatively few white people living there. In explaining this, Horse emphasised that the context in which she grew up

did not expose her to any forms of whiteness or racial micro-aggressions. She encountered only black people in her town village and the schools she went to in Umtata, so her first interaction with other races occurred only later in her life.

She grew up in a family of eight, including her parents, four sisters and one brother. They were relatively well off: *I was fortunate enough to have a relatively comfortable upbringing, probably the upper end of comfortable, uhm there was no, we didn't lack anything, let's put it that way.* Her mother was a doctor and her father a lawyer. They had a passion for business and had a number of their own businesses. Although they lived a comfortable lifestyle, they were taught that you had to work for the things you wanted. *I guess uhm, my parents were very much, I guess because they come from the generation before, where I think they had to you know struggle and fight to get what they had achieved. So we were never like spoilt...* It becomes clear that even though Horse was raised in a relatively wealthy family, she was aware of her privilege and understood that one needs to work hard to be successful. This becomes the foundation of her professional identity: becoming a professional requires hard work. Furthermore, as Horse pointed out, it was a value system that her parents wanted her to adopt. *I distinctly remember like if we go shopping and you want this and this, you would have to choose one not both, even though you needed it like obviously as you grow up you realise well these people can actually afford this, but I guess it was just a value system.*

Horse went to an international school in Umtata where she spent her junior school years until Standard 4 (Grade 6). During these years she performed well in school and was known to be driven and motivated and to want to excel. This became an important part of her identity construction in negotiating her professional identity. Her parents also played a core role as her support system and in negotiating her identity, both being role-models of what success looked like, which she wanted to emulate. *I think I have always been a driven child...motivated I guess internally and externally because I guess I had these parents who were these beacons of society and doing so well...I had this thing to say what excuse do I kind of have not to excel, but I also think just internally. And strangely enough, they never pressured me to be the best and do well academically, but*

I think I was just always that person who pushed myself quite, quite hard from a very young age.

In Standard 5 she moved to an all-girls boarding school in Port Elizabeth for logistical reasons. *I think primarily driven by the fact that my parents were so busy that they sometimes forget to pick us up from school...so the logistics were just getting a bit hectic.* Unlike her older sisters who went to a private school in Pietermaritzburg, Horse was sent to a government boarding school. At the time she found it devastating and she had to engage in active identity work as she associated herself with being educated in a prestigious private school and now had to adapt or reconstruct her identity to fit in with her new context – a government school. *...it was a shocker for me; it took me very long to accept the decision...I think I was already aware that you know it's a private school and it's prestigious and all of these things and now having to now like shift that...* The decision to change schools related to the high value her parents placed on value for money. She explained that her mother felt they were paying expensive fees for private school, whereas in fact there was nothing special about the private school compared with government schools. *...I think my mother decided she is not reaping the return on investment on this extremely expensive private school.*

Struggling with the adjustment of boarding school, a higher standard of work, new people and more competition, Horse's academic performance suffered. *I think I went through a bit of a wobble...the standard was a lot higher than [name deleted]. It was just a lot of adjustment, school, how demanding it was, the quality, the people, being in boarding school, everything was just you know a bit of a shock to the system.* Towards the end of Standard 7 or 8, Horse realised that she was not performing as she wanted to and that this was not who she wanted to be: she wanted to be one of the top performers. This is a crucial part of her identity as her values growing up surfaced and she intentionally reconstructed her identity based on her historical identity. This moment of truth impacted on her future professional self. *I remember, I think it was at the end of standard seven, when I just said, wait this is not me you know. I don't know why I let it go for that long. I'm not sure if I made this decision in standard 7 or 8, but I was like 'hmm no actually this is not kind of what I...I know I can do much better than what I'm doing. So I kind of did*

an absolute 180, or is it 360 whatever it is? And I changed and I really, really put in a lot of effort into my studies and they turned around like instantly which was great.

After this epiphany, Horse's performance started to pick up and she finished matric with excellent results. On the sports side, she played Eastern Province netball and squash. Looking at Horse's school years from a racial perspective, she did mention that black and white girls would often spend time with each other, but she did not experience any racial undertones at school level; it was mostly cultural differences that separated them. *I think in high school already you could see that you know the black girls hang out together and the white girls hang out together...because we kind of felt like we don't have much in common. And that's just you know that's just the thread, but I mean still the playing ground was almost like level because at school it's really about your performance and how much you push yourself. And I think because I was quite academically there, I never experienced any racial kind of undertones from the school level.* It is interesting here that she says "almost", implying that the playing ground was not completely level, which made one wonder if it was only the cultural differences that separated them.

On a personal level, during her high school years her parents got divorced, which was a traumatic experience for her. *I forgot to mention that huge, huge uhm event. So I think I was in standard 8, yes I was standard 8. And my parents got divorced and it was a bit of a shocker.* During the divorce she assumed the role of protecting her brother and making sure he coped with the situation. She described herself as an anxious person who worries a lot, especially about those around her. This constitutes an important part of her identity, namely that she is a caretaker but also that she becomes particularly anxious in emotionally demanding situations. *So I wanted to know what was happening, so I that I can protect him. So I remember crouching outside my parents' bedroom whilst they were having an argument. I'm like okay I felt like if I know, then I can- It's weird how a child's mind works, like I can do something about it, or protect my brother or whatever it was. So I think those kind of things, weighted pretty heavily on me, but you know it was just who I was kind of thing. And I guess I have always been a worrier. You know? I always worry about – is everything okay, is everybody okay. You know? Bit of an anxious personality...*

Despite the nature of her personality, she had to constrain this part of her identity due to her cultural context, in which one is granted little freedom to act on emotional difficulties. This required intensive identity work as she had to maintain the image of a big sister, a diligent student and a high performer. *Black culture doesn't allow you the luxury of 'ah let's fall apart now, let's rebel because my parents are divorced...You kind of just expected to you know carry on with it. And I think that's part of our culture you know you are not yeah, there's no rebellion allowed, doesn't matter what is happening.*

The divorce impacted Horse's family from a financial point of view as well as her father had to sell most of his side-businesses. After the divorce, her mother lost everything and had to move back to her home town in Butterworth, a small rural town, to work as a hospital doctor. *And you know it did affect us in the sense that you know, whilst my mom was still trying to build herself up, we would look to my dad to pay fees and do you know do the usual stuff. And there were times he wouldn't be able to and it was like what did you do with the - like you sold the business. And now you don't have like what the hell.. ...And so varsity came and went and it was you know it was just this thing of hmm you know, now our results aren't coming out because dad hasn't paid the fees and whatever. So we just had to navigate those issues that we never ever had to deal with before...* It becomes clear that when Horse's socio-economic context changed she had to deal with financial challenges for the first time in her life. This forms an important part of her identity as she decided to continue to persevere and work hard despite these difficulties.

Over time, her mother started to build herself up again and got back on her feet. *So it was very like weird, but I think uhm I guess my mom would always tell me you know children of divorce are always expected to you know, to not dwell on life and you know to be as negatively affected and she was like but one thing I want you guys to do, is to do well and to thrive you know? And I think I kept that uhm and coupled with I guess my natural just desire to always do well it was you know, I focused harder...* This highlights the fact that her mother played a big part in her work identity as she too had to pick herself up and build her career up again. As Horse explained, seeing her mother building herself up again taught her to keep moving forward and not let life drag her down. She had to continue to work for what she wanted to achieve despite any set-backs. Shaping this part

of her identity at an early stage was extremely important because she relied on these elements of her identity to persevere through challenges she faced later on in personal life and in her professional career. This enabled her to maintain a positive professional identity.

After matric, Horse decided to pursue a career in chartered accountancy. Her decision was influenced by her educational context because she had accountancy at school and performed quite well. It was furthered by her family context as she ruled out her parents' careers because neither medicine nor law appealed to her. Also, her mother had a close relationship with her uncle who was a chartered accountant. Even though at the time Horse did not know what a chartered accountant did, she aspired to be very successful like her uncle and decided to pursue this career. *So I guess I didn't really know what a Chartered Accountant did but I knew you'd probably going to be relatively successful...* Thus, a combination of her family context of growing up relatively comfortably, her educational context of being in elite schools and her achievement oriented personality contributed to her decision to pursue a career associated with success, status and financial wealth.

In 2003 she started studying for a bachelor's degree in Accountancy. As a result of her parents' divorce, Horse experienced some anxiety at university due to financial difficulty, but her hard work and perseverance resulted in her being awarded a sponsorship from a big corporate in her second year. This eased her anxiety and she could focus solely on her studies. Once again it becomes clear that her cultural context forced her to engage in extensive identity work. She needed to hide her anxiety while maintaining her identity as a high performing person.

In her fourth year, Horse experienced true failure for the first time in her life. *...and in my fourth year, because in your fourth year you have to pass all four of the exams at one go. Uhm there was one that I have been struggling with and I didn't make it in that fourth year so I failed the one. But that meant I had to repeat the whole year. And I think that was my first, how can I put it? My first big like sort of like real life kind of failure as such. I think regardless of everything that was happening in terms of my home life, generally if I put my mind to something, I was like I'm going for it, I'm going to achieve it you know. So*

I think that was quite a humbling moment. But I think I – looking back, I think I'm glad about the way I handled it because I was very much in solution mode. I was like okay this has happened, er what happens now. And because I knew I had my scholarship with company X I kind of knew I was going to do my Articles with them, which is a condition of the scholarship. And it was just a matter of convincing them to let me start my Articles and let me repeat in the same year. This becomes another crucial part of Horse's professional identity construction. Experiencing failure for the first time required extensive identity work in terms of re-building her confidence in her abilities and once again lifting herself up and persevering to work towards her professional qualification to become the chartered accountant she aimed to be.

Qualified and ready to enter the world of work, Horse started with her articles. For the first time in her life she became aware of her race. The workplace made her aware that she was different: she was a black female and she had to constantly prove her capabilities. *And uhm and I think that was my first real – first time I really had to deal with a kind of racial issue. I think I been relatively shielded all the way through...Uhm and that was really the first time that I was like okay well this doesn't look right, it doesn't feel right..*

Horse explained that completing articles was almost like a battle field. In her view, most of the allocations to clients were done according to race. The blue-chip clients were allocated to the white article clerks, whereas the small clients or pension funds, which nobody wanted to audit, were allocated to the black article clerks. She explained that as a black person you constantly have to prove yourself to be taken seriously, whereas a white person is assumed to be competent until they prove otherwise. She stated that it was a racial struggle all the way through and she just wanted to finish her articles and leave the firm.

...in Articles what you find would happen a lot is that they allocate you to clients, right. So there will be a first year, a second year or two first years, two second years depending on the demands of the clients and there the struggles start. It starts because of the allocation to say who gets to be on the blue chip client, who gets to be on this audit and who kind of sits in the office. Either unplanned or there was a thing called pension funds. Everybody hated pension funds, it was really – and you would find that they would put a

lot of black girls, black trainees into pension funds purely because you needed a certain number of hours, otherwise you would probably just be sitting in the office. So then the struggle would really start in terms of can you allocate clients fairly?

This was a complete culture shock to Horse as she explained that, being a privileged black African, she had never experienced being treated this way. *That was like the big, big, big struggle. And uhm I mean not to champion the struggle, but I felt really affected by it and I think that, that - I often say you know and I – [sigh] you know I feel like even with my kids sometimes that really with a lot of us more sort of privileged uhm black African people, the workplace is where you will really start to feel – it will be like a shock to the system...Uhm where for some reason it just becomes a lot more pronounced than in school and in varsity and in high school and in all of those things. So that was really interesting ja...That was like my first time that I felt I had to [pause] fight for things... And that you were being either overlooked or - in a very subtle and that was racist.*

Despite the period of financial difficulty during Horse's university years, she grew up in a privileged context, with access to education and resources and thus possessed a degree of privilege herself. However, despite this she was treated differently and felt excluded from the same learning opportunities her white colleagues were given. The researcher could see how her emotional state changed when she started to realise how the political and historical context impacted the way organisations are structured around race. She realised that this challenge was different from previous challenges she had faced. Her family values that led her to believe that hard work, perseverance and dedication could overcome all challenges, the same values that carried her through her parents' divorce, financial difficulties and past failures, did not seem to be valid in this organisational context and could not carry her through this challenge. In the past, her performance, grades and success gained the respect of people and influenced how they treated her; now her race determined the level of respect people had for her and how they treated her. Horse was used to being in control of her outcomes, including her work output, her emotions and her reaction to financial pressures. Now, for the first time, all this seemed to be out of her control and she could not change or influence the outcome.

If you are a black person you are almost considered – you have to prove yourself, to be taken seriously. You have to – you have to go above and beyond. Ja to cut it. If you are a white person, you are almost assumed to be competent until you prove yourself otherwise and you have to do something disastrous to prove yourself otherwise, so it's like the absolute opposite. And you kind of just experience that in the most like subtle of ways and that was just Articles, so it was this racial struggle like all the way through Articles.

This is the essence of whiteness, which can be described as the invisible norm or standard against which all identities are measured. These standards are defined both socially and historically and they place anyone who is perceived not to meet them at an immediate disadvantage through exclusion or differentiation (Al Ariss et al., 2014). In addition, at a meso-level the organisational context manifests environmental microaggressions, including invalidations of an employee's capabilities (Sue et al., 2007) leading to a constant identity struggle of proving one's worth within the work environment.

The next five years in Horse's career were similar in the sense that she still had to prove as a black African woman that she was capable of doing the work. She also pointed out that she had to become more assertive for people to take her seriously. Although Horse was always strong of character in the sense that she worked for what she wanted and persevered through difficulties, this was the first reference she made to assertiveness. This highlights that she had to engage in active identity work to become assertive in order to be taken seriously as a professional.

It is important to highlight that although whiteness prevails generally, the value of Horse's racial identity varied from context to context. Although she experienced the effects of whiteness, she also gained a degree of privilege, advantage and acceptance. After her articles, she decided to move into corporate banking where she specialised as a transactor or a deal-maker. This is someone who takes a business idea, translates it into a business case and tests it against a financial model to see whether it will work in practice and makes sense financially. Being a young black female chartered accountant specialising in transacting and working in the banking sector also had its advantages, especially with the transformation agenda present in South African organisations. She

was therefore seen both as a valuable scarce resource and as a black female who constantly needed to prove her competence.

So I think for me what has really helped me is that I found myself being in the minority [giggles] of the minority, of the minority and that, that can be [pause] it can put you at a disadvantage but it can also put you at an advantage.

Interviewer: "In what ways can it put you at a disadvantage?"

I think purely based on the fact that you – you know it's super smart people, you know super highly intelligent people, super arrogant people, and, and, and – I think they will initially perceive you to be 'do you have what it takes'...So it would be like 'uhm who is your proxy here, how did you get here, uhm we will see if you – how long you are going to last kind of thing.

This is a clear example of micro-invalidating, which means to display behaviours or make comments, often unconsciously, that exclude or invalidate the experiential reality of a person of colour (Sue et al., 2007). This became a trend throughout Horse's career. She continued to have negative experiences with regard to whiteness and micro-aggressions that were barriers in her professional identity construction.

The theme of exclusion from the same learning opportunities as her white peers that had presented itself during her articles presented itself once again in the banking environment. All of the blue-chip clients were awarded to the white CA's and the smaller client ideas that needed much more refinement and work, but were of less value, were awarded to the black CA's. This can also be referred to as racial stigma or 'othering' that black people have to deal with while under constant pressure to prove their capabilities without having access to the necessary opportunities to do so.

So there were these rats and – we called them rats and mice, there were these rats and mice and there were these blue chip deals where if you did one, you have met your targets for the whole year and you are fine. And again, you would find very much a trend in terms of who was allocated to which deals.

Interviewer: “Okay now I just want to understand. If you are a blue chip company you can work on one of them and you would be sorted. But you would have to work on a whole lot of rats and mice just to meet your target.”

Exactly...it was very racial. And the thing with the rats and mice is that they are soo difficult that they actually will keep you very occupied...but there's no value in it. So those were in the banking environment that were certainly very, very, very pronounced and you would find a lot of black people get all frustrated and leave.

As a result of the black employees leaving, the majority of employees who stayed at the bank were white. Thus there was a constant production and reproduction of white dominance within the bank (Al Ariss et al., 2014). The structures were fixed and work was allocated in such a way that these structures, centred around whiteness, were reproduced. The result was that there was no promotion or advancement opportunities for individuals like Horse. The political, historical and work context created barriers in her professional identity construction which forced her to actively reconstruct her identity and led her to make a career move. It becomes clear that Horse's embodiment as a scarce resource helps her to get access to opportunities. However her embodiment as a black woman then counts against her in pursuing those opportunities. Thus, the different contextual layers are in tension with one another: the macro-context gives Horse an advantage through legislation on affirmative action, but organisations dominated by whiteness give rise to disadvantages and differential treatment.

So that was basically corporate banking and really you would literally because obviously you are always thinking of your own development, you are always thinking of your next move and you would look at this whole structure and be like if I don't leave, I'm not going to get anywhere.

A contributing factor to this career move was that she was in an unhappy marriage that ended in divorce and ultimately resulted in her suffering from depression. This had a major impact on her identity. *I was with him for about eight years in total or nine years or whatever it is and I think that whole period had really taken such a huge toll on me and my self-esteem was just ruined, everything.*

Her family context influenced her performance at work and she decided to resign and receive treatment for her depression. In addition to the trauma of divorce she was also faced with the financial burden of supporting her children. Once she came out of the treatment facility, she moved back to Port Elizabeth to stay with her mother. She took the year off from work to recover and regain her strength. During this period she reflected back on her life and realised that she needed to assess what really made her happy and what she really wanted out of life. This act of reflection and reconstructing her future identity can be seen as retrospective identity work. She used past experiences and learnings to construct an ideal future.

And just being anxious and just being a bit like not sure about who I really am and what I want out of life and that period made me certain of [giggles] well one, who I'm not and what I don't want and I think it gave me a lot of time to figure myself out. And I guess if I had to look back, I think my life had just been one big like just keep going, keep going, keep going, do this, study, get married etc. you know it had just been non-stop the whole time and maybe that was just a time of reflection I don't know.

Her family and cultural context also had a major impact on her identity reconstruction because she realised what impact this period of recovery had on her mother and on the perception others might have of her child. *And it's weird because my mom who is quite a high achiever- she is this very driven woman. And, and, and I think she took that time harder than I did because she would wake up and go to work and she would leave me at home and she would be like 'this can't be my daughter, what are people going to ...' you know. That's the other thing about old school black people, they are very much about what are people going to say, v-e-r-y much about perception management.* Horse mentioned that she really needed this period to rebuild herself and gain perspective on her identity.

After her recovery, Horse was offered a job at a private equity firm in Bryanston. Working at this firm she experienced, in the worst ways possible, what whiteness really means. *A very hierarchal kind of environment, a very it was also centred around a personality so there was a guy [name removed] who had actually founded the whole company and everything revolved around this guy and I felt like you know I think I'm a bit, regardless of*

all the bumps but I think I have gone too many years in my career to have to – what is the word? To have this Alpha person, male and it was all-white males, like all-white males and the funny thing is they were all foreigners; Scottish, British, whatever like it was a very weird situation. And that was really more than [names of the previous organisations] where I really felt like these people actually don't like black people.

Horse explained that they were constantly looking to find fault in her work and expecting her to make mistakes or fail merely because she was black. This is a form of micro-aggression known as micro-insult, more specifically assigning a level of intelligence to a person based on their race – ascription of intelligence (Sue et al., 2007). The work context here was so intolerable that every black person they appointed would leave shortly after they started.

In addition to this, Horse mentioned that the only reason they recruited her was to present a front of diversity to their South African and African clients. *It was really a grudge recruitment and I think they made me feel like that and you know the guy who had been there for quite a while. I mean everybody admires how much [name removed] had stayed there, he had been there since inception. And every promotion he had, was because the investors were like but guys, why aren't you promoting this guy he is – he is awesome, he is been there for x amount of time, he keeps getting overlooked". So you need the external investors to always intervene, to get him promoted. And it was that kind of an environment and actually when I joined, they were trying to push him out.*

Horse explained that in this work environment she experienced racism to the extreme. *So I think in all of my work environments, that one was the most hostile, extremely hostile and overtly hostile not even – it wasn't even you know the small kind of nuanced kind of uhm hostility it was just like- 'we actually don't think you should be here or deserve to be here but hmm we are kind of forced to so we will take you.* This can be referred to as the unintended consequences of employment equity; it creates opportunities for members of previously disadvantaged groups, but if people and cultures do not change employment equity laws won't have the intended effect. In response to this she mentioned that if she had not survived the turmoil the previous year this environment might have broken her. This highlights an important part of her identity. Reconstructing her identity and actively

engaging in retrospective identity work enabled her to deal effectively with the challenges posed by her new work context. After continual incidents, traumatic experiences and the involvement of the CCMA, Horse was asked to leave the firm.

Today, remarried and happy, she is working at a wholly government-owned development finance institution as a transactor or deal-maker. Since she started at this institution she has never experienced any racial undertones and is given the support she needs to succeed in her career. She is given the same opportunities as the rest of the personnel and race does not influence the decision-making processes. She thrives in this environment as she does not constantly have to prove herself or counter the perception others have of her as a result of being black or being a woman. *I like the environment to be support and conducive and then I will – I'm more likely to flourish than you know, now I'm swimming against the tide and I'm you know, I'm proving myself despite all odds and whatever. So really [current company] has really just been the most amazing place to be in because I mean there, there's black and white it's not like everybody there is just a sea of black people but there is no racial undertone. I have really, really flourished in this role, in ways that I haven't before. And that's not because the expectations of me are less – and there are frustrations in terms of the systems and how things are not really that – they are not as smooth as you find in- so there are frustrations. But none of them are 'because you are black or because you are female I actually I don't think you can do this job and so you better prove me wrong'.*

This highlights the large impact negative experiences including whiteness and micro-aggressions can have on an individual's professional identity. It further highlights the impact of context in contributing to how a person constructs this identity. Feeling worthy, accepted and included in her work context contributed to who Horse is today: happy, flourishing and free from the constant need to prove to the world that as a black woman she can succeed in the corporate world.

Looking back at Horse's story, it becomes clear that the experiences she had and the challenges she faced both personally and in her professional career created a shift in her thinking. She became content with who she is and confident enough in her own capabilities to no longer feel the need to prove herself to others. This is an important

realisation in terms of her identity. Negative experiences, including whiteness and micro-aggression, would no longer define how she viewed herself as a professional. *And I think you know through the years, that value system has completely shifted for me. But I do think a lot of black people are very much stuck in that and I think it's like 'it's our time, we must prove ourselves'. There's this constant need to prove yourself and that's why you stick in that environment and tell yourself actually this is the best environment to test me and for me to prove to myself and all of these white people that actually I am good enough you know? And I think a lot of us are in that space, but me personally I'm actually not, I'm actually not.*

What was interesting about Horse's story is that because she grew up relatively comfortably, went to good schools and could afford education, she could not be viewed as previously disadvantaged, yet her embodiment immediately puts her in that category, assumed to be not quite good enough. Despite her upbringing and qualifications that put her on an even footing with white CA's, she nevertheless experienced being treated as previously disadvantaged when she entered the world of work. This highlights the fact that work organisations are so structured that the culture of whiteness and the perceptions of individuals within organisations inhibit black people from flourishing as professionals.

4.3 CASE 2 – THE BEAR

Bears are beautiful, sentient beings who are extremely large in personality, polite, and even empathetic. They also have a keen sense of community, and are not as solo and independent as people have suggested they are. They are peaceful, thoughtful, emotionally intelligent animals who truly love their kids. They are trustworthy, have a jolly sense of humour, curiosity and compassion. – Ellie Lamb.

Participant 2 struck the researcher as intelligent, loyal, strong, devoted, a nurturer by nature and naturally positive and joyful. He values family and friendship and takes his responsibilities seriously in order to protect his family and provide them with resources and security. Based on these traits, participant two has been given the alias of a Bear.

Bear was born and raised in the village of Vhembe, 20 kilometres from Thohoyandou, a small town in Limpopo. He lived there with his mother, father, sister and four brothers. While he was growing up, his mother never worked and his father left formal employment and worked as an entrepreneur to be able to raise Bear and his siblings.

So he bought himself a truck and a bakkie and he worked by delivering sand, bricks anything that needed to be delivered in the local community, he did that... Self-entrepreneur yes and entrepreneur selling wood, coal and all these sort of things, that's what he did to raise us.

Bear attended primary and secondary school in the same village where he grew up. One of the very first things he mentioned in telling his story was that he has always had a burning desire to become a farmer. He also described his home and school environment as one that stimulated him to become a farmer. Both at home and in primary school he was responsible for taking care of the garden. At school all the boys had Agriculture as a subject where they had to take care of their own gardens, whereas the girls did Needlework.

I grew up in an environment where stimulated me to want become a farmer...I always had a burning desire that one day I would be a farmer. Bear views becoming a farmer as part of his long-term plan and interestingly enough this seed was planted at a very young age. Thus, his identity was shaped at a very young age and was influenced by his family and educational context. Bear's identity of becoming a farmer is woven into his professional identity as he views farming as an aspect of entrepreneurship and being a professional accountant as the basis for becoming a successful farmer. He will therefore use the accounting principles and thinking processes he developed during his studies and years of working, and apply these in farming to ensure he runs a farm that is profitable and will sustain himself and his family in the long term.

So if I become a farmer, it simply means I will have to use my accounting knowledge to run that particular enterprise. That's what the profession provides...I'm a professional accountant the foundation of everything I do, is that because the profession itself has taught me so much skills. So if I were to become a farmer, the skills that I will have land

as a professional accountant, will assist me in ensuring that I run a sustainable and profitable family enterprise.

Interviewer: “Okay, and then the second question to that is you mentioned for the first time almost at the end of the interview, and I noticed that you also didn’t put it as one of your ten statements, that you always wanted to be an entrepreneur.”

Yes [giggles] it’s here

Interviewer: “So why – so do you regard the farmer and the entrepreneur as one?”

Yes, because you cannot be a farmer who is not an entrepreneur...Because if you are a farmer and you don’t want to be an entrepreneur, you are just running that for the purposes of making a living. But if you want to run it proper, then you must be an entrepreneur. And then that entrepreneur, it’s a farmer in my own instance. As much as it’s something that as I have indicated I hope – it feels like second nature to me to be doing something like farming, it feels like second nature – it is just part of me

Against this background, we take a step back into Bear’s story to where he was first introduced to accounting. In Standard 6 they were able to choose the subjects they want to continue with in Standard 7. Not being a high performer in accounting, Bear decided that he was not going to continue with the subject and chose only Agriculture, because he wanted to become a farmer. Arriving at home that afternoon, his older brother asked him what subjects he registered for. When he said that he was not going to continue with Accounting, his brother told him to change that.

And he said to me when you come back tomorrow, you must tell me that you have registered Accounting...It was not a discussion that was just an instruction: If you come back tomorrow you must tell me you have re-registered Accounting. And that’s the reason why I became an accountant.

This was a major turning point in Bear’s professional identity. He had always thought that he was going to be a farmer and that was that. Now, however, he had to re-negotiate his identity and assume the identity of an accountant. Furthermore, his family context

influenced his professional identity work because although his parents never pushed him to become an accountant, his brother did.

Interviewer: "Do you know why he said that specifically?"

When I asked him later on in life, he said he always felt Accounting it opens up so many doors and you can work anywhere...any business entity needs an accountant.

After passing matric in 1998, Bear wanted to go to Wits University. As he was one of six children, his father could not afford to pay for him to go to Wits, but his father saved enough money for him to register and study B.Com Accounting at a university in Limpopo.

I didn't even know about it so when I passed, he said no, there is R3000 here that I have saved for you...So you have to find a university or an institution which is affordable where you can use this for registration purposes.

Bear's socio-economic context posed quite a few challenges while at university, but it pushed him to work hard. A loan from NSFAS carried him through his university years, paying for his accommodation and tuition. He studied hard in order to perform well, because if he passed all of his modules, NSFAS would convert 40% of what they paid for his tuition into a bursary. Bear worked hard to obtain this bursary to avoid having study debt when he started working after completing his degree. Bear could not afford to buy his own textbooks and had to borrow textbooks from his fellow students, yet he made his way through first, second and third year without failing a single subject.

So I started studying okay? Without a text book from first year to third year. The way I studied was quite simple. In the class that I was in, I had friends and whoever within my friends is not studying a certain subject, who has a text book, I will borrow that textbook...So from day to day, I will borrow a textbook from different people...I knew if I borrow your book for today, I need to make the most of it.

Despite these challenges, Bear completed his degree in time. On top of that, in his second year he was selected as one of the top 25 students from the General Accounting group to move to the tailor-made Chartered Accountant B.Compt degree to study towards

professional accreditation. This highlights a big part of Bear's character: someone who perseveres despite difficulties and goes above and beyond in everything that he does.

Growing up in a small village, Bear was quite isolated and never exposed to white people. At his university the majority of his class were black students. However, when he was selected as part of the group to move to the B.Compt stream, he noticed that all his lecturers were white. This was the first time he was exposed to white people, but he explained that he never experienced the issue of whiteness or macroaggression at that level. He explained that the main reason for the majority of lecturers being white was the nature of the profession. Historically, blacks were not given the opportunity to study Accounting and although opportunities were provided to them post-1994, it takes time for a profession to transform. He added that even today at most universities the leadership in accounting departments were still predominantly white in terms of lecturers who had been there for years. This form of whiteness can be referred to as ethnic privilege encountered in the structuring of institutions and organisations and the management and leadership of people in the workplace (Al Ariss, et al., 2014).

Uhm the accounting profession by its nature, it happens across all universities – the lecturers historically have always been white and then it's something that even to this day, it is still – the transformation initiatives at various institutions where they are trying to transform it. Because remember, back in the previous dispensation in our country, there were professions where black people were not given access to be able to follow those careers...And accounting was one of those or the CA stream. So even today, if you go to professional bodies, you will find that the majority of professional accountants are still white people...because you working into – because remember if you are looking at 1994, when these doors become open for people to follow different careers, it simply means that in 1994 you are not going to have professional accountants immediately who come from previously disadvantaged groups. It will take time for people to be able to pursue that.

After completing his degree, Bear was offered a bursary to complete his honour's degree at a distance learning school in Randburg. The bursary was offered by a company that started an initiative with the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and SAICA to sponsor black

students and pay for their tuition, textbooks, transport, accommodation and provide a monthly allowance. This was the first time Bear had experienced no financial stress and had his own textbooks.

In 2004 Bear started with his articles at an audit firm in Johannesburg. He soon realised that he did not have a passion for external auditing and decided to move firms to pursue a career in financial management and complete his articles at a corporate company in Johannesburg. Although this was the main motivation for his move from one firm to another, he did mention that his first experience of racial segregation was at the firm where he first started. Audit client allocations were done according to race: the financial institution clients were predominantly allocated to white article clerks and the government clients predominantly allocated to the black article clerks.

Yes, when I was in external audit for the first time we realised actually when it comes to the planning of clients, who goes to which audit, who audit which companies – you start feeling there's a little bit of a segregation.

This was a bit of a culture shock for Bear, because for the first time in his life he felt segregated; he felt different.

...because remember we come from very different backgrounds...As black, white, Indians and coloured people. So when you all of a sudden you are working as a team, you do things differently...And you, it doesn't matter if it is an issue with the way you greet, the way you speak to each other, the way you conduct work – it becomes something else because we come from different perspectives and different backgrounds...Yes, it was at that point when I started feeling okay there's actually an issue here.

When Bear decided to pursue the financial management side of accountancy he started to work at a paper company in Johannesburg. For the first time in his life, Bear walked into an environment where there were very few black employees and the majority were white Afrikaans speaking people. He worked at this organisation for six years, during which he completed his articles and wrote his board exams to become a qualified chartered accountant. After this, he was promoted to assistant financial accountant, and finally management accountant. During this time he worked at various plants, including

those in Nelspruit, Durban, Cape Town and Springs. At the various plants, Bear found it extremely difficult to gain exposure. The workers at the plant who were expected to teach him only had a matric qualification, but they knew the work and had the experience. Bear, on the other hand, had the qualifications but no experience. They were expected to teach him but refused to do so. He found it difficult to explain why things were as they were at the plants, and he was never certain whether it was because of his qualification or because of his race.

...you get to a plant and at the plant you find the majority of people that work there, they don't have qualifications...but they have been trained to know this accounting work. They know the work. But you – I walk in there, I have got an honours in accounting, I don't have work experience...And these are the people that are expected to teach me...most of them will be thinking maybe we teach him, he knows the work because he's got the papers he will eventually take our job.

Here it's a young black man who walks into a white dominated environment at a plant in the middle of nowhere looking for exposure to be trained by white people...it was extremely difficult to gain exposure.

Interviewer: "But once again would you say it's more because of your qualification and you can take over their job or was it because of race?"

You will never pin point exactly what the issue is...Because eh even on the onset, it is very clear to those people that this person would be here for two years or so. But they know from the past, that those who have been here for two or three years, some of them may have went back to head office and come back to be senior managers. And then you looking at those that have happened in the past, those who will have been – all those who have went back to head office and come back, you will find that those were all white people.

This was quite a challenge for Bear as he had to repeatedly ask for work and ask them to teach him. This required active identity work as he was usually someone who did things for himself and made things happen. Now he had to depend on others to make things happen for him. After a while, luckily for Bear, one of his white managers took him

under his wing and taught him everything he had to know. Today Bear still sees this manager as a mentor and still asks for his advice from time to time.

Post articles, when Bear was promoted to assistant financial accountant, he experienced the real effects of macroaggression for the very first time. *That's when you started to feel actually uhm the mere fact that I'm a black professional in a work environment, it means that if you are given a task you found yourself in a position where you need to give as much as twice more than the other races...In order for people to recognise that you can actually do the work.*

He explained that his managers were constantly checking up on him. They wanted to know what he did every minute of every day, even though his work was always up to date. This invalidation and constant questioning the capability of a person of colour is an example of microinvalidation – behaviour that excludes or rejects the experiential reality of a person (Sue et al., 2007). Bear explained that he was given this wonderful opportunity, but with it came the threat or challenge that one has to prove oneself worthy of that opportunity.

...uhm you get given an opportunity, but then you have to prove that you can do it...You have to prove that you can do it, and it's a daily threat it's a daily struggle that one must live with.

This experience affected Bear on multiple levels and forced him to engage consistently in active identity work in order to remain confident of his abilities, maintain a positive professional identity and persevere despite the challenges he faced. This is an important part of Bear's identity as he always finds a means to turn a challenge into an opportunity. He therefore used elements of his professional context and work organisation to shape his identity.

You start to question yourself that if I'm being questioned in terms of competence, do I know what I know? It has an impact...psychologically it has an impact. Because if you are being questioned all the time...You have to start questioning yourself. But like I said, the answer to that is if you have ultimate confidence in your abilities and what you are doing, that's how you answer that question.

These experiences were not why he left the organisation. His two main reasons were that he had worked there for six years and just when he felt it was time for something new he was approached by a company owner in Midrand to assist him in expanding his company. After a year of working with the owner of this company, Bear felt once again that it was time to pursue something else. This was mainly because Bear and the owner had different visions of where the company was heading in the long term. Bear believes that success does not come overnight: in order to be successful one must sacrifice certain things and take enough time to put the building blocks into place and lay the foundation.

I don't think success normally it comes overnight...You don't build a giant company overnight...There are basic things that you need to put in place, there are sacrifices that you need to make at a personal level...In order to build a big company or a successful company so if at the beginning people are not willing to sacrifice certain things at personal level, which are having an impact particularly on the financial resources of the company, I have a problem.

This highlights a key part of Bear's identity. He takes elements of his professional context and his family context and brings them together to shape his identity. *I think it's an issue of being an accountant as well as the way that my father raised us. To be that thing, he is 76 this year, to this day he is still someone who is much more preoccupied with what is sustainable in the long term. And that is a value that he instilled in all of us...the issue is he was always forward-looking...we need to look forward. You must always have a plan in terms of where would you be in the end of the year, what do you plan to achieve. That's the way he raised us, yes, it came from that.*

A major turning point in Bear's career occurred then. One Sunday afternoon while he was reading the newspaper, something he seldom does, he saw that an academic position had opened up at the institution in Limpopo where he had received his undergraduate degree. As he read it, he thought to himself, *I thought of serving I always said no, I will work for an institution like SARS or I will work for an institution like Treasury, I will work for one of these government institutions just to serve my people. I never thought it will come in a way of teaching.* But when he saw this position he decided that this was what he was going to do and that is how he started as a lecturer.

Once again, this decision required Bear to engage in active identity work. He had to renegotiate his professional identity to assume the identity of a lecturer.

At the institution he found it interesting that the staff dynamics had changed since he left. Where previously most of his lecturers were white, the numbers were now quite evenly balanced. However, changing his career at this stage in his life posed new challenges. Since he had no experience in teaching, his abilities and competence were questioned once again. Lecturers would sit in in the classes he presented to check up on him. *He came running from his meeting, I think after that meeting, just to come and sit there towards the end of the class to see what I was doing...It was a very strange environment. It was an environment where it was even more where you feel you need to prove yourself. Simply that gesture from – I wouldn't call it a gesture or whatever, the act from the HOD of him walking into the class just towards the end to see what am I doing. It reminded me of what I went through during my articles.*

He explained that module allocations were done according to race, similar to the way audit clients were allocated during his articles. *When modules have to be allocated, you will find that with blacks it doesn't matter we got the same qualification. You will be sitting at those lower levels...Where being black it means that you must be sitting somewhere at third year level, and then second year level or even first year level. And you even find people who have been lecturing there for a while even with the qualifications. That they are not getting an opportunity to teach let's say third or fourth level.* This highlights the fact that even though there were equal numbers of white and black lecturers within the institution, the historical and political context still continued to produce and reproduce the structures of whiteness (Al Ariss et al., 2014).

The political and work organisation context made it unbearable for Bear to continue to work at this institution: *I had reached a point where I felt that the political dynamics, they were too much for me. I passionately hate politics. It is even worse when people are playing politics more publicly so than is necessary in the working environment...Yes because those issues for the segregation of who can lecture what modules and then the issues that we ended up focusing more attention on during departmental meetings – made it virtually impossible for me to stay there.* Bear was able to handle the racial

encounters at the previous organisations, but he felt that the moment racial issues started to interfere with his work and he was no longer able to teach it had reached a limit that even he could no longer accept.

This forced Bear to move to another institution in Gauteng, where he still finds himself today as a lecturer in the Management Accounting Department. Here he has not encountered any difficulties with regard to racial segregation, incompetence or differential treatment. He works effectively with his team and is able to live his passion – to serve others through teaching.

In listening to Bear's life story, it became clear that he is strong and resilient, yet caring. He wants to serve others and puts his family first. Although he faced various challenges during the course of his life, be they financial, racial or threats posed as the result of whiteness, it made Bear the person he is today. He views challenges as opportunities, he goes beyond what is expected and he lives according to the values instilled in him by his family.

4.4 CASE 3 – THE DEER

The more I see of deer, the more I admire them as mountaineers. They make their way into the heart of the roughest solitudes with smooth reserve of strength, through dense belts of brush and forest encumbered with fallen trees and boulder piles, across canons, roaring streams and snow fields, ever showing forth beauty and courage.

– John Muir.

Reserved and quiet, yet courageous, committed and determined, Participant 3 was given the alias of a deer. She struck the researcher as a loving and caring nurturer who works hard to be able to provide for her friends and family. Deer tend to travel in social groups and support one another. Participant 3 has a strong support system of friends and family that stuck by her side despite any challenges. She seems to appreciate the beauty of life, including time spent with her loved ones and taking care of her health. Although she is always surrounded by her friends and family, she comes across as a private person who tends to keep her thoughts and feelings to herself.

Deer was born in Limpopo. When she was younger, her parents moved around quite a lot, but in 1996 they settled in Centurion in Gauteng where she was raised. She lived with her mother, father and three sisters. Being the first born, she was raised in a strict home where hard work and performance were emphasised as she had to set an example for her younger sisters.

My parents were incredibly strict when they were you know raising me, especially being the first born they were ultra-super strict with me. So I always had to like study - like a 60% just wasn't good enough when I was growing up, so I was always just – I always had to go the extra mile and being the first born as well. You know you have to be like an example to your siblings, you have to do the best and be the best because you know they are looking at what you are doing, what you achieved they are likely to you know, make what you have done in your life.

Her family context and the way she was raised within this context and her parents' expectations of her started to shape her identity as a hardworking individual driven to achieve from a young age. *So yes, I have always just been a hardworking individual, always focused and determined to succeed.*

Her father is an agriculture economist. He completed his MBA a few years ago and is currently studying towards his PhD in Agriculture. Her mother has a degree in marketing and is now working as a teacher. Growing up, Deer's mother was a stay-at-home parent, always busy around the house taking care of her and her siblings.

Facing their own challenges growing up, her parents placed high value on a good education to ensure they could provide for Deer and her siblings. They also wanted them to work hard and obtain good qualifications to be able to provide for themselves and their families one day. *My dad – he has multiple degrees, and he wanted you know – he also wanted to be afforded with that education as well. And both my parents, they didn't have the best of upbringing, you know they were poor and somehow they managed to get themselves out of that. So they always wanted us to have the best possible education so that we don't ever have to walk in their shoes.* The strong value her parents placed on education became a foundational part of Deer's identity and of her description of herself as well.

As the oldest, she was responsible for taking care of her youngest sister. *My mom isn't really around now, because she stays in a different province, so I'm you know mainly responsible for that little person. And yes, she's also just being a good supporter of mine, forcing me to do well and also be the best that I can possibly be as well...* Taking up this responsibility and being there for her sister changed something in Deer's identity. Previously, her professional career was the most important end-goal she had in mind, but now, with her mother not being around for her sister and being a mother herself, she realised that work was no longer the most important aspect of her life. *So before I do anything, you know my daughter comes first – before work...before everyone else is my daughter...she is basically my everything.* She had to engage in active identity work and adapt her conception of herself as a professional to put her daughter first and always be available. *I don't want to be answering questions sixteen years down the line like 'where were you?' I want my daughter to know especially in these years where they are like forming their personality...I was there.*

Deer mainly grew up in Centurion where she attended both primary and high school. During her school years she participated in athletics, but her main interest lay in entertainment: she loved the arts – singing, dancing and acting. However, pursuing this as a career was no option in her family. *...but you know, parents being more education-riven, they didn't understand that as a girl you know I want to be a singer one day in my life...* The perception that one needs to have a professional degree to be successful was enforced by her family context and formed the basis of her professional identity

Growing up in Centurion, Deer interacted with members of all races regularly and the schools she attended were multiracial. In telling her story it was as if her eyes were opened for the first time and she realised that what she had experienced was not just rules or how she should be treated. Thinking back and coming to this realisation can be seen as retrospective identity work in which she realises that her exposure to whiteness and microaggression manifested early on in her life. Although she grew up with white children she did not understand what was happening at the time. It was expected of her to overlook it as rules and to excuse subtle insults towards her as a black person (Sue et al., 2007) so as not to seem to be overreacting.

Interviewer: “Tell me: during your years in primary school, were you ever faced with any type of macroaggression, racial encounters or anything like that in primary school?”

I think you know growing up where we did, there was a lot of it but you know you didn't realise it. It's only now that you think about it, you are like okay wow...

They were told to believe that these are rules and rules need to be obeyed. It becomes clear that the schools Deer attended were structured around whiteness in which all people of colour were measured against the neutral or invisible norm that was defined historically (Al Ariss et al., 2014). Thus, what is socially acceptable is defined by the norms of whiteness. Black girls were not allowed to wear afros or certain braids as it was not part of the acceptable norm. *As a girl, you weren't allowed to have an afro, your braids had to be a certain length, you weren't allowed to wear certain braids...*

In addition, they were not allowed to communicate with each other in their mother tongue. English was the standard language and the only language they were allowed to use at school. The language issue can be interpreted in two ways. The first is as an example of a kind of racial microaggression known as pathologising cultural values or communication styles and means believing that the values or communication styles of people of colour are abnormal (Sue et al., 2007). The other interpretation has to do with exclusion. Because English is spoken by most people in South Africa, the school may have enforced this rule to avoid excluding English children from conversations in African languages.

...you weren't even allowed to speak our mother tongue in school...Ja, you would actually get into trouble for speaking you know your own language, you know you are forced to speak English and communicate in English with everyone. Look, then I didn't see a big deal, most of all it is rules and you know we were taught okay, these are the rules, and you need to abide by the rules. So we did as we were told. It's only now as an adult you are like “Ja man, that was – that was not on” you know and it's to a point where it's – most of my conversations even with my friends who are all the same skin colour but you know, we communicate in English. Because we were in primary school together and you were told you can't speak this language with one another, you communicate in English. So even outside of school, you communicate in English and now as adults, we still continue

it because it was just embedded in our brains that you can't speak your mother tongue, you have to speak in English.

During high school, Deer realised that she performed well in accounting and economics. However, when it came to selecting subjects, her father made her take science as well. He wanted her to have a variety of choices when she went to university instead of being limited to just one option. Although she struggled with science she kept on working hard and pushing through it until she matriculated. She used elements from her family context, working hard and persevering, to maintain and construct her identity in her educational context of someone who performs well.

Being naturally good at accounting and economics encouraged Deer to choose chartered accounting as a career. A contributing factor was that her cousin was an internal auditor and inspired her to follow her in this profession. Thus, Deer had a role model and mentor of the same colour who had succeeded in the profession as a source of motivation to pursue a professional career in chartered accounting. *A person who also had a great influence on the career path I chose, is my cousin – cousin of mine. So she's an internal auditor and she is just – she is one of those – she was just exemplary. I wanted to be someone like her. She was – she pushed very hard in school, she was very good and she just motivated me to be in that type of field as well.*

After school, Deer went to study accounting sciences at a university in Pretoria. The company her father worked for funded her studies on the condition that she passed all her subjects. She lived on her own, but, as she explained, it came with a lot of responsibility and self-discipline. Accounting was not an easy degree and she had to study constantly to obtain good grades and pass all her subjects. This highlights an important part of Deer's identity: her family values were so deeply rooted that she was in the habit of enforcing strict rules and discipline on herself and remaining focused on the end-goal. *...I want to be the best in my field, I want to get to a place where I'm comfortable financially, I can afford my daughter things that I never had. And I just want to be like an expert in my field so that's uhm the end-goal for me...*

After successfully completing her Honour's in Accounting Science, Deer started her articles at a large corporate firm in Johannesburg where she decided to follow the tax

route instead of the internal audit route. She explained that this was not an easy time in her professional career. *Articles was not easy it was by far – it was actually, you know I thought studying was the difficult part, but working was the hardest of them all.*

During her articles she rotated through each department in tax for three months at a time to gain certain competencies and get specific work experience. In addition, the work in the tax environment fluctuates: there are periods of extreme pressure and a lot of work to be done whereas at other times it is quiet. The organisational context in which Deer found herself was highly competitive and she had to fight to get the necessary exposure. This impacted on her identity as a quiet, reserved person and she had to actively engage in identity work to construct a professional identity that would enable her to approach her superiors to ensure that she gained the experience she needed.

...in the program that we were in, you went into one department for longer than three months, so we moved around a lot. And then, depending on where you moved and at what time, you would find yourself idle for like months at a time. And then during that time you know that you are not getting the competencies that you need to get, you are not getting the work experience that you need to get. And I'm also like a very quiet person as well, so it wasn't always easy for me to shout at people and be like "hey give me this". My counterparts who were more outgoing, they ended up getting up most of the work because they were outgoing you know and not be afraid to ask people for things.

Whiteness in the form of exclusion or subjugation (Al Ariss et al., 2014) was also prevalent during Deer's articles. She mentioned that clients were divided into priority clients and *the little crumbs*. She often felt that clients were allocated based mainly on favouritism but also to some extent on race. Deer was excluded from the priority clients and always ended up with the "little crumbs". This theme of whiteness in the form of exclusion or subjugation seems to be prevalent during the article years of the majority of participants interviewed.

I think it's mainly because people know one another. Look, there was a lot of elements of you know, sucking up involved and those ones that were always just after the managers, they did get the work first. Unfortunately, that's not a skill that I have [chuckle]. Often people say you know you get always get the little crumbs, you know the priority

clients, you would get the problematic little ones...Yes, there were people who were allocated certain clients because of their race and their relationships.

Deer was constantly confronted with the part of her identity that is quiet and reserved, but was challenged in her work context by the realisation that she had to engage in identity work to reconstruct her identity to include speaking up and fighting when necessary in order to succeed in this context. *But the fact that they then want you to take on a more aggressive personality, you know a go-getter type of person, they do want that. Because at the end of the day, those are the people that bring in the revenue, the people that are not afraid to go out there and ask for work. And sometimes, for some of us it's not necessarily possible because I'm not that person.* The deer part of her identity, to persevere despite difficulties and to stay focused, is highlighted as well as she mentioned quite a few times that she learned from these challenges and told herself to keep pushing through.

In addition, Deer had to face the effects of microinvalidations, which are unconscious behaviours that exclude or negate the experiential reality of a person of colour (Sue et al., 2007). This means that her abilities were questioned because she was black. Although she had the same level of education and experience as her white counterparts, she constantly had to prove that she was able to do the work she was appointed to do. *...it felt like you had to work five times as hard to prove yourself worthy you know your counterparts who were at the same level – we had the same level of experience, same level of knowledge you know. They have stacks of clients and you are there with that little one and you have to constantly, constantly prove yourself...*

Interviewer: "And how did this shape your identity of who you are today at work?"

Look, it just – it taught me how to hustle – I don't know if there's a better word for hustle and just not take it into heart. Because, I think if you constantly think about that, you will go crazy. I think the odds will always be against you as a black individual in corporate. So you just have to develop a thick skin and do what you have to do...

As mentioned earlier, Deer grew up with differential treatment based on her race from a school level where this treatment was ascribed to rules that she needed to adhere to. In

the workplace, she was once again treated differently based on her race, but being so used to differential treatment it became 'normal' to her and she accepted that it was part of being black. The effects of microaggression and whiteness led her to believe that it was normal and she had to accept it. *But you know, sometimes it's so subtle you know you yourself are not sure what is going on – is it racially motivated or am I just you know looking too deep into something that is not necessarily there. And also, you must also think do I have the evidence to back up my claim as well...* This reinforces the normalising effects of whiteness and microaggression, making the victim question their own perceptions regarding their differential treatment.

The production and reproduction of white dominance in the structure and leadership of Deer's work organisation context (Al Ariss et al., 2014) is another pressing concern she alluded to. She explained that the majority of partners, associate directors and senior managers were white males. Although there were a few black managers, they did not stay with the firm long enough to reach partner level. *And with the managers as well, there's quite a few black managers, but you know, they don't stay in the firm because we are treated the way we are. As soon as you get a better opportunity outside, you don't even think about staying.*

In addition, Deer mentioned that promotion was offered to those who generated the most money for the organisation. The money came with working on the priority clients. In Deer's case, since she was constantly given the smaller clients, she would not be able to compete with her counterparts who worked with the priority clients. *We don't get the same opportunities. You find yourself always fighting for the crumbs at the bottom, whereas others are given you know, those ones that are going to look – when it comes to promotions, they are going to see that okay, this one has worked on the big four banks...Whereas you worked on some crumb in the corner, what kind of portfolio are you bringing to enable us to promote you further...* For this reason, the structure of whiteness continues to prevail. In looking at it through an employment equity or affirmative action lens, Deer mentioned that in order to meet the requirements prescribed by law, her current firm did appoint and promote black individuals up to a certain level, but she believed it

was merely to comply with legislative requirements rather than from a genuine intention to change.

Interviewer: “Do you think in the long run there will be equal opportunities for all races to be promoted to the top?”

I don't think so, I think if it wasn't for the fact that they have to meet certain ACI quotas, you know there wouldn't be as much black representative at the top or ACI representatives you know. Right now, it's done purely because they have certain ACI measures.

The effect here is that although these individuals are appointed, they are still allocated to the small clients generating small amounts of money. In order to stay ahead and compete for managerial positions they have to reach certain targets and as a result have to work twice as hard as their counterparts who are working on the priority clients and generating large amounts of money. *So if you are allocated small clients, it means you have small budgets and I just with anything, small budgets like they can be from what - ten to maybe ninety thousand and to be promoted to a manager you need to like make what? Three million. So with all the little clients of ten big – ranging from ten thousand to ninety thousand, you have to make three million. How are you ever going to get there? You are going to be working day in and day out, you won't even get to that three million first of all and yes, you are basically going to be working your life away.*

Language also seems to be one of the barriers present in Deer's work organisation context. This theme was also prevalent in her educational context in which she was forced to speak English with her friends at school and university. In the work context, she walks into a meeting room where people who are speaking Afrikaans do not switch over to English when they see her. Although she understands Afrikaans, Deer felt that her colleagues should switch over to English when others enter the conversation as a sign of respect and because English is the shared common language spoken by all in the organisational context. This conscious action of speaking Afrikaans in the work context is an example of whiteness and automatically excludes those from the conversation who do not understand the language. It is clear that Deer's educational context influenced her

perception of respecting others in terms of the use of language and thereby avoiding the exclusion of anyone during a discussion.

Just you know in terms of you will be in a room and they are predominantly Afrikaans speaking, they will ignore the fact that you are there and just go on speaking Afrikaans. Then after they had a four hour conversation, they apologise....I understand Afrikaans completely, but for someone else it's not necessarily – it's not right.

The theme of feelings of incompetence presented itself again when Deer was leading an engagement at one of her clients. At the time she was in a senior associate role, and although she had enough knowledge to lead the engagement she was still relatively new to the department and needed support from her manager to review the work and provide additional expertise. After communicating with the client regarding the engagement for quite a while, Deer and her manager visited the client site to meet the team and get started on the engagement. *So we went to the client and obviously I have been communicating with this client for a while. And when we got up to greet him, I'm the first one in line but he goes straight to our white manager to greet her first so that was that kind of...* Being the closest to him and being the point of interaction prior to this meeting, Deer felt degraded and not seen as competent to lead this engagement.

This behaviour prevailed during the rest of the engagement. For example, Deer was asked multiple questions where the question in itself made her feel that the client was questioning her abilities and competence. *Just asking you obvious questions as if you don't know about tax...testing you but I'm like 'okay guys, I'm a CA and there's certain things that I do know...* These subtle remarks or questions are examples of microaggressions in the form of ascription of intelligence. This means that people assign a lower degree of intelligence to a person of colour based on their race. Deer asked to move off the engagement. In doing so her career was affected in two ways: firstly, she missed out on the experience she could have gained from the rest of the engagement, and secondly, moving off an engagement is career limiting, as she risked becoming branded as a trouble maker. *I feel the white counterparts already have I don't know, they really have credibility to them just because of you know, their colour and people will easily*

believe what they say. Whereas you, you have to jump over rocks and mountains before anyone actually believe you.

After completing her articles and successfully registering as a chartered accountant, Deer was offered a permanent position at the same corporate firm in Johannesburg in the VAT Department. This is where she finds herself today and where she continues to overcome the barriers of whiteness and microaggression in her work organisation and professional context. *So I love what I do, I love my work. I have worked very hard to get to where I am today, So I try and maintain that momentum. There's an end goal in mind and I'm just still trying to push forward.*

What struck the researcher most about Deer's story is how she has grown throughout the telling of it. At first she came across as shy and reserved, but as she told more of her story she emerged as a strong person who perseveres and is driven and can overcome the challenges she faces because she has her end-goal in mind: to provide for her family and to be the best CA she possibly can be. *...the work environment that I have been in you know, I have no other choice but to be strong and to continue to persevere just to get to my end goal. Because you know, just the type of personality I have you know – before I just used to give up, but you know I had to force myself to be strong and just continue pushing forward just to get where I want to be...*

She developed a strong positive professional identity to survive in her profession and become even stronger. Like deer facing the challenge of surviving in the forest, she has faced many challenges herself, but remains focused on her end-goal and continues to work hard. She describes herself as strong and patient and says she will persevere to be the best in her field. The researcher thought that the words of Emily Dickinson seemed like a suitable description for Participant 3.

A wounded deer leaps the highest – Emily Dickinson.

4.5 CASE 4 – THE LION

There's nothing that rouses a sense of awe quite like the proud stance and flowing mane of a lion. For centuries, lions have been rooted in our hearts and minds as symbols of beauty, strength and bravery... – Susan Portnoy.

Bold, imaginative and strong willed, a leader always finding a way or making one, Participant 4 has been given the alias of a Lion. She struck the researcher as strong, confident, courageous and a natural leader, determined to achieve whatever goals she sets for herself. She strives towards excellence with a strong will not to let the opinions of others influence her success.

Lion was born in December 1985 and raised by her grandmother, uncle and aunts in a small village in Tzaneen. Her grandmother was a farmer and she lived on the farm where they had cows, chickens, goats and pigs. Being a farmer, her grandmother believed that hard work was the only way to achieve success. Raised in this context and instilled with values of hard work and having a go-getter mentality started to shape Lion's identity.

Lion's mother was young when Lion was born and a year later she had to go to university, leaving her grandmother to play the role of both her parents and raise Lion in a strict rule-bound environment. *So my grandmother was my parents if I can call her that. But my grandmother was a very demanding person, she was difficult and impossible.*

Being raised in this context, it was no surprise that Lion went to primary school early. *Because I'm a December baby, technically I was supposed to go to school with the 1992 people, not the 1991 people. But I guess I was always an eager person, so they let me – did a test, I passed it and so they let me go to school.* This highlights a big part of Lion's identity: she came across as extremely driven and did not let anything hold her back.

Lion attended the only primary and higher primary government schools in her village and had to walk to school every day. During her primary school years she was number one in her class – that was “her thing”, as she put it. Her strong family values of hard work influenced her educational context and shaped her identity in this context as she was known to be a hard worker. Although she grew up on a farm and there was enough money to afford the basics, she had to work for what she wanted. *...nothing was ever*

handed to us. Everything you have to work...So if I wanted to go on school trips, I would have to work for it, I will have to join the people who worked on the farm...and they would ensure they pay me for it or I would have to sell the produce.

In Grade 9, Lion went to live with her mother in Johannesburg and went to school there. This move changed her entire educational context and forced her to engage in active identity work to adapt to her new context. She moved from a government school where she was the top performer and the only person who tried to speak English to a private school where everyone grew up speaking English. *Ja, so all of primary and secondary I was in a government school, where I was the star, I was the only person who tried to speak English – broken English, but tried nonetheless. And then in grade nine, she actually took me to a private school with kids who knew how to speak English...* Moving from top of the class to the farm girl with broken English impacted on Lion's identity and she realised she had to do something to change it. She wanted to be known as a top performer and not as a farm girl who speaks broken English. This realisation of needing or wanting to change one's identity highlights how context, in this case educational context, regulates identity. She used elements from her family context and the values instilled in her as a child to construct a new identity in her new educational context. *However, because I am a go-getter and driven, I quickly adapted and worked hard to perfect my English and to learn and make sure that I am at the standard they're at. So I had to put in a bit more effort in my grade nine, to make sure that I get to the level they are at. And I did, I ended up being top two, no top three – four, top four.* Aside from performing academically, Lion also participated in various sports during her school years.

In Grade 10 Lion had the option to move from her small all-black private school to a large mixed-race partial government school. She decided to stay where she was. This decision was influenced by her cultural context – the fact that she was teased for speaking broken English and constrained by her socio-economic context: her mother was a security guard at the airport and she was afraid that her financial situation would cause embarrassment. *...Because I knew that my English was not where it needed to be and if I got teased in a small little school, how I'm also going to get teased in a big school. Also my mom was also a security guard at ACSA at the airport, so we didn't have money at the time. So I*

didn't want to go and embarrass myself in a bigger school because uniform was a problem, food was a problem so I was not in the mood. The alias of a Lion is strongly reinforced here as she wanted to maintain her strong image and did not want to come across as weak or struggling in her educational context, but rather wanted to maintain her identity as a top performer.

Lion performed exceptionally well in Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) during grades eight and nine and had a wonderful teacher. She saw this teacher as a mentor and supporter, someone she listened to. This teacher had a major impact on Lion's educational and professional context as she encouraged her to make the decision to take Accounting and Economics as subjects in Grade 10, and to study to become a chartered accountant when she went to university. *...in grade eleven and my economics teacher at the time told me that she reckons that I should become a CA because being that I like it.* With this advice, Lion applied to the university she wanted to attend and applied for a bursary at the organisation she wanted to work for. That was the start of her journey to becoming a CA and the foundation of her professional identity.

Lion's identity as hard working is again highlighted as she knew she had to obtain good grades in matric to qualify for a bursary. Although the bursary was awarded to her, it only started during her second year of university. *I got to first year and continued working hard because I knew my mom was not going to be able to pay for my fees...So I had to work harder. I heard about how you get money for every distinction. So that year I had to make sure that I get distinctions then I got quite a couple of them and that's how I paid for my first year.*

Growing up in a village and attending all-black schools, Lion did not encounter any racial incidents during her childhood years. Her first personal interaction with whites was at university level. The majority of her lecturers were white, but she never felt that she was being treated differently by her lecturers because of her race. Her explanation for the majority of her lecturers being white is linked to Participant 2's description of the Accounting profession. Being denied opportunities in the past, there are not many black CA's today, the majority of whom choose to follow the business route and not academia. Thus, although the profession is transforming, academia is still lagging behind. *Uhm it's*

because of the field, the profession itself. So there wasn't as many CA's back in the day there was a small number of black CA's and also a small number of the black CA's chose to go the academia route...So there is quite a lot of black CA's now than there was then, but in terms of Academia – no.

The only other interaction Lion had with white people during her university years was in a religious context. She joined a white missionary society and an Afrikaans Baptist church where she met her spiritual parents. They took her in as part of their family and took care of her and supported her during her time at university. Lion mentioning this as part of her life story highlighted the important part of her identity that values religion and spiritual faith. This came through strongly in her ten statements, as her first three were *I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ, My identity is in Christ, and I am loved by God*. She claimed that this was what keeps her grounded, gives her strength and provides the values that influence how she responds to the challenges she faces. She also said that it keeps her anchored in her identity. *...Whether a person is treating me unfairly because of race or gender or whatever their reasons are, it doesn't take away from you know, who I am.*

Moving into the work organisation context, Lion explained that the dynamics changed: *And then racism was real and ...because I am black, I am automatically incompetent.* Although she was given the opportunity to work for this organisation because she was awarded the bursary, she felt that the only reason was because of BEE. *I think there was a lot of black people who got the bursaries and I think that has to do with BEE than anything else.* This confirms Participant 3's explanation that laws are only adhered to for compliance, but without changing the structures of organisations or the presence of whiteness within organisations.

In her organisation she consistently felt that she was viewed as incompetent and was treated differently based on the fact that she was black. *Ja but clearly, I only made it because I cheated or something. And I had an encounter where I performed better than expected as they call it. And I uhm went over and above what was expected of me. However it came time to get my rating I was still rated 'That is what is expected of me'... when another trainee was doing even less than what I was doing, but because they are white and Afrikaans, they automatically are two rated and I'm automatically three rated.*

This can be seen as whiteness in the form of assigning a degree of privilege to white personnel based on their race (Al Ariss, et al., 2014). It is automatically assumed that the white individuals perform better than the others and 'deserve' a better rating. In addition, the unspoken assumption in the organisational context that Lion must have cheated to become a CA can be seen as a micro-insult in the form of ascription of intelligence: because she is black, a lesser degree of intelligence is assigned to her based on her race (Sue et al., 2007).

In order to survive in this context, Lion used elements of both her family and educational context to construct a positive professional identity of a hardworking, driven individual who fights to prove that she is competent to be given the performance rating she feels she deserves. *Uh so for the first two years of my Articles, I was...I'm a fighter by nature, uhm aggressively so. So uh whenever a person tells me I can't do something, I actually then take it upon myself – I take it upon myself and go out of my way to prove to them that I can ... I would go over and above to prove that you know what, I am a two-rated and even one-rated so three-rating wasn't an option for me. So I always had to work harder...*

In order to survive in the work organisation context and be given the opportunities she wanted Lion used her courage and confidence to approach partners directly and ask them to go out on certain audits. *I'm a fighter by nature. I would always get what I want, if I can put it like that. And even if I had to fight to get it, I would get it. So for me, I would go into an office of a partner who we are not allowed to talk to kind of thing and sit and be like 'Can I talk to you?' and they would be 'Ja, sure what's up?' and I tell her 'I want to be part of the Standard Bank audit' and she's like 'what can you do?' I can do this and this and this. They would be like 'okay sure. I don't see why not'. Although this generally worked for her, she had one encounter where another partner felt that her approach was disrespectful and asked that she be removed from the team. When she confronted him and asked why he wanted to remove her from the team, ...he said I needed an audit touch is what he called it. Because in audit, you are made too low and feel your place, well that thing – you knew your – a first year is just a first year and a first year is meant to be seen and never heard kind of thing. So he felt I needed that moulding of not being*

able to walk into a partner and I must look at a partner as 'die baas' and I must not speak to him unless spoken to. Lion never really knew if this was because she was black and had to show more respect for the white partners or whether it was to enforce a culture of white privilege and dominance.

As discussed in Chapter 2, racial microaggressions are intentional or unintentional behaviours or verbal remarks which communicate demeaning, negative or hostile insults (Sue et al., 2007). Lion experienced micro-insult in the form of second class citizen, meaning a person of colour is treated as a lesser person or group based on their race. This was highlighted when she struggled with chronic headaches during her article years and had to go for various tests. The medical aid plan that she was on at the time did not cover all of these tests and she had to go to the public hospital, which required her to take sick leave for a long period. When one of the white partners saw this he called her in and asked her if she knew she had medical aid now and if she knew how it works. *I had the sick note, I gave it to him and so one of the Afrikaans partner's called me to his office and he's like 'Hi Lion, do you know that you have medical aid now?' i.e. I have never had medical aid my entire life because I lived under a rock...If you don't understand how medical aid works, you can ask one of your colleagues. So he referred me to two other black colleagues to explain to me how medical aid works, even though I have been on the Discovery medical for over eight years, ten years with my life before that, but hey.* Although the white partner might have meant well in asking her these questions, he unintentionally engaged in microaggression by making the assumption that because she was black she had not had a medical aid before and did not know how medical aid worked and needed an explanation from her black colleagues. It is these remarks, whether intentional or unintentional, that have a major impact on the professional identity of people of colour. It is also the impact of these remarks that forces them to engage in professional identity work to use coping mechanisms to maintain a positive professional identity.

In terms of the structure of the organisation, Lion mentioned that most of the leadership, including partners, associate directors, senior managers and managers are white males and females, and this reproduces white dominance (Al Ariss et al., 2014). This structure of dominance is maintained in the sense that although the organisation adheres to the

laws of employment equity and BEE and although these laws are enforced, they have no effect on the structure and operations of the organisation. Lion said that although black individuals were promoted to manager and senior manager, they were not given the authority that comes with the title. *X have measures and whatever in place, that create an opportunity or a platform rather for me to progress...However, and I have come to realize that, one our black heads don't actually have authority, they are puppets. The white heads are actually still leading from behind. For example, my current boss is white. His boss is black. However, my current boss has more power than his boss.*

The same thing happened to her as well. She started working in a new division where the white man heading up the division made her the head of one of the sub-divisions. *So we were leading this and then my Afrikaans other white boss came into the picture and he was now part of this division. He then became the head of this division, and I became the head of the sub-division or rather, he gave me the title as the Head of the Sub-division. However, when it came time for me to attend meetings and I talk presentations in front of people that matter, I have the title but not the role.* She added that she was presented to clients as the subject matter expert; she was the one who had to win work and do most of the work. *I'm the one who knows the work. So I'm taken to the clients and I speak about the work to the clients and I win the project. However, when the project now needs to be delivered from a revenue perspective, revenue allocation perspective, the win is allocated to another senior manager and not me.*

In the meantime, in the background the head of the division was always busy grooming someone else, another white person, for her position. *And in this year, I heard four instances where he goes and hires a white Afrikaans person – not a white Afrikaans person, a white person above me. Like a senior manager, he is in the process of always grooming some or other shape or form of a senior person, to do the same thing that I am doing and he is willing to give those people greater opportunities to advance in this field, than me.*

This reinforces the fact that she is given the title and puts in the work, but she is not given the authority or recognition that comes with it. It also affects her when it comes to promotions, as she would not be able to compete with someone who had been given

more opportunities and exposure than she had, and they would then be given the promotion. *So I'm supposedly the head for this team, however, he is secretly grooming other people to do the same thing I'm doing. So come promotion time, I can be black and female, and who knows this thing however, the mere fact that there is somebody more senior who actually who knows the same thing I do, he takes away my business case and gives it to that person. So he is indirectly grooming. For example, I found out two weeks ago that he is grooming a white, Afrikaans male who is currently a senior manager to do the same thing that I was doing. So clearly promotion time, the senior manager was going to be promoted to Associate Director.*

Interviewer: "Yes. And is this solely based on the fact that you are black?"

I honestly really do see it – it is because he knows very well that technically I am capable. Personality-wise, I am capable knowledge-wise to ask, I am capable. However, he is forever trying to bring, put in and advance other people other than me.

In addition to this, there was another effect of the structure of whiteness in her organisation. This linked to the culture enforced by the partner mentioned earlier, the 'audit touch' where ranking and dominance were important and the fact that Lion was not allowed to speak to partners because of her ranking within the business. She explained that in some of the meetings she experienced micro-insult in the form of Second Class Citizen as she was treated as a lesser person based on her race (Sue et al., 2007) and could not contribute to the meeting in any way. *I was the only female in a male-dominated meeting. I was the only female and I was the only black in the meeting...So it was as if I wasn't even in that meeting room at all. When I tried asking questions, I was dismissed quickly like we don't even want to know what you want to say or what you are thinking.*

These circumstances in Lion's work organisation context, and the fact that she was given the title but not the authority that came with her promotion and felt she was being used as a puppet, forced her to actively engage in identity work and decide on a course of action or coping mechanism to maintain a positive professional identity. She decided to resign. *Only now, when I resigned did they say "okay no, we will give you this, we will give you that, we will give you this and we will do this, we will do this and we will do that".*

However, they said that before and they haven't. so even if they did that, I would still be a puppet. She explicitly stated that this was the reason for her resignation.

Interviewer: "Okay so you resigned and the motivation for the resigning, what was that?"

My white male Afrikaans boss.

Interviewer: "Is it? In what – do you - is this linked to the fact that you said you are promoted, you have the title but you don't have the authority?"

Yes.

Although Lion resigned as a result of differential treatment as an effect of whiteness and micro-aggression, she never felt that the challenges she faced in her work organisation context were so bad that she wanted to change her profession as a chartered accountant. She rather resigned to go and follow her passion elsewhere.

An interesting turn in Lion's professional identity occurred during her second interview when she mentioned that she was a mother. She stated that becoming a mother changed her entire perspective on her career and working as hard as she did and her end goal. *...in all of this you know in career progression and what kind of professional do I want to be and you know, do I want to be a CEO and to what extent am I willing to sacrifice to become a specific professional in a specific field. Either, it doesn't have as much of value as it used to before, I told you that I used to fight so much and I used to be so driven...and ever since I became Y's mom, I realized that I would actually be content with just being Y's mom if there was no need for Y to go to school and get all the things I want to get for her, the key thing would mean just being Y's mom and if I could do that alone, I totally would.* This change in perspective and end goal after becoming a mother or father also came out in the interviews with the other participants.

Lion's family context and the way she grew up shaped her perspective on the kind of mother she wanted to be and the kind of life she wanted for her child. *So now I want my child to have a better life than the one I used to have...I have grew up without my mother because she did everything she needed to do to make sure she gets me out of the village, and she did it. She successfully did that. However, in her doing that, I didn't have her.*

She added that she values family and wants to live a family-centric life because she did not have her parents around when she grew up.

Lion's educational context also played a role in shaping her perspective in terms of the schools she wants her child to attend. *I grew up in a village, went to a public school and then I went to a private school and I was afraid to go to a better school that was going to afford me even better opportunities in terms of you know, exposure. And because of how I grew up and my background, I was afraid to tap into that potential, that possibility. And I want Y to have that...Having white friends has its benefits. You get exposure to different thinking, to different mind-sets and just a different way of life which actually helps. And if I didn't grow up you know around black people only, I maybe would not have associated myself with black people only. So I want to make sure that Y grows up in an environment from day one, you know she goes to a mixed-race school and she decides for herself what kind of friends she wants to make and how she wants to live her life.*

Her socio-economic context influenced and shaped her professional identity as a chartered accountant. *I believe it is something that set me apart to a certain degree in that as much as it is not as difficult as it used to be and there's a little bit more of us than in the past, it is still an accomplishment and one that I'm proud of.* Lion's socio-economic context, together with her historical context as a black person forced her to engage in active identity work to create a positive professional identity that she is proud of and to prove a point to herself and others.

Interviewer: "So to whom did you want to prove a point?"

One to myself, then that was foremost to myself that I am capable and that my history does not define me and my upbringing and you know, the conditions I grew up in – does not define me. And also, just to – so growing up...I was the least fortunate out of all my cousins. When there's something as stupid as [pause] uhm I had bread – if we had bread with butter, it was like such an accomplishment...When I went to my cousins, they would have eggs or whatever - the fancy life. So compared to them growing up, I was the least well-off. I remember one of my cousins actually made a joke one time, she came over she says Do you know what pie is? and at the time I didn't know what a pie was. She says Do you know what a pizza is? and at the time I didn't know what a pizza was. And

then so they had it all, and it was enough reason I pushed myself that I too want to have it all and uhm it was I guess also to prove to them that I too – like that I never want to find myself in that position ever again and I most certainly don't want my child to be in that position ever again.

It becomes clear that the adversity Lion faced in all these contexts shaped her identity. . . Overcoming adversity became the motivation behind most of her decisions and she used elements of all these contexts to construct an identity she is proud of. She closed the interview with the following advice for others who experience the same challenges she does:

...my initial advice would be fight, don't ever take anything lying down – always question everything. However, before that, I would say do your job so well, that you leave no room for any form of discrimination, any form. Be good at what you do, that there is no ground for any black, white, Indian, coloured person to discriminate you.

4.6 CASE 5 – THE CAT

Perhaps one reason we are fascinated by cats is because such a small animal can contain so much independence, dignity and freedom of spirit. Unlike the dog, the cat's personality is never bet on a human's. He demands acceptance on his own terms –
Lloyd Alexander.

My work should talk for itself and not necessarily me. Based on these words, Participant 5 was given the alias of a cat. Cats demand acceptance on their own terms and Participant 5 follows the same philosophy. She uses hard work to define her identity and gain the acceptance of others and she does not allow people, her background, her race or anything else to constrain her identity or regulate unnecessarily who she would like to be. She struck the researcher as quiet, reserved and soft-spoken yet stern and strong willed. She enjoys challenge and wants to experience the beauty of life. Her strong character enables her to cope with life's difficulties and achieve success in spite of her circumstances. The saying "curiosity killed the cat" is a suitable description for Participant 5 as she comes across as curious, a big dreamer and an explorer.

Cat was born in Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, where she grew up. She was an only child for the first eighteen years of her life until she got a little brother at the age of nineteen. Growing up, she lived in Meadowlands, Zone 3, Soweto for a while with her mother and her great grandmother before she moved to her grandmother, her father's mother, in Diepkloof, Zone 2, Soweto. In Grade 3 her parents got married and moved to the East Rand. She stayed with her grandmother up until Grade 6, when her grandmother died and she had to move to her parents on the East Rand. During her first six years of primary school, Cat attended a primary school in Soweto. Here her educational context consisted of walking to school, cleaning every Thursday and playing sport on gravel – bare foot.

Interviewer: "What was like the school in terms of – how were the facilities and electricity and the teachers and the-?"

So fortunately, we didn't have electricity problems, but so we used to clean every Thursday...Literally we used to kneel down and scrape the floors...Ourselves as students. I played – my first experience with playing netball and doing athletics I was running on gravel, barefoot.

Cat's educational and family context took a dramatic turn after her grandmother passed away. Not only did she have to move to the East Rand, which is a totally different environment to the one she grew up in, but she also lost a lot of friends and had to attend a different school, a multi-racial school, where the language of learning was English. Being used to being taught in her home language, which is Pedi, North Sotho and Sotho, Cat had to engage in active identity work to adapt to her new context. She was used to being the top student in her class, and now she had to start with the basics. *I was the top student in primary school and now having to come back and be taught in English and I literally had to learn like the basis of like a verb and noun in Grade 7.*

However, being the hard worker that she is, Cat managed to be one of the top students again closer to the end of the year. *I managed to just uhm go over the obstacle and I think I was number – number two or number three in the top 10 that year in Grade 7 my first year.* In terms of racial incidents in her school years, Cat mentioned that she never experienced any differential treatment from teachers based on her race. She did however

mention an interesting fact about punishment in schools. In the school she first attended in Soweto, they were punished by being beaten with sticks, but in the multi-racial schools they were never beaten. This led Cat to this conclusion: *I still believe that multi-racial schools or private schools are better suited for a child than the schools in the townships.*

In working hard to maintain her identity of high performing student, Cat had to renegotiate other parts of her identity and make sacrifices along the way. *But a little bit of my life was altered because I used to do a lot of athletics in (school name) Primary School, but somehow I stopped that and I had to put more focus on my studies, particularly my languages uhm Afrikaans and English – I struggled a lot with that.* This highlights an important part of Cat's identity: she works hard for what she wants and education is what is most important to her.

Cat continued her education in the East Rand where she attended secondary school. She did not perform as well in grades 8 and 9, but in Grade 10 she refocused her attention on her education. This highlights the fact that she made a mindset shift to refocus her attention and engage in active identity work to maintain her identity as a top performer. *Grade 9 as well then I started surrounding myself with friends who were not really – who were not really beneficial in my life and grade 9 as when I didn't do well. And then grade 10, I started shifting again towards the education.*

Her family context also played a big role in her identity as a top performer. She described her mother supporting her and pushing her when she was not performing well. *And my mom was now asking about my results and I now had to start pushing.* This shows that the value of education was rooted within Cat from her family context. In line with this, Cat mentioned that her teachers in high school also invested time and pushed her to improve her grades in her languages. *They invested a lot...they literally, like they were on my case they were pushing me. And I was reading a lot, started reading a lot English and it improved to be honest.*

During high school, Cat was a top performer in Accounting. Not only was she good at it but she also enjoyed it, and this was her main reason for deciding to become a chartered accountant. *So I always knew I wanted to be a CA. But from a point of view that I was good in Accounting and I was good in numbers. I never really understood the other items*

that entailed being a CA i.e. having to go into auditing. Thus, her decision to become a CA was influenced by her educational context. Her family context, specifically her mother, also played a role in this decision.

As a result of being one of the top students in her grade, Cat was offered a scholarship to go to university. She was also offered a company bursary to complete her articles at that company when she finished her studies. She said that if she had not been awarded the scholarship she would not have been able to go to university. Thus, her hard work created an opportunity for her that she would not have had in her normal socio-economic context.

Cat studied at a university in Johannesburg where she performed extremely well in her first and second year. In her third year, she went through a challenging phase. She faced difficulties with her family at home and started to suffer from depression. *And then in my third year, then things started taking its own toll on me, I don't know what I was going through. I somehow went through a depression phase. Uhm there was a family crisis at home, uhm it was very personal where there were a lot of things that happened in my family.* However, although her family context had an effect on her performance in her educational context, she was able to maintain her identity as a top performer. *...so I passed though my marks were not that great in comparison to my first and my second year, but I still managed to get like top 15% of my peers.*

In her fourth year, Cat's mother fell sick and her condition started to worsen by the day. Although this was an extremely difficult time for Cat, she maintained her identity as a high performing student and graduated in the top fifteen of her post-graduate class. As a reward for her performance she did not have to go to the company she signed with for her first year of articles, but was given the opportunity to complete her academic articles at the university. *I didn't have to go to (Company) because I was in the top 15, I went to go do my academic articles, so I don't know if you have heard about that? So they choose the top students and to start your first year instead of going to an auditing firm, you started at a university and you lecture and you tutor.* Her educational and work context made it easier for her at this stage to maintain her identity as a top performer, because the work environment of an academic article clerk is less challenging than a corporate article clerk.

Cat said that this made it easier for her to cope with the challenges she faced in her family context. *So it kind of worked out well for me because you earn more than the average first year student...who is at an auditing firm and it was much more of a relaxed environment, taking into account what I was going through.*

Cat's depression worsened after her mother passed away in her first year of articles. During this year she also started with her master's degree but as a result of her depression she was unable to complete it. *And then I was doing my first year of master's then, my MCom in tax and I tried to push to do it and I couldn't finish it. I went through into a depression spiral that year and I will say for the past four years. I only became normal I think towards the end of 2016.* Her family context started to influence her educational context and she had to engage in active identity work to manage these challenges and maintain a positive identity. She said that she felt she lost a big part of her life when she lost her mother as most of her motivation for becoming a CA was to do things for her mother with her education and the benefits she would reap from it. *I lost a huge chunk of myself when she left and I felt like I didn't have time to – to make her experience me post my studies because I had planned so much to do for her.* Cat only decided last year that she was going to continue with her studies and finish her master's, which she aims to do this year. This shows that she had to engage in identity work to pick herself up and renegotiate her identity to be a top performer again.

After her first year of academic articles, Cat completed her last two years of articles at the organisation in Johannesburg with which she signed in her first year. She always wanted to go on a secondment and work overseas. Her work organisation context also influenced this decision as her performance manager supported her plan. In 2015 she went on a short term secondment to the United States and from there she went to the UK in 2016. She returned only last year in April.

She described the working environment in the UK as harsh in the sense that you have to be outspoken in order to succeed. This forced her to engage in identity work as she was a soft spoken person who now had to be able to deal with colleagues and bosses who treated her harshly. *It's very harsh for someone who is quite softly spoken and who believes in showing their work, in showing themselves by their work and not really being*

outspoken. So I struggled a lot with that. Because in London you have a lot of people who are outspoken and you need to talk. However, when reflecting back, Cat realised that this was an important part of her professional identity development, as it enabled her to deal with difficult individuals within the organisational context. So it was a huge adjustment for me. Ja and I had harsh bosses who in hindsight, they have taught me how to be able to deal with difficult characters. One of her female managers in the UK became an informal mentor to Cat and taught her the importance of defending yourself. She developed a strong character as a result of this experience and learnt to speak her mind when necessary.

In terms of the South African working environment, Cat said that this was the first time she realised that who you know, who your parents are and where you come from will allow you to have benefits others do not have. She mentioned that one of her colleagues was the daughter of the CEO of the JSE and was allocated to the best clients and could take leave whenever she wanted to, even during the busy season. By comparison, when Cat's mother passed away she was given two days leave and had to plan the entire unveiling during this time, while grieving. Cat also mentioned that she had to work harder than some of her white colleagues to be recognised even though she was known as a hard worker, coming from Academic Articles. Thus, her hard work gave her a degree of privilege in the sense that she was allocated to important clients and treated well within the work context. At the same time, however, her degree of privilege was compromised by her background and her historical context and she therefore had to work even harder to be recognised and prove herself capable.

Then they managed to give me the good clients...and the managers and the partners were very lenient towards me because they knew I worked hard. So my work spoke for itself.

Interviewer: "But you had to work very hard to prove yourself?"

Yes to prove

Interviewer: "Harder than – would you say you worked harder than some of the other white-?"

Yeah definitely...To get recognised

Coming back from her secondment, Cat realised how much of a focus there was on race in South African organisations. *I guess it made me notice more of a South African uhm... landscape yes uhm...We focus more on race.* However, she did mention that as a black woman she had more job opportunities in South Africa and could progress faster within a firm because there were relatively fewer highly skilled people above you in South Africa. *...but the nicest thing about South Africa is our progression is quicker, you have more opportunities as a black woman. And your progression is quicker as a black woman. In overseas, I always explain the pyramid. So we have a pyramid like that in SA...Where the highly skills it's saturated, it's like very small right? So obviously it's easy for you to go up. In international, it's like that...so the low skills- you have got a very few people who are low skilled, a lot of people are high skilled. So for you to go to top position is very, very niche.*

On the down side, although there may be more opportunities to progress, Cat said that the compensation in South Africa did not match the level of the position in which a person is appointed. She was unsure whether this was linked to her culture or what the reason might be, but upon her return from secondment, the organisation where she completed her articles offered her a salary package that was lower than market value and she decided to apply for other jobs. Later in the interview Cat also mentioned that this made her feel like cheap labour and that contributed to her seeking other opportunities. She also mentioned that one of her friends who worked for the same company under the same manager also left the organisation due to differential treatment based on his race.

Cat then received an offer to work for a company in Centurion where she still works today. In the first role she was appointed, Cat felt she was working long hours without getting any recognition for her work. She experienced differential treatment or favouritism for the second time in her career. However this was based solely on the fact that her colleague knew her manager personally. This influenced her professional identity construction as she felt the relationship of trust between her and her manager was in question and she had to engage in active identity work to maintain a positive identity and continue to be a high performer despite these challenges. In reflecting back on the two types of

organisations Cat worked for, a large corporate international organisation and a smaller South African organisation, she explained that the cultures differ greatly. For example, the universal language was English in organisation A, but not in organisation B. *Yes and it's so difficult when you are working with people of different backgrounds, because then they will speak Afrikaans in front of you...or someone will speak Zulu in front of a white person and there's no sort of like relation in that. It creates so much of an obstacle from a business relationship perspective.* Not only does this create a barrier for understanding what is being communicated, but it is also a form of micro-aggression where the individual is excluded from the conversation when a universal language is not spoken. *That's what I believe, because it creates animosity because the other person is like I don't understand what you saying.*

The issue of language was also mentioned in completing the second year board exams. *...my second Board results and that's when you started realizing that a lot of black people were failing, so a lot of failures were black people. And it grew as like a shock, it comes as a shock and all of them it's because of its either there's a language barrier, they don't understand English properly because the way the standard of Board is set, is pretty high.*

From a cultural perspective, Cat is facing financial challenges because she has to support her father and grandmother financially. *...so my dad did what he did, he made his own decisions but then he went into a financial distress. And I'm at this point because literally every month, I need to give my dad something. And then now my gran - so she stays now in Meadowlands Zone 3 with my aunts. Uhm literally when I visit her, she will pass a comment You not even giving me cash. So it's like all the time when you are around them, you need to be conscious because they always continuously ask for money and they forgetting you are still young and you still want to develop yourself.* This forces her to engage in active identity work as she has to accept that it will take her longer than her white counterparts to develop herself, invest her money, save to buy a house and build a financially stable life for herself.

Throughout all these challenges Cat remained positive and kept working hard. Her religious context also influenced her positive identity construction as she mentioned that her faith carried her through difficulties. *In everything and I feel like my life in everything*

that I do, there's always a sprinkle of God and Jesus Christ and that's why I'm fortunate in a lot of stuff. Though I go through obstacles of like having difficult bosses and that and that, eventually my life kind of progresses and it doesn't take a step back.

Although soft-spoken, Cat has a strong character and stands up for what she wants. She is currently very happy in her new role and has a good relationship with her manager. She is aiming to work towards a more strategic role and is as curious as a cat to see what opportunities lie ahead of her.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I presented the narratives of each participant, outlining their life story and how whiteness, micro-aggression and context influenced their identity construction.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 provided an outline of the individual experiences of each of the participants as narrated to the researcher. It also described how each of the key contexts explored in this study influenced their identity work and enabled them to construct a positive professional identity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this chapter, a framework is proposed to illustrate and discuss the research findings. The framework is based on the work of Al Ariss et al. (2014) and Crafford et al. (2018) and illustrates the regulatory role context plays in identity construction. The chapter closes with limitations, recommendations and a concluding paragraph.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework consists of the macro-contextual, meso-social and micro-individual environments situated in the broader South African context, all of which were studied to determine their effect on the professional identity construction of individuals of colour. It was clear that the macro-contextual environment resulted in whiteness and racial micro-aggressions, which impacted on the contexts within the micro and meso environments. In turn, these regulatory effects of context influenced the individual's identity work, goal setting and perception of reality (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Crafford et al., 2018).

The framework will be used as a vehicle for the discussion of the research results and to address the research objectives. The researcher found that the key contexts and terms explored in the study greatly impact on one another, as illustrated in Figure 1. The objectives addressed in this chapter include the following: to explore the contextual factors that shape identity construction; to explore how whiteness is experienced by previously disadvantaged professionals and to understand the nature of the micro-aggressions they experience and how they affect their professional identity construction.

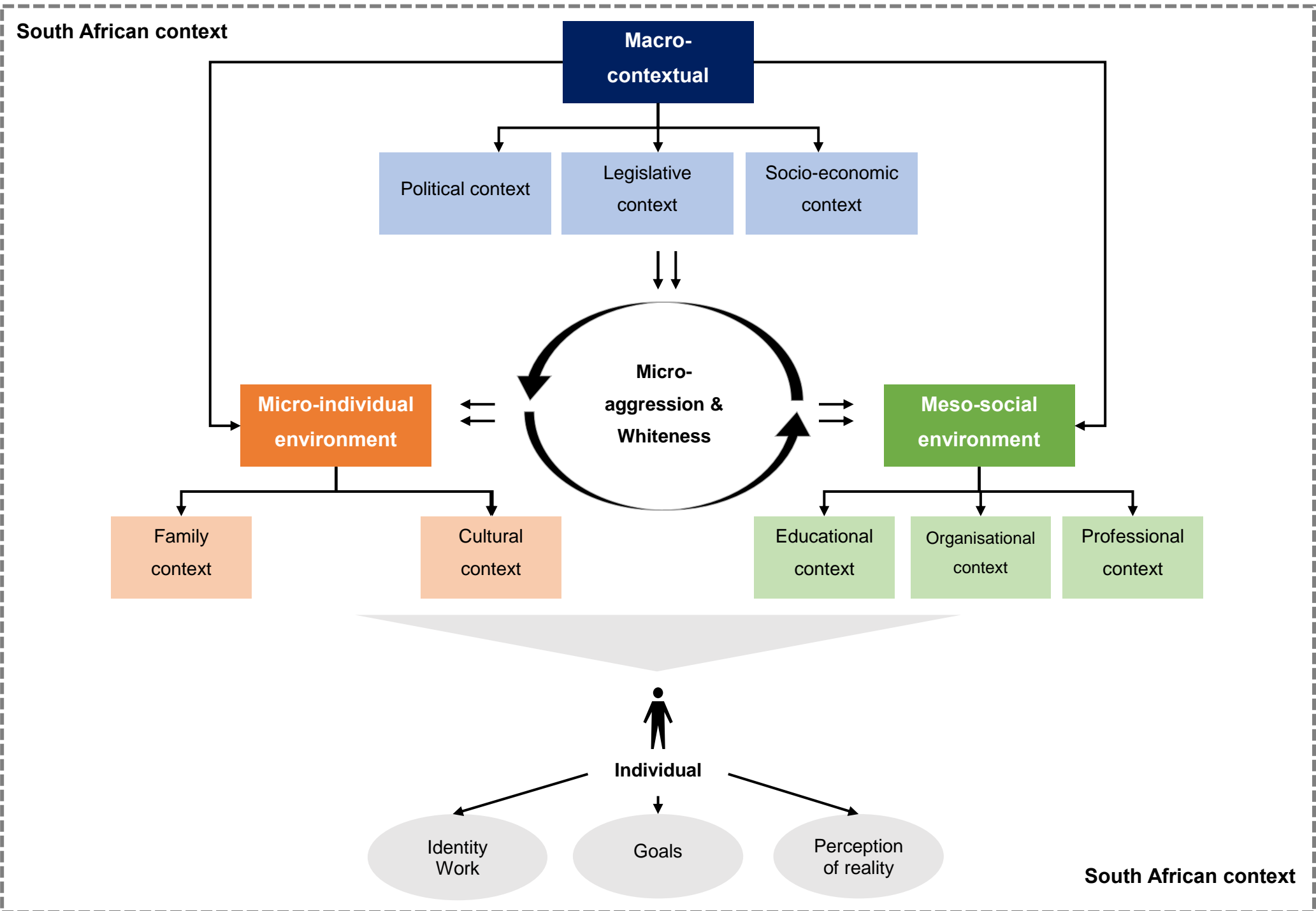


Figure 3 The regulatory role of context on individual identity construction

5.2 MACRO-CONTEXTUAL ENVIRONMENT

The macro-contextual environment consists of events in the global, political, legislative, governmental and socio-economic contexts that define social settings and can facilitate and spread ethnic privilege in education and employment, influencing policies and practices within organisations (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Crafford et al., 2018). This study considered the political, legislative and socio-economic contexts in the unique South African context.

5.2.1 POLITICAL CONTEXT

Apartheid created a political, legal and economic climate characterised by oppression, separation and exclusion from opportunities for people of colour. People were classified by race, with black people given citizenship in 10 autonomous homelands that were responsible for their own administration, including education. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 enforced segregated education in South Africa and implemented curricula designed to prepare black school leavers for employment as labourers. Separate universities were created for black, coloured and Indian people in 1959, after which existing English and Afrikaans medium universities were not allowed to enrol new black students. This resulted in differential access to educational and professional opportunities for white and black people (Botha, 2009; Smith, 2011; South African History Online, 2015). The economic legacy and social effects of apartheid still persist, shaping the political context in which South Africans live and work and hampering their construction of professional identity (Crafford et al., 2018).

In line with the above, most of the participants in this study grew up in small villages or towns in the homelands, where their parents lived during apartheid. They had limited or no interaction with other races and were shielded from the effects of racial stigmatisation present in South African contexts. However, when this separation ended and they moved into the cities they experienced an identity shock. Lion mentioned that she grew up in a context where she was the top performer. Moving to a school in Johannesburg where she had to compete with learners who grew up speaking and being educated in English was a major identity shock for her. Cat was used to being taught in her home language and experienced an identity shock when she moved to a multi-racial school where the language of learning was English. Thus, similar to what was stated in the literature above, the participants suffered from the effects of Apartheid as the environment they grew up in –

where their parents were forced to live during Apartheid - resulted in having a lower quality education. When moving out of this environment, they started on a “back foot” compared to their peers and had to adapt and face the challenge of working much harder to prove their capability and achieve the same results as in their previous environment. This suggests that despite the government’s efforts to change South Africa’s situation of privilege for white individuals, people of colour still face challenges of coming from a disadvantaged background labelled by struggles on the financial, socio-economic and education fronts (Cohen-Scali, 2003).

The influence of the political context came through strongly when the participants spoke about entering the world of work, where they realised what it meant to be a black person. This racial dynamic was magnified in Cat’s narrative when she explained that there was a clear difference between the culture in British and South African organisations. Cat’s experience confirmed what was found by Omi and Winant (1986), Jones (2000) and Grimes (2001) in the literature when they stated that race, rather than being a biological construct and a reflection of reality, is socially constructed and the importance of racial categories is determined by the political environment which surround individuals from different races. Thus, the history of apartheid determined the racial classification of these participants and for this reason, they are automatically at a disadvantage when compared to their white peers. This classification prompts subtle remarks or actions that have racial undertones that they ignore to protect their careers or, as Lion put it, because they do not want to be seen as overly dramatic. Deer also mentioned that she was often uncertain whether she was treated in a certain way because of her race or for another reason. Due to her historical background she chose to live with this constant uncertainty rather than to address it. Horse realised when telling her story just how much the political history of South Africa shaped her status when she entered the organisation. In the past, her performance and successes gained her respectful treatment, but when entering the organisation she realised that her race determined how she was treated. This supports Slay and Smith’s (2011) assertion that although an individual’s professional identity comes with an element of prestige, in South Africa, individuals from previously disadvantaged groups may be given less prestige in their professional identity. Thus, although subtle in nature, whiteness and micro-aggression present in organisations has detrimental effects on the identity construction of those who are at the receiving end (Sue et al., 2007).

5.2.2 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

After 1994 South African legislation introduced the Employment Equity Act, the Labour Relations Act and the Affirmative Action and Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE) to redress the disadvantages of the past and transform the labour market. However, as seen in the literature and from the participant narratives, these laws do not achieve their intended purpose but are used instead as mechanisms to hide the effects of racism in the workplace. White people are still in power positions and control the economic participation of previously disadvantaged people in their organisations (Steyn & Foster, 2008; Walker, 2005). In line with this argument, Lion referred to the legislation as a platform for them to progress in their careers, but after promotion they did not have the authority that comes with the title, but instead were puppets carrying out the orders of the white leaders behind them. Similarly, Horse suggested that legislation gave her the opportunity to enter the organisation, but once in, white people were given opportunities that would equip them with the skills and experience to progress, leaving inferior opportunities to black people which is an example of institutionalised racism – differential access to opportunities – as articulated by Jones (2000). The consequence of a lack of opportunities is that white people continue get promoted and forcing black people, to move to other organisations, leading to the reproduction of whiteness in leadership positions. This highlights one of the key themes of CRT described in the literature, racism is not only an issue found in individuals, but also within systems. Particularly in South Africa, the history of Apartheid resulted in systems consisting of racial stigma and racism that continues to be reproduced today (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

Adding to the above, in a study investigating promotion to top leadership positions of ethnic minority groups, Cook and Glass (2013) found that organisations promote black people into top leadership positions to uphold their BEE status as mandated by law. However, in the background, as Lion mentioned, they are grooming a white individual to perform the same job. When performance drops they replace the black individual without giving him or her enough time, resources or opportunities to develop into the position. On the other hand, if they do perform well they are not given the recognition for the hard work they put in. As a result, they leave, and white individuals continue to dominate the power positions in organisations.

In agreement with the study conducted by Cook and Glass (2013), Lion mentioned that the opportunities resulting from BBBEE and AA come with conditions, one of which is the constant need for black employees to prove their capability. Horse explained that white individuals were automatically seen as competent and given opportunities to further their careers, whereas black individuals were seen as incompetent and had to constantly prove them otherwise. Bear explained it as being given a wonderful opportunity, but with it the threat or challenge of proving oneself worthy of it.

The participants' stories clearly indicate that in addition to the complex process of becoming a professional and acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to qualify as chartered accountants, the history of structural oppression in South Africa has forced them to also face the challenges of coming from a disadvantaged background (Cohen-Scali, 2003). Instead of having a shared identity among professionals, with shared abilities, characteristics and values that mark their profession (Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012) and having the status and prestige of being seen as experts in their field (Slay & Smith, 2011) their competence is questioned. Meanwhile their white counterparts are seen as competent and receive the status and prestige that comes with their profession highlighting the effects of micro-aggression.

From the literature and the results found in the study, it can be concluded that although the legislative context in South Africa is positioned to give previously disadvantaged individuals the opportunities that they were denied in the past, the intended effects are not always achieved. It gives them the opportunity to enter an organisation but because their competence is questioned and they are denied equal opportunities to develop their skills, they are unable to advance. It is when they start to internalise these stereotypes that their professional identity is impacted. This is confirmed by Bear when he stated that their ability to perform capably is a big part of their identity. When it is constantly being questioned they start to question their own capabilities.

5.2.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

As explained in Chapter 2, apartheid denied people of colour access to good education, which made it difficult for them to compete with white people and enter universities. Job

reservation laws reserved high level employment for white people and lower level jobs for people of colour. Rural land owned by black people was sold to white farmers, forcibly moving black people to homelands (Smith, 2011; Raiford, 1979; South African History Online, 2015). All of these restrictions placed most black people at a disadvantage because they were unable to own businesses or develop their professional careers to create a financially stable lifestyle (Phillip, 2010).

Similar to the literature findings, the results in this study found that the current South African socio-economic context reflects this history and still affects the financial situation of many South Africans as all the participants mentioned that they were aware as children that their parents struggled financially. This influenced the way they raised their own children, emphasising that they had to work hard to achieve success in life. All of the participants also mentioned that they made a promise to themselves that they had to be successful one day in order to be able to take care of their families and to prevent their children facing the same difficulties they had as children. This was the reason most of them gave for deciding to become professional accountants. The devastating irony is that even as accountants, and as mentioned in the discussion in previous sections, they are denied opportunities to progress in their careers and this may impact on their financial future as well as the future they are able to give to their children.

In line with the above, in Bear's story he recalled that his socio-economic context posed challenges on his journey to becoming a professional. Although his father gave up permanent employment to become a farmer and take care of them, his parents' financial status still affected him highlighting the circular effect Apartheid has on many families and their children today. Thus, the structure of Apartheid still continues to inform the context in which South Africans live today (Botha, 2009).

Cat also faced socio-economic challenges coming from a previously disadvantaged background as she had to support her father and grandmother financially (Cohen-Scali, 2003). Deer had to take care of her little sister, as her parents were no longer alive to do so. These are examples of results of the past which impact on those who were born after the ending of apartheid, but now have to face the struggles resulting from it as they have to support their families who were denied opportunities in the past to create financial wealth. This puts them at a disadvantage compared to their white counterparts because, as Cat mentioned, it will take them longer to create a stable financial lifestyle.

In exploring the life stories of the participants included in this study, it was found that as a result of the past, black individuals feel the constant need to redress the stereotype of black people being impoverished and they constantly try to prove that they can afford a high standard of living. More specifically, Horse mentioned that a lot of black individuals buy expensive cars and houses to prove to themselves and to white people that they can afford that lifestyle. This has a major implication on their identity construction as it becomes a belief that in order to be good enough or successful they have to own these things. Thus, the socio-economic context regulates the identity construction of previously disadvantaged people and more specifically, often leads to the construction of a professional identity that is closely associated with financial success.

5.3 MESO-SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The meso-social environment refers to the various contexts the individual interacts with including school, university, organisation and their profession (Crafford et al., 2018). The racial stigma, including whiteness and micro-aggression resulting from the macro-contextual environment, is institutionalised in the meso-social context and plays a role in its reproduction (Al Ariss et al., 2014). The role of the educational, organisational and professional contexts in the reproduction of racial stigma and its impact on professional identity construction was considered in this study.

5.3.1 EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

As previously mentioned, during apartheid quality education was reserved for white people, limiting opportunities for black people to gain entry into good schools and universities and to build a professional career (Raiford, 1979; South African History Online, 2015). This resulted in education being associated with cultural and social capital which can increase or limit access to various occupational choices or to professional development (Crafford et al., 2018). Thus, an individual's educational context can have a major regulating impact on identity work.

While some of the participants were able to attend private or former Model C schools and obtain a sound educational background, others had to attend the village or township schools where they lived. Horse went to school in Umtata, separated from the rest of South Africa.

Bear attended an agricultural school where the focus was on learning to become a farmer. Lion walked to the school in her village every morning. At Cat's school they had to clean every Thursday and play sport on gravel, bare foot. Although Deer attended a multi-racial school in the city, she faced subtle forms of racism hidden in the rules of the school, for example that black children were not allowed to communicate in their mother tongue, grow their afro's or wear certain braids. Deer's experience is a clear confirmation of the literature that defines micro-aggression as often unconscious negative racial slights that are frequently overlooked but have a life altering effect on the individuals at the receiving end (Franklin, 2004; Sue, 2004). One of the main things Deer remembers from school is that it is wrong to live out her culture and she needs to suppress who she really is because the school rules are reflective of a Western society or white norms.

In the same vein, most of the participants experienced a major transition or culture shock when they had to move from their primary schools in the village to a high school in the city. Horse moved to a multi-racial government school in Port Elizabeth where white girls and black girls socialised separately. Lion and Cat moved to schools in the city where they had to adapt from their home language to English as their language of learning.

In these difficult educational circumstances, developing a positive identity can be challenging, but all of the participants relied on the support of their teachers and families who encouraged them to continue to work hard and achieve success. In addition, all of the participants grew up in families that placed immense value on education and they felt that since their families sacrificed a lot to support them in obtaining a good educational background they had to perform exceptionally well. Thus, as a result of the regulation of context they developed the intrinsic motivation to maintain the identity of a top performer. They also believed that through education they would be able to support their families and ensure that their children would not have to endure the same challenges they had faced. In contrast with the literature and the argument of Steyn and Foster (2008) that nothing has actually changed in South African systems, the participants in this study were able to break down some of the barriers created through Apartheid. They contributed by changing the educational system through being top performers, gaining entry into universities and obtaining bursaries to fund their studies. This highlights the other side of the coin, context and specifically the family context in this case (support from family and teachers), had a

positive regulating effect on the participants and enabled them to construct positive identities and change barriers into opportunities.

5.3.2 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The organisational context regulates how identity and the roles associated with identity are lived out and in turn inhibit or motivate positive identity construction. Vince (1999) maintains that organisations have their own dynamic or culture that is ever changing, and that individual roles constantly change within the organisation. In order to adapt to these changes, people constantly need to redefine their identities. The organisational strategy, policies, practices, management and reward systems also influence identity work (Crafford et al., 2018).

Under the influence of the macro-contextual environment in the South African context, organisations play a major part in the production and reproduction of racial stigma (Al Ariss et al., 2014). This results in organisations that are structured around whiteness and micro-aggression. As previously mentioned, each of the participants realised what it meant to be black when entering the world of work. They had limited access to opportunities when compared to their white counterparts, which led not only to differential access to power and growth as professionals but to the perpetuation of white dominance (Green et al., 2007).

A new finding in this study was that in the accounting profession article allocations were done according to race, with white individuals given access to high priority clients. This grew their capability and status within the organisation at a faster pace than the low priority clients allocated to black individuals. In addition, low priority clients required twice as much work and time: one high priority client brought as much value into the business as several low priority clients. This determined perceived success and promotion and, as a result, the majority of the employees who stayed with the organisations were white, which led to a constant production and reproduction of white individuals in the leadership structures of organisations. Bear confirmed this in his story when he explained that the financial institution clients were given predominantly to white article clerks whereas the government institutions were allocated to black clerks. Deer also highlighted the effects of favouritism in client allocations and Horse mentioned that she wanted to complete her articles as soon as possible because the racial struggle made it difficult to maintain a positive professional identity. She felt she had to become assertive in order to be taken seriously as a

professional. This highlights the detrimental effect these subtle forms of racism have on individuals of colour which remains invisible to their white counterparts or as Steyn and Foster (2008) framed it the blindness of white individuals as they fail to see the power that comes with being white.

If the organisation is structured around whiteness then employees modify or redefine their identities and live out their roles according to what is acceptable as defined by white norms and standards. For example, Lion mentioned that she spoke directly to partners to build a relationship and fight for the clients she wanted so as to get the best exposure she possibly could. However, one of the white partners told her that it was not appropriate auditor behaviour for a black female to enter a partner's office or even to have a good relationship with a partner and that she should 'know her place'.

Horse also struggled to construct a positive professional identity in most of her work contexts as a result of racial stigmatisation. Coming from a background of privilege and quality education, she believed that she would be given the same opportunities as her white counterparts who attended the same schools and obtained the same degree as she had. To her surprise, however, she was denied the same opportunities and was treated differently because she was black. This constant differential treatment and feeling that she wasn't good enough was one of the causes that led to her emotional breakdown, where she had to resign from work and take time by herself to rebuild her identity. It was only when she moved to the organisation she works for currently that she felt herself again. She feels worthy, accepted and included in her work context, which has contributed to her flourishing and feeling free from a constant need as a black woman to prove herself to the corporate world. Her context has enabled her to construct a positive professional identity which confirms Slay and Smith's (2011) contention that the magnitude of the influence of racial stigma such as whiteness and micro-aggression is dependent on context. In exploring and understanding the dynamics and effects of subtle racism in the lives of these participants, this study is starting to address the need highlighted by Sue et al. (2007) to uncover these effects otherwise they will continue to remain invisible and become potentially harmful to the self-esteem and well-being of people of colour.

This constant feeling of being different or of 'otherness' is known as the effect of whiteness, where the standard of being 'normal' is to be white (Al Ariss et al., 2004).

Micro-aggression in the form of exclusion of language also emerged as a theme in the participant narratives. Although the commonly accepted business language is English, Deer noted that when she walked into a meeting room her colleagues would continue to speak Afrikaans to one another and not switch over to English. Although she understands Afrikaans, she felt that out of respect they should switch over to English because some of her black colleagues do not understand Afrikaans and would be excluded from the conversation. Lion on the other hand mentioned that she was not even acknowledged when entering a meeting room: her colleagues would keep on talking and when she asked questions it was as if she was not even in the room and could not contribute to the meeting at all. This impacts negatively on the professional identity construction of Deer and Lion as they are not seen as important enough to include in conversations, even though they are appointed into positions associated with importance.

The aim of exploring whiteness and micro-aggression in this study, was to unmask the various ways in which power relations and racial hierarchies continue to exist and remain invisible within South African organisations (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Nkomo, 1992; Steyn & Foster, 2008; Twine & Gallagher, 2008). In the results it was clear that although those who are currently employed in these organisations did not create the systems or structures, they play an immense role in recreating them every day (Grimes, 2001; Frankenberg, 1993) albeit consciously or unconsciously. As a result, members of previously disadvantaged groups, and specifically the participants in this study continue to suffer the consequences of whiteness and micro-aggressions.

5.3.3 PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

There are many instances in which the organisational and professional contexts overlap. Therefore most of the findings discussed in the organisational context apply here as well, and only findings related exclusively to the professional context will be discussed here.

In the macro-contextual environment it was established that in the past black individuals were denied opportunities to gain access to highly skilled jobs or to establish themselves as professionals. Therefore, the accounting profession today consists primarily of white individuals, especially in the leadership and management of organisations and institutions. Bear's experience as a lecturer confirmed this when he stated that most of the lecturers who taught him and with whom he works now are white. He attributed it to the history of apartheid

and added that although there were opportunities given to them post-1994 it would take time for the profession to transform confirming the views of Steyn and Foster (2008) and Walker (2005) that structural oppression is still present in some South African structures and the white minority is still “gatekeeping” organisations and in this case, the profession.

The professional context is a significant source of identity as it becomes the basis against which professional decisions are made and roles are carried out and it determines the direction in which an individual develops as a professional (Brott & Myers, 1999). It is also influenced by the value or status of a given profession at a certain point in time (Crafford et al., 2018). The participants’ idea of the accounting profession influenced the decisions they made, including the subjects they chose at a school level, the universities they went to, the organisations they applied for and the amount of work they put in to make sure they were able to follow the professional path to becoming an accountant. For example, Bear was guided by his professional identity in the way he farmed and made decisions in farming. All of the participants associated the profession with the achievement of financial success. Horse specifically admitted that she did not exactly know what a chartered accountant does, but she aspired to be as successful as her uncle and decided to pursue chartered accountancy as a career. Thus, as indicated in the socio-economic context, as a result of the past black individuals feel the constant need to redress the stereotype of black people being impoverished which in turn influenced their decision to pursue and construct a specific professional identity.

Although black people are given opportunities post-apartheid to develop themselves as professionals, it is clear that it will take time for the profession to transform and to provide opportunities for equal development to people of all races.

5.4 MICRO-INDIVIDUAL ENVIRONMENT

The micro-individual environment consists of the subjective experiences of the individual in their immediate environment, including their self-perceptions and interaction with others (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Crafford et al., 2018). The family, cultural and religious contexts were considered in this study.

5.4.1 FAMILY CONTEXT

An individual's family context serves as the foundation for shaping their identity as most of their lives are spent under the guidance of their family. It is therefore no surprise that it contributes to the development of their professional identity as well. It also determines their education, socio-economic class and culture (Crafford et al., 2018).

As alluded to in the educational context, most of the participants relied on their family context to support them through the challenges they had to face. All of them highlighted the role that either their parents or grandparents played in shaping their identities and value systems. Horse's parents taught her the value of money and that it takes hard work to be successful. Bear understood the importance of family and that sometimes sacrifice is needed to take care of one's family. Deer's parents emphasised the value of education and obtaining exceptional grades. Lion's family had a strong focus on rules and the need to approach life with a 'go-getter' mentality. Cat's mother was her biggest supporter and encouraged her to obtain good grades because she believed in the value of education.

In terms of pursuing a profession in accounting and developing as a professional, most of the participants had a specific person who played a significant role. As mentioned earlier, Horse aspired to emulate her uncle who was an accountant in order to share the same success he had. She ruled out becoming a lawyer or a medical professional like her parents as those careers did not appeal to her. Horse's mother also played a major role in her professional identity development. After her emotional breakdown she modelled the behaviour of her mother during her divorce and picked herself up again to further her career as a professional accountant.

Bear was convinced that he would become a farmer and only a farmer. His brother played a big part in his path to becoming an accountant as he told him to take accounting as a subject at school. Throughout his school years and his studies his brother encouraged him to continue despite the difficulties he faced. Today, Bear is thankful for the ways of thinking and doing he developed as a result of studying accounting and believes there is no way to farm other than as an accountant.

Deer's cousin was her role model and source of motivation as someone of the same race who had succeeded in the accounting profession and influenced her decision to become an accountant. Lion's teacher encouraged her to select Accounting and Economics as subjects

and provided guidance on which universities and organisations she needed to apply to for bursaries and to gain entry to study towards becoming a chartered accountant.

Changes in one's family context can also impact on identity construction. For example, Deer had to engage in identity work to shape her identity as a professional who was also a caretaker and a mother. She had to adapt her picture of someone who was just focused on being the best in their field to someone who wanted to give her daughter things she never had growing up. After her parents' divorce, Horse had to cope with financial difficulties which she was never used to. She had to change her identity as someone in a financially stable family to someone who was unable to access her grades because her tuition hadn't been paid for.

The importance that all of the participants in this study placed on their family and closest friends emphasises the regulating role of the family context in identity construction and is in line with Slay and Smith's (2011) statement of the importance of context and the influence thereof on identity construction. For example, the participants family was who they turned to when making life decisions such as choosing a professional career which is one of the biggest influencers of identity and who they are today. Their families supported them through daily challenges and finally they were the ones for whom they became accountants, to make them proud and to take care of them.

5.4.2 CULTURAL CONTEXT

The cultural context plays a significant role in the prescriptions for constructing an identity that is acceptable in one's culture (Crafford et al., 2018). An individual's culture determines their behaviours, values and beliefs and, in turn, shapes their identity. For example, as indicated previously, Horse had to work through her parents' divorce when she was very young. Her cultural context did not allow her to show the effect the divorce had on her. She had to engage in identity work to be strong for her little brother and at the same time not let the divorce affect her identity as a high performer at school.

As explained in the socio-economic context, as a result of the past many young black professionals in South Africa have to take care of their parents and support them financially. This support often includes taking care of not only parents, but also grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings. The result, as Cat explained, is that she started her career at a disadvantage because her money was not just her own money and she still does not have

enough money left every month to invest or save or to buy a house. This means that her cultural context regulates the expectations of those in poverty and as a result it will take her much longer than her peers to establish herself financially.

5.5 LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to this study and its findings as it focused on only a few participants and the challenges they experienced in constructing a positive professional identity in the South African context.

Firstly, the composition of the sample can be seen as a limitation as it consisted mainly of black females, which is not representative of the demographics of the South African context. This was due to the difficulty in finding participants who met the criteria of the study and were willing to participate. It can be argued that it would be good to include male and female participants from various race groups in future studies to ensure equal representation of South African demographics.

Secondly, the researcher initially planned to include multiple forms of data collection including interviews, diary entries and participants' personal documents. However, due to the participants' work pressure the only form of data obtained was via interviews. This can be viewed as a limitation in terms of the richness and depth of the data obtained; the participants may have felt more comfortable about sharing sensitive information in a diary entry rather than an interview.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Identity – self, work or professional – remains complex, multifaceted and elusive due to individual uniqueness. Its iterative and on-going nature makes it ever-changing, and no one researcher can provide a full and stable definition of the concept. This highlights the importance of continuing identity studies to explore its various nuances in multiple individuals.

Considering the impact of context on the professional identity construction of participants included in this study, it might be useful to expand this study to add to the body of literature on the influence of context on identity construction. Although extensive research has been

conducted on identity work, only limited research has focused on the influence of contexts on identity and identity work (Brown, 2015).

Future research is encouraged to create an awareness of institutionalised racism as one of the most fundamental levels of racism (Jones, 2000) and to find ways to address it. It is possible that once institutionalised racism has been addressed all other levels will be cured over time, highlighting the importance of focusing on this topic in future studies.

Over the course of time society has started to disapprove of explicit forms of racism and as a result, and as seen in the study, more implicit forms including whiteness and micro-aggression started to receive more attention (Sue et al., 2007). This study provides the future researcher with a foundation to create awareness of these forms of racism and to understand their dynamics in the South African context. Future studies can enhance the awareness of subtle racism which would otherwise remain invisible and become potentially harmful to the self-esteem and wellbeing of people of colour.

Nkomo (1992) and Cotton et al. (2014) aver that studies using white males as the norm against which all others are measured claim to be race neutral. The aim of this study was to uncover the perceptions of those who are not part of this defining group and to understand their point of view. This study was only the beginning; future studies can focus on exploring these perspectives in greater depth.

White people tend to avoid the subject of race as far as possible (Grimes, 2001). One way to transform our thinking is to become aware of whiteness and to break the hidden assumption that white people do not have a race or that theirs is the universal category. Future studies can start to interrogate whiteness and reflect on the implications of a race centred society that give rise to systems and structures that reinforce white dominance.

Lastly, most of the participants in this study did not experience any racial stigmatisation when they worked in government institutions. However, in the private sector they became aware that they were seen as different – being black signified something. This made the researcher wonder to what extent whiteness was present in government institutions. Perhaps future studies could look at whiteness in the public sector from both black and white perspectives to gauge its influence on career growth within this sector.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The effects of pre-apartheid South Africa are still prevalent today in the systems and structures of university institutions, businesses and professional bodies. Grimes (2001) and Frankenberg (1993) maintain that even though the current members of society did not create these systems and structures, we all recreate them every day and continue to benefit or suffer accordingly. Due to the subtle unnamed and invisible nature of racism exercised in society today, black people struggle to construct and maintain a positive professional identity within their organisational context. Although they have the same qualifications, skills and abilities as their peers, they start to internalise subtle cues of racism directed at them and to question their own competence. Most of the participants in this study initially felt they had to prove society wrong and show that they were just as capable as their white peers. Most of them experienced a shift in thinking in terms of their professional identity, however. They became content with who they were, confident in their capabilities and their own sense of self-worth, and did not let society define their worth. This prompts both a reflection and a concern. The reflection is this: racism forced them to become strong in character, which gives rise to the question: do these challenges actually build a positive and proactive professional identity? The concern, however, is whether all individuals are equally strong and equally able to benefit from these challenges and maintain a positive professional identity.

The answers to these questions are uncertain. This highlights the importance of creating an awareness that the laws implemented in South African organisations do not achieve their intended purpose and that previously disadvantaged people still fight the effects of apartheid every day. Let us as psychologists take it upon ourselves to break down the barriers of whiteness and micro-aggression and shed light on the topic through continuous research to create schools, university institutions, organisations and professional bodies that provide genuinely equal opportunities for all.

5.8 PERSONAL REFLECTION

Conducting this study was not an easy process. As a white female researcher there were times where I felt uncomfortable but at the same time I had to put my interviewee at ease. Race isn't an easy topic to talk about, especially in South Africa. I believe that conducting

these interviews shaped me not only as a future industrial psychologist but also as a human being in my every day interactions. Through this experience I discovered that identity is multifaceted and extraordinary. Each person's idea of their own identity is unique and serves as a description of their character. Identity can be packaged in many ways and in focusing on professional identity in this study I realised that many other facets of identity exist as well. I believe there is so much more to know and learn about identity and I would value the opportunity to explore it further.

Interviewing black professionals and asking them to reveal private aspects of their life was both challenging and rewarding. It was challenging in the sense that it took some time for them to warm to me and I had to probe quite extensively to get the relevant information. There was some racial dynamic initially, seeing that I am a white researcher asking black participants about how they are treated by white people in organisations, but once they understood the purpose of the study they were willing to share more. It was rewarding in that most of the participants thanked me for giving them the opportunity to tell their story and be heard. I believe that as white South Africans we often underestimate the struggles people of colour have had to endure to get to where they are today.

In conducting this study my eyes were opened and I was astonished to find that even so many years after apartheid was ended its effects are still present in so many ways. Most striking for me was that these professionals have the same qualifications as their white peers but are automatically assumed to be incompetent for the work they were trained for. We often speak about the rainbow nation or a country that celebrates its diversity, but we do just the opposite in our daily lives and treat people differently based purely on how they look – based on their race. The participants in this study amazed me when they told me their life stories and I realised how strong their characters are. They never gave up; they continued to fight despite the challenges thrown at them and despite being denied opportunities for which they had worked extremely hard.

The awareness this study created for me will inform my future perspective of the reality within South Africa. It will also inform my thinking, actions and behaviour in the future and make me conscious of subtle forms of racism, including whiteness and micro-aggression, that have a detrimental effect on those towards whom they are directed. It will also inform my interactions with others both in my immediate circle and at work, where I shall strive to make them aware of unconscious cues of racism directed towards others. The stories of

the participants encouraged me to stand up after I've fallen, to understand that no challenge is too big to overcome, to persevere and to continue to work hard to achieve what I've set out to achieve in life.

To change a country like South Africa we need to be able to talk about race and how our actions affect one another. We need to stand together instead of fighting against each other. We need to celebrate our differences and appreciate the variety of perspectives we can bring. As Desmond Tutu aptly said: *Bringing people together is what I call 'Ubuntu' which means I am because we are. Far too often people think of themselves as just individuals, separated from one another. Whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out: It is for the whole of humanity.*

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APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL CONSENT FORM



Faculty of Economic and
Management Sciences

Informed consent for participation in an academic research study

Department of Human Resource Management

EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF PREVIOUSLY DISADVANTAGED CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Research conducted by:

Miss. L. Erasmus (13044118)

Cell: 079 365 0126

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Lucia Erasmus, a Masters student from the Department Human Resource Management at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of the study is to explore how Chartered Accountants from previously disadvantaged groups construct and negotiate their professional identity within the multiple contexts of which they are part.

Please note the following:

- With your consent, an audio recording of the interview will be made. If at any time you are uncomfortable with the recording, you may ask to turn off the device. You may also refuse to answer any question you do not want to. Once the interview is completed, it will be transcribed for further analysis. The transcription will be sent to you to make any amendments (should you wish) and to decide whether you would like to withdraw any parts thereof.
- Your confidentiality at all times will be upheld and the data will be kept in a safe place within the confines of the Department.
- Your participation in this study is very important to me. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. On request, I will provide you with a copy of the results as well as a summary of the findings as they pertain to you.
- Please contact my supervisor, Dr. Anne Crafford, 083 393 8115, if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

Participant's signature

Date

APPENDIX B: BREAKDOWN OF INTERVIEW HOURS

Participants	Transcript length (pages)	Interview time (H:M:S)
Horse	127	3:0:41
Bear	88	2:20:55
Deer	44	1:18:5
Lion	36	1:21:15
Cat	99	2:22:57

APPENDIX C: PROOF OF EDITING

CERTIFICATE FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

259 Muckleneuk Street
New Muckleneuk
Pretoria
0181
02 August 2019

I hereby declare that I have edited the language and References of the MCom thesis in Industrial and Organisational Psychology entitled “Exploring the professional identity construction and negotiation of professionals from previously disadvantaged groups”.

I returned the thesis to the student, Ms Lucia Erasmus, showing track changes, queries and comments.

Peter Southey
082 8504015

APPENDIX D: TURNITIN RECEIPT

13044118_Lucia Erasmus_Mini Dissertation_20190729

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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