

**EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF
ENGINEERS FROM HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN THE
SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

By

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12004032

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Commerce (Industrial and Organisational Psychology)**

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Study Leader:

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Declaration

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11 December 2018

EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF ENGINEERS FROM HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

ABSTRACT

Orientation: This study aimed to discover how context, Micro-Aggressions and Whiteness impact on the professional identity negotiation of Engineers from Previously Disadvantaged Groups construct and negotiate their professional identity in the South African context.

Purpose of the Study: This study focussed on the construction and negotiation of professional identity of Engineers within the South African context. Specifically, the study focussed on Engineers that form part of historically disadvantaged race groups. The study focussed on the significance of contexts, such as culture, socio-economic status, history, organisations etc, in the development of professional identity. The concept of Whiteness was also studied, along with the impact racial micro-aggressions.

Motivation for the Study: This research provided a place for Engineers from historically disadvantaged race groups to tell their stories. The aim of the research was to explore the barriers that Micro-Aggressions, Context and Whiteness pose to professional identity negotiation in the South African context, and provide suggestions to overcome the impact of these barriers.

Research design, approach and method: This research makes use of a qualitative research design and a multiple case study method was used. Semi-structured interviews were used, and the question “tell me your story” was raised to each participant. The results were analysed in terms of narrative and a thematic analysis. Five Engineers took part in this study.

Main Findings: Context, on the Macro, Meso and Micro level, plays a regulatory role in professional identity development. Whiteness and racial micro-aggressions are prevalent in South African organisations.

Practical Implications: Although organisations are focussing on BBEEE and transformation, many structural and contextual factors can impact on the professional identity negotiation of Engineers from historically disadvantaged groups. Very little beyond what is currently being addressed through these policies is done to support professionals of colour. This can impact on professional development, skills transfer and talent retention in organisations.

Contribution / Value Add: The study expands on current knowledge of professional identity and intends to make the theory relevant to South African context. The results of this study aim to help organisations to understand the many different factors that could play a regulatory factor in professional identity development in the South African context. Through this understanding, strategies to eradicate these barriers can be implemented and the profession of Engineering could ultimately become more accessible.

Keywords: Identity Work, Professional Identity, Racism, Context, Whiteness, Micro-Aggression, Historically Disadvantaged Groups, People of Colour, South Africa, Apartheid, Engineer, Engineering, Profession, ECSA.

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1 CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This document is presented in six chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the study and provides the background of the history of South Africa, the reasons for conducting the study, the research questions and the intended contribution of the study. Chapter two consists of the review of previous literature which provides information about the existing knowledge on professional identity, identity work, racism, Micro-Aggressions and Whiteness. The third chapter is a presentation of the research methodology and the strategies that were taken for ensuring quality research. The findings, in the form of case narratives, are presented in Chapter four and themes across the cases are discussed in Chapter five. Chapter six provides recommendations and limitations, as well as the conclusion of the thesis

1.2 BACKGROUND

I was born in Midrand, South Africa at the end of 1993. Mere months later saw one of the biggest events that would shape our country and my life forever. South Africa entered the post-apartheid era and elected Nelson Mandela to be our new president in a democratic and free society. We entered an era of political freedom and respect for our incredible diversity in what Nelson Mandela called our Rainbow Nation. This, of course, was the idealistic view on things, but the reality is in fact quite different. Fast forward 24 years and South Africa still has a culture of structural oppression of certain race groups. Apartheid has left a legacy of profound inequality and insecurity, and many of the causes of inequality, both social and economic, are deeply rooted in apartheid law (Carter & May, 1999; Frye, Farred & Nojekwa, 2011). Certain groups remain racially stigmatised. Racially stigmatised, or Historically Disadvantaged groups, are devalued, usually by the broader society or culture (Crocker & Major, 1989). This can be seen simply by gazing out over Alexandra, a township just outside Sandton. Sandton, once being dubbed the richest square mile in Africa, represents the epicentre of our economy. How can two incredibly different concepts, extreme poverty and the richest square mile in Africa, exist so seamlessly right alongside each other? It is the perfect metaphor for the South Africa we live in today.



Figure 1: Alexandra & Sandton

As was the case in South Africa, political freedom did not necessarily lead to economic prosperity. In fact, in a study conducted by Farr, Lord and Wolfenbarger (1998), there was significant proof that political freedom does little to enhance economic well-being. Given South Africa's Apartheid history, there is a strong correlation between race and household income that is statistically being described as "unambiguous evidence of interracial inequality" (Nasttrass & Seekings, 2001, p. 49). Logically, one can argue that such income inequality will have an effect on individuals that grow up in those households, and subsequently limit the opportunities in their future for a quality education. People simply cannot afford to get a good education, and are being priced out of furthering their education by structural economic and social inequalities in South Africa. The difficulties that People of Colour face ultimately present a huge barrier to the negotiation of a professional identity.

It cannot be assumed that all individuals from Historically Disadvantaged groups come from underprivileged backgrounds. However, there is a general theme of privilege for White people and a general theme of disadvantage for People of Colour. In a famous speech, former president Thabo Mbeki described South Africa stating that "we have divided our country into two nations – One of the nations is White, relatively prosperous regardless of gender and geographical dispersal, and has access to a developed economy, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. But the second, and much larger nation of South Africa is Black and poor, with the worst affected being women in rural areas, the Black rural population and in general those with disabilities."

The term Whiteness has emerged as a means of “critiquing the maintenance and reproduction of systems of racial inequality” (Pierce, 2003, p. 55). Whiteness deals with the concept of White privilege, and therefore demands an acknowledgement of the unearned ethnic privileges that White people undoubtedly possess (Al Ariss, Ozbilgin, Tatli & April, 2014). Whiteness is a part of an historical concept that can be traced back to the history of colonisation by the Europeans (Samaluk, 2014). Hughey (2012), acknowledges that White people have inherited the legacy of White supremacy that has resulted in White privilege, whilst they are also simultaneously confronted with the moral and political challenges that are associated with that privilege. Whiteness has also been defined as “being the neutral and invisible norm against which other identities are measured and by which they are defined” (Al Ariss et al., 2014, p. 363). This is important in this context. There are many different cultures in South Africa, with many different cultural norms. That being said, it may be difficult for an individual coming from a Historically Disadvantaged group to walk into an organisation that is built around White identity and White norms. An example here could be a Black South African who comes from a culture where it is rude to look superiors in the eye. In an organisation it is customary to look people in the eye during conversation, and therefore these individuals may come across as rude when in fact they are just abiding by their own social and cultural norms.

Economic inequality, circumstance and the concept of Whiteness leads on to another possible barrier that Historically Disadvantaged groups may face in the negotiation of their professional identity. The effects of Micro-Aggression are likely to have a great influence on the negotiation of professional identities in Historically Disadvantaged groups. Racial Micro-Aggressions have been defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slurs and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009, p. 271). An example was brought to my attention just recently. My friend was at work, and they were dealing with a coloured client over the phone. They were unaware of this until they saw the photo of the client. Her colleague then said “Wow, she has a very nice accent, I did not think she was coloured.” That statement is an example of a racial Micro-Aggression because according to Sue et al. (2007, p. 274), these types of statements nullify the “experiential reality of a person of colour”. The lady who made the statement assumed the client was not of colour because of her accent, indicating that

there is an underlying stereotype that People of Colour have a certain type of accent. This nullifies the client's lived experience. According to Sue et al. (2007), Micro-Aggressions are so powerful because the perpetrator, and sometimes the recipient, are unaware of their damaging actions.

In the organisational context, we can see that although People of Colour represent the majority of our population, they somehow are still treated and represented as minority groups in the work context, especially in the skilled sector. This despite affirmative action and the efforts of Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). Statistics South Africa (2014) stated that White South Africans make up more than 30% of the skilled workforce, despite only making up 8.43% of the population. Black South Africans make up just over 50% of the skilled work force, despite making up 80.24% of the South African Population. What is even more shocking is that the number of skilled Black professionals has only increased by 3% since 1994, whilst the number of skilled White professionals has increased by 19% (Statistics South Africa, 2014). These statistics only refer to the Black South African population and not the entire population that is referred to as Historically Disadvantaged.

The severe structural inequality that is prevalent in South Africa for Historically Disadvantaged Groups, and the impact that Micro-Aggression and Whiteness is likely to have on their everyday lives, obviously present large barriers for individuals that are apart of these groups to ultimately become professionals. The purpose of this study is to explore how individuals from Historically Disadvantaged groups actually negotiate their professional identity. There will also be a focus on discovering to what extent the variables of structural inequality (as part of their context), Micro-Aggression and Whiteness influence this identity construction. The study focuses specifically on those who have Engineering degrees and operate within the Engineering profession. Originally, the study was intended to focus solely on individuals who intended to or already were registered with the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA). However, it became apparent that not all professionals who have Engineering degrees and refer to themselves as Engineers needed to be registered with ECSA.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Work is a major part of our lives, it is therefore inevitable that a large part of an individual's identity is influenced by work (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Identity is important, as it will often regulate how we act in certain situations, how we go about our daily business and can even have an effect on what we are feeling (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Identity work, refers to the active construction, negotiation and regulation of identity (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The process of negotiating one's identity takes place throughout one's life, and is influenced by many factors, including social identity, personal identity, societal norms, individual agency and the nature of one's work (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). According to Brown (2015) as well as Smith, Crafford and Schurink (2015), there is a need to further investigate and explore how various contexts impact on and shape identity work.

As stated, South Africa is a country that is characterised by broad based economic and social inequality, coupled with the history of Apartheid that is accompanied by a legacy of systematic oppression, segregation and marginalisation of certain race groups (Carter & May, 1999; Frye et al., 2011; Adams, Van de Vijver & De Bruin, 2012). These factors, forming part of the broader context of South Africa, do not exist in isolation. Inevitably they have a large impact on everyday life in South Africa, and they therefore have an enormous impact on organisations. Organisations form the basis of our economy, and are the places where most professionals engage and make a living. As a professional, one needs to negotiate and construct a professional identity which is defined as "one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences" (Slay & Smith, 2011, p. 86). A successful construction of professional identity is often correlated with career success, achieving social approval, well-being and power (Morgan & Roberts, 2011; Slay and Smith 2011).

The South African workforce is diverse, this is clear through our population demographics. Race is not the only diversity factor; age, gender, religion, culture, and sexual orientation also play a role. By means of the constitution, no one is allowed to be discriminated against based on these factors. However, in a study conducted by Adams et al. (2012, p. 379), it was stated that the "social, political and economic discrepancies between the White group

and the three other ethnic groups continue to influence each group's identity". Race is still one of the most primary sources of identity in South Africa (Boswell, 2014). In South Africa, forms of racial Micro-Aggressions and forms of aversive and covert racism persist (Boswell, 2014). It has been noted that the past decade has seen an increase in emphasis on how people cope with negative stereotypes or group stigmatisation within the work place (Roberts, Settles & Jellison, 2008). Racial stigmatisation may mean that an individual can enter the workplace as a qualified professional, with all the merit that goes along with that, but may still face a struggle to negotiate their professional identity due to the broader context of South Africa as well as the organisational context that they find themselves walking into. In a study conducted by Boswell, (2014), a Black participant noted that his ideas would often get criticised at work, and he noted that he had to work extremely hard to get proposals accepted. He also stated he has experienced other forms of Micro-Aggression, as one of his colleagues stated "we did not realise that Black people like classical music", with another adding "that is very White of you" (Boswell, 2014, p. 6). These examples are proof of the upward battle that Historically Disadvantaged groups face every day at work, through the effects of Micro-Aggression and Whiteness. Historically Disadvantaged groups who are affected by this have to "continually adjust their identity so as to obtain respect, dignity and ultimately a tangible reward" (Boswell, 2014, p. 2). It is therefore clear that Historically Disadvantaged groups in South Africa face many challenges when it comes to the construction and negotiation of their professional identities.

1.4 PURPOSE STATEMENT

As indicated, there has only been a 3% increase in Black professional skilled workers since the end of Apartheid in 1994 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). In comparison, the number of professionals within the White population group has increased by 16% (Statistics South Africa, 2014). The Indian population has increased professionals by 26% and the Coloured Population by 11%. Even though the Black population group is the majority, the group's professionals have not increased on a similar level to their colleagues. This indicates that although affirmative action and BBBEE have been brought in to try and right the wrongs of the past, there are still very little people from Historically Disadvantaged groups in managerial, professional or skilled roles.

This study focussed on the construction and negotiation of professional identity of Engineers within the South African context of Historically Disadvantaged groups. The study also explored the predefined barriers of context, including Whiteness and Micro-Aggressions that Historically Disadvantaged groups possibly face whilst negotiating their own professional identity.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

An exploration of the construction and negotiation of professional identity of Engineers from Historically Disadvantaged groups in South Africa.

- To conceptualise the theories of professional identity, Micro-Aggression, and Whiteness using previous literature.
- To explore the contextual factors (at the Micro, Meso and Macro levels) which shape and regulate the construction and negotiation of professional identity.
- To explain how “Whiteness” is experienced by Historically Disadvantaged professionals and how this impacts on the construction and development of a positive professional identity.
- To understand the nature and type of Micro-Aggressions experienced by Historically Disadvantaged professionals and how this impacts on the construction and development of a positive professional identity.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The Chapter aimed to conceptualise the topic at hand and to provide context to the research conducted. The Objectives of the research were clearly stated and the chapters following aim to address the objectives listed.

2 CHAPTER TWO - REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section is in line with the first research objective as outlined in section 1.4 above. This Chapter aims to conceptualise the theories of professional identity, Micro-Aggression and Whiteness using previous literature.

2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

As previously mentioned, South Africa has a long history of structural inequality, brought on largely by our history of segregation on the basis of race. These inequalities mean that even now, twenty-four years after the end of the apartheid era, South Africa is still experiencing the problems of social and economic inequality that was a characteristic of the apartheid era. Many of these inequalities are deeply rooted in apartheid law (Carter & May, 1999; Frye, Farred & Nojekwa, 2011). This has been discussed at length in Chapter 1.

2.3 IDENTITY

An individual's identity can be seen as their own subjective understanding of themselves (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas 2008; Brown 2015). The key word is subjective, identity is an individual's own personal answer to the question "who am I?", "who should I become?", "what should I stand for?" and "how do I act" (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006, Alvesson et. al., 2008; Brown, 2015). Identity can be seen as a key factor for issues that relate to an individual's perception of their own meaning and motivation (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2008). One's own personal identity can be seen as "both a product, and a producer, of interaction and interpretation" (Beech, MacIntosh & McInnes, 2008, p. 959).

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) discuss the identity process, and state that it is in fact an interplay between an individual's self-identity, identity work and identity regulation. Self-identity is the individual's perception of self, identity work is the negotiation of that identity and identity regulation is seen as the regulative effects of social and work situations on an

individual's perception of self (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006). This relationship, or interplay, can be seen below.

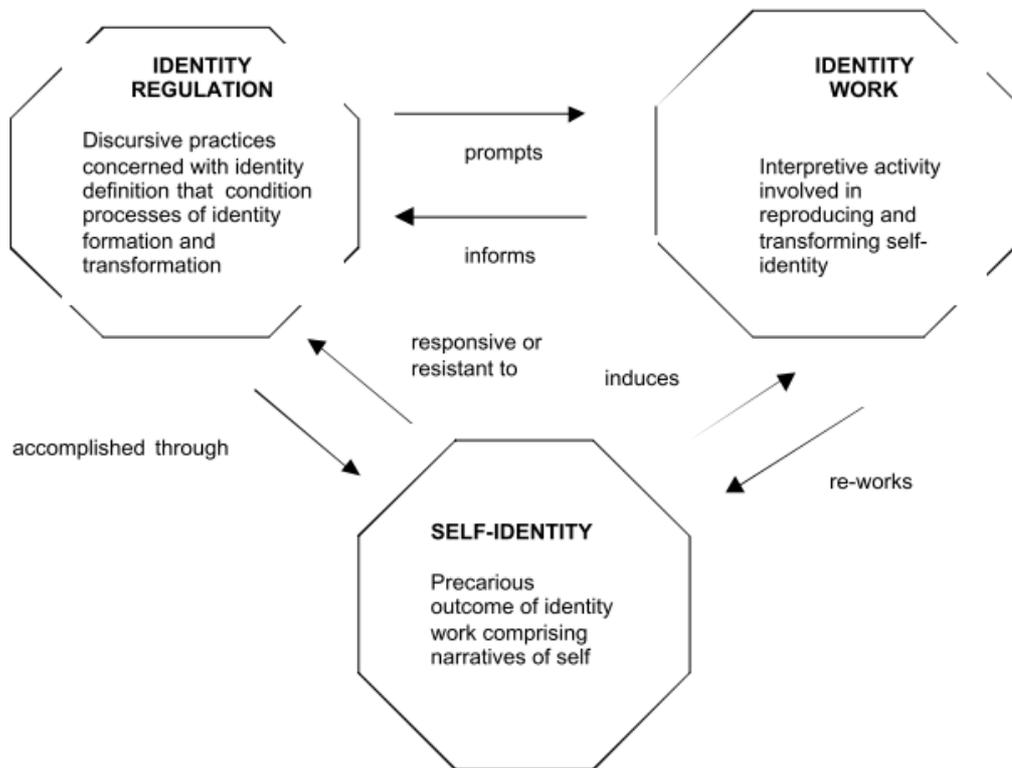


Figure 2: Identity Regulation, Identity Work and Self-Identity (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002, p. 10)

Identity is an integral part of an individual's understanding of self (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). Identity will often regulate how people act in certain situations, and can even have an effect on what we are feeling (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Identities can be seen as "a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society" (Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverungen, Ellis & Sabelis, 2009, p.300). Sveningsson and Larsson (2006), add that identities are usually seen as temporary, and individuals regularly go about negotiating, constituting and reproducing their identities in various social settings. This brings us to our next topic which covers the negotiation of identity.

2.3.1 Identity Work

Whereas Self-Identity is the answer to the question “Who am I”, identity work is the process of getting to that answer (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The process whereby one goes about negotiating, creating and maintaining their professional identity is known as identity work (Adams & Crafford, 2012). Identity work refers to the activities that one uses to build, negotiate, maintain and repair their own desired versions of themselves or their own identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Brown & Coupland, 2015). There are many definitions of the concept, however the following has been chosen to explain the concept - “Identity work refers to the mutually constitutive processes by which people strive to shape relatively coherent and distinctive notions of their selves” (Watson, 2008, p. 129).

According to (Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009), individuals are very flexible when it comes to the identities that they have. Identity negotiation is a process whereby roles in relationships are spoken about so that the identities of all parties can be understood. (Swann et al., 2009). Identity work is therefore not only concerned with how individuals categorise themselves, but also with how these individuals are categorised by others (Beech et al., 2008). Identity work is also classified through an element of concern with how certain images or representations ultimately become permeated with meaning, and are therefore seen as culturally embedded. If an identity claim about a certain image or representation is made, these images can become permeated with meaning based on whether individuals accept, reject or ignore the claims being made (Beech et al., 2008).

According to Saayman and Crafford (2011), individuals seem to constantly try and separate themselves from others and create a unique perception of themselves, by continuously comparing themselves to others. As previously stated, identity work also includes how individuals are categorised by others. Identity work involves people constantly engaging in forming and maintaining their own identities in order to get a sense of distinctiveness (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006). Individuals have the yearning to “belong to something greater than themselves”, whilst simultaneously seeking ways to maintain a sense of individuality (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1033). The need that people have to constantly differentiate themselves between various different contexts (such as work, social and home based contexts) is central to the term identity work (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). People take

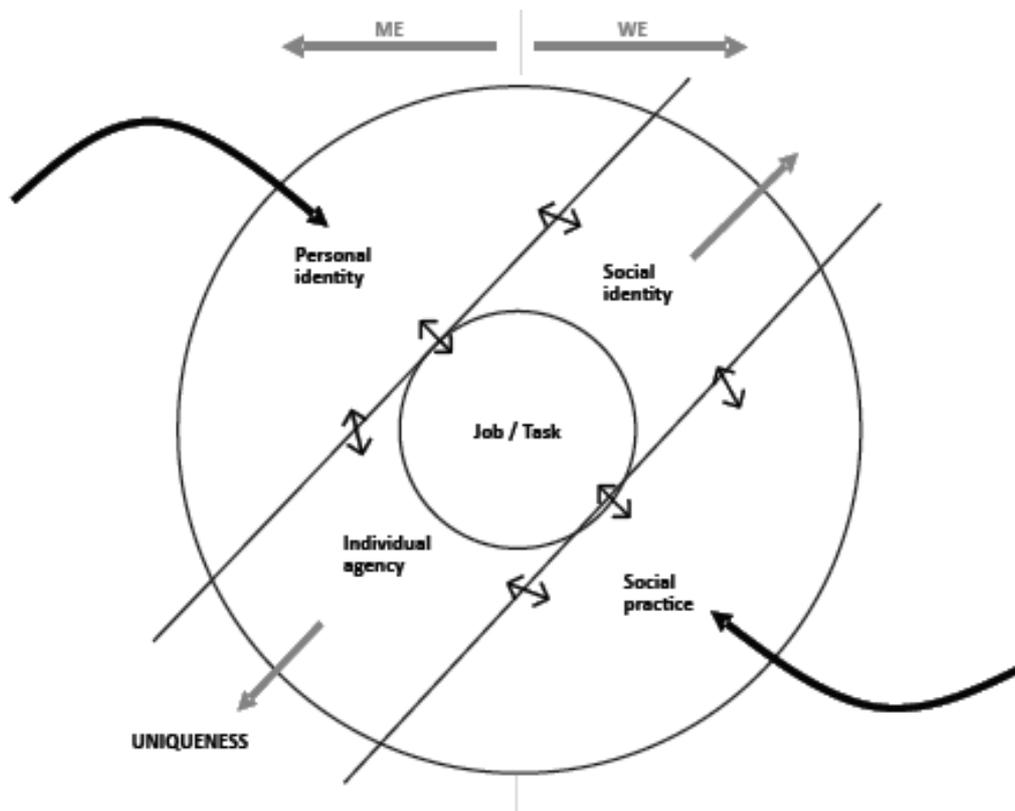
on various identities and these identities are used to balance the demands of different contexts that individuals find themselves in (Adams & Crafford, 2012).

According to Alvesson (2010), identity work can be an ongoing event or it can be something that occurs during times of change and crises, where individuals have to adapt to new and more complex contexts. Given the nature of identity, much activity involves active identity work (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). During times of change, specific events, encounters or experiences, individuals experience a heightened awareness of their own constructed identity, which leads to a more conscious form of identity work (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Alvesson, 2010). This more conscious form of identity work is “grounded in at least a minimal amount of self-doubt and self-openness, typically contingent upon a mix of psychological-existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them” (Alvesson, 2010, p. 201). How individuals understand themselves is also often shaped by a larger societal, cultural and historical norm that effects an individual’s identity in subtle and indirect ways (Alvesson et al., 2008). Societal norms often influence things like the way we dress, talk and interact with others (Beech et al., 2008).

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2008) state that perceived organisational roles which influence how organisational members are expected to think and feel about their day to day work, are in fact an essential input for identity work. Identity work is therefore essential in the organisational context as individuals’ need to adapt to their given roles in the ever changing organisational environment (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2008).

When it comes to the negotiation of identity, and relating this to the organisational or work context, Saayman & Crafford (2011, p. 10) found that identity work can be broadened into three dimensions, including identity tensions, Identity demands and the individual dimension. Below is a model that was created to represent the identity tensions and demands that mobilise identity work. One’s personal identity is who one is and how one came to be (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). One’s social identity can be seen as roles one takes on like a team member, a colleague in the work environment, or more personal roles such as a mother, a father, a daughter, a wife or husband at home. (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Social practice, is societal norms etc. that one has to adhere to (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Individual agency represents an individual’s uniqueness and ability to make

autonomous decisions (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). The nature of work and the job demands of an individual also influence one's identity negotiation (Saayman & Crafford, 2011).



Figures 3: Conceptual Model of Identity Tension and Demands that Mobilise Identity Work (Saayman & Crafford, 2011, p.5)

It has been found that identity work can be influenced by the numerous contexts in which we as humans function. The contexts can provide the back bone from which human functioning and identity is developed and constructed. Context subtly shapes how we make sense of and understand our work environments (Watson, 2008; Atewologun & Singh, 2010; Smith, Crafford, & Schurink, 2015). According to Brown (2015) as well as Smith, Crafford and Schurink (2015), there is a need to further investigate and explore how various contexts impact on and shape identity work. *“Despite significant theoretical developments in understanding identity, many of which consider the context of identity work, there is little understanding of the regulatory effects of multiple contexts on identity work”* (Crafford, Masombuka, Marx & Carey, 2018, p.2). This is significant for this research as contexts are seen to play a major role in professional identity development.

Crafford et al., (2018) developed a table as seen in table 1 below, that outlines the various contexts that influence identity work.

Table 1: The Various Contexts Influencing Identity Work (Crafford et al., 2018):

Context	Influence on Identity work
Political	The political system determines the measure of freedom a person has in contracting identity and the boundaries that may be set on these. Political stability allows for identity work to proceed and for identity to be reproduced fairly continuously whereas instability may cause huge disruption in life circumstances with the associated identity work. The political climate regulates relationships between races, ethnic groups, between genders and promotes (or not) a fair climate for social and economic opportunities.
Historical	The historical context influences systems of domination and oppression, distribution of systems of wealth and poverty, and determines the socially constructed notions of social and other forms of capital.
Economic	The dominant global system, capitalism, prescribes the striving for wealth, defines the value of success in largely economic terms, and determines the means by which economic capital is derived and established. These set desirable parameters for what is desirable with regard to identity, and thus influence the means by which it is established. A disruption in the global economic system has ramifications for national systems as evidenced in the recent global financial crisis. This had far reaching effects for many people, who lost their jobs and were faced with redundancy and the consequences of the latter for identity and identity work.
Cultural	Culture plays a significant role in cultural and religious guidelines and proscriptions which may influence identity work (Carrim, 2014; Essers & Benschop, 2009).
Family	A person's family determines socio-economic class and influences the nature and extent of education as well as the culture in which a person is raised (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, Horvat, 1996).
Educational	Education is closely associated with social and cultural capital and thus influences opportunities and constraints with regard to identity work, as well as potential occupational choices opening up or hindering access to professional training and development (Ayling, 2015; Horvat, 1996; Palardy 2013).
Occupational / Professional field	Professional field A significant source of identity as people draw on particular tasks, discourses, values, goals, beliefs, stereotypical traits and knowledge, skills, and abilities to create a professional identity (Ashforth et al. 2013) Influenced by the value of a particular profession at a given time (Walsh & Gordon, 2008).
Work Organisations	These provide a significant source of and context for identity work. Elements that influence identity work include organisational identity and culture, organisational strategy and management practices, policies and practices such as

	management accounting systems, HR policies, training and development practices and compensation and reward systems. All of these play a role in disciplining employees, promoting certain types of behaviours and constraining others (Alvesson et al. 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Brown & Lewis, 2011; Casey, 1995; Clarke et al. 2009; Elsbach, 2004; Ibarra 1999; Kirpal 2004; Swann et al. 2009).
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2.3.2 Professional Identity

Professional identity is the identity that is associated with those who carry out critical and somewhat difficult organisational functions, individuals commonly referred to as professionals (Pratt et al., 2006). Professional identity can be defined as “the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764). Professional identity construction is usually associated with an individual’s career success (Slay & Smith, 2011). Professional identity is one of the multiple social identities that individuals adopt (Cohen-Scali, 2003).

Pratt et al. (2006) states that despite the growing interest in professional identity, there has been little research into how identities are formed in these professionals. According to Beijgaard, Meijer & Verloop (2004), professional identity is influenced by the expectation of individuals in society about how the professional should behave, and also about what the professionals themselves find important in their work, based on their background, previous experience and various life roles. This also links back to the conceptualisation of identity work, where it was mentioned that identity is framed by how one sees oneself and how others see them, and also how certain images or representations become embedded with meaning.

Cohen-Scali (2003) mentions that although professional identity is embedded in a work-based self-concept, it is in fact negotiated throughout one’s life, from childhood to professional practice. This is influenced through the child’s family life, social life and development, as well as the school context that the individuals found themselves in. If children find themselves in a family that pushes the development of skills, or in a school that can help them facilitate the development of skills necessary to become a professional, this can go a long way in assisting that individual to negotiate a professional identity (Cohen-

Scali, 2003). This can also help an individual develop a certain degree of social awareness that will help them to avoid confrontation, in the sense of differing views, beliefs and behaviours, with the professional environment that they may find themselves in (Cohen-Scali, 2003).

Professional identity also needs to be negotiated and reconstructed through identity work, especially during times of change and adaptation (Ibarra, 1999; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Alvesson, 2010). In the professional context, these changes are usually characterised by moving to more senior positions in an organisation, or taking on a new role within one job. It appears that professionals seem to use three tasks to adapt, including (1) looking at role models or individuals around them in similar positions, (2) experimenting with an identity and (3) evaluating this against standards and listening to feedback (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006).

According to Slay and Smith (2011), professional roles are often quite prestigious in nature and thus they provide the holder of the role with a certain degree of autonomy and privilege. Something important to note, especially in the context of this research, is that Historically Disadvantaged individuals often have little prestige and privilege based on the fact that their identities have been tainted by racial stigmatisation (Slay & Smith, 2011). Stigma that is attached to race, gender etc. is an integral concept of the social context in South Africa. Slay and Smith (2011) state that one's career and social context do not exist in isolation, social context will have an effect on an individual's career. Cohen-Scali's (2003) notion that professional identity is built throughout one's life, from childhood to adulthood, could mean that Historically Disadvantaged individuals may face an uphill battle in the negotiation of a professional identity.

As previously mentioned, South Africa has a history of inequality, characterised mainly by White privilege and subsequently disadvantages for People of Colour. Many Historically Disadvantaged individuals have had to overcome many economic challenges to get into University and get their degree in order to become professionals. This could mean that many People of Colour in South Africa will not find the negotiation of a professional identity as easy as their privileged counterparts. Yamauchi (2005) reiterates this notion, as it is stated that despite South Africa entering a democracy in 1994 and the government promising equal

education for all, there is still an astonishing difference between the qualities of education throughout the different regions in South Africa. The apartheid era was characterised by segregation, and this was no different in regards to education, as there were schools for People of Colour and schools for White people. The Black schools were totally inferior to the non-Black schools in terms of funding and quality (Yamauchi, 2005). This culture of education inequality has continued and this could mean that “a vicious cycle of poverty and low-quality education will persist in the long run” (Yamauchi, 2005, p.214).

Another possible barrier for children from Historically Disadvantaged backgrounds, is the lack of professional role models in their lives (Slay & Smith, 2011). Ibarra (1999) makes mention of the importance of role models in the negotiation of professional identity. Given South Africa’s history of segregation, many People of Colour did not manage to get a higher education. Despite many individuals from Historically Disadvantaged groups now being able to get a professional degree, those individuals still did not have many professional role models to look up to as they grew up, as there was probably an absence of People of Colour in professional roles within their network (Slay & Smith, 2011). In figure 4 below, Engineers that are registered with ECSA are represented by race in the different age groups. It can be seen that there is indeed a lack of role models that are of colour in the Engineering industry. The distribution of White Engineers is relatively even. However, the distribution of Black Engineers is skewed. There are not a lot of Black Engineers over the age of 50. Apartheid has been over for 25 years, but the history of structural oppression is still evident in our organisations to this day. The South African society still remains segregated in terms of social, economic and political issues (Adams, Van Der Vijver & De Bruin 2012).

This distribution not only impacts within the work environment, but also confirms Slay and Smith’s (2011) notion that Historically Disadvantaged children have a lack of mentorship within their households growing up. Younger Children of Colour are less likely than White children to have Engineers that are close family members or friends to look up to in the construction of their professional identity. This is undoubtedly caused by the structural oppression that was Apartheid, which still impacts people to this very day.

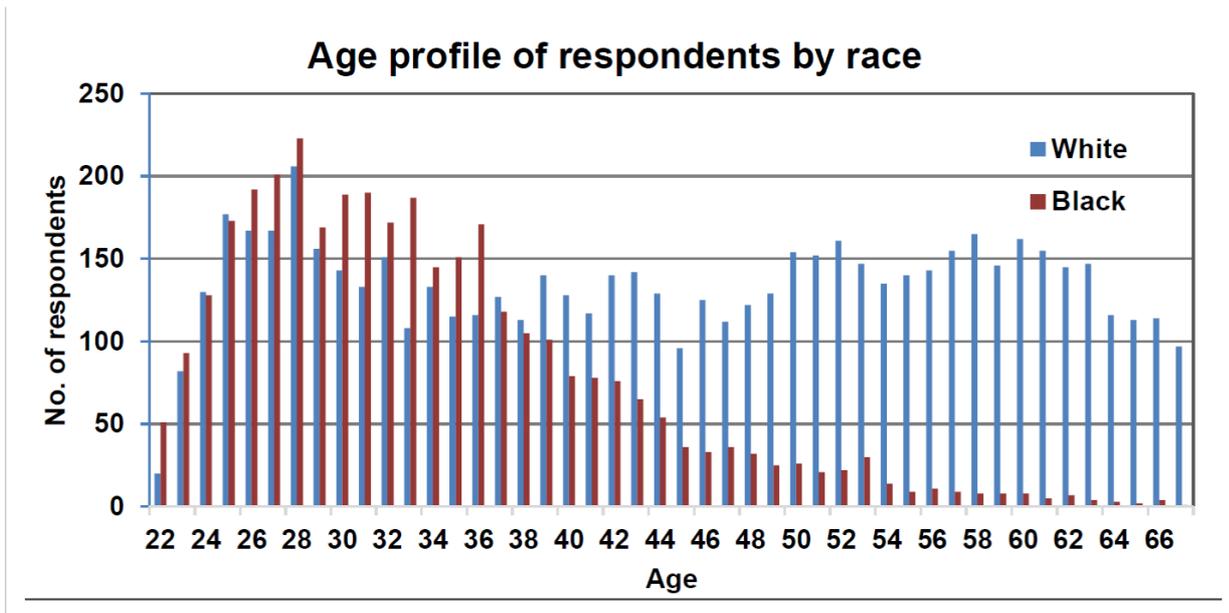


Figure 4: Age profile of Engineering respondents by race (ECSA, 2013, p. 8)

Lastly, Slay and Smith (2011) indicate that the issue of receiving feedback contributes to an issue for Historically Disadvantaged individuals in the negotiation of a professional identity (see also Ibarra (1999)). However, individuals from Historically Disadvantaged groups often feel that receiving fair feedback is a major issue (Slay & Smith, 2011). This is because the perception is that negative feedback is a form of racism and discrimination, and that positive feedback could not possibly be genuine (Slay & Smith, 2011). Without the contribution of constructive feedback, professional identity negotiation becomes more challenging.

2.4 RACISM & RACIAL STIGMATISATION

Racism can be defined as "a complex ideology composed of beliefs in racial superiority and inferiority and is enacted through individual behaviours and institutional and societal policies and practices" (Sue, Capodilupo & Holder, 2008, p. 329). Racism is an ideology that has been used to justify the many years of differential treatment between White people and People of Colour, based on the perceived superiority of White individuals (Puttergill, 2008). Discrimination on the basis of race has been a direct consequence of this ideology (Puttergill, 2008). Jones (2000) mentions that we, as a society, often use race to differentiate ourselves from each other and argues that race has moved away from being a "biological construct that reflect innate differences" (p. 1212) to a "social construct that precisely captures the impacts of racism" (p. 1212). Critical race theory (CRT) is a movement adopted

by scholars that argue against the slow pace of transformation in today's society (Ladson-Billings, 2010). The theory argues that racism is ordinary and an everyday lived experience for many People of Colour (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006).

Jones (2000) differentiates between different levels of racism, including:

- Institutionalised Racism,
- Personally Mediated Racism and;
- Internalised Racism

The first level of racism is institutionalised racism. Institutionalised racism is somewhat normal and even legal at times and will usually manifest in an inherited disadvantage (Jones 2000). This links back to the structural inequality that is prevalent in South Africa, as institutionalised racism can also be seen as structural racism. Apartheid law was institutionalised racism, where it was legal to segregate people based on race. Even though apartheid is over, it must be noted that the legacy of apartheid remains and institutionalised racism “persists because of contemporary structural factors that perpetuate those historical injustices” (Jones, 2000, p. 1212).

Personally mediated racism refers to prejudice and discrimination, the type of racism that most people are familiar with (Jones, 2000). Personally mediated racism leads to assumptions about the abilities and motives of individuals based on their race. This type of racism manifests in a lack of respect and general suspicion when it comes to People of Colour (Jones, 2000). It could also manifest in beliefs that People of Colour are not competent, leading to the devaluation and stigmatisation of People of Colour.

Lastly, internalised racism is a general acceptance by the stigmatised individuals of the negative messages and beliefs that are aimed at their group (Jones, 2000). Racially stigmatised individuals sometimes end up not believing in others who look like them, not believing in themselves and giving up on their dreams (Jones, 2000). Baily, Chung, Williams, Singh and Terrell (2011), characterise this concept as internalised oppression and state that

it occurs when stigmatised groups turn on themselves due to racism, and somehow start emulating the actions of those that oppress them.

Racism is built on the stigmatisation of individual's based on race, and is an outcome of social exclusion (Benoit, Shumka & Barlee 2010). Racially stigmatised groups are devalued, usually by the broader society or culture, purely on the basis of their race (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Benoit, Shumka and Barlee (2010), define stigma on five main levels or interrelated social processes:

- A person or group of people are identified as being different
- “Dominant societal norms and values link the difference with certain undesirable characteristics and fears, which leads to the creation of negative stereotypes” (p. 2).
- “Labelled persons are identified primarily in terms of a single attribute (e.g., their sexual orientation or perceived race) that becomes their defining characteristic” (p. 2). This labelling leads to a phenomenon called social distancing, and allows society to place ‘them’ in a totally separate category from ‘us’.
- “Labelled persons experience status loss, blame and discrimination” (p. 2).
- “Power is exercised through an individual’s access to key resources, including money and social networks, which determine their ability to resist stigma labels” (p. 2).

Racism can be an extreme barrier to the negotiation of a professional identity for individuals from Historically Disadvantaged groups. The end of apartheid consequently meant the end of racist and discriminatory laws against Historically Disadvantaged groups, but the institutionalised racism and racial stigmatisation in the country persists (Jones, 2000, p. 1212).

2.5 WHITENESS

As indicated, Whiteness has also been defined as “being the neutral and invisible norm against which other identities are measured and by which they are defined” (Al Ariss, et al., 2014, p. 363; Cotton, O’Neil & Griffin, 2014). Recent research on Whiteness focuses primarily on examining and exposing the often invisible or masked power relations within existing racial hierarchies (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). Whiteness is part of an historical concept that can be traced back to the history of colonisation by the Europeans (Samaluk, 2014). The concept of Whiteness is critical to understanding of the role that race plays in the working environment (Cotton et al, 2014). Whiteness and White privilege go hand in hand, White privilege being the unearned privilege that White people possess based purely on their race (Pierce, 2003). ‘White’ practices and norms are seen as professional, whilst other practices are not. The concept of race was created on the myth of the ‘inferior other’. It is this social hierarchy based on racial classification that still burdens post-apartheid South Africa, and this manifests in organisations in the form of Whiteness. Whiteness does not only refer to practices that lead to racial discrimination, but also discrimination based on gender, religion, class and nationality (Jay & Jones, 2005; Leonard, 2010). Al Ariss et al. (2014) found that Whiteness can be studied at various levels, which can be seen in the table below:

Table 2: Key Levels & Themes in Tackling Whiteness (Al Ariss, 2014, p. 364)

Key Levels	Specific Themes
History	The history of colonisation, migration and racism have led to a degree of ethnic privileges for White individuals. In South Africa, institutionalized racism, whereby racist laws limited the movement and rights of individuals of colour means that even today, even after the abolishment of those laws, the unearned ethnic privilege that White people possess still plays an enormous role in society and in organisations.

Space Whiteness needs to also be analysed with respect to its context. In South Africa, Whiteness allows unearned ethnic privilege to have an impact in all aspects of life. These unearned privileges are also intersectional, and have different effects based on gender, sex, ethnicity, disabilities and social status.

Macro Context This typically involves legislation, political and legal frameworks that seem to institutionalise the ethnic privilege.

Organisational Level This usually includes practices applied by the human resource management department, be it conscious or unconscious, to retain the ethnic privileges of certain individuals. It also includes the creation of policies and cultures that seem to only benefit individuals with unearned ethnic privileges.

Individual Level “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” (p. 364)

In the South African context, the historic level is of particular interest because our Apartheid history of institutionalised racism needs to be taken into consideration. Botha (2009), made mention that the Apartheid laws defined and identified individuals as being ‘White’ or ‘Black’ and this identity determined where you lived, worked, went to school and even determined who one could get married to. Even though there is legislation promoting equity, through BBBEE, Whiteness in organisations means that organisational norms and practices still lead to individuals who do not fall into the same category of norms to feel marginalised. The ending of apartheid was not enough to end the structural inequalities in South Africa, that obviously then has an influence on the organisational context.

White people, as the recipients of unearned White privileges, often attempt to deny the role that they play in racial inequality, and at times deny that White privilege even exists (Pierce, 2003). Grimes (2001), makes an important point regarding White people and Whiteness. Whiteness is often considered the norm and race is not considered. White individuals are

perceived to have no race, in the sense that they are not racially marked, they are seen as ordinary (Grimes, 2001). In organisations, Whiteness gets considered as the invisible norm - this allows differences between individuals to be ignored, and allows White people, their assumptions and their ways, to be empowered (Cotton et al., 2014). Power in organisations is usually aligned with a specific ethnic group, and White ways of thinking and working are then seen as superior (Grimes, 2001). Alvesson speaks about how individuals regulate their own professional identities by having the right habitus, which is essentially being able to fit in with all the regulations and cultural norms within an organisation (Beech et al., 2008). This habitus essentially allows individuals to be successful in a certain culture (Beech et al., 2008). Whiteness may present a barrier to this habitus for Historically Disadvantaged individuals, because it may be impossible for individuals who do not possess the same ethnic privileges as White people, to fit into their so called 'ordinary' organisational culture. Therefore, Whiteness could have an enormous effect on the professional identity negotiation of individuals from Historically Disadvantaged groups.

2.6 MICRO AGGRESSIONS

Over the last few years, there has been a shift in racism (Sue et al., 2008). Racism was once rather overt, but has now shifted to a more subtle form of racism called aversive racism or modern racism (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal & Torino, 2007; Sue et al., 2008). This form of racism can usually be seen in individuals that seem to have good intentions, and are not always seemingly aware that their beliefs, actions and attitudes constitute a form of racism (Sue et al., 2008). These actions are often referred to as racial Micro-Aggressions. The term Micro-Aggression is defined by Sue et al. (2007, p. 272) as referring to "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'". This term 'Micro-Aggression' was first used by Chester Pierce in 1970 (Sue et al., 2007; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2010). Micro-Aggressions are those very brief, subtle and daily exchanges that perpetuate degrading messages (Sue et al., 2007). According to Sue et al. (2007), there are three main types of Micro-Aggressions that have been summarised in the table below:

Table 3: Types of Micro-Aggressions (Sue et al., 2007)

Micro-Aggression	Description
Micro-Assault	<p>This is an explicit racial slur that is usually primarily seen by a verbal or nonverbal attack that is directly intended to harm or hurt the “intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behaviour, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (p. 274). This is usually an insult behind the individuals back.</p> <p>As previously mentioned, the newer type of aversive or modern racism is more subtle. However, micro-assaults are similar to the older form of racism, where there is explicit and very deliberate intention to harm.</p> <p>This type of racism is usually expressed in private settings, maybe over a dinner table. As a White person in South Africa I can recall many an occasion where I have been sitting with friends and there has been occurrences of micro-assaults. This indicates that individuals will usually keep their feelings of superiority to themselves unless they lose control or they feel that the people who are listening share the same notions, or they feel safe expressing themselves.</p>

Micro-Insult

Micro-insults are usually subtle communications that convey a degree of rudeness or insensitivity to the participant. They “represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of colour” (p. 274).

In the South African organisational context, a very real example would be when a person of colour is employed, and everyone in the team automatically thinks that this was because of Affirmative Action. Then individuals say to the new employee in passing “I believe that the person who is most qualified should get the job regardless of race” subtly insulting that individual by implying that they got their job solely because of their race.

Micro-insults can also be non-verbal in nature, as Sue et al. (2007) gives an example of when a White supervisor seems distracted and avoids eye contact when a person of colour discussed something with them.

Micro-Invalidation

“Micro-invalidations are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of colour” (p. 274).

Micro-invalidations that are prevalent in South Africa include when White people compliment Black individuals for having a nice English accent. Or when People of Colour are told that “I don’t see colour” or “We are all human beings,” the effect is to negate their experiences as racial/cultural beings” (p. 274) Another example includes when People of Colour share their experiences of discrimination and invalidations with White friends, only to be told that they should stop being so sensitive, ultimately invalidating the Black persons own lived experience.

According to Boswell (2014), the norm is that individuals who fall victim to aversive racism, should ignore the occurrence or respond in an ambivalent manner, but this just results in

those victims having to bare the weight of Micro-Aggressions, due to the fact that averse racism seems to go by unpunished. Boswell also argues that due to the history of South Africa, individuals are extremely aware of when they are falling victim to incidents of averse racism, and when they seemingly ignore the occurrence it should not be assumed that they do not understand. Micro-Aggression can be seen as a lever of power that is in essence invisible to those who wield it, and unless spoken about such Micro-Aggressions can be let go without ever being examined (Alexander, 2004). Micro-Aggressions can invalidate the lived experience of others and cause indirect or direct discrimination. This can have an impact on professional identity negotiation as this can impact on work relationships and general experience within a given organisation.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The Chapter aimed to answer the research objective to conceptualise the theories of professional identity, Micro-Aggression, and Whiteness using previous literature. Previous literature regarding Micro-Aggression, Context and Whiteness have been discussed in detail. This will act as a base of understanding for the chapters ahead.

3 CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section aims to outline the methodology and research approach that was taken in conducting this research. The research paradigm will be discussed, as well as the approach of data gathering and analysis. Strategies to ensure quality research are highlighted, and a thorough reflection on the research is also highlighted in this section.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

In order to determine and explore the impact of various contexts, racial Micro-Aggressions and Whiteness have on professional identity development, this research was conducted from a critical realist perspective. According to Kempster and Parry (2011), critical realists examine underlying structures, structures that some individuals may not even be conscious of and the extent to which those structures have an influence on social reality. Bygstad & Munkvold (2011) suggest that “Critical realism combines a realist ontology with an interpretive epistemology, and although a real world exists, our knowledge of it is socially constructed and fallible“ (p. 1). Easton (2010) states that one of the key assumptions of critical realism, is that the world exists independently of our knowledge, and in order for social scientists to understand social phenomena, researchers need to evaluate them critically.

Fletcher (2017) states that human knowledge is only a small part of what is the wider reality, instead of reducing reality to what is human knowledge alone. Critical Realism “treats the world as theory-laden, but not theory-determined” (Fletcher, 2017, p. 4). There is an assumption that there is a social world that we can attempt to understand through research within the social science field, however there is also an assumption that “some knowledge can be closer to reality than other knowledge” (Fletcher, 2017, p. 4). The paradigm aims to be explanatory in nature, and thus allows the Researcher to explain and understand social events and recommend solutions to address social problems (Fletcher, 2017). For this reason, it is appropriate for the purposes of this research.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research design was used for the purposes of this research. According to Hewitt-Taylor (2001, p. 39), “qualitative research is to portray the reality of the area under investigation, and to enhance understanding of the situation and the meanings and values attributed to this by individuals“.

In this research study, multiple case studies were made use of. A case study is defined as “a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context. The aim is to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied” (Hartley, 2004, p. 323). According to Easton (2010), case studies are suitable when answering questions of ‘how’, which is the case in this research which focuses on "how" Context, Whiteness and Micro-Aggression influence the construction and negotiation of professional identity.

Case study research comes with advantages as well as constraints. The biggest constraint is the problem of representativeness, however this problem can be overcome by increasing the sample size from one case study to multiple case studies (Easton, 2010). The biggest advantage being the fact that a case study allows one to understand phenomena in a comprehensive and in-depth manner (Easton, 2010).

Context is of vital importance in this research, as a phenomena is being investigated in a particular context. Hartley (2004) states that case studies are analysed in line with the context, because this allows one to understand how the phenomena influence the context and how the contexts influence the phenomena. The use of a case study ensures that multiple sources of data are used and rely on those multiple data sources that are gathered from a single case, to explain certain phenomena (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2009).

At the very heart of a case study design, is the exploration of each and every individual's own unique story, and how their contexts have possibly impacted on their identity work (Yin, 2009). The method provides a degree of flexibility. Thus, the data gathering and analyses phases can largely be impacted on by the subject that is being researched. For this reason, a narrative perspective was also used as a tool to conduct the multiple case studies. The

elements of the narrative approach that were made use of for the purposes of this research will now be discussed in more detail.

A narrative approach is an approach that draws on the assumption that people's unique stories are the very foundation with which they understand and make sense of their world (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kohler Riessman, 1993). When it comes to the construction of one's identity, a narrative gives prominence to individual agency and imagination (Kohler Riessman, 1993). Narrative research is rather diverse and in scholarly discussions, academics have drawn on a wide variety of traditions, meaning that the definition of 'narrative' can be largely related to the discipline within which it is being made use of (Kohler Riessman, 1993). For the purposes of this research, a psychological / sociological approach to narratives was taken. These narrative were then viewed as "extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of a single or multiple research or therapeutic conversations" (Kohler Riessman, 2008, p. 6). Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2008) highlights that there are three theoretical divisions of narrative research, namely: the Event-Centred; the Experienced-Centred; as well as the co-construction of narratives centred approach. In this research, the Experienced-Centred approach was made use of. This means that, the participants themselves are the focus and narratives are "assumed to be a representation of internal phenomena such as events, thoughts and feelings" (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2008, p.5). Narrative research is different from other qualitative frameworks in that it does not provide a clear methodological procedure (Squire et al., 2008). Squire et al. (2008) further states that there are also no clear guidelines about levels at which the narrative should be gathered. Narrative research is thus relatively open by nature.

In this research, the Researcher made use of multiple individual case studies and the Researcher relied on multiple interviews to conduct the case study. The Researcher also made use of diary entries to provide more context, but the diary entries were not used for direct quotations in the writing of the narratives and the analyses of results. The ideal was that all participants complete diary entries, but given the busy lives that professionals lead this was not always possible. Thus, the data that was aimed to be gathered with diary entries could not form part of the research, as the researcher was unable to consistently gather this information from all participants. The participants each took part in two interviews and some

and there were also informal follow up sessions when certain elements of the case were unclear.

3.4 SAMPLING

For the purpose of this research, the Researcher will made use of non-probability sampling in order to obtain a sample that is relevant for the purposes of this research. As qualitative research is not prescriptive by nature, and therefore there are no real guidelines as to the sample size needed, this usually differs from study to study (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012). Qualitative research looks at rich and deep data over time and context, and therefore a smaller sample size is usually appropriate (Wagner et al., 2012). Non-probability sampling is non-random, and in that sense it allows the Researcher to purposely include individuals in the sample who are able to contribute to the study, and are available and willing to do so (Wagner et al., 2012).

3.4.1 Sampling Method

Three types of sampling methods were used for the purposes of this study. These methods include Purposive sampling, Convenience sampling and Snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is sometimes also referred to as judgement sampling. According to Wagner et al. (2012) purposive sampling is appropriate when the Researcher relies on their own experience to find participants that are appropriate for the purposes of the study. This method can also be used when only a limited number of people can serve as a primary data source (Black, 2010). Purposive sampling was used to identify certain areas where the Researcher could search for participants. Convenience sampling involves using people who are readily available (Wagner et al., 2012). The Researcher made use of a contact within the Engineering field to allow her to present her research to a group of engineers, allowing them to anonymously participate in the research should they want to. Purposive and Convenience sampling were used to sample three participants. Lastly, Snowball sampling is generally made use of when a specific group of people who have something in common are being asked to take part in a research study (Wagner et al., 2012). One individual was approached about the research study, and due to this, two additional research participants were sampled. Due to the manner of the sampling, four Black individuals and one Indian

Individual was sampled. Unfortunately, the researcher did not manage to find a coloured participant to willingly partake in the study, which is a major limitation.

3.4.2 Sample Size and Specifications

As previously mentioned, qualitative research focuses on collecting rich data over time and context, and thus a sample size of five individuals is appropriate so that the richness of the data is not lost.

This research study forms part of a larger study that explores the professional identity construction of Engineers, Industrial and Organisational Psychologists and Accountants. The interest of this particular study lies in the professional identity construction of Engineers. The Researcher identified five Engineers from Historically Disadvantaged groups that are employed by organisations. The participants needed to have a degree in Engineering equivalent to the B. Eng. degree. At first, a criteria was set that all participants would need to be registered with ECSA. However, it became apparent that not all Engineers register with ECSA. It is also a long process to eventually become registered and thus the Researcher thought it important to include an individual who is still in the process in the sample. Participants cited that ECSA registration adds no value in certain fields of Engineering, and the registration fees are relatively expensive. Thus, two participants were registered with ECSA, one intends to register in the near future, and two were not registered at all. Upon discovering this, the Researcher asked an expert in the field to clarify why not all Engineers are registered as 'Professional Engineers'. His input is seen below:

“As a graduated Engineer of 37 years in business it is my experience that you could either be employed as a professional Engineer or as a technical expert/business person using your Engineering qualification:

1. Professional Engineer – highly regulated

- Specific official legislation governing the rules & conduct*
- In this position the Engineer has a high responsibility towards society and plays a crucial role to ensure safety etc.*
- Factory Engineer – specific legislation*
- Consulting Engineer – specific legislation*

- *ECSA registration is clearly a must, like all other professional bodies*
- *Most typical types:*
 - *Civil Engineers*
 - *Electrical Engineers*
 - *Mechanical Engineers*
 - *Chemical Engineers*

2. *Engineer as technical expert / business person – not specifically regulated*

- *In this environment the Engineer is a normal employee or business person*
- *He works for technical companies as an expert and/or a career manager*
- *Incidentally he is an Engineer*
- *ECSA registration completely irrelevant his company which employs him will have a “factory Engineer” who takes responsibility for operations, the Engineer now is just a regular employee of that company*
- *Most typical types:*
 - *Industrial Engineers*
 - *Electronics Engineers*
 - *Software Engineers*

Anonymous Input

Defence Electronics

B. Engineer Electronics (Hons) 1981”

If an Engineer wants to be a manager, they often do not have to be registered with the professional body. The two Engineers who are not registered are coincidentally Electronics Engineers and they therefore had no need to register with the professional body. The Individuals who are registered or want to be registered are Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineers. The sample is thus representative of both sides of the Engineering profession spectrum as indicated in the extract above. It was also deemed important to interview a participant who was still in the process of gaining her hours in order to register. As she is still in the process of negotiating her professional identity, it was deemed important to gain insight from that perspective as well.

3.4.3 Description of Participants

The participants were given alias names of birds that the Researcher felt matched their personality as it came across in their case narratives. The participants are described as follows:

<i>Alias Name</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Career Stage</i>	<i>Engineering Field</i>	<i>ECSA Registration</i>
<i>Owl</i>	Black	Female	Establishment	Mechanical	Yes
<i>Dove</i>	Black	Female	Exploration	Undisclosed	Aiming to be
<i>Hawk</i>	Black	Male	Late Career	Electronic	No
<i>Blue Crane</i>	Black	Male	Late Career	Electronic	No
<i>Penguin</i>	Indian	Female	Late Career	Aeronautical	Yes

Owl is a Black female Mechanical Engineer in her late twenties. Despite being relatively young, she has experience in abundance and provided rich information. *Dove* is a young Black female who is in her twenties. She is in the exploration stage of her career and provides a different perspective from the other participants. *Hawk* is a Black Male in his forties. He has worked in numerous organisations and grew up in Soweto during the Apartheid era. *Blue Crane* is also a Black Male in his late forties. He grew up in an isolated area away from the city during the Apartheid era. He runs his own business which he started after gathering a lot of experience in both the private and public sectors. The last participant is *Penguin*. *Penguin* is an Indian Female in her late thirties. She is a mother of two. She has an abundance of experience in the public sector as an extremely technical Engineer.

The sample is limited by the fact that no coloured people were included. Another limitation is that certain fields of Engineering, such as Electrical, Industrial, Chemical and Civil Engineering, were not accounted for in the sample.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

For the purposes of this research study, In-depth, semi-structured interviews entries were used as a means to gather the data. In-depth qualitative research interviews were used to gain rich information about the feelings and the experiences of the interviewees (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), in-depth interviews are synonymous with qualitative research, and are one of the primary sources of data collection in such studies. According to Kvale (2006), during an in-depth interview the Researcher attempts to use a range of probes & other techniques to achieve depth of answers and increase the richness of the data. According to Qu and Dumay (2011), semi-structured interviews allow an interviewer to change the order in which the questions are asked, the style of the questions and the pace of the interview in a manner which will allow the respondent to provide the interviewer with a fuller response. Ultimately, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility that is crucial in order to gain rich in-depth information about the participant. The ability to probe for more information is very valuable in qualitative research because the Researcher wants to see the world from the respondent's point of view (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Foldy (2012), conducted a study looking at the construction of race and gender identities in organisations. A version of his method was used for the purposes of this research. The method involves asking the individuals that participate the question 'who am I? ', in ten different ways (Foldy, 2012). The individuals will then be asked to look at all those different answers and decide which of those are valued by themselves, and which are valued by the organisation.

As mentioned, a narrative approach to case studies was used. Narrative approaches to research provide a degree of openness. Because of this open and self-directed research approach, researchers often treat narrative interviews as "socially situated interactive performances" (Chase, 2005, p. 657). These performances are produced in a particular setting, for a specific audience and for a definite purpose (Chase, 2005). The focus is on the "narrative in the context of its telling" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 12). This takes into account the flexibility and variability of the interview setting itself (Squire et al., 2008).

The interviews were audio recorded. As is ethical practice for research in the psychological setting, highlighted by the HPCSA annexure 12, all information was kept confidential, and

the Researcher ensured to obtain formal written informed consent from all participants to participate in the research study. The consent form indicated that participation in the research was optional, and the individuals also consented to the audio recording of the interviews. Due to the original requirement for ECSA registration, the requirement appears on the consent form. It was only later discovered that the registration was not always necessary, but for consistency purposes the consent forms were not changed. For the purposes of the research, any confidential information (e.g. names of individuals, universities and organisations) were disguised in order to use the information for research purposes, as is ethical practice highlighted by the HPCSA document annexure 12.

3.6 RESEARCH SETTING

For the interviews, it was ensured that a quiet and private office was used, where the interview could take place without any interruptions. This also ensured that all audio recordings would be clear. Upon completion of the interviews, all interviews were fully transcribed by a professional transcriber.

The Researcher was closely assisted by the research supervisor throughout this research process. This was in order to ensure that the research questions were indeed being addressed. The supervisor assisted the Researcher in ensuring that the interviews were conducted properly and assisted in the data analyses.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

As a narrative approach to case studies was used for the purposes of this research, each individual's own data sets were analysed separately within the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis aimed to firstly explore individual experiences of each participant, in their own various contexts as these were narrated to the Researcher in the interviews. The narratives from the interviews were seen as verbal action, and are assumed to argue, complain, confirm, challenge, defend, entertain, justify, persuade and inform (Chase, 2005; Gabrield & Griffiths, 2004; Kohler Riessman, 2008; Squire et al., 2008).

Throughout this process, the Researcher was aware of the fact that the narratives that were being analysed were already constituted due to the process of interpretation by the participants themselves (Freeman, 2002; Kohler Riessman, 2008). Each participant's data was inserted into an Excel spreadsheet, where identity related experiences were classified under various contexts. These firstly included the socio-economic, political, educational and family context. I also included space for examples of Whiteness and Micro-Aggressions. In addition, spaces were added for serendipitous moments, the religious context, the social context, the cultural context and language. This was done to accommodate each individual's specific data sets. Based on this preliminary analysis, the Researcher wrote a case narrative for each individual participant. In these case narratives, key contexts, identity relevant events and examples of Whiteness and Micro-Aggressions were discussed. In the case of narratives, some references are made to a key moment directly correlated to an experience had by another participant, although at this point a proper thematic analysis had yet to take place. The aim of this step was to ensure that each individual case was explored in-depth (in line with the aim of a case study), in order to understand the participant's identity and how each context had regulated their identity. The Researcher also wanted to explore how the person, through identity work, had shaped a specific context, as it is in context that action is rendered meaningful (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ochs, 1997).

In narratives, the main focus is on the narrator's (the participant's) ability to state their own point and generate emotions (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). In order to achieve this, accuracy may thus be compromised (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). The narrator may focus on certain details about issues, and remain silent on other details that the Researcher themselves may find important. Narratives are thus considered to naturally contain certain imprecisions, lacunae, non-sequiturs, illogicalities, inconsistencies and ambiguities. For the narrator however "the truth of a story lies not in its accuracy but in its meaning" (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004, p. 155). During the analysis phase of this research, wherever there were aspects that were not always clear or seemed inconsistent, these were referred back to the participants in order for them to clarify the situation.

From the results of this analysis, are the case narratives for each individual. These are presented in Chapter four. These narratives contain key identity related events and experiences that are shared as they have been interpreted by the Researcher. The analysis

is based on careful consideration and significant engagement with the research supervisor. However, the interpretation presented in these case studies, is still one of many possible interpretations that could come from these stories (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004).

After the case narratives were written, the Researcher compared thematically across all five cases. The aim of this was to search for patterns across all of the cases in the form of a thematic analysis. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter five.

The thematic analysis took place by means of coding information under contexts for each individual. This aided the researcher in identifying the patterns and similarities across the case studies.

3.8 STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY & TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Wagner et al. (2012) trustworthiness in qualitative research can be likened to the terms' reliability and validity in quantitative research, and is vital in order to achieve ethically sound, meaningful research. Quality is essential for rigorous qualitative research. For the purposes of this research, the Researcher critiqued the quality of research using the criteria outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994).

3.8.1 Confirmability

According to O'Neil (2011, p. 14), confirmability involves confirming that "findings are reflective of the subjects and the inquiry itself rather than a creation of the Researcher's biases or prejudice". According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the focus is on ensuring that the conclusion of the research is dependent on the participant's view and not the views and biases of the Researcher. The emphasis here is on whether or not the research could be replicated by other researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Below, the Researcher critiques the confirmability of this research.

The methodology of this research is laid out in clarity, and thus if one wanted to replicate the research they could make use of the same methodology as laid out in this thesis. The Researcher has an audit trail which makes it extremely clear how the data were gathered

and analysed. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber and are available to be reanalysed should any other researcher want to conduct a reanalysis. The conclusions are an interpretation of the Researcher based on the case narratives given by the participants. Thus, it is possible that another researcher could have a different interpretation of the results. However, the results were discussed in detail with the research supervisor, along with other researchers who were conducting a similar study. Thus the interpretation has been tested before being finalised for the purposes of this research. The Researcher conducted a thorough reflexivity exercise as is outlined in section 3.7 below. Reflexivity has allowed the Researcher to reflect on her own possible biases in this research, and any assumptions, values and biases as well as how they could possibly have come into play during the study, are clearly outlined in the section.

3.8.2 Dependability

Dependability involves being able to be reasonably sure that findings from this study would be able to be replicated if they were conducted on the same participants in the same context at a different time (O'Neil, 2011). The question here is whether or not the study was consistent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Below, the Researcher critiques the dependability of this research.

The research questions or objectives are clear. The Researcher aimed to look at the impact of context, Whiteness and Micro-Aggressions on professional identity. The information was gained over multiple interviews and follow up sessions. Over and above this, the cases were sent to each participant as a form of member-checking. Here, the participants were able to read their own story and indicate whether or not the interpretation was in line with their experiences. This process ensures that the conclusions are dependable within the participant's context. Thus, if the research were to be conducted with similar participants in similar contexts the results should be more or less in line with what was found here.

3.8.3 Authenticity

According to Wagner et al. (2012), authenticity is a term that is used to address the activities that state that the findings that were found were in fact derived from the data that was collected. The question is whether or not the data can be seen as trustworthy. Below, the Researcher critiques the authenticity of this research.

Detailed case-narratives that were context rich and aimed at looking at the unique relationship between the participant and their own specific contexts were provided. The accounts of stories are plausible given what is known about the historical context in South Africa. For instance, *Hawk* mentions the many times protestors came and disrupted his classes in Soweto, incidents that are known to be true. In *Dove's* case, the fact that she was not exposed to any racial incident throughout her school career is inconsistent with the other cases. This is likely due to her sheltered upbringing. This explains the enormous change that was experienced between her first and second interview, where she realised that there was indeed active discrimination within the organisation.

3.8.4 Transferability

According to O'Neil (2011) transferability can be seen as the ability to generalise the findings of a study across all settings. According to Wagner et al. (2012) transferability is the starting point for making similarity judgements. The question is do the findings fit and how easily can we make generalisations based on these findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The characteristics of the original sample are clearly outlined enough to permit a degree of comparison with other samples. However, the sample size is rather small, and the nature of the study itself limits generalisability. There were some consistent themes across numerous cases, but some of the results are unique to each participant's own unique contexts. Thus, it would not be safe to say that all results apply to all Engineers of Colour in South Africa. However, it is possible to infer that the challenges and experiences outlined by the participants are being experienced by a large number of Engineers of Colour in South Africa and particularly in the industries and organisations from which these individuals are drawn. The Researcher sent each individual their cases narratives in order to ensure that they are authentic when looking at the participant's unique context. The findings of this research form part of a larger study and when correlating the data with another student who was also

researching the professional identity of accountants, as well as another student conducting the same study with Engineers, a lot of consistency was found. It must be remembered that all organisational contexts are different, and thus the transferability of the data is likely to be better in the same organisations or organisations of a similar context to the ones that were assessed in this research. The case narratives as provided in Chapter 4, provide thick description so that any reader can assess the generalisability of the case within their own specific context. In the recommendations the Researcher has outlined possible settings where the results of this research could possibly be tested further.

3.9 REFLEXIVITY

According to Bowtell, Sawyer, Aroni, Green and Duncan (2013), reflexivity is a key researching tool to promote ethical mindfulness. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) acknowledge that in social research, reflexivity is seen as an important part of the research process. According to Tracy (2010), the reflexivity process allows the Researcher to take a step back and assess their own biases and motivations. It involves asking the question “In what ways could I as a researcher have possibly influenced the research results”? In this section, the Researcher will refer to herself in first person, to give her account of the reflexive process that took place when writing this research.

When considering this research, a concern that was raised was the fact that I was White woman conducting research on the experience of historically disadvantaged individuals. I was not sure as to whether or not the participants themselves would be willing to share their experiences with me, perhaps they thought that there is no way I could ever begin to understand their reality, as I had never personally experienced it. This concern was short lived. My participants were wonderful, they were so open and willing to share their experiences. I put this down to the fact that I was there, willing to listen. I was asking them about experiences that many people do not know about or choose not to even acknowledge.

This topic resonates with me on a deeply personal level. I resonate with the topic because I myself am also part of a marginalised, stereotyped and stigmatised group. As someone who is part of the LGBTQ+ community, I myself have experienced Micro-Aggressions, homophobia and stereotyping. Whilst I am not exposed to the construct of ‘Whiteness’, I do resonate

with the concept. The context in which we live is heteronormative, thus I am held to that invisible standard, and when I break that norm it will consistently come as a shock to others. I also resonated with the concept of Micro-Aggressions as when my supervisor explained the concept to me, I could immediately give numerous examples of incidents where I had been exposed to Micro-Aggressions. For instance, when people find out that I am gay, they will often say “no, you are too pretty to be gay” or “it is just a phase”. These invalidations aim to nullify my own lived reality, and are examples of micro-invalidations. .

This whole process has allowed me to become more self-aware and also understand and reflect on my own White privilege. I grew up in a very privileged home with a Mother who was always there for me. She was there to take me to school fetch me from school and manage all my extracurricular activities. I went to a private school for my whole schooling career and always had support, both financially and emotionally, from my parents. This is in contrast to some of my participants, who generally experienced financial trouble and may not have had as easy of a schooling experience, or as quality of a schooling experience, as I had. Apartheid did generally leave most White families as relatively well off in comparison to Black families. Our financial stability aided me in the construction of my Identity as a professional. I believe that this is important because in order to understand the concept of privilege and how it can regulate identity, one needs to recognise their own privilege. I recognise that structural factors undoubtedly provided me with an easier path to success than that of my participants. This was not because of anything that I did and didn't do, it was simply because of the privilege that I had, the support my parents were able to give me and the schooling that I was provided with.

When my supervisor gave me the opportunity to do this research, I saw it as an opportunity to do something that will really make a difference in an area in which I took a great interest. A concern in research such as this is subjectivity, however when correlating my research with that of other students participating in the larger study, and sending the case narratives to the participants to check, it was found that there was a degree of consistency regarding the challenges and experiences of Black professionals in South Africa. Nevertheless, as qualitative research is by its very nature subjective, my own circumstances and personality could have had a subjective impact on the results.

The impact that this research possibly had on the participants is also a consideration that needs to be reflected on. Interviews are known to have a cathartic effect, and many of my participants mentioned that it was an extremely cleansing process to go through. One candidate informally told me that the process made her feel so much better, and that she was considering going to therapy because she realised how much better talking about all her challenges had made her feel. All participants were really positive about the study and were excited to see what the results were. Thus it can be assumed that the process was relatively cathartic for the participants.

3.10 RESEARCH ETHICS

The ethical conduct of a researcher when making use of interviewing as a research method creates trustworthiness of the study (Wagner, Kawulich, & Garner, 2012). When research is conducted, it is essential that the Researcher causes no harm to the participant, and ethically sound research should always ensure that the participant's human rights, according to chapter 2 of the constitution, are always protected (Hewitt, 2007). Ethical practices are important in research and there are many institutions all over the world that provide guidelines in this regard (Hewitt, 2007). In South Africa, the HPCSA document annexure 12 chapter 10 gives clear ethical guidelines for individuals in the profession of psychology to follow when conducting any form of research.

Procedural ethics aim to ensure that the research to be conducted conforms to universally recognised standards (Tracy, 2010). It is of vital importance to ensure that the participant has had the research explained to them in a manner in which they can fully understand, this meaning that the participants should understand the purpose, the process and the expected outcome of the research (Hewitt, 2007). The Researcher should then ensure that the candidate's written informed consent is obtained and in line with the practices of the HPCSA when recording audio interviews, ensure that the participant gives the written informed consent for those interviews to be recorded (Tracy, 2010). It is also of utmost importance to ensure that the participants' privacy and confidentiality is protected at all times, as according to the South African constitution, individuals have a right to privacy, and that right ensures that professionals conducting research ensure that they take reasonable steps to ensure that the participant's confidentiality remains intact at all times (Tracy, 2010).

The Researcher explained the research to the participants in a clear and concise manner. A presentation was created that contained the research question, definitions of the concepts and what the aim of the research ultimately would be. The participants' written consent to take part in the study was obtained and in that consent form they consented to the interviews being recorded on an audio recording device. To protect the confidentiality of individuals, names were changed and replaced with an alias name of a bird. The names of Universities and organisations were also removed, and the names of any personal friends, colleagues, family members etc. were replaced either with alternative names or with names such as "colleague" or "friend".

Situational ethics refer to certain practices that often emerge in the field (Tracey, 2010). Situational ethics views each circumstance as different, and aims at looking at if the moral good outweighs the moral harm. During the data collection, one participant became extremely emotional upon reflecting on her life. At that point, the tape recorder was turned off and the Researcher took a moment to de-brief the participant. The participant was reminded that the research was voluntary and that she could stop if she wanted to. The participant then chose to continue, but the Researcher believes that she acted in an ethical manner in this regard. This relates to relational ethics as well, which according to Tracey (2010) involves the Researcher ensuring that he / she does not exploit participants simply in order to get a good story.

Lastly, exiting ethics refers to how the Researcher leaves the scene and ultimately shares the results (Tracey, 2010). "Certainly, researchers never have full control over how their work will read, be understood, and used. However, they can consider how best to present the research so as to avoid unjust or unintended consequences" (Tracey, 2010, p. 847). The Researcher in conjunction with other students and the research supervisor gave a great degree of consideration as to how this research is presented in order to minimise negative and unintended consequences.

3.11 CONCLUSION

The Methodology of the Research study has been discussed in detail. The aim of this is to ensure that if any Researcher would want to conduct a study similar to that of this study

would be able to do so with relative ease. Ethical consideration have been highlighted to ensure the Quality of this research.

4 CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the Researcher will present the case narratives of each participant that took part in the research. The participants have been given alias names of birds in order to protect their identity and retain confidentiality. In these case narratives, key contexts, identity relevant events and examples of Whiteness and Micro-Aggressions are discussed. In the case narratives, some references are made where a key moment directly correlated to an experience had by another participant. The aim of this step was to ensure that each individual case was explored, in order to explore the participant's identity and how each context had regulated their identity.

4.2 CASE ONE – THE OWL

This candidate has been given the alias of an *Owl*. She struck the Researcher as wise and humble, but also fierce. She also does not seem to be one to act on an impulse and seems to think about things quite carefully. She also seems to be a rather self-aware individual.

Owl was born in 1992, and grew up in a town called Matatiele, a township situated on the border of the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal. She lived with her Mother, Father and Brother.

She attended a private primary school in Kokstad which was quite far from Matatiele. Both her parents were teachers, and placed a degree of importance on education. She states that she did not really realise how important education was until she got a bit older.

“And I think when I realised how much my parents were spending on education, was kind of like okay, I’m not just here for fun I have to actually do stuff.”

The realisation she had above was when she was in about grade 4, so relatively early in life she already understood that education was not just fun and games. This is a very young

age to already be considering the financial impact of education. It is likely an indicator that although she enjoyed a degree of privilege in terms of her education, it was at the great sacrifice of her parents to ensure that she was able to have that privilege. She stated that over and above realising the financial implications, she also wanted to perform well.

"I think it was that and also wanting to perform well and also that's when they started giving out awards and so. I don't think until that stage there was like a gauging of smartness. And then you realise you are like not top 3 and you're just like 'What?!'"

This realisation is significant because it presents Owl as an individual who wants to achieve, who wants to be the best and is willing to work hard to be the best. This is in fact the beginning of her formulation of a professional identity. Becoming a professional of any type requires a degree of hard work and persistence. Above everything it requires the will to achieve and the need to be the best. Therefore it is reasonable to argue that her achievement orientated mind-set was the start of her professional identity construction and negotiation.

She also realised very early on in life that Education is key to becoming independent and to succeed in life and her parents played a large role in that. She attributes a lot of her identity to her being intelligent as well, and emphasised how the search for independence played a key role for her in saying *"If I am smart enough I can be independent"*. On this topic, she made mention of how she grew up in a rather religious household, and attended a church that was rather Patriarchal and Homophobic. She made it clear that she did not enjoy the messages that were being portrayed at Church, and she began to realise how important her independence was to her.

"The church I went to is v-e-r-y like it's very old school and old testament-y and it's quite patriarchal, ja quite patriarchal and very rigid. And like so it's all the things that you hear from like conservative Christians. So it's the 'man must serve a woman' and uhm sorry the 'woman must serve the man'. - And the homophobia - And the like ja. I think what bothered me first actually before the homophobia and stuff when I got older, was the – ja was I think the patriarchal-ness in it and I was just like "no but I'm smart and I'm independent and I can do whatever [chuckle] I want. I don't have to serve anyone"

This is important as she attributes a lot of her identity to her independence and this incident in the religious context has played a role in shaping that need for independence. This is

when she decided that she needs to gain success in order to become financially independent as well. She was also keenly aware that money was not in abundance, as was mentioned earlier, so in essence she could not mess around with regards to her education, it was essential that she succeeded because there was unlikely to be a second chance.

She makes reference to how lucky she is to be in the position that she is in, stating that she knows many Black kids who were just as smart as her, but have not managed to achieve what she has achieved, stating *“you do not have money to go to a good primary school, and then uhm you can't get it, you know your English is not up to scratch to get into a good secondary school and like you know if you don't have money and the classes are crowded and the teacher does not understand why you don't understand something.”* It is clear that she sees herself as privileged to be in the position she finds herself in, and compares her context to that of many of her peers, noting that it has been so different for many of them. This educational foundation is the very basis of her professional identity. Thus, the fact that she has not dealt with the struggles that she describes others as having, to the extent to which they had them, has contributed greatly towards her success. She was able to go to a good primary school, learn to speak English well, get into a private high school and ultimately go to University and become an Engineer. Her parent's socio-economic circumstances set her up for success, or allowed her to even consider becoming a professional as a possibility. Money allowed her to go to good schools, go to University, and in essence allowed her to develop a professional identity. Owl has highlighted the importance of structural factors, such as money, in the construction and negotiation of professional identity.

In primary school, she was around a lot of White children and she was in fact the only Black girl in the school. It remained that way generally until she got to high school. She stated that she did at times experience herself as being 'different' from her class mates in terms of the degree of privilege.

“Uhm, I did it was I think it was a while until I noticed, but I always felt less-privileged. As far back as I can remember. I think I always felt less-privileged than my classmates. But that was on a point of view of just you know, these kids seem to have a lot of money kind of vibe.”

Despite this, she has grown up in a privileged context, with access to education and in doing so, possessed a degree of privilege herself. She said that despite this she did not feel excluded, at least not in the primary school stage. She grew up with the White children, and therefore felt that they had a lot of things in common, which is why we essentially become friends with people (because we have things in common). When the school then started implementing a diversity scheme, they brought in a number of children of colour from less privileged schools in the area. It was in this moment that she realised they were treating those children differently to how they treated her.

“They treated them differently to the way they treated me. And I remember thinking that it was maybe because I had grown up with them”.

The Researcher then asked for confirmation that it can be assumed that she believes they experienced her as one of them, and the new Black students as different, to which she responded *“Exactly”*. At this point in the discussion, the participant became emotional. She indicated that the other Black children were seen as the ‘other’ and she was seen as ‘one of the White kids’. The fact that she thinks back on this and gets slightly emotional can be seen as retrospective identity work. As she looks back on her life it is almost as if she realises just how much was structured around race. She grew up with White children, and when they were younger it was clear that they did not see colour. Later in life it only started to become a problem. At this point she also realised that the new Black students were treating her differently as well.

“So we’d all - some of us were even in pre-primary together you know. So, so that they remained my friends but like it was something that I noticed and I did also notice like the os—not ostracized - because we were still like very young, we didn’t ostracize but it was kind of a – like even the Black people were kind of like not including me because - of the way I was treated by the White people and like all the associations that come with that, you know. Like you speak a certain way, therefore you’re a – like a snob and - and why do you think you’re White – And all that kind of stuff.”

She stated that because she speaks in a certain accent that is associated with White English people, people often assume that she cannot speak the “venac”* languages. They assume that you speak only English. She stated that she often had to say that she does in fact speak Xhosa. She stated that after spending some time with the new students she believed they

eventually came to realise that she was a “*normal Black person*”. This is significant because Owl, as a Black, Xhosa woman, obviously identifies as such. However, she is confronted with people questioning her identity on a number of levels, leading her to feel the need to confirm that she can in fact speak Xhosa and that she is indeed a “*normal Black person*”. An amount of value is placed on accent and the fact that she speaks in a manner usually associated with White people, is leading her to be excluded by People of Colour on the basis of accent. She has to negotiate her identity and a place for herself in a situation where she is not accepted as being a ‘normal’ Black person because of her accent and education, but she is also not White. She almost is placed in a situation where she has to validate her own “Blackness”.

She tells of an interesting dilemma when using taxis in South Africa, although she states that she has not used the taxis very often. She mentions that due to her accent being associated with Whiteness and with a degree of privilege, when she is in a situation where she has to make use of the South African taxis, she actually changes her accent in order to sound ‘more Black’. She does this to ensure that she does not get into a dangerous situation, where she may be victimised due to her status.

“You go in there not wanting to sound ‘too White’, because that will draw attention to yourself, and uhm – ya so it’s ultimately to not draw attention to yourself and not make yourself an easy target if something were to happen. Uh cause if you sound like this, people think ah, you have lived a soft life. First of all you are wealthy, you have lived a soft life, you are not from the streets like as basic as that sounds. Uhm and everything so, in order to, ja to not draw any attention and to not come across this rich kid who is trying to you know.”

Interviewer: “So do you change your accent?”

“Ja you change your accent. Uhm, ja I think I was in a taxi with my brother once, and I was just like shhhh. His accent is so bad and everyone was turning around and looking and I was just like shhhh we will talk afterwards. And like saying (where to) stop, like usually you would say after the robot, is what you want to say so like after the next robot. But you say ‘afta robot’ (puts on ‘Black’ African accent), to uhm kind of sound like everyone else.”

This situation further indicates the dilemma that she is placed in. In the Black community, she is often trying to prove her ‘Blackness’ and is very aware and conscious of not acting or sounding ‘too White’. In the White community, her accent gains her a degree of privilege

and acceptance. However, she is still seen as a Black person in the White community and thus faces many challenges in that context as well. She is thus occupying a liminal space, which means that she is likely between or belonging to two different places or statuses. This is due to her having the characteristics of two different groups.

She then went to a Private boarding school for her high school years from grade 10 to matric. She was on a partial scholarship, so her parents had to incur some financial costs in order for her to go to this school. She stated that in her grade of one hundred (100) people there were only six (6) Black girls. In this instance she stated that it felt like the Black girls had bonded together, and in a way there was an element of "Black girls unite". She stated that they did not really have much in common, so they were not necessarily friends in the traditional sense, but instead perhaps because they were all Black. This is significant because in primary school she stated she had friends with whom she had things in common, but in high school the picture was slightly different. It was not that she was excluded by the White girls in high school, but she was inherently a part of the group of six Black girls. As she got older and her peers got older, they seemed to then become more aware of race, and then relationships seemed to start becoming structured around race where that did not necessarily seem to be the case for her before. This indicates that as she grew up, her embodiment began to trump having things in common when it came to relationships and friendships. The political and historical context forces relationships to rather be structured around race. She remembers that her roommate with whom she stayed was coloured, but 'White-Passing'. This in South African "Venac" means she looks White so no one would assume that she is coloured. She stated that she always noticed that they treated her differently from the other Black girls. In this context, the White girls' seemingly kinder treatment of the coloured girl because of her White embodiment is an example of Whiteness and even White privilege, because although she is in fact coloured, she still received favourable treatment from others simply because she is light skinned. Ow/ states that at times she felt that the White girls would be slightly friendlier towards the coloured girl than they were towards her. This could also be significant in terms of identity standards, this implies Whiteness is a standard to which all South African's 'should' aspire and the aim is to pass that standard. This is the essence of Whiteness, which describes White cultures and norms as invisible standards that everyone is measured against, which places anyone who does not fit within those standards at an immediate disadvantage.

Not attending University was not an option for Owl as her parents had gone to University and she had always wanted to go, it was always in the plan. This indicates that her identity was always shaped by education, and her family seemed to be extremely important in this regard, as they encouraged her to get an education. In fact they did more than just encourage her, as Owl mentions that going to University was always on the cards from when she was very young due to her parents' influence. When Owl first started looking at career choices, she had a Mathematician in mind because she really enjoyed maths. When she was in high school she opened a book of careers. She decided to just open and in the beginning of the book an aeronautical Engineer was the first option. She liked the concept and that is where the idea stemmed from. Engineering began to feel like a good fit for her, which was a form of professional identity work. She then looked at the modules that they did in first year and then decided that is what she wanted to do. She did at one point have an opportunity to do accounting because she went for Scholarship interviews with PWC. It was her Dad who stepped in and told her that she should rather do something that she loves and then she realised that she would rather choose Engineering over accounting. This is a significant moment and again highlights the important role her parents played in her education and ultimately in the construction and negotiation of her professional identity. Her Father gave her the agency to choose. A scholarship at PWC would certainly have been the easier option, but she was still given the agency to follow her dreams and desires, which was essential in the construction and negotiation of her professional identity.

Owl went to University in the year 2011. The University that Owl decided to attend was a long way from home, and thus she needed to stay in residence on campus. She says that the experience of this is one that she will never forget as compared to her high school where the facilities were not as nice and fancy and that in itself came as a shock to her. Growing up in the Eastern Cape and going to high school in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Owl had not had a lot of previous interaction with Afrikaans people. This was also a culture shock to her.

"It was 100% a culture shock because uhm that all happened I got dressed when they tell you to get dressed in your uniform to go downstairs for the first time and I never seen that many Afrikaans people in my entire life. That was – that was a very, very big shock – There are no Afrikaans people in KZN."

Afrikaans is a language spoken in South Africa. Generally, it is a language that many White people grew up understanding and speaking. Owl was unable to understand the language.

“And everyone was speaking Afrikaans and I was like there's that awkwardness of like when people are speaking another language and you walk in and you feel like you're disrupting 'cause now everyone needs to – (change)“

She remembers how she felt awkward around the Afrikaans people because if she would stand with them they would need to change the language, although sometimes they would not change at all which was even worse for her. The very fact that the people who were speaking Afrikaans did not change is an example of a micro-insult. They may not have known that she didn't speak Afrikaans, however it would have been easy for them to simply find out. She describes the fact that she cannot speak Afrikaans as a 'disruption', an inconvenience for others so to speak. This would have led to her feeling excluded from many conversations in her residence years and feeling like she could not necessarily make friends with people who are speaking Afrikaans. University is the time in one's life where you often build a network of relationships that will be carried over into the working world, and for *Owl* that feeling of being so actively excluded from conversations could have had a major impact on her identity work and the negotiation of her professional identity. She recalled that when she was younger, she and other children were not allowed to speak Xhosa in class as they were not allowed to exclude the other children who did not understand. She was raised in an inclusive culture and now all of a sudden was dealing with a culture of exclusion. She automatically felt 'different' from a large group of people and by so doing could lose out on many networking and knowledge sharing opportunities. She tells of how she ran up to the first Black person she saw and they became friends, simply because everyone else around them was speaking Afrikaans, subtly excluding them from conversations. She said that this really annoyed her.

In the first few weeks in res, she was confronted with an incident that made her feel slightly uncomfortable. The lady who was in the room next to hers invited *Owl* in for some tea (a double room – the lady that invited *Owl* in had a roommate as well who was not there at the time). Her roommate returned to the room and seemed to be in shock that *Owl* was sitting in their room on her friend's bed.

“And then when her roommate, oh my gosh [giggles] I have never seen someone so shocked like [chuckle] because I walked in and she told me like to sit on her bed. And like ja and I remember like a look of like shock it is like ‘Oh my gosh you are welcoming this person and you are letting them sit on your bed?’”

This adds to the feeling of exclusion that has already defined the experience of residence and University life for her so far. This left Owl feeling uninvited, but the incident also tells us a lot more about the South African context and the political context as a whole. This lady that was shocked to see Owl on her bed, likely grew up in an area where People of Colour and White people did not socialise on that level. Having a Black person sit on her bed is such a foreign concept that she actually was genuinely in shock that it was happening. That reinforces the theme of exclusion, racial stigma and 'othering' that People of Colour have to deal with on a daily basis in South Africa. It manifests in her feeling 'different' from those with whom she shares a home and with whom she studies purely because of her embodiment and the colour of her skin. This incident was validated in a follow up session with Owl, and she confirmed this feeling of exclusion and feeling 'different'. This has been a trend throughout her education, from primary school right up until University on various levels. The very fact that the norm made her feel different is an example of Whiteness. As we see later when Owl begins work, she continues to have negative experiences with regards to language, Micro-Aggressions and Whiteness, which seem to present as major barriers in her professional identity negotiation.

After University, Owl became an Intern Engineer at a relatively large company. She has remained there ever since. She mentions that the industry as a whole is White Male dominated, and the people in the organisation with critical skills have been there for 20-30 years. She recalls an incident when she was relatively new in the organisation, where she was following an older White Male who was providing her with instructions. After he had told her exactly what he expected her to do he turned around, looked at her and asked if she had any idea what he was talking about. She says that she really felt underestimated as he was talking about basic things that one learns in University. This was when she first started working, and she recalls thinking to herself "*oh is this what I can expect of the rest of my career*". It was not even a few days in and she was already feeling like others were underestimating her ability and it appeared that the underestimation was a form of micro-invalidation towards her. This assumed incompetence is a theme that is seen throughout most of the cases.

She mentions that in the organisation, there are a lot of older White people, a lot of young People of Colour, and not a lot in between. This is a statistic validated in figure 2. She specifically indicates that these organisational demographics create a problem with skills transfer. She mentioned in a follow up session that she had recently attended a meeting with

regards to skills transfer with some senior people, and was representing the younger people in the organisation. She stated that when she brought up the issue of skills transfer, there was no resistance from anybody that it was indeed a problem. Her question was, if it is so obviously a problem, why is nothing being done?

“So like asking uhm like a specialist whose been working for thirty years to mentor someone straight out of varsity you know, doesn’t work because there’s not that much patience and there’s so much – there’s too much catching up--to do in that. So that’s one of the problems. Uhm and another one of the problems is that uh is that I feel like it’s like the White kids don’t have as much of a problem and I kind of understand in the sense of [pause] uhm [pause] it’s human nature to be comfortable around people who are like you. Whether it’s similar background, also male, also White you know? Etc. etc. and so they seem to find mentorship.”

This situation says a lot about the historical and political context of South Africa. It should technically not be an issue for an older individual to mentor a younger one, but due to the history of structural oppression in South Africa and the culture of Whiteness in organisations, this does become a problem.

Ow/eludes to the fact that within the organisation it is difficult to find mentorship because of age differences, gender differences and also racial differences. She states that it is difficult to have a mentor that you do not have a relationship with, and that those relationships do not usually stretch beyond racial lines. This is due to the history of racial division in South Africa. She also states that it is human nature for people to group around those similar to them, in a sense indicating that she can maybe understand why things are like that. She states that she is aware that she is not getting the same mentorship opportunities as the younger White Males in the organisation, simply because she is a Black woman. She mentioned that there is a degree of assumed incompetence. The Black women do not get the ‘hard work’, because it is assumed that they cannot competently complete it. This could impact on her professional identity negotiation and identity work, because she is now not being offered the same learning opportunities as her White Male counterparts. She is unable to receive valuable knowledge and the transfer of skills from those who possess the critical skills in the organisation. This whilst some of her peers are managing to get access to these knowledge and skills, leaving her at a disadvantage. This is an example of Whiteness in the form of White privilege.

Apart from the issue of skills transfer, the issue of language appears to also be an issue in the organisational context, something that was prevalent in *Ow!*'s educational context as well. She highlights the same issue as she had in her University years, with regards to walking into a room full of people talking Afrikaans, them seeing her and not switching over to English.

“There’s also the feeling of walking into a group of people speaking Afrikaans and there’s that you know ‘are they going to continue speaking in Afrikaans?’ or now are you inconveniencing everyone because you’re there? – and it kind of hurts your feelings a bit when people just carry on - Almost as if you weren’t like there. Uhm and whether they do it intentionally or not with intent— like if they do it intentionally, you’re hurt- If they do it unintentionally, you’re angry at your lack of I don’t know, like observation [chuckle] or just thought [giggles]”

This is now the second time she mentions her inability to speak Afrikaans as an inconvenience to others. The fact that people speak Afrikaans in the organisational context is an example of Whiteness in itself. It is widely known that English is the common spoken language in organisations, and that not everybody can speak Afrikaans. *Ow!* felt that out of respect individuals should switch over to English when others enter the conversation. It should be that way regardless of colour. This impacts on her professional identity negotiation, because she mentions that this will happen in formal business meetings, especially when someone asks a question and they ask it in Afrikaans. *Ow!* will then inadvertently miss out on a degree of knowledge sharing because of the rest of the group excluding her and continuing to speak in Afrikaans. The mere fact that she is missing out on vital knowledge that is gained through knowledge sharing and simply overhearing conversations in meetings will have a huge impact on professional identity negotiation. It is easy to forget just how much knowledge gets shared in business meetings and in the corridors of our organisations, or even over lunch. It is reasonable to argue that the language barrier can cause one to miss out on vital information. Although it may be natural to switch over to your home language, English is the shared common language in South Africa and thus in the Organisational context it is reasonable to expect that everyone sticks to a medium where all can understand in order to ensure that no miscommunication happens. *Ow!* indicated that one is not always in the mood to say *“Hey guys, I literally don’t understand what you’re saying”*, eluding to the fact that it should be common knowledge and common decency to do so.

4.3 CASE TWO – THE DOVE

This candidate has been given the alias of a Dove. She was given this name because in the first interview she had just started working and displayed a relatively upbeat and positive attitude. By the second interview this attitude had indeed changed slightly, with her starting to notice more injustices, with hints that this may be because of her embodiment, within the work environment. It is questionable as to what impact these interviews had on this change in perception. The Dove is representative of hope and persistence in the face of hardship, something that is true to her story.

Dove was born in in the Gauteng region of South Africa and is in her 20s. She mentioned that she was in the same Catholic school from primary school until high school. She stated that the school had interesting demographics as 90% of the students were Black, but all of the teaching staff were White. She said that others would think it is an interesting dynamic, but to her, school was like a family.

“So the dynamic in that – I don’t know what other people would think, but it was – it was like a family type thing - and you actually didn’t see that as racial, you didn’t see the differences because all our teachers genuinely took us as their own children”.

Dove was not very elaborative around her primary school years but made mention of the fact that her parents were able to support her education financially up until around Grade 8, which was likely when she was 13-14 years old. Her mother was a professional and her father was a business owner. Thereafter, tough financial times hit their family, and she got a scholarship at the school to continue until Matric. She got a scholarship through a foundation that was rewarding those who did well in Maths and Science, which suited her perfectly.

“From grade 9 onwards that’s where the struggles started happening with their own business, so I got a scholarship”.

She was doing well in maths at school, and this helped her to gain accesses to the finances she needed to continue her studying. She stated that when her parents first got into financial

troubles, it hit her hard, she said that there were many times when she felt that there would be no food on the table that day, and her academics suffered especially at first. However she stated that she realised the only way to get herself and her family out of this situation was to be active at school, get a degree and get a job.

“The only way that we could get out of the situation is if I was active at school and got that right and then get your degree, get a proper job and then that’s how you change things - Not by letting it change you”.

This is an important realisation for her in the context of her professional identity negotiation. In essence she has realised that hard work can get her and her family out of these troubling times. Becoming a professional is associated with financial stability and so this stability and possible ability to look after her and her parents galvanised and motivated her towards becoming an Engineer. From the very beginning an enormous amount of pressure is on this very young lady’s shoulders. She had taken on the responsibility to get her family out of financial trouble when she was only a teenager. It is indeed a lot of responsibility for someone so young, and she stated that the pressure she felt to succeed was indeed immense.

She stated that she has had times where she wanted to give up, but her family and her teachers helped her refocus and not allow the situation to derail her. It is evident that her family played a big part in building her professional identity, as they ensured that she kept focus on her academics which was essential. Her teachers at school whom she also stated she was close to, also seemed to motivate her. It is clear that she had a good emotional support system, which helped her in dealing with troubling times financially.

She mentioned that school was a very sheltered and safe environment, and felt like a *“safe little bubble – of you’re all the same, the only thing that makes you different is how hard you work”*. The reference she makes to hard work is important, because hard work is what has gotten her to where she is today. This is not the last time that she mentions working hard, also stating that ensuring that she got a solid education was extremely important to her and this thus propelled her to work hard. She understood that if she did not work hard, she would lose her scholarship and would not be able to finish Matric at that school.

*“Uhm ja, so I did Maths, Physics, Science all the things to be an Engineer and basically it was – was basically me trying to make sure that I kept the scholarship bars. If I don’t have a scholarship then I’m not at that school anymore and to be honest the only way that you could get a solid foundation, so you don’t drown in varsity, is if you are in a school that has best of the best teachers and that’s what you found in the private schools that Model C schools. So that really pushed me and propelled to be like the best that I could be, matriculated top of my class. And then that allowed me to get a scholarship for my first year at *anon University”*

It appears that very early on in life *Dove* realised that hard work and dedication were the only things that would get her into University. Despite the fact that she acknowledged that she worked extremely hard, when prompted by the Researcher she also made mention to the fact that things also just came naturally to her.

Researcher: “Did you find that you had – that you worked really, really hard or does it just come naturally to you?”

Dove: “It was half-half. There's some things where I just understood them faster and then there are other things where you generally have to work harder.”

Obviously, she has a degree of natural talent that allowed her to do so well academically. This is something that is rather serendipitous in the sense of her professional identity negotiation, an indication that if you are smart enough and you work hard enough you can achieve your goals and become a professional.

Dove previously mentioned that it was important for her to retain her scholarship, because her parents could not afford to pay for her education, and she wanted to get the best education possible. She thus stated that for her it was important to know how to balance what was going on at home with her studies.

“It was just the balancing act of trying to separate the work that you have to do with school versus the things that are happening at home - then you just have to just stay focused. So I

guess that's where the "work hard" bit would come in, just keeping out distractions but work – itself was pretty natural"

Revisiting a previous quote from *Dove* where she mentions that school was like a safe bubble, the Researcher felt it important to ask when it was exactly that she realised she was in a bubble, and when that bubble was possibly burst. She stated that it was when she was in Grade 11, when she went on a school camp. She said that it was a leadership camp and made mention of the fact that everyone was very different, and that in turn made her believe that she was different to others.

"And you just uh pretty much realise that people are very different and like it made me realise how different I am, I guess".

This was the first time that *Dove* experienced a feeling of 'otherness', which could lead her to believe that she was different, perhaps, from the supposed norm, especially in that context of the school camp. She states that she was at this camp and the other students were all from top private schools, and generally most of them were White. When prompted on why she felt different she said it was to do with race and also possibly class as they were all from very fancy schools, and she just felt like she simply did not fit in. She stated that she and her fellow classmate were actively excluded by the other children who were White. She said it was clear they were excluding them, and mentioned that the whole experience was a major culture shock. This active exclusion could be viewed as a form of Micro-Aggression, a micro-assault to be more specific. This type of Micro-Aggression can be characterised by avoidant behaviour. Avoiding others based on race led her to experience a feeling of 'otherness' that she describes as having burst her bubble that she is the same as everyone else. Despite this culture shock, she said that her parents ensured she did not put all White people in the same box, reminding her that her teachers were White and that they cared about her deeply. This is significant because despite the fact that she seemed to be actively excluded based on race in this context, she did not allow this to tarnish her perceptions of an entire group of people.

"Because I will be honest, there was a moment where I was like "Oh okay so this is how White people really are" - But then they (her parents) reminded me that more than 90% of

my teachers are White - And they loved me – genuinely - So just because a certain pool is like that, it's not – it's not really the race, it's the personality of that person. - So they instilled that in me and I tried to see it that way. That when I interact with a person if you treat me a certain way, I'm going to attribute it to your personality”

Throughout *Dove's* story she mentions that her parents are important to her and that they played a big part in her success. She structures a large part of her identity around their influences on her. They also played a large part in how she sees race. Although her parents lived in the Apartheid era, they tried as much as possible to instil in her the belief that White people are not all racist. They were obviously natural influencers on her, as is seen in the quote above. She even goes as far as saying *“I owe every success I have so far to them”*, mentioning that being a Daughter is a key part of her identity. Thus, it is understandable that they played a big part in her decision to ultimately become an Engineer, having mentioned it to her since she was three years old.

“My dad sang that song a lot “You Are Going to Be an Engineer” and I liked the sound of it so like “Okay, cool going to be an Engineer””

Her family did more than encourage her, they in fact did not give her much of a choice. Luckily, her personal desires and her parents' wants for her coincided. This choice was the factor that aided her in becoming the Engineer she is today. She also mentions that a friend of her cousin is an Engineer, which also helped her in making her decision. At her school, there was a degree of career guidance as some of the teachers had people come to the school to talk about careers and she heard about Engineering on that day as well. She mentions that she liked the sound of being an Engineer, and when asked to describe herself, she listed being an Engineer as one of her key identification factors. It is clear that for her she has worked hard for the title and strongly identifies with that.

After *Dove* had decided to become an Engineer she went to University, and this was funded by a scholarship. She stayed at home throughout her University years and her parents drove her to University every single day. This act again highlights how deeply involved her parents were, and still are, in her professional identity development. She states however that this

constant protection and sheltering that they were exposing her to eventually lead her to become rather frustrated.

“I’m still at that point where “Just tell me, I know there are problems. Don’t hide it from me” but they still – they still want to put me in that bubble again.”

Dove’s parents obviously tried to shelter her from harsh realities. She still seems to believe that they do so even to this day. This act of sheltering, whilst normal when children are young, is significant in this context. Due to South Africa’s Apartheid past, and with her parents growing up in Apartheid being exposed to clear racism themselves, they are clearly trying to protect her from experiencing the same things that they have been through. After she had finished her University years, her mentors chipped in to help find her a job. She got a job and now works within the mechanical field of Engineering.

The job she is currently in is her first professional role, and it was interesting how her perceptions changed slightly from when she was first interviewed to her second interview which was roughly around two months later. She did state from the start that the organisational culture was indeed very Afrikaans, and that she felt that the culture takes some getting used to.

“So that was a bit of a culture shock, but it’s actually quite easy to integrate into it because people there are – they – they genuinely want you to know what they know”

In the first interview, she seemed to be upbeat about the organisation. She described the environment as a place where learning was easy and everyone was very helpful. She stated that people are very willing to answer questions and that she felt she really was learning a lot. However, she says the language barrier really does play a role, and there will be times when she is standing in a large group and then all of a sudden everyone will switch over to Afrikaans and then she feels that they are just assuming she understands or assuming that she doesn’t. She also stated that there were very few women around which was the other culture shock. Despite that, she stated that whilst it was a culture shock, she believed it was something that she could easily integrate into. This in contrast with the second interview, where she realised that fitting in to the culture of the organisation is not as easy as she

thought. She realised that getting used to this may be tougher than anticipated. She states that she can at times go the whole day without speaking to anyone, which undoubtedly makes her feel isolated

“So there will be a group of you and then all of a sudden someone switches to Afrikaans. I feel like it’s either they’re assuming that I understand Afrikaans or they’re assuming that I don’t understand Afrikaans. And if they’re assuming I don’t, then why switch to Afrikaans? In assuming that I can, why have you assumed it?”

This experience of the organisation is in contrast with her experience in the educational context. In her foundation education and even throughout University her experiences indicate that she was never really exposed to situations that made her feel isolated and uncomfortable, because she always had her family and her teachers there. But now in the organisational context, the contexts of the South African organisational landscape are very different from the sheltered environment of her schooling years.

She states that even though she does understand Afrikaans, she finds it frustrating because she feels that it is common courtesy to involve as many people as possible in a conversation. She states that she would not necessarily speak Zulu so why are the White people speaking Afrikaans. She also noted that sometimes it could be the case for people who do not understand, that they will actually miss out on valuable information simply because of a language barrier. However, in her second interview she said that it has started to become more apparent, stating that things are just ‘easier’ for her White colleague that is on the same level as her, because socially her White colleague simply adapted to the environment faster. Her White colleague also has an advantage because if everyone is talking Afrikaans her White colleague simply understands, whilst she first has to sift through the information and try to understand fully. She mentions that this was a big stumbling block. At this point she says she is not yet comfortable telling people that they are being rude, because she is still too junior. This is an example of Whiteness in the organisation. It can also be seen as a micro-insult, because they are making her feel excluded by talking in a different language. Whether this is known or unknown to the perpetrators is obviously unclear. This is undoubtedly impacting on her development as a professional as she misses out on various information that gets communicated within the work environment. Despite this however, she feels powerless

to say anything. As mentioned above, she believes she is powerless because she is too junior. It says a lot about the environment. Even if she is too junior, there should be other channels to follow to rectify the situation. It speaks to the same problem that many other participants face regarding language and missing out on crucial information in the work environment.

Apart from feeling that she is unable to understand at times, she also believes that skills transfer is a problem. She states that her White colleague is very hands on and her mentor gives her a lot of opportunities. *Dove* on the other hand has yet to be given an opportunity to be as deeply involved as her colleague. Because of this she feels that she has to put in extra effort just to feel like she is on the same page as the rest of her colleagues.

Interviewer: "How much more effort do you have to put in to learn?"

Dove: "A lot, a lot of effort. Like I'm – so basically my – my learning strategy ever since has been to go as deep into research as possible. So I'm constantly researching things and then I go and ask if there are things I do not understand. Rather than 'here is the information, this is what we are working with and then you can sift through that'. So it's – like I'm double-working ja."

This is an interesting realisation and speaks to a topic that has been noticeable throughout the research, and that eludes to the sense that Black individuals seem to have to work twice as hard as everyone else in order to achieve the same amount of recognition. It is almost as if they are, metaphorically speaking, starting one hundred (100) metres behind everyone else despite having the same skills and attributes.

In a third follow up discussion with *Dove*, she stated that she had now started to prove herself within the organisation, stating that they slowly started to realise that she is competent and capable of completing tasks.

"With every task that I completed, I started being seen more and more as someone who can add value to the team."

She stated that whilst her colleague was automatically accepted as competent, she had to prove herself. There is an assumed competence when it comes to White people and assumed incompetence when it comes to People of Colour. This is seen in other cases as well. She mentioned that realising such a thing really exhausts you as a professional. She felt that she was not being accepted for her personhood, but purely because of what she can do for the team.

“It’s exhausting, you are not sure if you are being accepted because of what you can do for them or because of who you are as a person.”

Acceptance she feels is based purely on capacity to add value, where as her White colleague was accepted based on personhood.

On the topic of language, she noted that her English accent is quite well developed and she speaks as if it was her first language. This entices a degree of Micro-Aggression, in the form of micro-insults, as she said that often People of Colour will comment that she speaks like a White girl.

“And they – well there’s this conception that if you speak English well, that means you can’t speak your own language, then there are situations where now you get – [sigh] okay victimize is a strong word – but there is some sort of animosity from other Black people that “Ah you’ve forgotten your culture, you’ve forgotten your tradition”. Yet, I can speak my language in African languages, but now because I speak English in this way they think is better than them.”

In this quote above, she faces a bit of a dilemma. She obviously identifies as a Black woman and that is how she is embodied, however, her accent is reminiscent of that of a White person and thus other People of Colour question her 'Blackness' because of her education and her accent. She says this makes it difficult for her to decide where exactly it is that she fits in.

“It’s kind of – it’s hard to decide where you fit in. If there’s a group of White people, a group of Black people – like okay, I go the White guys then my race is what makes me different, if I go to the Black guys then my accent is what makes me different.”

She does not belong in the ‘White’ group because of her body and skin colour, but her accent makes her different from the ‘Black’ group. There is a sense that she feels a sense of ‘not belonging’ to any group, which leads her to occupying a liminal space as is seen with other participants.

Now that she is working, Dove mentioned the phenomenon of Black graduates in South Africa supporting their parents and their families. In other words, the money that they now make is not only for themselves, and she mentions that she is actually *“starting at a negative”*. This phenomena has colloquially been given the name of ‘Black tax’. It is important to state that some People of Colour are unhappy with the label ‘Black tax’. Some participants do not see this as a burden, they rather see it as a privilege. They are more than happy to help and support their family. Others however feel taxed by the situation, because it is not only parents that are in need of financial support, it is cousins, aunts, uncles and siblings.

“So if I put it in perspective, I’m starting at a negative - So anything that I earn, is going to be going to patching up what is behind me - So even though I’m an only child from my direct parents, there’s still my cousins to take care of, there’s still my aunts and uncles that were helping us and then we directly need to cover accommodation, need to cover transport and food and things like that”.

It is interesting because individuals who come from more privileged homes and backgrounds would not experience this and thus, Dove is starting behind her White colleagues who are generally more privileged than she is. She has gotten to the point where she has the same job, the same qualification and the same salary as her White peers, but yet is still experiencing a disadvantage due to the historical contextual factors that have resulted in general disadvantage for People of Colour in South Africa. It is an example of how this disadvantage is so far reaching, even 24 years after Apartheid ended.

4.4 CASE THREE – THE HAWK

This candidate has been given the alias of a Hawk. He presents as someone who, despite having a fierce side to him, is also calm and gentle. He was someone who always stood up for what he believed in.

Hawk was born in 1974 in Johannesburg South Africa. One of the first statements that Hawk made in the interview process, is that when he first heard the story of his birth, he was told that his Dad got arrested on the way to witnessing the event. He had gotten arrested because he did not have his passbook with him and thus missed the birth of his son. The passbook was an identity document that needed to be carried around by mainly Black individuals during the Apartheid era in South Africa. The book, a form of internal passport, severely limited the movement of the holders of the document and allowed the government to track the movement that they did make. Hawk was exposed to forms of racial discrimination from the minute that he was born as discriminatory racial laws stopped his own Father from witnessing his birth.

He stated that he spent a large part of his school years in Soweto, and only really ventured outside of Soweto in 1990. His schooling years were filled with unrest due to riots and protests in Soweto, and he tells of occasions where he and his classmates were told to pack their books and go home in the middle of the day.

“The rioting – we were boys then but it affected us a lot because during school hours, you see guys coming in, into class and saying eh “Pack your books go home”.

He further eludes to the fact that he grew up in a community that was hostile and did not really contribute in a positive manner towards the development of a professional identity and an identity that would bring success. Despite this, he was able to move along and achieve what he did, which was to become an Electronic Engineer.

“I’m glad I turned out this way, by God’s grace, I really - Most of my friends also, they – some are employed, some have made something out of themselves but - some have died but I [stutter] that period that we grew up, was, was actually very painful. You had the social and you also had the political. The social was harsh but the political made it even worse because where I grew up, I mean alcohol and drugs was not even there, we never had a drug problem. Alcohol, alcoholism was there, people entertained themselves that way. And you know when people get drunk, knife stabbing and all that. That we had a lot of.”

Hawk's memories of his foundation education are filled with violent protests and riots that were caused by the racially based political unrest that was present during that time. As human's, events like these leave a permanent mark on our memories. It is also clear that these protests would have severely disrupted *Hawk's* education as he and his classmates were told to pack their books and leave in the middle of the day. This highlights the impact that the socio-political context at the time had on his educational context in the foundation phase. He insisted that the things he saw were too awful to share in detail, and stated that he, his colleagues and his parents should probably have received '*Psychiatric*' treatment as a result of witnessing these horrible events. Thus this experience had obviously harmed him psychologically. He places a lot of thanks for overcoming these hardships to the grace of God, and mentions that his parents prayed for him and encouraged him. Throughout his story he gives God a lot of thanks for his success and eludes to being a dedicated born again Christian.

After this traumatic foundation phase of his education, his parents then decided it was important that he do his matric in Central Johannesburg, and he therefore went and completed his matric at a College. This was a private school and his parents likely sent him there to overcome the turmoil that was present in the townships at this time, as well as the poor schooling that was associated with township schools. He recalls this being the first time that he had to start conversing in English on a daily basis from morning until night. This is an interesting moment for *Hawk*, as throughout his story language and understanding are significant themes. He indicated that when he was already around 17 years old, this was the first time he needed to converse in English on a daily basis. It also says a lot about the time that *Hawk* grew up in, as he was only ever expected to converse in English from 17. English would become the language that he studied Engineering in and conversed in professionally from that moment.

When deciding on what to study, *Hawk* indicated that he always thought he would be a systems analyst, a designer or something that eluded to creativity in combination with technology. His Dad always said he should be an Engineer or a Doctor because he was good at Science and Maths, and did not like the idea of him studying a teaching or arts degree. Therefore, *Hawk's* decision was swayed slightly through the influence of his father. His mother was an academic herself and was a school principal, which further encouraged him to learn and study. These factors in the family context played a huge role in encouraging *Hawk* to begin the construction of his professional identity. He also mentions that he made

use of the University's formal data base of careers which likely aided him in deciding on the career path to take. This is a more formal type of career guidance that not all other participants had the opportunity to engage in.

He registered to study at a University in Gauteng in 1992, originally wanting to do medicine. However the University said he lacked the points that were needed to get into the program, and Engineering was then his second choice. Interestingly, he states that by his third year at University, 70% of Historically Disadvantaged students had dropped out or were not succeeding. He says that he managed to get his degree, and was one of only 10 Historically Disadvantaged students that finished out of the 58 that had started.

“But what I think always is something that I take note of, is it's by the grace of God. There were about 58 of us, about 58 of us. Of the 58 students, I was one of the only ten – ten students that finished.”

This statistic indicates that although Historically Disadvantaged students were admitted to study, they were not completing their degrees, emphasising that *Hawk's* success that he has today is not something that was easy to come by and he had actually almost overcome the odds by not only going to University but also graduating. The reasons for this are widespread, however *Hawk* did mention that the low success rate had a lot to do with structural oppression and the fact that the White students got a degree of support from both their families and lecturers that the Black students never had. This is an example of White privilege, where the White students experienced an easier time at University than the Black students.

His father had agreed to pay for his first year of University, and told him that he cannot afford to fail as he can only pay for one year. He then passed his first year and managed to get a bursary which eased the financial strain on him. This indicates that *Hawk* was placed in a position early on in his University career where the only option was to succeed, because if he had failed he would not have gotten a second chance. After he received the bursary he went through a bit of a rough patch in his University career. He tells of a close personal friend who had committed suicide around his third year. His friend was in University with him, and stated that life as a Black University student in South Africa at that time was just too much for him to bare. This is significant in the sense that so few People of Colour actually made it through the Engineering program at the University. This is purely speculation, but

for this context to have been a contributing factor for a young man to take his own life highlights how evidently tough the situation really was for People of Colour at the time.

“He committed suicide because eh [pause] He – He argued (that) we- we suffered enough in where we grew up. And he felt that we could do a breather at varsity, but it proved to not be the case. Uhm in his eh argument, uhm he even wrote a letter to his mom, he said he’s sorry but life is unfair. But before that, he used to share with us that no, no, University is unfair, we work six times as hard as everybody else. And [pause] ja it - It was actually harsh, it was very hard.”

His friend’s reason for taking his own life touches on a subject that is very evident throughout Hawk’s University story. This is the fact that he and many Historically Disadvantaged students, believed that they needed to work a lot harder than the White students just to pass. As well as having to deal with a personal loss, he states that he had also started to get involved with various student movements on campus. He stated that the reason he had first gotten involved with the movements was because he was boycotting the institution. He said that whilst at this time in history they were no longer separating races in terms of having different classes and different toilets, it was still clear that the White students were simply provided with more support than the Black students were. This support was not only of a financial nature, it seemed that the White students got certain privileges when it came to working with lecturers and getting certain tips that would help them as well. He stated that the White students met with the lecturer’s often after hours and would get tips for the assessments and examinations that not everyone would be provided with. He stated that the White classmates had no problem sharing the information, but stated that the Black students believed that the lecturers had decided to oppress them in a systematic manner.

“if you just looked, you will never see that until you actually got to the core of the problem and started asking most of us as Black students what was happening and you would - all of us, we believe that there was a systematic, very subtle thing that was orchestrated behind the scenes”

This is an example of Whiteness as well as a degree of institutionalised racism. The systematic exclusion of the Black students in an almost subtle manner gave the White students an unearned advantage, leading to the White students having an easier time than the Black students. The bias of the lecturers was not the only thing that worked against the Black

students. *Hawk* also speaks about when he realised just how much support his White colleagues got from their family, a support that his family simply could not financially afford to give him.

“We would go to the homes of some of their – our White colleagues. And for the first time actually, you realized how supportive their [chuckles] fathers were. I mean one parent was – he would actually give us all the equipment we needed which we would actually have to buy but he – and he took pride in his son doing Engineering. They didn’t want his son to struggle”

This is an example of *Hawk’s* socio-economic context being a major barrier to the development of his professional identity. His White colleagues simply had things handed to them and things just came easier to them than it did to the Black students due to the unearned privilege that their ethnicity had provided them. Socio-economic privilege, systematic oppression and Whiteness can thus be a contributing factor as to why less Black students managed to finish their degrees in comparison to the White students.

Hawk was involved in student movements to protest to the unfair institutionalised racism, high tuition and accommodation fees and other financial problems which were mainly experienced by the Black students. He indicated that his involvement in these student movements, which would cause him to miss class, was a major contributing factor as to why he failed his third year. The unrest on campus and “battles” by students with the police were one of the cornerstones of the struggle for freedom in South Africa at the time. As a result of his involvement in the student movements, he almost lost his ability to qualify professionally. He was suspended from University and was not allowed to carry on with his studies until he submitted a motivational letter as to why he should be allowed to continue. Thus, he submitted the letter and once he was permitted to return to the University, his attendance and performance were then monitored very closely by the University.

“I then registered and then I was put through a – another observation process where all of us, when you have failed, they allocate one of the senior lecturers that you -almost like prison. Every week you go sign uhm attendance, you also furnish your progress in terms of what happened during the week and what your performance was marks-wise.”

This is a significant moment for him because he was given a second chance to get his education back on track. However, it is also important to realise how tough it was being a Black student at the time. He was overcoming the odds and actually pushing through to get

his degree in a situation that was not necessarily favourable for him to do so. This required a degree of resilience. After getting his educational career back on track he unfortunately failed his final dissertation. He then approached a Professor who told him to go and redo the research over the December summer holidays.

“So I went to and I once again, God has been [pause] merciful. I went to see ‘a Professor’, that man God bless him I think probably he’s dead now – during November you got your results. So during December holidays, I sat down and I said but before they shut down, God said “Go speak to this man”. And I got there and he – he said you realize we are about to close? And he said “What is your problem?” and I said “Sir” I explained to him. And he treated me like a son. He wasn’t a dean..... He said “No sit here and listen to me”. And he said “You know what? I’m going to do this for you. During this December go away, do your dissertation again, and by January come back, give it to me and I will review it and will submit it”. And I did exactly that. So my December that time was - I forgot about all these other things, I was busy doing it. And I went back to him, gave it to him, he submitted it and I passed with some I think C or sixty something, seventy something. And then – then I was free from the University”

He mentions that this Professor treated him like a son. He contrasts this with him acting like the Dean of the faculty. This highlights that in any system there are individuals who can make a difference as this Professor did for *Hawk*. In *Hawk’s* educational context, this Professor’s ability to give him a chance saved him from the cost of having to repeat another year in order to get his degree.

After this, he managed to graduate and start his career as an Electronic Engineer. *Hawk* stated that he was the first Graduate from this University in his entire community - thus it emphasises the general disadvantage that people from that community had. *Hawk* stated that a huge driver for him was the fact that he always thought Engineering was a career that was ‘sought after’.

“I actually found that during my years of study, being known as one of the Black Engineers was a driver – even when I graduated, I always thought Engineering it means [chuckle]– it’s one of the most sought after careers.”

Whilst in school leading up to his graduation, he mentions that he and his friends were talking about plans to buy cars and do things that they have always been unable to do, due to the financial constraints that they have had to deal with for their entire lives. This is the more

personal side of a professional identity, exploring the benefits that come along with that. A professional is someone who generally makes a good living for themselves, and thus once one is a qualified Engineer, it is obvious to expect life to get better from a financial point of view.

After graduation, he went and worked for the company that had offered him his bursary. Usually the condition that comes with a bursary is that you work at the company for a set period after you graduate in order to repay them. He needed to work for them for two years. So he worked there from 1997-1998 and then he wanted to leave and so he left. However he then later found out that they had Blacklisted him because he left before the end of his contract. They indicated that because he failed his thesis, he could not produce his certificate in 1997 and thus actually needed to work in 1999 as well, according to the company. *Hawk* stated that the work environment is what actually drove him to leave the company. He said that he felt his boss was actively favouring his White colleague over him. He stated that his colleague would be given a laptop, an office and all these responsibilities and when *Hawk* asked what he could do, his boss told him to go sit with the technicians. He then sent him out to a sight where the low skilled technicians worked and said that he needs to go out and understand their culture so that he knows what to base his design work on one day. He thought this was very unfair as his White colleague was not being asked to do the same. He said he felt so helpless in this moment.

*“And I – as you can imagine, I didn’t know what channels to utilize, I just was very grumpy, very angry. I thought this guy is a racist. And I asked him “Why are you treating *my White colleague* different from me?” He say “No, I mean we have decided this is what he does. You we have a different plan for you”. I was not pleased and I resigned. And when I left, he instituted punishment to get me Blacklisted”*

This is an interesting moment for *Hawk* as his first experience in the occupational and organisational context has been clouded by racism and unfair treatment. This is an example of Whiteness at the organisational level and how work is structured to benefit White people, and systematically disadvantage People of Colour. White people are given the good and exciting work, whilst People of Colour are given the dead end jobs. This is a trend in the number of cases, where it seems common practice to not give ‘difficult’ work to People of Colour because there is a degree of assumed incompetence. It is an example of how the work environment in the South African context gets structured around race. From the start

he identified that he was being treated differently from his White colleague. Again the metaphor of starting one hundred (100) meters behind his White colleague provides context to how this impacted on him. These opportunities were simply not afforded to him, due to the unearned ethnic privilege that his White colleague had. As can be imagined, the fact that he was not participating in higher level work meant that he was not developing as a professional at the same rate as his White colleague. On top of this, he seemed to be rather isolated throughout this ordeal. He mentions that he did not really have a network of Engineers or people he could turn to for advice. He also had no channel to take up his grievance with and was thus rather vulnerable. Thus, he dealt with these issues in a degree of isolation.

After he left this company he moved on through a few jobs and said the treatment was better and he started to learn. Now he is currently a manager at an Engineering company in South Africa. He states that he had issues when he first started at the company. *Hawk* recalls that he never really got support, never really got taught what they were doing, and it was strange for him because there was a White lady who was also working there who was not really an Engineer, but they hired her and showed her the ins and outs and always gave her support that he would not necessarily get. He said that when he first started he spent 6 months reading pages and pages of documents just to understand the work. Today, he has been at his current organisation for 6 years. In his current organisational context, he says that people often interpret him as being simply an Employee Equity employee. This is an example of Whiteness. It is an organisational practice that negates his professional identity. In labelling him an 'Employment Equity Employee', he is being stripped of all his competence and professional credibility and labelled purely on the basis of his race alone. That is, someone who was hired just to up the organisation's numbers when it comes to People of Colour, especially in managerial and supervisory roles.

"They would say ja, this one is also one of those to make the numbers. I was the only one Black guy in my – in – amongst twelve White guys that worked in our section."

He further eludes to the reproduction of Whiteness within organisations, by explaining that managers often hire White people to 'protect' themselves. There is a fear of hiring someone that is automatically assumed to be 'incompetent' simply based on their skin colour. The managers want a degree of comfort and thus prefer not to 'risk' hire Black individuals for fears that they may be incompetent.

“And also you must consider, I think there is a need for – guys are saying, those who appoint might just argue “I need to – I need competent people, because my appointment represents me. If the guy doesn’t do well, it means I failed”. So they would like that comfort level.”

Therefore when a Black person is hired, again people think it is just to make up the numbers, having a preconceived idea that People of Colour are already incompetent. Thus, when a Black person comes into the organisation, instead of starting on a blank slate, they already need to prove their competence, instead of being given the benefit of the doubt. As one can imagine, this type of label again means that he is already on the back foot before he has even started, and because his colleagues think that he is there just to make up the numbers, he seems to need to work harder than others to prove that he is in fact qualified, skilled and capable of performing in such a role.

“Now interestingly enough, the first few months I felt this I needed to – to – push myself to prove that I wasn’t just called here to make the numbers. [stutter] I really felt [chuckle] I had to and luckily today, I don’t really have to and I certainly don’t also become complacent but it was a painful experience -”

He elaborates further by saying that because he is in a position of leadership, he often feels invalidated because people will speak Afrikaans and he is the only one that does not understand.

“- in that in meetings you can imagine, you are a senior person or supposed to be leading. People don’t listen to you, they speak Afrikaans it was their place and I thought-“

The Researcher interjects “I was going to ask is it (the company) very Afrikaans?

“It is very Afrikaans. And I didn’t understand it. I didn’t understand it. I mean I don’t know – I don’t speak Afrikaans. Why do you converse in Afrikaans with me? Even when the guys were advised “Look be careful guys to accommodate, we are a multi-diverse multi-racial company”, guys will still not do it.”

For *Hawk*, the fact that he now cannot converse in the same language as his colleagues has become a barrier for his professional identity negotiation. The fact that he cannot understand what people are saying in meetings whilst he is in a position of leadership undermines his authority, and the fact that people still carry on even when being reminded to accommodate others indicates that there is a degree of micro-invalidations. The perpetrators

are being rude and insensitive to the needs of *Hawk*. *Hawk* is being excluded from conversations. He eludes to the fact that this is used as a deliberate power mechanism to exclude and undermine him, based on the colour of his skin. *Hawk* says that these days when this happens he simply gets up and leaves because he believes that there is no point in sitting there if they want to converse in a language that others do not understand. When probed on whether this behaviour made him feel discredited, he said that there is a degree of blissful ignorance amongst his White colleagues.

“No, I maybe – I don’t know because I never asked the guys why do you treat me like this? I didn’t want to speculate. But my view of it was they – there needed to be a proper socialization of my colleagues. They needed to understand we are in the new dispensation, diversified – cultural diversity is important. I don’t think here, I can bet with you – I can bet with you a hundred bucks, none of my colleagues here understand cultural diversity, none.”

This is interesting because in 2018 which is a quarter century into the new democratic South Africa, one would expect a degree of change within our organisational contexts. But yet, it appears that specifically in the organisation where *Hawk* is currently, there seems to be a tendency to turn a blind eye to the importance of inclusiveness and cultural diversity. This links to how organisational practices and procedures actually reproduce Whiteness. This tendency to ‘turn a blind eye’, means that unearned ethnic privileges that White people undoubtedly possess can be maintained. There appears to be no formal mechanism that promotes inclusion. There are also no consequences for people who behave in a manner that promotes the exclusion of others. For *Hawk* these tendencies can have an impact on his professional identity negotiation as an Engineer, as he seems to always be on the back foot despite working just as hard as everyone else, or arguably even harder than everyone else.

He states that the Afrikaans culture bothers him in formal meetings, especially if he convened it and is therefore chairing the meeting. He says that he has never directly addressed the issue or he doesn’t because he does not enjoy the conflict. He stated that he is also able to speak a different language but no one can understand and so out of a degree of respect he will speak English. He questions why it is so difficult for his White colleagues to do the same.

“Me and my colleague we can converse in Sotho or Zulu but because she’s here, you are here, we would speak about what we speak about in English so that you – you know we are not planning something [giggles] untoward or whatever. Guys here don’t really see it that

way. In fact, we hardly avoid to ..., to isolate our own White colleagues, but I don't think they do the same."

He states that the CEO of the company even stepped in, him himself being Afrikaans, and appealed to colleagues to speak English in formal meetings.

"He sent this email because somebody I don't know, eh and when he sent it out, he just was appealing: "Colleagues, we are professionals please take cognizance of others, speak English when you are in meetings, formal meetings"

Interviewer: "But nothing changed?"

"No in fact they laugh about it. They say now ja well, let – it's almost as if "we will show him" type of a thing"

Hawk says that people simply ignored the appeal, even laughing about the matter. It is relevant that in *Hawk's* organisational context he is invalidated on such a large scale due to a language barrier that does not need to exist. English is the formal language in which business is conducted and as such it should not be a problem to converse in English. His colleagues' refusal to listen in this regard invalidates *Hawk* as a professional, because for them it is almost as if they do not really mind if he understands or not.

Hawk mentions that he also finds that people do not easily share information with him and when things are going wrong, he is the last to know. Furthermore, when he questions people about it they do not give him the full answer, which frustrates him because he is actually in a senior position.

"And sometimes it's embarrassing - you get from the other guys telling you what you also think you should know. This for me, I have actually said maybe it's because of me, maybe it's just purely because of who I am. Maybe they don't do it to other people but from what I know, my experience is my colleague relates to it, but I don't know why. I don't know – maybe guys don't think it's a racist thing, but they think [sigh] you are either not matured or no, maybe information is power so the fact that you are still in the dark, it's okay. Let somebody else have the information, I don't know."

He states that this means he has to dig for answers and information in a manner that his White colleagues do not have to. He is someone who is in a rather senior role, and states that he often finds that people collude together and he is often in a position where he is the

only one who does not agree. He feels then that perhaps all the information has not actually been shared with him, because how does everyone else come to a different conclusion. He believes at times that his colleagues will meet without him and come to a consensus, and when he is brought into the picture his opinion gets cast aside because his opinion is of a minority nature.

“And you get people who – who don’t, really maybe I don’t know – they realize if they come to you, there will be conflict – so they collude. And you get three people who have agreed on something and then it’s only you. And it makes you think ‘How come I’m the only one that doesn’t agree?’ - ‘Is there something wrong with me or what?’ And you find that in their discussions, there is more info. So at the disposal then when I’m actually asked to consider something in a meeting. So they would have discussed and there will have been a lot more information coming out of that - those discussions. But when we meet, none of that will come out so I would not understand what informs this. As I ask questions, “oh no, but this is what’s happening” but it seems the other guy already knew, you understand? This is how I discover”

This is another example of how Whiteness is reproduced in the organisation. Information is kept from him in order to ensure that he does not have everything at his disposal to make an informed decision. He states that often he will get copied in emails very late in the discussion, and thus only realises what has been discussed when it is already too late to make a contribution.

“I mean you get here, a guy going talking to one guy giving him a brief. And he – by within a week, you see an email trail that ‘oh but there’s been an interaction here, you only come to know about it now. How come?’ - And why is it that nobody bothered to even let you know what’s cooking?”

Not only does he get left out of email trails, but he also indicates that colleagues discuss issues over lunch, whilst making tea and in the passages. These discussions are not formally shared, which makes him feel completely out of the loop as a manager. *Hawk* mentions that in his organisation there is a culture where alliances are formed in order to discredit each other, and he feels that this is what is happening here. This impacts on his agency as a manager. He can repeat himself and consistently ask his colleagues to CC him, but it seems that he is likely to have little control over what others think and do. This likely acts as a regulator in the construction of identity. He mentions that whilst there are some people who do not behave this way, they are the exception to the norm.

“So this are the type of individuals that I deal with and I'm painting a picture of the sore areas that remind me of who I am, as Black as I am, as a male. There are other areas that are positive, there are people I work well with, they don't invalidate me and so on. But those, those are also rare”

In a further explanation on how Whiteness regulates the organisational context, *Hawk* tells of experiences where his ideas go unheard. He mentions an idea that is simply ignored until such time as a White person brings up the same idea and suddenly it is noted.

“Other things, in meetings there is that struggle with opinions and views. So I would be saying something, I would be saying uhm “This is what I think we could do” and then I articulate my reasons. A few minutes later the same thing being said by my White colleague, will be acknowledged and it all of a sudden becomes noted. Whether he says it differently or what, I don't know. And I have seen this, consistently.”

Hawk does not sit back and keep quiet in the face of these troubles, he states that he is a man of integrity and does not like to let injustices go by unnoticed.

“I'm a man of integrity so our organization has hated this – I would challenge some of the thinking....And I think that in itself means people would not want somebody that always gives them a nudge on some of these things that we do. So I do. And maybe that has worked against me, I don't know. I ask a lot of difficult questions.”

It is significant that he calls himself a man of integrity and suggests that he asks difficult questions and for this he appears to be side lined. In this instance, the organisation attempts to regulate his identity, but he counters this by asking tough questions. The structure of the organisation does not take kindly to that, and thus the reproduction of Whiteness occurs almost in order to keep his questions in check. He states that he does not know what impact this tendency to speak out against issues has had on his career.

Hawk commented on his own embodiment in the interview sessions, indicating that he does not really want to use race as an excuse for everything that happens in the organisation, but through his deliberations he realises that race is what it always comes back to, he cannot find any other explanation, saying that time and time again issues always come down to race.

“I think I cannot change who I am, [chuckle] colour-wise - [stutter] I mean who I am. But if people would judge and act ethically and treat one another without really having to really

treat you because of your colour - I don't – I can't avoid this, it comes to that time and time and time and time again."

Aside from work, *Hawk* mentions that he has a wife and two kids. He mentions that if he did not have work anymore he knows he would still have them, eluding to the importance of family in the building of his professional identity. He mentions that his wife and children validate him and give him meaning, which is an important aspect of his identity work. This is in contrast with him saying that people at work invalidate and discredit him.

"So you will find uhm I have also found more support actually from my family- my wife and my kids I think play that role of just validating me.... I would not walk in my house and make them feel like that maybe there's things that I hold that are important from work. I stopped even taking work home, I don't do – I hardly do any work at home, that is, work that is related to this"

It is clear that *Hawk* finds validation in his family rather than his job title and position at work. He mentions that the experiences he has had allow him to not get too bogged down in the title of Engineer, and focus more on the importance of what he is doing and the value he is adding,

"So the title I have - I think as you grow and the experiences that I have had, I have been able not to be so bogged down on titles and more on what I think is important. You can call me a Chief Executive officer of something and if it means all I do is write minutes, it would mean nothing to me and I would not accept that. If you called me whatever and what I do is fulfilling and challenging, that is a good start for me"

He has gone through the ranks as an Engineer and now holds a project manager role. When he was young, the drive he had to become an Engineer was because Engineering was a career that was 'sought after'. Now, he gains value in the work that he does. This is significant because it is an indication of how our identity work changes over time. When he was young the title was important, now it is just a title and he derives value rather from the work that he is involved in, which directly relates to professional identity work.

4.5 CASE FOUR – THE BLUE CRANE

This participant has been given the alias of a Blue Crane. Blue Cranes are birds of stature and this participant has managed to become someone of stature within his industry. He is an entrepreneur with a successful business. This participant seemed willing to take chances in his life, and wasn't scared to chase after his dreams. He has generally been a high flyer which led to his given name.

Blue Crane grew up in Chaka Stad, which is in the province of Mpumalanga. He lived in Chaka Stad his whole life with his Mother and his Father, as well as his siblings. He was born in 1980. His mother was a teacher and had a Master's degree. His father was a brick layer and therefore did not really have a formal education. He recalls the area that he grew up in as being rather remote, and states that he felt quite separated from any other culture other than his own Swati culture.

"It's a completely Black neighbourhood then, you know in South Africa most of the time the Black remote villages were even much divided. You find that I grew up in a Swati's place, so there's only Swati's. You won't even get Zulus, you won't get Pedi's and so I grew up in a purely Swati setup because we were very close to the border of Swaziland."

It is clear that *Blue Crane* grew up in a context that had one culture and one language. This environment was separate from the city world, which is characterised by diverse cultures and languages. He thus mainly conversed in Swati and was only exposed to the Swati culture growing up.

Throughout the interview process, *Blue Crane* was very forthcoming about the fact that he is rather spiritual and religious. He states that he was the one in his family that actually got his parents into church. He is a dedicated Christian and states that this is a huge determinant of his decision making.

"And then uhm I'm a spiritual being. Uhm I'm a believer. So that component for me, it's actually what determines a lot of the decisions I take - Because that's the spiritual orientation and I take everything from that."

He mentions that his spirituality impacted on how he makes decisions and also who he builds relationships with. With such an impact on his decision making processes, his spiritual

identity and the religious context played a regulatory role in his professional identity development.

He mentions that he does not believe that his family were poor as he was growing up, he rather described them as a little bit above average. His father had his own business and his mother had a formal education. He also stated that most of his family studied and got a formal education, so it is apparent that success and education was something that most individuals in his family would pursue. He went to a relatively good school in what was then the homelands of South Africa. He stated that back then some of the White teachers from the cities would periodically come and teach at these remote schools. He stated that before the Apartheid policies, the school used to be used by White people and thus it had great facilities, including a fantastic library. This statement is significant and gives a lot of information about the political climate at the time, the fact that the school used to be 'White' meant that the school was a 'good school'. As has been seen in previous cases, there is an element of Whiteness being an invisible standard that anyone needs to aspire to in order to be successful. We see here this invisible norm is present from primary school level. This standard in this context has been created by structural oppression of People of Colour, and the upliftment of White people, leading White people to have more socio-economic privileges and access to the 'good schools'. Success, particularly as a professional Engineer, is founded in education and the fact that he managed to attend a good school that had access to a vast array of knowledge undoubtedly aided his professional identity development. He states that he believes he was able to break the stereotype that White people are smarter than People of Colour, because of the fact that he had access to these facilities. Rather he believes that White people simply get more exposure.

"Yeah so I kind of like even broke the stereotype that maybe White people were more intelligent than Black people and what I actually experienced that's not the case. We are all equally capable it's just the exposure sometimes that our White counterparts have had very good exposure."

Blue Crane first became interested in electronics due to all the reading that he did from the books in library. He stated that his Dad was relatively strict and thus he was unable to watch TV and spend a lot of free time reading and learning. It was great for him that he got access to such a library as this provided him with essential knowledge about electronics.

“Even without the teachers teaching, just that the library was there so after school I would go to library. And they would borrow us books so they had this system where you lend a book, go with it at home but you must return it after three days. That’s what actually helped me and even the interest in electronics, started.”

Blue Crane’s journey to becoming an Engineer started in this library at his school. As previously mentioned, *Blue Crane’s* father had his own business, and soon enough *Blue Crane* also began to create his own business based on the knowledge he had gained from the library.

“I even started my own business from the electronics that I learned at school. In our village we didn’t have electricity. So the people were using radios with batteries. And then within a year, the whole village was electrified. Then the people had a problem now that – all the radios were battery operated, now they wanted to connect them up to the electric sockets and they were not just like that. So I saw an opportunity. So I learned how to make a converter, DC adapter, you know like this? A battery charger”

He refers to himself as a builder, and remembered that he actually built his father a foldable pocket knife to help him at work. This creativeness and ability to build something out of nothing continued, and he taught himself to create electronics to sell to the community. He actually managed to make money doing this and at such a young age had already created a business based on his technologically inclined nature and creative abilities. He states that he is a rather independent learner and it is evident that this independent ability enabled him to learn on his own from those books available in the library, which in turn aided his professional identity development.

His father seemed to have a great degree of influence on *Blue Crane*. He states that his father had a contract to build RDP houses, and he used to help him. He stated that he learned a lot about resilience when he was young, he did a lot of work and kept himself busy which helped him to build character. He states that his father always told him that he would be an Engineer. In that sense, he was not really given a choice. However he was lucky that this forced choice coincided with his own interests as he states that he enjoyed building and thus thought Engineering is likely to be a good career choice.

In the year 2000 he went to University at the Pretoria Technikon. His diploma was funded by an organisation that awarded him with a bursary. He stayed in a residence on campus and mentioned that the University was predominantly White. He mentioned that coming to

Johannesburg and Pretoria was a massive culture shock for him. Before that he had only really known Swati individuals, and then coming to the city he realised that there was a whole mix of different cultures and that people started to speak slang, which is a mixture between different languages.

“And even language-wise, I kind of like struggled when I came here. Because you have to now speak a language that is Johannesburg. We speak a new language when we come to Johannesburg. It is not the traditional Swati that I'm speaking. So we kind of like the Pedi will come, the Tswana will come, the Zulu will come, the Swati will come, the Venda will come then we have to find [chuckle] a common ground language”

He stated that it is not really seen as acceptable for People of Colour to speak English to each other, because if you do you are seen as someone who is not African, a statement which is relevant in the other cases too. It has been mentioned that if you speak in an accent that is too English, you are not Black enough. This means that if a Black person were to speak English to other People of Colour, it could lead to the questioning of their identity based on their embodiment as a Black person.

“Sometimes it can be sensitive to speak to our fellow people in English - I mean it kind of comes with a stigma - Ja. But it depends on the exposure of that person - Like in the professional set-ups, we may but you're also looked at as a person that's – there's a stereotype against it - You look like you are not really African.”

He stated that it was also a culture shock in the sense that it was the first time he had lived away from his parents, and thus he felt shocked and alone. As has been seen, his parents, especially his father, have played a large role in getting him to this point and thus he started to miss them when he had to start living on his own. Lastly he also stated that the initiation was hectic for him as he had never experienced something like that before. He stated that it was a relatively harmonious work environment where he and his fellow students used to help each other. However he states that he was not really an open person and generally kept to himself. He attributed this to his Christian lifestyle. He stated that his parents were strongly against them having friends or for their circle to stretch further than the people they met in Church. Therefore he did not really make friends, but lived harmoniously with his classmates.

After he finished his degree he had to complete 12 months of practical training, and he completed this at a small Engineering company. Whilst he was at this organisation, he experienced a degree of racial stereotyping. There was an incident of theft in the organisation, where someone stole confidential files from *Blue Cranes* office computer overnight. The culprit had broken a lot of glass in their attempt to steal, and there was blood everywhere. *Blue Crane* came in early the next morning to see all his colleagues standing in the front, and when he arrived they all turned quiet and looked at his hands. He recalls wondering why they were looking at his hands, but then he saw the crime scene and understood that they thought that it was him.

“So I'm just wondering why are they looking at my hands? So I'm going to my office and I was the only Engineer at the company. When I arrive at the office, then I understood why because my office was broken into and then the server where we stored all the computer programs and actually the intellectual property of the company was stolen - And then there was so much blood, the person was cut by the glass so much - They thought it was me. And strange enough, it was one of the employees in the company, a White employee and he had been asking to buy the company. So then that day it was crazy.”

This is an example of personally mediated racism, and a micro-insult if they were indeed looking at him because of his race. This was non-verbal communication that portrayed insensitivity to *Blue Crane*, having unverified beliefs that he was the perpetrator without any form of evidence. He stated that he knew he was the one that had access to that information, and thus he justified their behaviour by reasoning that they thought it was him for this reason. This is an example of Identity Work. He seemed to refuse to believe that they were looking at him purely on his race. He then simply brushed off the incident, but still it shocked him that he was automatically the first suspect, eluding to the fact when reflecting on the incident that it was possibly because he was Black. If they happened to be looking at his hands because he was the only Black man there, this is an example of racial stigmatisation. Because *Blue Crane* is Black, his colleagues have assumed he would steal, based on a stereotypical belief that People of Colour would steal. Racial stigmatisation is the very foundation of racism.

After the 12 months at this organisation he resigned in order to get his B-degree and then he decided to study masters. This was funded by a government department. He stated that his boss really did not want him to go and study further, preferring him to rather stay at the

organisation. They asked him to help find a replacement and he asked one of his friends, who was a White lady, if she would be interested. They liked her and when they employed her he found out she earned almost twice as much as he did when he was in the same position. He stated that they were in the same school and she could even have been seen as junior to him but yet was earning more. He said that he felt slightly let down by the situation.

“I was let down. It was not for money reasons that I left the company and they did pay me well, I didn’t go – they paid me well, they gave me a car to use, it’s just that I didn’t have a drivers licence. They took care of me for what I was – I wouldn’t complain. My parents were quite happy. But the let-down was probably maybe for Mr ANON he thought it was a money issue then maybe he was amending it on the next person that he was employing, I don’t know. But to me it was like why – anyway, it didn’t affect me much because I was not leaving because of money it was just purely career progression.”

Again, he stated that he managed to brush it off even though he was disappointed, as he was not leaving for money but rather for career progression. It appears to be a trend in *Blue Crane*’s story that he tends to brush off incidents that others may perceive as unfair discrimination relatively easily. Again this is an example of Identity Work, as he is maintaining his professional identity and seems to refuse to let race define him on a professional level.

He studied masters in conjunction with a University in France. He started his own business that focussed mainly on consulting, whilst he was busy with his Masters and continued with this until he had gotten his degree. In 2007 he had a baby with his wife and felt that he needed to get a stable income and thus went to work for a company in Durban. During his time at this company he consulted on the design of the new HD DSTV decoders. He said that during his time at this company he was one of the only Engineers of Colour, and that the rest were either Indian or White. He worked his way up in this organisation and managed to get himself a senior position. During his time at this organisation he stated he was working on a project in France, and stated that whilst there he experienced an incident of Racism.

“There was one of my colleagues I’m mean it was just a raw moment. He called me the “k” word but uh his other colleague actually had rebuked him very, very sharp - Ja He could get in serious trouble – For doing that ja. But even that, he didn’t do it face-to-face. He was going away and he thought I didn’t hear. And I heard about – we were actually in France working there for about a month and a half, it was just four of us. And uh I didn’t take it

personal. He did it and then I pretended I didn't hear, then I just came and we continued. Because we were focused on just getting the product out."

A colleague used a highly derogatory racist term towards him, in an example of overt racism. However, because it was said as *Blue Crane* was walking away it could be described as micro-assault. This is a verbal attack by means of name calling. He again states that he brushed the incident off, seemingly looking past incidents of racism. In this case he stated that he looked past it because he was at work and wanted to get the product out, so for the sake of productivity, this incident needed to be overlooked. In the negotiation of his professional identity it is clear that he will not allow racial stereotyping and racism to stop him from achieving his goals. His peaceful nature aids him in overcoming this as well.

"Ja I'm not that type of person that's affected much by what people say about me truly speaking ja - People can throw a lot at me, I don't take things personally. I think that's my nature – I'm not a fighting type."

After he took on this managerial role, he states that there were situations where people would comment about affirmative action and BBEEE aiding him in getting such a role. He believes that this stereotype is around because people accept jobs that they cannot handle and jobs that they are not competent enough to complete. He believes that there are people who are opportunists and who have used BBEEE for their own gain, which has created this stigma in the industry.

"And then their thing comes "Oh ja you see these Affirmative Action, you see this BEE you see it" and there are people who are correct, that they can put. But I think they have missed them because they didn't want to do it in the right- ah now, they get like excuse me to say, there are opportunists also who look at this transformation and then they go and they take a role that they can't fulfil and it just creates that stigma in the industry that "Oh you see the Black people they just want to take positions". I think it's unjust to take a role that you can't do"

Blue Crane mentions that he believes he is a builder and a creator, and states that he has always thrived on challenge, a trait to which he believes he owes his success. He states that he has an adaptable and flexible personality, and has always been innovative, someone that enjoys driving change. He states that in today's world one needs to be a global citizen, be able to adapt and fit in anywhere, and then opportunities will exist anywhere. He seems to have a very broad focus, and tends not to get bogged down in details.

He states that throughout his career many incidents have occurred and people have aimed racial slurs at him. However, he states that he is not one to fight and does not take things personally, thus he is able to brush these incidents off relatively easily. He mentioned that for him it is important not to make himself a victim so that he can stay ahead of the game.

“Because at the end of the day Megan, I think it affects you more than the people who have made you the victim - Because once you treat yourself as a victim, anybody else who looks like they can victimize you already you are victimize(ing) yourself when you are approached and people see you have got that “I’m being down looked at”. I don’t look down at myself, so anybody who looks down at me, it’s their problem. I know that I’m not dumb. Yes so that’s what helps me and myself what also helps me is that I always excelled, I was always number one at school.”

He states that he had an incident where a friend’s manager was rude to his friend. His friend’s flatmate encouraged him to write a letter and complain. *Blue Crane* encouraged him not to, stating that when you do things like that it always affects you more than it affects those who you are aiming it at. When further probed on how he manages to overcome incidents likely this with apparent ease, he stated that he would consider how developed the other person or people were in their thinking.

“I just said this was a phase of life. And I would think that also looking at the other person, how developed they are, also helps you really to understand that I don’t expect him to really think like this. He is not really developed at that level - When a person has been very developed and they do something to you, then that may become very hurtful, you can see that it’s deliberate - But where you see that this person is not very developed so you can then brush it off and say no.”

He reasons that individuals who would endeavour to make such racist comments are not functioning on the same level as him to understand. Over and above this, he states that he is a peaceful man, and he does not enjoy conflict, which further pushes him to rather overlook these incidents. As we have seen throughout *Blue Crane’s* story, he has managed to brush off any incidents of racism rather easily. *Blue Crane* states that he has an attitude that aids him in refusing to let himself be victimised. In the construction and negotiation of his professional identity, this refusal to be made the victim has aided him in excelling in a world that has constantly tried to pull him down. This resilience, perseverance and grit coupled with his natural intelligence have played a big part in getting him to where he is today. When

describing himself, he mentioned that he is someone who is always up for a challenge which is what drives him to succeed beyond these incidents that are designed to pull him down.

"I'm excited by challenge. My wife kind of like feels like when there's a parking lot and there's a difficult spot, I go to the difficult one. She always screams at me "Why didn't you just go the easy one?" [giggles] it's like I think maybe my mind is wired like that. As soon as something is challenging, it excites me ja."

This is essential for *Blue Crane's* identity work, as he has become the successful person he is today due to his willingness to take on the challenges that lie in front of him, and also as previously mentioned having the resilience to overcome them. He states that he sees himself as so much more than his title of an Engineer. He says that the degree and the title are in essence a smaller part of his life.

"Truly speaking. It's a smaller part of my life. The bigger part is how do I connect to everybody else in the world - That is much more a bigger part of my life - Ja the Engineering degree, I already have that and uhm [pause] it's more of a "What do I make of that? And then how do I really reach out to beyond my living circles?"

In 2010, he moved to a different organisation for a period of two years, still focussing on the DSTV decoders. In 2013 he made a slight career change again and started to consult for one of the biggest Engineering firms in South Africa.

In 2014, *Blue Crane* revisited the idea of opening up his own company, and decided to persist with this. He had a contract with an American company to continue work on the DSTV decoders. Within three years, the company had grown from 3 people to 24. At the beginning of 2018 the contract ended and he had to downsize slightly, leaving him with 10 people to continue work within the organisation. He is hugely successful and owns a business that is relatively established. In contrast with other cases who have found themselves being stuck in the White dominated industry, he has created his own space for himself. Here he feels he can control his own destiny. He has put himself in a position of agency where he can control his space.

Whilst discussing his company, he mentioned that he had no White employees. He stated that he was actually worried about how White people would perceive working for a Black man.

“It may be biased it may be wrong, it may be a fear that doesn’t exist. It may be that I feel the company is still small. I was just afraid, I was just afraid.”

“Especially in South Africa Megan - All around the world, I never had a problem. Actually I did try in the US. I’m trying to start up a branch in the US - And I had a friend I was with at UCT so he went to work in the US, so I was trying actually something with him - But I’m not afraid, it’s just I think the South African setup – but he is not really South African. Ja the South African setup I feel like there’s just that legacy.”

It is interesting how the socio-political and historical context had made *Blue Crane* wary about hiring White people in the South African context. He states that if he finds someone that resonates with the values and he feels will be a match he would not hesitate, but up until this point this has not happened. This is impacting on his identity work and how he is choosing to build his organisation. What is significant, is that whilst *Blue Crane* states that he refuses to make himself the victim and move on from incidents that are racially charged relatively easily, these incidents may have an effect on him in a different way. As can be seen, there is a degree of mistrust about White people, given the way he has been treated in the past. He is scared and even nervous to hire a White person because his experience tells him that stereotypically White people look down on People of Colour and therefore would never want to work for a Black person. The mistrust that was caused have likely affected him emotionally, and the mistrust is leading him not to take any chances. He positions himself as an entrepreneur and has a strong entrepreneurial identity. As an entrepreneur it is clear for him where the organisation is heading. He may want to hire White people, as he states he is not against it, but it is clear that he is nervous about what the unintended consequences of that decision may be.

In rounding off, *Blue Crane* believes that South Africa has a strange legacy and a dynamic that is seen nowhere else in the world. He believes that in South Africa people are extremely aware of colour, adding that it has everything to do with the historical political landscape in the country. When reflecting on this, he found it interesting that with the younger generation it does not seem to be as much of an issue. He tells an interesting story where a friend of his child does not see his child as Black.

“He’s a celebrity of his own. Yeah so the other day I went to fetch him at school. Then the little child, like one of his friends, he says “Ah, but you didn’t tell me that your Dad was Black? – So he doesn’t see him (my child) as Black – So they are colour blind to each other – When

he sees my child he sees a neutral person, but when he may see me, it may be like maybe – you understand where I am going? – So I feel like maybe it would take some time for us here in South Africa to really change our perspectives”

This is an interesting dynamic for children who were born in the new South Africa. It seems that they do not see colour amongst each other, but when they look at adults they do see colour. This extract is fascinating. How this has been interpreted is that the children may see colour, but because *Blue Crane*'s son is the little boy's friend, it does not seem to matter to him. The relationship trumps racial preconceptions, almost like he did not even notice that his friend is Black. It then comes as a shock to him that he has a Black father. As the little boy does not know *Blue Crane*, he immediately sees him as a Black man. Whilst the extract shows that children may be blind to race when it comes to their friendships, the fact that he noticed his friend's Dad was Black indicates that he does still see colour.

4.6 CASE FIVE – THE PENGUIN

This participant has been given the alias of a Penguin. Penguins are known to be deceptively intelligent, only showing the side of themselves that they want others to see. In this case, the participant was particularly intelligent, excelling in her career from the start. Despite this however, she was questioned for how far she had come, with some attributing it to her race and gender, rather than natural abilities.

Penguin was born around 1979 in Kwa-Zulu Natal. She stayed in Verulam, which she indicated was a predominantly Indian area. She stayed in this town for her school career up until she went to University. She was the oldest of three children. Both of her parents were teachers, which she indicates was a positive impact on her life. They lived in a relatively middle class area, and her parents did get a bit more money in to support them as they got older.

She states that her family are very important to her, and identifies strongly to her family roles as a daughter, a wife and a mother. When starting her 10 statement test, she started off stating *“Uhm so if I see myself, to me it's very important that uh most of my statements revolve around family, uh that's how I see myself”*.

Her area was predominantly Indian, and she mentioned that the school she was in was not very diverse. She stated that there were two primary schools and two high schools that were all very close together, and therefore she felt that everybody seemed to know everyone. She states that her Mom taught at her high school and it was extremely close to her house. She stated that she enjoyed her school years in retrospect, and never really felt out of place or out of her depth.

“School was fun - It was nothing - nothing what - that you felt out of place. It was – it was gone through with lots of friends”

Although the school was mainly Indian, she mentioned that she was in Grade 9 in 1994. 1994 was the end of the Apartheid era in South Africa, and she states that during that time the school did become slightly more diverse but remained predominantly Indian. This emphasises the segregation of the Apartheid era. Schools were not extremely diverse during that time, and the end of the era brought a lot more cultural diversity into *Penguin's* educational context.

Penguin mentioned early on in the interview that both of her parents were teachers. She said of this that the situation brought both positives and negatives into play. When probed on whether or not she felt that the influence of her parents encouraged learning, she agreed, but also mentioned some of the drawbacks.

“Yes, uh the positives was that they encouraged learning and that they – like you had – you knew you were going to University so you had to do what you had to do to go to University - I think the negatives was the fact that uhm you tended to focus more on school than on other extra-curricular activities because it was more seen as a distraction”

She mentioned a degree of frustration around not being able to take extra-curricular activities outside of her academics seriously, as her parents saw them as a distraction to what was really important, and that was doing well in order for her to go to University. She said that because of this, a lot of her hobbies tended to be more home based, and she would spend a lot of her time reading and baking. She said school was a bit of a non-event for her, and went by as a time that she just went through.

Her parents told her that she was going to go to University from the start and as such, the decision of whether or not she would go to University never really rested in her own hands, the decision was made for her by her parents. She stated that originally her Mother wanted

her to become a Doctor, but the thought of blood bothered her, and on top of that she simply did not want to.

“My parents, well not my parents, my mom wanted me to do medicine [chuckle] to become a Doctor and I - Well it’s more the factor – there’s a small factor there, I don’t like the sight of blood. [giggles] so it’s not going to work out – So she I think ja she – my father was very understanding, my mom was a little bit “Don’t you want to try to apply” sort of.”

This is a significant moment in *Penguin’s* construction of her professional identity, as her ideals and her Mothers ideals for her education clashed slightly. The fact that she would go to University was never up for debate, as we saw earlier. However, she took individual agency over just what she would specialise in when she did go to University. She mentions that her parents were rather conservative, thus it is significant that she managed to stand up for what she wanted and needed in that moment. That choice set her on the path to become the Engineer that she is today. It is a significant moment both in the family and educational context. She wanted to study Aeronautical Engineering, and picked chemical Engineering as her second choice. She mentioned that her interest in Aeronautics sparked when she first attended an air show with her parents, and watched all the aeroplanes fly around.

“So the whole – so with aeronautical Engineering, it’s I think the first time my parents went to go see air shows and you sit there and you watch airplanes fly. And you’re thinking ja that’s actually quite a cool – Ja - It’s cool because you’re literally defying gravity [chuckle] to be able to do that - And that’s something I decided oh well, I want to do it – I’d like to do that, be able to do something unusual”

This sparked interest in the ‘unusual’ enabled her to study the degree she wanted to study and become the professional that she wanted to be. I asked her to explain a bit to me what it is that she actually does. It was amazing to see how her face lit up when she spoke about her work and how it allows her to use her natural abilities to create things that are extraordinary. In *Penguin’s* case, Engineering does seem to be a passion.

She enrolled in a University in Johannesburg to study Aeronautical Engineering. When first thinking back on her experience of University life, she reminisced that she had to stay in a residence, because it was so far from her home in Durban. She recalls the entire experience as being ‘*horrifying*’ at first.

“It was horrifying [giggles] - Uhm you had to – you move from living in your own house, with your own bathroom to sharing a bathroom with people you have no idea. And it’s a very diverse lot - So it’s not like you’re just with Engineers, you’re pretty much with everybody - Ja so you have got obviously your uhm - All the degrees, all the races, there’s just uhm – There’s everybody, ja it was I think it was a very harrowing ja experience - But to say – but I mean it was not insurmountable - It’s just different”.

Coming from a small town and growing up in a conservative family meant that she was not really exposed to other cultures. Although she mentions that post 1994 the school became slightly more diverse, she remained as part of a majority Indian community her whole life. This culture shock that she experienced was her first taste of the world outside of that community, and she realised that she would have to adapt quickly. She mentioned that whilst the situation she found herself in was weird, she developed strategies to cope.

“That was, the first week was weirder but you find techniques to – you find ways of doing it like get to the bathroom at four o’clock when no one else is awake. Type of thing [chuckle] you learn well I was able to learn very quickly, how to just deal with those feelings. - [giggles] it’s completely different from living at home, especially when you come from a very conservative family - Uhm I mean I made a few mistakes with friends, uh like people who you think they’re your friends and then you literally figure out all they’re doing is they’re asking you – taking all your clothes away or taking your money away or something like that - And you learn quickly. There was a period where I literally just stayed away from everybody”

It is clear that her first year in University was challenging for her socially as well, as she mentions she wanted to stay away from everybody at one point. Apart from dealing with the stressors of residence life and life away from home, she mentioned that her parents were paying for education and were not extremely well off, and she knew that they could not afford to pay any additional fees. This is an example of identity work, she is coping with this situation by isolating herself. Thus, her only option was to do well and pass.

“So the first year I think was particularly difficult for me. uhm and it was also a time where – okay my parents are not well off, so they were paying for my studies. I knew that I needed to get out of there in four years [giggles] - They couldn’t afford anything-[giggles] - Anything extra. They were paying for res, they were paying for food, and they were paying for my studies. Thus, there was no way that they could afford extra.”

Thus she seemed to isolate herself in a way. Despite the many temptations that University brought, she states that she did not fall into those traps as her life was simply too uncertain.

“So – so in a way I spent literally the first half of the year not – I wouldn’t say not going out, like everyone was like the free - move like you could do what you want right? - So you could go and stay up till six in the morning - And no one cares. I didn’t do that for the first half of the year. I just needed to get myself – there were too many uncertainties in my life at that point”

Researcher: “Hmm. So what – what – you say there were uncertainties. What sort of uncertainties?”

“So I mean it was new, the place was new, the degree was new, it was a completely different school.”

The newness of University and everything that comes with it forced her to isolate herself as a coping strategy that is how she managed to maintain a coherent sense of self in the face of all the newness she was experiencing. It is apparent that she felt the pressure to get her degree done within the given time, due to financial pressures, and thus felt that she needed to spend the majority of her time studying. It is also interesting that she felt the need to stay in instead of going out to deal with all the uncertainty surrounding her, which further emphasised the immense culture shock that the University environment was for her.

She later indicated that she believed res was the best thing that ever happened to her. She mentioned that coming from a conservative family, she was used to having her parents do absolutely everything for her. She was then put into an environment where she had to adapt to others and be able to communicate and socialise with a diverse group of people. This is an example of identity work. She is constructing a new side of her identity through interaction and socialisation with a new group of people. Although she did not always find the experience easy, she indicated that the stay in res helped her put her own perceptions and prejudices aside, and essentially taught her to be a better person.

“And that helped me - Where I - getting into the work place, living by myself, being able to do things for myself ja –

Researcher: “Hmm. So you say you learned how to communicate with other people. So maybe that’s a good thing for you so you – you were also sort of removed from the diversity

of the country maybe even of – in a sense and when you got put into that situation, you had to adapt and learn how to deal with it, because it was also different for you to be there?”

“Yes. And I think to a large extent puts up this concept of prejudices where you would lead and live in a very – oh once again, you live in a very Indian environment so you tend to have certain prejudices about people that you don’t know..... And you – so you view the world very differently”

This new view that she has constructed about the world is a form of Identity work, she is constructing new views based on her new environment and adapting accordingly. She stated that her experiences allowed her to bring some learnings home back to her parents, and she believes that she helped them expand their own views as well. She mentions that her parents were a lot less strict with her brother and sister and she attributes this to the fact that she went to University first. She states that her sister is such a free spirit and believes it is because she was put under less pressure from her parents to conform to the more conservative lifestyle. She also stated that she finally showed her parents that she is responsible as she does not need them hovering over her at all times. This is significant because she earlier chose to study Engineering against her mother wishes, and the fact that she was able to prove to her parents that she was capable and responsible enough to make a success out of her life in her own way almost justifies her decision.

“To like you know, like your mom would constantly nag “Are you studying, are you doing this are you doing that”. And you know you are getting – you got through the years without actually uhm - Having a hiccup, a big hiccup – that’s it – she’d let you go but she was always like “Be careful of this, be careful of that, do this don’t do this, don’t do that” you know - Even from a “Don’t talk to these people don’t-“ [giggles] and she’s become a lot more – she became a lot more “Okay so you can adapt”.

She mentions however that she is very grateful to her parents, because she knows that she can always call them no matter the situation. She mentions that her family have always been extremely supportive and still are to this day, but this story indicates how she went about gaining her own independence, which is significant in the construction of her professional and personal identity. This is again an example of identity work. A lot of her views that she holds clear and her values were constructed once she got the opportunity to do so.

Of the classes themselves, she stated that her group were a relatively diverse lot. There were seventeen people studying with her but only three were studying Aeronautical Engineering. Out of those three she was also the only girl. Despite this, she stated that at University with her classmates her gender was not really an issue. She mentioned that no one made her feel inferior, and that they all helped each other out. After she finished her four years she also completed her masters. She started her Masters in 2002 as a full time program, but in around August 2002 she decided she was bored and needed to work, so she switched over to the part-time program and continued whilst she was working.

She applied to an Engineering company in August 2002. She stated that they actually had no openings, she just thought that she would message the Human Resources manager and see where it gets her. She stated that they read her CV and called her in for an interview.

“Uhm so [pause] they had no advertisements, I just got bored at being at University, so I just emailed them. Emailed HR [chuckle] so and like “Do ya’ll have any positions?” and there were - so I get called for an interview for actually two – well the first one was properly – they said it was an interview [chuckle].”

She later got taken on a tour of the organisation before they offered her a job as a Junior Engineer within the aerodynamics department. She stated that her first experiences of work were fantastic, and indicated that the environment she was a part of was very ‘jovial’ and ‘playful’. She mentioned that it was an easy and fun environment which she enjoyed very much. She was the only girl, but it was never an issue. She was also assigned a mentor with whom she indicates she is friends with until this day.

“Uhm it was a, it was probably one of the best environments to get into when you started working - Because nobody looked at you, your skin colour”

She indicated that the organisation was very White and very Afrikaans, but everything was in English and she indicated that everyone was very accommodating. She worked in this organisation for a period of six years and it seemed that she generally enjoyed it. During her time at this organisation, she went from being a Junior Engineer to being a Senior Engineer when she left.

In 2008 she moved to another Engineering company that was in a similar field. In this organisation she said that there were a lot of older Afrikaans men. She said that she felt uncomfortable in this new organisation, because of the lack of skills transfer and because she

felt that opportunities were not equally provided to everyone within the organisation. She mentioned that there were a lot of young Black guys, and she realised that there was a problem with skills transfer.

“It's there's lots of – [sigh] ja so that was a very – so there were a few young guys in the group and they were all Black - Uhm and they would tell you stories about nobody wants to pass over work and nobody wants to talk. Uhm”

Researcher: “Did you personally experience that?”

“[sigh] I – okay so I got allocated to a man who was like the same age as my father [chuckle]”

Researcher: “A White guy?”

“Ja...So while he – while he was a very [pause] a very – he was very open and I would get and I would sort of get work out of him, he wasn't very forthcoming with it, so I had to constantly ask him and ask him. But when I did, he did give the stuff. So I'm not going to like say you know what, he just brushed me aside.... But he was not a – he was not willing - I mean not willing – he was not uh in his own world, you would have to go and constantly go and get it from him.”

At this point, she mentions that her experiences in Res aided her in this regard, as she was able to negotiate the vast cultural differences she was faced with. She was now working with Afrikaans people and felt that the organisation had a very Afrikaans culture. The extract above is also significant because the manager seems to display a degree of unwillingness to be helpful. He will only give work to people if he is nagged to do so. Given the power differentials between managers and subordinates, it may be quite challenging for younger employees to nag their managers for work. This could make it rather difficult for her to get work. Despite this she felt that it was not the most favourable environment and decided to move back to her old organisation just one year into this new job.

She moved back to her original organisation in the role of a manager, which was in and around the middle management level. She then got promoted to the Engineering management role, so she then managed the entire Engineering group, and then decided to walk away from it all in 2017.

“And then I rea— then I got the Engineering management role, so I literally managed the whole of the Engineering group - And then I walked away from it[pause] 200- and - well last year, 2017 and I went back to do aerodynamics, completely Engineering”

“I don’t want to know what’s happening in the company, I [pause] don’t want to get involved in decision making that’s outside of what I’m supposed to do...I don’t want to be anything that reminded me of being in Engineering management [giggles]”

She seems to feel quite strongly about her decision to walk away, and seems to harbour a lot of resentment around the whole situation. She states that her decision to walk away from management was driven by a number of factors. These factors are in the socio-political context as well as the historical context. Historically, she stated that the organisation has a culture that is deeply rooted in how things were done in the 80’s. She felt that being in a managerial role allowed her to see that. She stated that people in the managerial environment felt extremely threatened by the junior individuals of colour coming through in the organisation.

“But in that environment there were people that were threatened by junior people coming through uh and I had to manage this group [chuckles] this - these guys - And they were just not willing to change and that’s the one aspect. And they just they felt that for as long as they don’t want to move out of management to make room for people’s newer, fresher ideas, they just wanted to stick with what the [pause] conventional, orthodox, pre-90’s thing was”

She mentioned that as an Engineer who is very factual, she seems to dislike the culture of management by opinion. It has likely put her off management as they do not make decisions with reference to the data. As an Engineer who is very factual, this was very difficult for her.

The socio-political context also greatly influenced her experience of being a manager. She managed a group of older White men that were on a lower level than herself, who were the ones who felt slightly threatened. When probed on whether she thought there was a fear of Affirmative action she stated that there was actually an incident where one of the managers who she thinks told many people she only got the job because she was a ‘Black’ female (Black in terms of affirmative action laws – she is in fact Indian).

“That was – well one of the guys one of the younger – well I suspect, that one of the senior managers that reported to me when I got the job as Engineering manager, told them I got it because I was a fem— Black female. And one Engineer walked up to me about eight months

whilst I was into the job and told me 'Okay I want to apologize because uhm I only thought you got this job because you're a Black lady. But you actually did some things'"

She mentions that she had four White Males and two Indian males reporting into her. The White Males were older than her. She states that one of them was actively against transformation, and she believes he was the one that was spreading such rumours. She said she was shocked that someone would walk up to her and say something like that to her face, she said she was speechless really, and when her colleague left she just took a minute to cry. Her competence and fitness for the job was indeed questioned when people assumed she was only in her role for Employment Equity reasons. She states that there are a lot of managers within the organisation that hold the belief that People of Colour only hold their roles for EE reasons. Despite actively stating that she was pushed by the negativity surrounding this, the legislative context around employment equity has actually triggered identity work, as seen in the quote below.

"I do have-I mean I have a masters in Engineering, but I do have an honours in technology management. I have changed – I have done things throughout my career that warrant what I have done. And if I look at a job specification, that job specification for that particular job, I could do that. So you know, people are allowed to have their opinions".

Apart from these issues, she also felt that there was a degree of outside political interference, where she was expected to take part in things and do things that she believed were unethical, and thus felt that she could no longer be at the forefront of it all. She said that she has two young children and did not want to compromise them because of poor choices being made around her. This is very significant in the political context and demonstrates how the political context can regulate professional identity.

When she quit, she returned back to a more operational role, where she could again focus on what she loved which was Engineering. She stated that after she quit, the stories that went around about her were horrific.

"Ja that was difficult. Because at the end of the day, the conversation that went around was I was a stupid Black female who couldn't handle the pressure."

The structure and context of the organisation was the push factor in her leaving management. The structure is to blame but when she actually left the blame somehow got shifted onto her. This Micro-Aggression was in the form of a micro-assault. This racial slur was said

behind her back with the intention to hurt and discredit her based purely on the colour of her skin. When probed on how she overcame this, she stated that being back in the aerodynamics department doing what she loved, helped her cope.

“There was no think “Oh you know you’re coming back in a senior position, you’ve done management so you should just – just go and do your job - Just go and create outputs again”, they gave me a lot of space Hmm and you needed that - So they – I would literally close my door, not fully but partially and people just let you be - So you needed - so I think from that perspective, it helped my mind calm down.”

This links back to her isolating herself in the res environment. By closing the door she closes off the world, and that helps her cope and triggers identity work. She further states that she does not want to do anything that reminds her of being in Engineering management. Whilst it must be stated that there were political factors involved, she also was driven from the role by a degree of prejudice based on her gender and skin colour. In this situation, the perception of affirmative action (which is designed to right the wrongs of the past) is of such a negative nature, that it acted as a push factor for a competent female Engineer of colour to be pushed from her managerial role due to all the negativity that surrounded her. She stated that whilst political factors also pushed her, this negativity played a role in her decision making.

“Ja like I think like it played a big impact in – my decision making. And the worse thing is when you’re sitting there and you see incompetent people [giggles] - I mean really and you know that the only reason they got there is because of and I'm going to just it's this colour of their skin, whether it's White whether it's Black - [giggles] you listen to the decisions that they make and you're like “How on earth can you come to that?”

The above quote discusses a phenomenon that can be true in South Africa, in which incompetent people are placed in roles for which they are neither qualified nor experienced. She states that this can happen for both People of Colour and White people. She states that both races experience a degree of privilege due to skin colour, White people because of White privilege and People of Colour because of affirmative action.

“It's the general like in management, the guy doesn't realize you are a Black, like you are Black. You know, you are an Indian and apparently Black and Indians are the same. But uhm and just because the colour of your skin, you're not competent - That's by definition of

what they say, it's going to take you longer - To teach and nobody uhm the older guys don't want to teach the younger guys. Uhm they would rather leave somebody without work."

In this quote she says that at times people do not place her in the same category as People of Colour, which is significant. She states that people in fact view Indians as more competent than People of Colour.

"And they have this concept that Indian – Indians are not- No, I Indians – Indians are more competent - Than Blacks - Which is a weird thing. But when you explain this to them you realize that when you are talking about that, it is all of us but it's not viewed as such."

She said there is also an issue with the structure of the organisation itself. She states that most senior individuals have been working with each other for years, and thus the top level managers only approach the senior managers for work. This leads the senior managers to be somewhat overloaded at work, and leaves the lower levels with no work at all. This means that the younger generation that will one day take over are not gaining the critical skills needed to be successful in such an environment. She states that it may also be a problem of a very large generation gap.

"I think what we are heading towards at the moment is at this company in particular, there are lot of senior Engineers who have taken on management positions - And these senior Engineers, unfortunately White males who are anything between 55 and 60 -Different generation, different ideals, different – they grew up within Denel in a very different environment. The new generation, there's a generation of younger individuals that come with their own issues [chuckle] into the work place. There's no – and because we have lost a lot of middle – middle generation people - Once again, uhm I think it's got to do a lot with these older generation guys not wanting to give up work - So not wanting to – some of them don't want to impart knowledge - It's their characteristic. They view it if I say "Give this to somebody else" they're going to become better than me, they will take my job. It's very threatened, I think they are very threatened"

This is the second time she mentions that the older generation possibly feels threatened, which is her reasoning why she believes they act this way and become so secretive with their knowledge. She states that there is a lot of bitterness around the topic of transformation, and people believing that it has not been handled properly. She states that generally the belief is that the People of Colour do not deserve what they get, be it a promotion, or a managerial position, simply because there is a belief that People of Colour are only getting

these jobs and experiencing this success because of their skin colour. She states that what is happening currently is that many of the young and talented People of Colour are leaving because there are better opportunities elsewhere. They are not given opportunity to do important work, so they simply leave for greener pastures, which causes the organisation to lose out on that talent. She states that she plans to move on soon, as she feels that she has had enough of the corporate environment.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the Researcher will present the case narratives of each participant that took part in the research. The aim of this was to ensure understanding of each and every individual's own unique story, in order to aid the integration of the research. Although themes are apparent, the uniqueness of each participant's story was important and this Chapter aids the explanation of Context for each individual.

5 CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

During this chapter, the results will be discussed in terms of themes. The themes discussed are in the form of contexts, under umbrella terms being the Macro, Meso and Micro contexts. Within these contexts, phenomena such as Whiteness and Micro-Aggressions will also be discussed in terms of Identity work and professional identity. A theoretical approach was used when analysing the data, as the approach was based on a model adapted from two separate typologies. The two typologies are 'The Various Contexts Influencing Identity Work' (Crafford et al., 2018) as seen in table 1 and 'Key Levels & Themes in Tackling Whiteness' as seen in table 2 (Al Ariss, 2014, p. 364). These were combined to create the model in which the results will be discussed. This is because the contexts themselves are so intertwined and thus could not be discussed in total isolation.

The objectives of this research included exploring contextual, factors, Micro-Aggression and Whiteness and the impact that may have on the development of a positive professional identity. It was found that all these factors were so deeply intertwined that it made sense to discuss everything within the contexts that they are occurring, and then illustrating how that could possibly have a negative impact on professional identity development. For that reason, all research objectives are addressed in the headings highlighted in the model.

The model represented below illustrates how various contexts can play a regulatory role in the development of professional identity. The model views the construction of professional identity at a Macro, Meso and Micro level, and within each level, there are various contexts that play a role. Whiteness was found to have an impact on most levels and thus is seen as a factor that influences all the levels as well. Micro-Aggressions and racism were prevalent in the research, and are strongly related to Whiteness. History impacts on various levels because history plays a regulatory role in all contexts. Geographic location also impacts various contexts and so is also seen as an overarching factor. Throughout the results, it was seen that individual agency also forms a large part of professional identity development and seems to play a regulatory role in certain contexts. Thus, individual agency is seen as a factor that can heavily impact what one chooses to do with information gained from both the

Macro, Meso and Micro context. From theory, it is known that Identity regulation prompts Identity work (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). Thus, context as a regulatory factor will prompt Identity work in the development of professional identity.

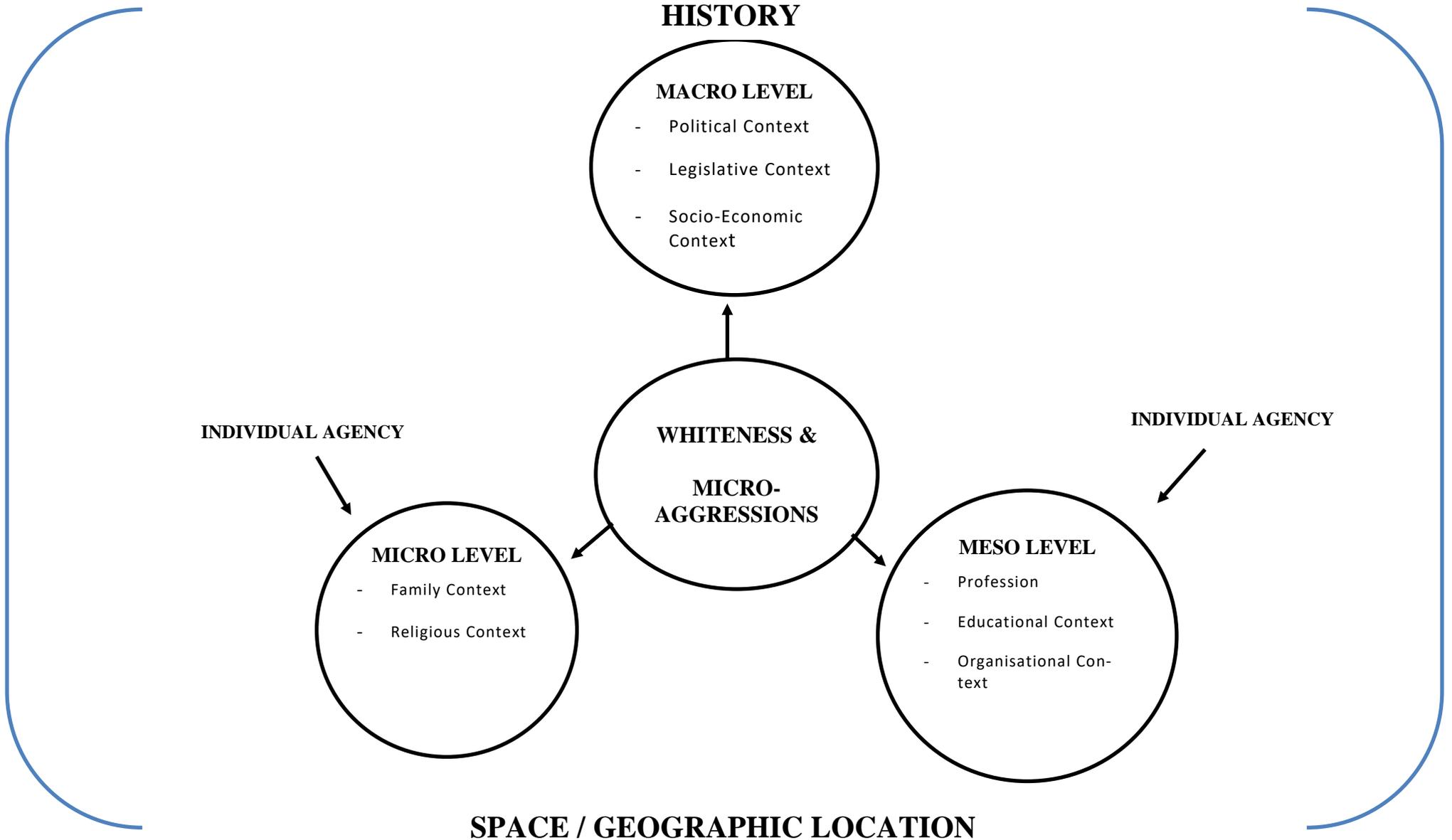


Figure 5: The regulatory role of context on identity work (Adapted from: Al Aris, (2014) & Crafford et al. (2018))

Figure 5: The regulatory role of context on identity work (Adapted from: Al Aris, (2014) & Crafford et al. (2018))

5.2 MACRO-CONTEXT

The Macro-Context usually refers to the broader environment, including societal factors that impact in the legislation, political and legal frameworks (Al Ariss, 2014). Within this context, the Researcher will discuss political factors, legislative factors and socio-economic factors.

5.2.1 Political Context

According to Crafford et al., (2018, p. 3) “the political climate regulates relationships between races and ethnic groups, as well as between genders, and promotes (or not) a fair climate for social and economic opportunities“. Political stability should aid identity work to continue fairly easily, whilst instability may cause disruptions that could negatively impact identity work (Crafford et al., 2018).

The political context Apartheid created was characterised by both social distance and hostility which influenced not only both the identity of the youth and future professionals, but also those to whom they looked for guidance. Apartheid led to the separation of people by race, culture and language. The policies severely limited the movement of People of Colour and limited the access that People of Colour had to Education and job opportunities. The legacy of Apartheid persists within the South African context in the form of exclusion through language, space, education and socio-economic status.

In the days of Apartheid, People of Colour used to have to carry around ‘passbooks’. The books were a form of internal passport and were needed to move around within the country’s borders. This practice entrenched the idea of ‘Otherness’, and led to a degree of exclusion that is experienced by People of Colour to this day. *Hawk* mentions that this caused his father to miss his birth, because he could not get home due to the fact that he did not have his passbook. The separation was highlighted by *Blue Crane*, indicating that he can remember the Black villages being very remote. The people were not only separated by race, but also by culture and language. The remote areas that they lived in were generally a protected space where they were sheltered from the ‘Otherness’ that the separation forced upon them. This meant that people grew up highly dispersed, leading to culture shocks when the separation was ended, usually at University level. At this point many participants

moved to the City to attend University if they lived in remote areas. This culture shock at University was experienced by most participants, due to the fact that they had simply not experienced a great deal of diversity in their younger days.

The separation of people means that people generally speak the language that they were surrounded with. Generally, White people would speak either English or Afrikaans, and People of Colour would generally speak Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, SiSwati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa or Zulu. Thus, some participants mentioned the culture shock that came with moving to the city to study Engineering, and having to speak, learn and converse in English on a daily basis. *Blue Crane* mentioned that when he moved to the city, he noticed that many of the People of Colour started speaking in slang, a mixture between a number of different languages, just to understand each other. *Hawk* mentioned that when he first left Soweto, and went to school in central Johannesburg, it was the first time that he had to converse in English from morning until night. Because business is formally done in English, it is difficult when one does not fully understand, and this has an impact on identity work.

Dove and *Owl* mention another phenomena regarding language that is influenced by the historical and political context. Both *Owl* and *Dove* are slightly younger than *Blue Crane* and *Hawk*, and thus had less direct exposure to Apartheid. Both of these young ladies went to good schools and developed very professional English accents. Both eluded to the fact that they feel as if they are occupying a liminal space. Their accents make them sound White, and thus many People of Colour feel that they are 'not Black enough' and stereotype them as people who cannot speak their native language. They find themselves having to validate their 'Blackness' because their accent does not sound like many other People of Colour. With White people, their accent allows them to fit in but their physical embodiment makes them different, leading them to experience racial Micro-Aggressions. *Blue Crane* as well as *Dove* verify that this is indeed a phenomena, where they indicate that it is sensitive to talk to fellow People of Colour in English, that it comes with a stigma that you are 'not really African' or are not 'authentically African'. It seems clear that if you talk in a way that is associated with Whiteness you are viewed as being 'not African'. *Owl* mentions that at times when with her fellow People of Colour, she has to put on a 'Black accent' to protect herself, especially when in taxis. She states that the fear of sounding like she is not authentically African is so great that she changes her accent just to fit in. The passbooks restricted the

movement of People of Colour in apartheid and thus impacted on identity work. In the past, identity work and identity was regulated by a tangible object, being the passbook. As will be seen in the numerous contexts below, identity now is significantly regulated by language. During the days of Apartheid, the oppression of People of Colour was written in law. However, the effects of this persist to this day. In the absence of written law, the separation of people by race, culture and language persists in regulating identity in numerous contexts including the professional, educational and organisational contexts.

The separation of people meant that most People of Colour had access to education that was of an inferior quality when compared to that of most White people, which can be contributed to the political context, history and space. *Hawk* had a traumatic start to his educational journey, that was directly influenced by the political climate at the time. Born in the 70s, he was around for the end of the Apartheid era and attended school in the build up to the end of Apartheid. He stated that whilst he was in primary school, there were a number of riots going on in Soweto. On more than a few occasions, protestors would come into class, tell the students to pack up their books and go home. This severely disrupted his education, and that of many other Historically Disadvantaged students. He stated that the protests were violent and scary, and mentioned that he and his peers should have received therapy to deal with the things they saw. He grew up in a community that was hostile and did not contribute in a positive manner towards his professional identity. In this case, the Political context regulated the educational context. His parents eventually took matters into their own hands and put him in a school away from all the drama, and he himself put in a lot of hard work that allowed him to overcome all this and become an Engineer. The context triggered a significant amount of identity work, in that he needed to validate himself and work harder than everyone else to get where he is. To this day he experiences the challenges in the workplace, that are regulated by the political context. Here, the political context of Apartheid can be seen to have caused a chain of oppression that has ultimately had a negative impact on Identity Work. *Hawk* has also been the one participant who speaks out about the oppression the most, and also seems to be the one who struggles the most in the organisational context. It seems that his agency and willingness to speak out is not received positively within organisations because they are structured around the idea of "Whiteness". This is in contrast with the story of *Blue Crane*, who grew up in similar time. He states that he went to a school that was previously White and was therefore of quality.

He also mentioned that sometimes, White teachers would come to teach at the school, and that would really aid his learning. Because the school was “White” in the past, they had an amazing library. This helped him to learn and gain the knowledge he needed to become an Engineer. In Apartheid, White people had the better books, schools and teachers, and thus were generally more privileged when it came to education. In essence, their access was not restricted, whilst generally the access to education for People of Colour was restricted. *Blue Crane* was in a position where the school used to be White and thus he benefitted from having access to some of the same resources. This is an example of Whiteness, as the system of racial inequality is promoting privilege for White people and disadvantage for People of Colour (Pierce, 2003). As seen in the Educational context, most participants were placed in schools that had a positive impact on their professional identity negotiation. Although *Blue Crane* grew up in Apartheid, he grew up far away from the city and was thus slightly more sheltered from the violence and oppression associated with the political system.

Penguin stated that she was in high school when Apartheid came to an end. She stated that the community she lived in was mainly Indian, but she noticed that when Apartheid ended, the community became slightly more diverse but remained predominantly Indian. This demonstrates the legacy of Apartheid in the geographical dispersion of people within South Africa. Even after Apartheid ended, many areas are still characterised by being ‘White’ ‘Indian’ ‘Black’ or ‘Coloured’ areas. This geographical dispersion can have a regulatory factor on numerous other contexts. *Penguin* herself stated that when she moved away from this area it was a major culture shock. She was not comfortable at first with the diversity that she had to cope with in the broader South African context. This would have an impact on identity work as she needed to teach herself how to handle more diverse situations. As a professional, she stated that she was lucky because her University years aided her in managing diversity, as this has helped her significantly as a manager in the workplace.

Penguin mentions that in 2017, the politics in South Africa crept into her organisation and was a major push factor that pushed her out of her managerial role. She was expected to allow political motives to influence the execution of her professional duties. The political context thus was regulating her professional context, and she was forced to withdraw from the role due to her personal values. She mentioned that the consideration for her family and

her childrens' future also played a regulatory role here. She mentioned that she left the role because she felt that she did not want to be involved in such negative actions, stating that her children and life were too important to her. This has caused the organisation to lose a competent individual within Engineering management. This also impacts on *Penguin's* identity work, as she is forced to withdraw from a managerial role because the demands of the role clash with her value system. She thus needs to renegotiate a space for herself within this environment in a more technical area.

In South Africa, the political context is strongly influenced by history. Although the political system of Apartheid came to an end in 1994, the legacy remains within the South African context. It is clear that the impact on Identity work was significant for all participants. In the negotiation of their professional identity, the regulatory factor of the political context made their negotiation and construction significantly more challenging than that of their White colleagues.

5.2.2 Legislative Context

Since the end of Apartheid, the South African government has made transformation a priority. The introduction of Employment Equity methods such as BBBEE, have been introduced to right the wrongs of the past, and attempt to get the demographics within Organisations to more fairly reflect the demographics of the country. However, the Historically Disadvantaged participants stated that often Employment Equity in itself causes a degree of disadvantage and has led to unfair stereotyping within Organisations.

Statistics South Africa (2014) indicates that there has only been a 3% increase in Black professional skilled workers since the end of Apartheid in 1994 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). This means that, despite the efforts of BBBEE, Historically Disadvantaged people are not becoming professionals. Despite the fact that Organisations promote the appointment of Historically Disadvantaged people, there simply are not a lot of Historically Disadvantaged professionals to choose from. This indicates that other contexts, such as history, education, socio-economic and family, are possibly a barrier in professional identity negotiation.

BBBEE is implemented in South African organisations, to improve on Employment Equity. Due to the fact that there are not a lot of Black professionals, many people get placed in roles that they cannot competently perform. *Blue Crane* makes mention to this phenomenon. He indicates that many people that are Historically Disadvantaged get offered roles that they cannot perform, but take them anyway. He calls them opportunists, and indicates that it is unjust to take on a role which you cannot competently perform. He believes that this has given rise to the stereotype around BBBEE appointments. That stereotype is that People of Colour are appointed simply to 'make up the numbers' and to comply. They are seen as automatically less competent than their White peers. The majority of professionals of colour, who are competent and capable of performing the role, are then put into that very same box. Many participants indicated that they had to work harder than their White peers, because instead of starting off on a clean slate, they started off as being seen as incompetent. Thus, they first need to prove themselves as professionals before they are given credit. There was an indication that the same is not so for their White colleagues.

Penguin's experience of BBBEE was so negative, that the stereotyping eventually was a push factor that pushed her out of her managerial role. She stated that when she was placed in the role of a manager, there was a lot of talk that she was a BBBEE appointment simply put there to make up the numbers. In this case someone actually admitted to her that they stereotyped her as being automatically incompetent because she was a person of colour and a female. There is a belief that she could not possibly have got the job because she is competent, and thus people believe that this is a BBBEE appointment. She mentioned that everything really took a toll and she eventually asked to move back into a more technical role. The pressure she felt was unlike anything a White male would face in her opinion, because her competence was questioned from the start, she had to prove herself and started from a negative rather than starting on even ground. This would have a negative impact on identity work and the context actually became a push factor that forced her out of her managerial role. Her experience could explain why there are so few Black females in top management roles. *Hawk* had a similar experience, where he was labelled an 'Employment Equity Employee'. Such a label strips him of his observed competence and labels him as someone who is in a job based purely on skin colour. There was a belief that he was simply there to make up the numbers. *Dove* was just starting off as an Engineer when she was first interviewed. At first she felt that she was fitting into the organisation quite

well, but later on, she began to feel that she was being treated unjustly. During the third time the Researcher interacted with her, she felt that her colleagues saw what she was capable of and they began to accept her. She said it was different for her White colleague. She very powerfully added that this was “exhausting, you are not sure if you are being accepted because of what you can do for them or because of who you are as a person.” She felt that others were accepted for their personhood, whilst she was simply eventually accepted because of her skills. It seems unfair if it was only her that was put through such an ordeal. This would trigger identity work because she needed to validate her own competence in order to negotiate her professional identity. The stereotyping and negativity seems to be absolutely immense and could break the strongest of individuals.

The above indicates that whilst BBBEE is positive and is very necessary, the implementation thereof and the perception thereof has led to Historically Disadvantaged people being automatically labelled as incompetent, because there is a perception that the only reason that they get put into the role was because of the colour of their skin. This means that they are immediately starting on the back foot. When going into the job, instead of starting on a clean slate, they already need to overcome perceptions that they are incompetent. This stereotype is a form of Whiteness, where White ethnic privilege allows White people to be seen as competent from the start, whereas Historically Disadvantaged individuals will have to put in a lot more effort to be seen in the same light as their White colleagues. This has a negative impact on professional identity development for Historically Disadvantaged individuals.

5.2.3 Socio-Economic Context

As previously mentioned, despite the fact that Apartheid has been over for 24 years, the political freedom that was gained has done little to enhance economic prosperity and the causes of this is deeply rooted in Apartheid law (Carter & May, 1999; Frye, Farred & Nojekwa, 2011). In a study conducted by Ken Farr, Lord and Wolfenbarger (1998), it was found that political freedom in fact does very little to enhance economic prosperity. It was found that in the South African context, there is a very strong correlation between annual household income and race (Nasttrass & Seekings, 2001). As mentioned in chapter 2, it cannot be assumed that all Historically Disadvantaged people are from poor backgrounds, and that

all White people are wealthy, but there is a general theme of disadvantage for People of Colour and a general theme of advantage for White people. Crafford et al., (2018) mention that within the economic context, the system is driven by capitalism. “The dominant global system, capitalism prescribes the striving for wealth, defines the value of success in largely economic terms, and determines the means by which economic capital is derived and established“ (Crafford et al., 2018, p.3).

The results of the research indicate a general theme of disadvantage when it comes to socio-economic status. Most participants did not have families who were well off. Barring *Penguin*, all participants made use of bursaries at some point to access education. *Penguin's* parents paid for her education, but she felt immense pressure to do well because she knew she could not afford to repeat a year. *Owl* indicated that from when she was small, she remembered having a feeling of being ‘less privileged’ than her classmates who were mostly White. It is clear that this privilege is apparent from when *Owl* was still a child. Retrospectively, she remembered a time when she was the only Black girl in the school, and at that point she was not as aware of how her physical embodiment made her different from her friends. She stated that when the school brought in other children of colour from the surrounding area as part of a diversity project, she noticed that the other children treated them differently to how they treated her, giving rise to a liminal space in this context as well. She realised the socio-economic differences and this made her more aware of her own embodiment.

Dove's story is heavily influenced by her parents’ financial troubles, indicating that there were some days where she didn’t know if there would be food on the table. She indicates that the troubles that she experienced meant she had a degree of responsibility to make something out of herself in order to get her and her parents out of financial trouble. This seemed to be a major driver in her identity work. There is an immense amount of pressure for someone who comes from the new and free generation to make something out of themselves in order to support their family. This triggers a degree of identity work because it takes an immense amount of dedication to handle that pressure and manage to reach the goal of becoming a professional.

Dove mentioned that the economic prosperity would not only help her, but family members as well. There is a phenomenon in some cultures where it is customary to help the wider family when you are doing well. This is colloquially known as 'Black Tax'. It must be highlighted that some People of Colour are uncomfortable with the term 'tax', as one participant stated "I think it is a bad name, Black tax" because they do not see helping their family out financially as a burden. But others do feel slightly "taxed" by this and feel that they are starting at a negative because of the situation. *Hawk* further elaborates on this and states that it is out of a sense of duty, if a family member needs help you need to help them. This phenomenon means that unlike more privileged colleagues whose parents can support themselves, their monthly salaries have to get split over a number of areas. Whereas more privileged colleagues already have their own cars, others may still have to rely on public transport because their money does not stretch as far. In this instance the socio-economic context impacts on one of the positives of becoming a professional, which is having the money to do certain things such as buy a car. Like in previous contexts, Historically Disadvantaged groups have to start from behind their White colleagues, leaving them at a disadvantage.

Socio-economic disadvantage will obviously have an impact on professional identity development and identity work. *Hawk* mentions that he remembers clearly being in University and going to his White friend's house to work on a project. He said he was shocked to see just how supportive his White colleague's father was. He told of how his White colleagues were given all the equipment they needed by their families, that the White children's families did not want them to struggle. In this instance, *Hawk* realised the disadvantage he was at due to his socio-economic status. It was not that his Father wanted him to suffer and therefore didn't help him with equipment, it was that he simply did not have the financial means to do so. This impacts on identity work as again *Hawk* needs to put in more effort because he does not have access to the same resources that his White colleagues have access to.

Wealth creates wealth, and due to the structure of Apartheid the South African context has generally allowed for White people to hold a large degree of wealth. There is a difference between equality and equity. Even though South Africa is a free country and we are all equal, some have access to more opportunities due to structural oppression. Structural oppression has led to general economic disadvantage for People of Colour. Even though there

are policies in place to try and uplift the Historically Disadvantaged community, poverty is a vicious cycle. The past is impacting on the present and political freedom will not lead to economic prosperity overnight.

5.3 MESO-CONTEXT

Within the Meso context, which Al Ariss et al. (2014) look at an 'organisational level', areas of the profession of Engineering itself, the Organisational context and the Educational context will be discussed.

5.3.1 Profession of Engineering

In the professional context of South Africa, the construction and negotiation of professional identity through mentorship and role models may be limited (Slay & Smith, 2011). Figure 4 depicts this, as it can be seen that Engineers that are registered with ECSA are not equally represented throughout all age groups. It can be seen that there is indeed a lack of role models that are of colour in the Engineering industry. This is a phenomenon that was clear in the research.

The issue of skills transfer seems to be a major problem in the Engineering context, and it was mentioned that people seem to generally be aware of this. Despite this awareness however, it seems that there is still relatively little being done to try and fix this in a formal sense. In an example of how Whiteness influences the professional context in organisations, it seems that it is easier for White professionals to find mentorships simply because White Engineers are more likely to mentor other White Engineers. Because of the demographics of Engineers being mainly White in the older and more experienced generation (In what is a direct consequence of Apartheid), younger Engineers of colour are finding it difficult. Obviously, the historical political context has had an impact here. However, even though there are not a lot of older Engineers of colour, it should still be possible to find mentorship as such a relationship need not be structured around race. However, due to the history of SA professional mentoring relationships have also been affected. Dove has an experience of this, mentioning that her White colleague has a mentor who is very hands on and her mentor gives her a lot of opportunities. *Dove* on the other hand has yet to be given an

opportunity to be as deeply involved as her colleague. Because of this she feels that she has to put in extra effort just to feel like she is on the same page as the rest of her colleagues. Over time, people have started to realise that she was capable, but mentioned that it was difficult to understand why her White colleague was accepted and given opportunities from the start, whilst she had to work extra hard to prove herself first. She also mentioned that this is actually rather exhausting. This links to what was discussed regarding EE in the legislative context as well.

Another scenario which has been discussed in previous contexts that participants reported was a degree of assumed incompetence, despite their professional qualifications. Due to this, they felt that their bosses would give their White colleagues the better work and the harder work because they are assumed to be less capable than their White colleagues. *Hawk* tells of how his White colleague had a laptop and got given important tasks, whilst he had to work with the technicians and was not provided with his own laptop. Other participants mentioned Black women in Engineering do not get the 'hard work', because it is assumed that they cannot competently complete it. This also directly impacts on professional development as Historically Disadvantaged individuals will not have the same learning opportunities and scope for skills transfer enabling them to learn how to solve complex problems by taking part in the hard work.

The professional context automatically triggers identity work for everyone, but it seems that Historically Disadvantaged individuals have to constantly validate themselves in a manner that their White colleagues don't. It also seems apparent that Historically Disadvantaged individuals have to work harder just to learn; instead of being mentored like their other colleagues, they are left to figure things out on their own. In the formulation of a professional identity, this puts Historically Disadvantaged people at an immediate disadvantage. This is an example of Whiteness, in the sense that the practices are, be it consciously or unconsciously, protecting unearned ethnic privilege of White people, as they seem to be provided the opportunities and are given proper mentorship. This lack of mentorship can impact on skills transfer and thus the development of competent professionals of colour. Thus the very system that unfairly assumes their lack of competence, colludes to ensure that the status quo remains. This requires active agency and a significant amount of extra work and effort on the part of professionals of colour to learn and develop their competence

within their profession. Once they reach they required levels, they also need to go above and beyond to convince others that they are indeed competent. It seems that they are constantly on the back foot. In addition, as *Penguin* mentioned, often individuals will simply leave organisations resulting in the talent loss.

5.3.2 Educational Context

In the Macro context, the Researcher established that there is general economic prosperity for White people and general disadvantage for People of Colour. Logically, one can argue that such income inequality will have an effect on individuals that grow up in those households, and subsequently limit the opportunities in their future for a quality education. As indicated, the educational context can influence the opportunities that humans get and can also be a constraining factor with regards to identity (Crafford et al., 2018). Education can also drastically impact occupational choices, and can also either hinder opportunities for further development or the opening of doors depending on the quality thereof (Crafford et al., 2018).

As previously mentioned the participants generally all had rather unique experiences when it came to their foundation phase of education. *Blue Crane's* experience highlights White Privilege. He stated that his school used to be "White", and thus subsequently had better facilities and a fantastic library. The access to this aided his learning. *Owl* and *Dove* went to private schools, but had different experiences. *Owl* was one of the only Black children in her school, whilst *Dove* mentioned that there were no White children in her school, but all the teachers were White. They both felt that they got a high standard of education. This ties in with *Blue Crane's* experience. They all had some form of "White" influence in the school that has coincided with them receiving a higher standard of Education. This in contrast with *Hawk*, who was schooled in the townships, and had to deal with disruptions to his learning due to the riots in the country at the time. He was subsequently also moved to a private school by his parents which aided his professional identity development. Had he not been moved and continued his schooling in the traumatic circumstances that he was in things could have been very different. This illustrates how circumstance and a good education can aid one in succeeding.

Hawk mentioned his pride at being the first Engineering graduate from his community, indicating that it was not the norm to become a professional in that environment. Some participants strongly identified with their title of Engineer and that there was a degree of pride around that. *Owl* recognised that structural factors, such as her schooling and her parent's financial stability, undoubtedly aided her professional identity development. She mentioned that she sees other People of Colour in a totally different circumstance, and she states that it is a cycle that all starts with education. She describes a vicious cycle of poor education that leads to many people not being able to go to University and thus not being able to become professionals. This cycle is rooted in socio-economic circumstance that is linked to the structural oppression of People of Colour that was caused by the system of Apartheid. Here we see how the Macro context significantly regulates the Meso context. *Owl* and *Penguin* noted that the realisation of the amount of money their parents were spending on education really encouraged them to perform, they realised that it was not all fun and games. As previously mentioned, *Dove* also indicated that there was immense pressure to succeed to alleviate the financial turmoil her family had faced. Thus the socio-economic context regulates the type of education one gets, and together these act as a driver in professional identity development.

When deciding on what to study, most participants did not really receive formal career guidance. Some had access to data bases and books that explained what different careers were. Most participant's parents also played a large role in getting them interested in Engineering. All of them indicated that they were always told that they would go to University by their parents. Some were even told that they would study Engineering. Here it is apparent that the Family context, which we will discuss later, has an impact on the educational context. Of the participants, *Blue Crane* was the only one who stated that he used to play with blocks and build when he was younger. This allowed him to learn how to build and create things, as well as solve problems, which is key to being an Engineer. *Penguin* mentioned that the profession is a passion. She stated that creating extraordinary things with her natural ability is something that drives her. An interest in the unusual, which she was exposed to by her parents taking her to an air show, is what sparked her interest in the first place. *Dove* and *Owl* both mentioned that their parents had always told them that they would go to University and even that they would become Engineers. *Owl* also mentioned that Engineering was what she wanted to do, choosing the career path over accounting despite having a bursary

opportunity with another accounting organisation. It is clear that a number of factors regulate the negotiation of professional identity, and individual agency is indeed also one of them. *Owl* gave up an immediate bursary to do what she loves (although she received another for Engineering at a later point) and *Penguin* defied her Mother's wishes for her to become a Doctor so that she could become an Engineer.

University was a particularly tough time for *Hawk*, who had to deal with the riots when he was in school, and also took part in protests when he was in University. He was part of the struggle and the fight for freedom for Historically Disadvantaged people in South Africa. To this day he does not hold his tongue about oppression and unfair exclusion. He mentioned that he was one of only ten students that were of colour to finish their degree. Significant identity work was likely triggered during his University years, where he had to overcome significant barriers, including Whiteness, to ensure that he managed to get his degree.

Another theme that came through from the Participants' University experiences was the culture shock that came along with it. *Penguin* grew up in a predominantly Indian environment, and stated that she experienced a culture shock when coming to University and interacting with all these different cultures. There are two issues that could have led to the severe culture shock for participants. The one is the fact that they had to deal with diversity when they were not used to it. In *Owl's* case, she was surrounded by a language that she did not understand which was likely overwhelming. The other issue is the issue of Whiteness and how the Universities are structured around Whiteness. In the case of *Hawk* the Whiteness was the most apparent as he alluded to the subtle exclusion of People of Colour. *Owl* mentioned that the issue of Language and individuals speaking Afrikaans really made her feel slightly isolated throughout her University experience. She stayed in a residence on campus and most of the people that she lived with were Afrikaans speaking. This resulted in her being excluded from a lot of conversations simply because she could not understand. University is a time where people often build a professional network that they will take with them for the rest of their career. This lack of understanding severely limits the ability to network. *Owl* felt awkward about the situation and felt like causing a disruption whenever she was around people who spoke Afrikaans, because it seemed to be an inconvenience for them to switch over to English. Language in the educational context can thus be something that impacts on professional identity negotiation.

5.3.3 Organisational Context

The organisational context can also impact on identity work. According to Crafford et al. (2018), elements that can impact on identity work include practices of management, the strategy of the organisation, policies and procedures, training and development as well as pay and compensation systems. In the profession of Engineering, the issue of mentorship was discussed because it seems to be a relevant topic throughout the Engineering profession. It is however also relevant in the organisational context. There are two dimensions of mentoring. The first is where the professionals themselves can ensure they mentor all young people and give them the necessary skills they need to succeed. The second is more organisational, and the organisation can do more to ensure that mentoring becomes more of a key practice in the profession. It seems that even though organisations may nominate mentors there is nothing to ensure mentor to mentee fit and often people simply do not manage to build up that relationship. Thus more can be done to ensure the success of such initiatives.

In an incident only mentioned by *Blue Crane* he discussed the issue of inequality in compensation. He mentioned that when he quit his first job, they hired a White lady to replace him and paid her significantly more than what he was getting paid. He knew her and they had the same qualifications and similar experience. Thus, he felt that there was a degree of unfairness. Despite this, he felt that perhaps the organisation simply wanted to ensure she did not leave and thus paid her more. Such an incident can cause one to question their value and thus has an impact on identity work, because one would need to find a way to validate oneself. *Blue Crane* tends to be someone who can easily overcome incidents and states that he does not want to play the victim, but as seen in his story, all the incidents of Micro-Aggressions and Whiteness that he was exposed to have led him to distrust White people somewhat. *Blue Crane* validates himself by explaining the situation in a way that excludes race. *Blue Crane* handled the situation by creating his own organisation, where such problems simply cease to exist. *Hawk* and the other participants are stuck in organisations that are structured around Whiteness. In the case of *Hawk*, he mentions that although he has tried to validate people's actions, he has found that it always comes back down to race and

he speaks out against that. He seems to have experienced negative backlash to his speaking out, simply because the organisations are structured around Whiteness.

A theme that came out strongly in most of the cases was the issue of language, specifically, the practice of speaking Afrikaans whilst at work. Afrikaans is a language generally spoken by White people in South Africa. Typically, business is conducted in English because it is a common medium that everyone understands. Participants spoke about how language was an issue in University and it continued to be an issue in the organisational context. There were incidents where Afrikaans gets spoken in formal meetings, jeopardising people's opportunity to understand and give input. Language in this sense is being used as a tool to exclude, be it intentionally or unintentionally. This is an example of a micro-insult due to the fact that this displays a degree of rudeness and insensitivity (Sue et al., 2007). *Owl* specifically mentions that the situation makes her feel awkward and even hurts her feelings. She refers to her presence around people who are speaking Afrikaans as an inconvenience. It is worth questioning the psychological impact of thoughts such as those. Becoming a professional should in fact give one access to a degree of prestige and status, but instead she is troubled by thoughts that she is an inconvenience in the space of others. The very act of talking Afrikaans is in essence invalidating her as a professional, because they refuse to talk in a way in which she can understand.

Hawk also has an experience of Micro-Aggressions with regards to language in the organisation, but in his case it seems to be used as a tool to actively exclude him from work, meetings, conversations and decisions. In his case, the action of speaking Afrikaans seems to be more sinister than in the other cases. He gives a detailed account of how Whiteness is reproduced in the workplace, starting with the use of language. This act is a form of a micro-insult, but as *Hawk* continues his story, it begins to seem more like a micro-assault. It seems that some of his colleagues use language as a tool to exclude and undermine him. He states that there is an unwillingness to accept, understand and embrace cultural diversity within the organisation, which leads to colleagues excluding him. He mentions that people will even start talking Afrikaans in meetings that he chairs and that his colleagues will collude against him and make decisions without him before they are in the meetings. Then, by the time they do get into the meeting, he is already on the losing foot and his ideas are rejected before he even opens his mouth. This is active exclusion and illustrates the reproduction of

Whiteness within the organisation by the workers. The feeling of 'Otherness' is highlighted here as he is made to feel like the other, like he is different from the norm, which is an example of Whiteness. The situation is so bad that even formal organisational mechanisms and senior managerial instructions are ignored as a way of showing how resistant people are towards speaking an inclusive language in the work environment. This has a negative impact on professional identity because it reduces *Hawk* to someone who is seen as not important enough to include in decision making, even though he holds a position in the organisation that gives him that positional power.

5.4 MICRO-CONTEXT

Within the Micro-context, factors such as family, religion, and social issues will be discussed. The micro level represents the smallest level of interaction in the research and relates to issues that are close to the participants.

5.4.1 Family Context

"A person's family determines socio-economic class and influences the nature and extent of education as well as the culture in which a person is raised" (Crafford et al., 2018, p.3). Family plays an important role in shaping our identity because much of our years spent growing and developing are done under their guidance. Thus, they can have a profound impact on professional identity development.

All five participants listed their parents as people who played enormously important roles in shaping their professional identity. All participants also noted that at least one of their parents were professionals, and all participants except *Dove* noted that either one or both of their parents were teachers. This suggests that professionals raise professionals, and academics raise academics.

Owl and *Penguin* noted that their parents were both teachers and thus encouraged learning. *Owl* mentioned that her parents placed a degree of importance on education, but her realisation that performing well was rewarding, played a large part in her success. This illustrates that although her parents encouraged learning, a degree of individual agency also aided her

in pushing towards her goals. *Penguin* mentioned that whilst it was a positive to have parents that encouraged learning, this came at the cost of a broader educational experience.

Dove's parents played a significant role in her professional identity development. She often referred to all the hard work she put in by stating things such as “all the hard work we put in”. She sees herself and her parents as a collective and believes that she owes a lot of her success to the hours and effort they put in to support her. She believes however that in doing this they kept her in a bit of a bubble and sheltered her from the real world. This act of sheltering meant that when she got into the organisational context the culture shock was relatively large. She stated that the act of sheltering became slightly frustrating as she got older. Despite this, she states that her Dad, who was the one who introduced the idea of Engineering as a career to her, encouraged her significantly to become an Engineer.

Blue Crane's parents also played a large role in his development. His mother was a teacher and his Dad was a builder. *Blue Crane* is also the only one of the participants who has an entrepreneurial identity, something that he undoubtedly learned from his Dad who was an entrepreneur as well. He has subsequently built his own highly successful business. *Hawk* indicated that his Dad always told him that he should become an Engineer or a Doctor, and did not like the idea of him studying an arts degree. His mother was a principal at a local school and this encouraged him to study and further his education. As previously discussed, *Hawk's* parents also took him out of his school that was impacted by the turmoil in Soweto and placed him in a private college. Thus it can be seen from all participants' accounts that their parents played a role in shaping their professional identity. It highlights the importance of a proper support system in one's childhood to aid development as a professional.

From the accounts of the participants it can be deemed that their parents played a significant role in setting them up on the path towards becoming a professional, be it through encouragement or decisions that their parents made for them. They ensured that their children had the best that they could give and did all they possibly could to help their children make a success of themselves. Most participants mentioned the importance of having a support structure such as a family, and those who were married also indicated that their partner and children give them additional meaning over and above their professional identity.

5.4.2 Religious Context

The religious context emerged as a theme from the data and was not based on theory. Two participants referred to the religious context as a means of motivation and a framework that they use to guide decision making. Another participant indicated a more negative view around religion and stated that this drove her to be independent. The definition of religion is the belief in a controlling power, such as a God or gods. In this research the only religion referred to is Christianity.

Hawk grew up in a time where riots ran rife and he said that he believed that as children they should have received psychological treatment for the things that they saw. He stated that he believed it was only through the grace of God that he has managed to gain the success that he has and overcome the horrors of that time. Religion aided *Hawk* in overcoming what was a really tough time in his life and provided him with the peace that he needed to move on from that. A large amount of that identity work would have been regulated by his beliefs as he has indicated. *Hawk* and *Blue Crane* both attribute a lot of their decisions to their religious beliefs which impact the agency that they take in any given situation.

Owl's take on the religious context was slightly different. She stated that her parents were rather religious and always took her to Church. She began to notice that the church was rather patriarchal and later on she began to notice they were also homophobic. This did not fit in with *Owl's* personal values and thus she took individual agency over the situation. She stated that her independence has always been very important to her and that this situation drove her to become more independent. This highlights the importance of individual agency in the Micro context. As much as context can influence one's thinking, your individual agency can influence what you do with that information.

Whether religion was seen as positive or negative, it triggered identity work for all the participants who brought this up in their stories. Religion thus played a regulatory role in their identity work.

5.5 CONCLUSION

During this chapter, the results were discussed in terms of themes with clear reference to the theoretical typologies that were used in the research. This Chapter addressed the research objectives involving the impact of contextual factors, Whiteness and Micro-Agressions on the construction of Professional Identity.

6 CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, the Researcher explored the patterns across participants with regard to the regulatory role context plays with regards to professional identity development in South Africa. In this concluding section, the Researcher will discuss the results of the current study as they pertain to the guiding literature and in particular with regard to the typologies of Whiteness, Context and Micro-Aggression.

In the literature, it was established through the typology of Al Ariss (2014) as seen in table 2, that Whiteness can be studied on five clear and distinct levels. Those levels include History, Space, the Macro Context, Organisational level and Individual level. In the results, examples of Whiteness was found for all levels, and there even seems to be an additional factor that is at play in South Africa which is not strongly eluded to in that typology.

In the context of history and space, it was found that the history of colonisation has a negative impact on professional identity and the history of our country has led to a degree of ethnic privilege for White people and a disadvantage for People of Colour to this day. Racist laws limited the movement of people and the impact of that has led to separation of people to this day. The impact of history was particularly evident in educational systems with “White” schools and teachers being viewed as superior. Therefore the impact of history on space and thus educational opportunities is enormous and can negatively impact on professional identity negotiation. Whiteness is playing a big part here, because Whiteness is upholding unfair ethnic privileges even in a country of supposed equal opportunity.

In the Macro-context, Al Ariss et al. (2014) mention that some legislations, political and legal frameworks institutionalise ethnic privilege. Racist Apartheid laws did just that. Racism in South Africa can be seen in the structural and subtle oppression of People of Colour that was mentioned throughout the research. This persists even after the laws were abolished. Equity laws such as BBEEE attempt to level the playing field in the organisational context, but little is being done in other contexts such as educational contexts. The socio-economic context heavily regulates what type of education parents can afford to provide their children.

If parents cannot afford a private school education or education at a high quality institution, they have to accept education of a possibly poorer quality. This illustrates how poverty is a vicious cycle, and in the South African context, this is strongly linked to racist Apartheid legislation that allowed White people to generate wealth for years whilst People of Colour were forced to accept poor education and live in general poverty when compared to White people. These socio-economic consequences can be linked to the Apartheid legislation and therefore the historical and political context.

In the Organisational level, Al Ariss et al. (2014) mention that Whiteness can include Human Resources practices and the practices of management to retain ethnic privilege. This was extremely prevalent in the results of the research. It was also found that although BBEEE is an attempt to level the playing field and provide equity in the work environment, the manner of the implementation thereof may have led to negative stereotypes associated with the policy. However, the importance of BBEEE is not disputed, but there are recommendations about educating the work force as to just how this is implemented to try and eradicate these stereotypes. In the research, it was found that mentorship in the work environment seems to be heavily regulated by Whiteness. It was mentioned by participants that they found it hard to get mentorship, and their White colleagues did not seem to have the same issue. Another thing that was mentioned was that the participants felt they were not provided the hard and challenging work, almost as if they were not trusted with the complexity. There was an opinion that they were viewed as automatically incompetent, whilst their White colleagues were viewed as automatically competent. They thus need to work harder to prove themselves at all times. The ethnic privilege that White people undoubtedly possess is subtly being retained in the organisational context.

Lastly the individual level according to Al Ariss et al. (2014) consists of individual agency as well as the interplay between gender, ethnicity, religion, physical ability and age factors. Individual agency can play a role in regulating Whiteness. The individual agency of *Blue Crane* removed him from an organisational situation where he even had to deal with Whiteness. *Hawk* and *Owl* use their agency to challenge the reproduction of Whiteness within their organisations.

Language is not mentioned in Al Ariss et al.'s (2014) model, although it could be linked to the individual level. In the South African context, there are eleven (11) official languages in the country. This automatically separates people based on culture and language. In the context of professional identity development, language seemed to play an enormous role in this research. Mentioned by all participants as a negative factor within their work environment, language seems to perpetuate the concept of Whiteness within organisations. There is a general trend of speaking Afrikaans in formal meetings and generally being unaware of the negative impact this may have on people who simply do not understand. It also seemed that although organisations were aware of the problem, little was being done beyond an email sent out by the CEO. There seems to be no consequence management. In the case of *Hawk*, the use of language actually was seen as a micro-assault, due to the fact that it was used as a weapon to consciously discredit his opinions and his competence.

It can be concluded that Whiteness as a concept is relevant in South Africa, and the research illustrated just how Whiteness is perpetuated within South African Engineering organisations.

With regards to the contexts that were used in the typology of Crafford et al. (2018), evidence was found for all of the contexts even if not mentioned directly under that heading. The Historical context as mentioned by Crafford et al. (2018) was seen as an overarching factor in this research that regulates everything as opposed to a separate context entirely. The Economic context was discussed within the Socio-economic context here. Evidence was found for the family context, educational context, occupational context and organisational context. The only context that was not mentioned directly was the cultural context. This is because it was not extremely evident in the research, and the incidents of cultural context that were found were weaved into other contexts in which those incidents occurred. The Researcher decided to make use of the Religious context, which was not mentioned by Crafford et al. (2017), as they rather included this within the cultural context. Another context that was added to this research was the legislative context, as it was found that legislature heavily regulates the professional identity of previously disadvantaged individuals in South Africa.

Sue et al. (2007) describe three types of Micro-Aggressions as can be seen in Table 3. These include Micro-Assaults, Micro-Insults and Micro-Invalidations. Evidence was found for all three types of Micro-Aggression in the research and proves that racial Micro-Aggressions are at large within the South African context.

In the case of micro-assaults, Sue et al. (2007) regard them as avoidant behaviour, name-calling or purposeful discriminatory actions. Language in the case of *Hawk* is an example of a micro-assault. The perpetrators were using language as a weapon to exclude him and invalidate him in a direct attack on him. Another example was when *Penguin* had a colleague openly admit to her that he at first did not think she was capable because she was a woman of colour. She stated that the talk was that she was just “a stupid Black woman who could not handle the pressure”.

In terms of micro-insults, many examples in the research related to language. People may be genuinely unaware that their speaking a different language is so frustrating to someone who does not understand. Micro-insults consist of a degree of subtle rudeness that conveys insensitivity. Thus, when people do not switch over to English it can be seen as a micro-insult. Another incident was seen when *Blue Crane* was exposed to non-verbal communication that seemed to insinuate that he had stolen something from the organisation.

Lastly, micro-invalidations are statements or actions that nullify or discredit someone's lived reality. This is seen with regards to accent. Especially in the case of *Dove* and *Owl*, their accent is seen as being 'White'. There was an indication that due to this they occupy a liminal space, where they form part of two groups but are not fully part of either. With fellow People of Colour, their accent makes them different. They are viewed as being privileged, as having had an 'easy' life and are seen to be wealthy. They are then viewed as being people who cannot speak their native language and who are not authentically African. This is a form of a micro-invalidation. Around White people, their accent gives them credit, but their embodiment makes them different. This was seen with the incident from *Owl* where she called an estate agent to view a flat. When she met the women, there was a degree of shock that she was a Black lady because her accent made her sound White, which is a micro-invalidation.

6.2 INTENDED CONTRIBUTION AND ACADEMIC VALUE

Pratt et al. (2006) highlight that although there is a lot of research regarding the negotiation of identity at work, not much research has been done about how the professionals, individuals who carry out highly specific functions, negotiate and construct their identities. Furthermore, the context of South Africa, due to its particular history, brings in more barriers to the negotiation of this identity for professionals from Historically Disadvantaged groups. The aim of this research was to broaden the topic of Whiteness to the South African context, as the theory was founded in the United States of America. In that, it was found that Whiteness can be reproduced in different ways in the South African context due to our unique history. The theory of racial Micro-Aggressions was also important to understand for the context of this research and, as mentioned, the Researcher managed to find examples of all three Micro-Aggressions.

The issue of the racial marginalisation of the majority of the population has been a very relevant topic over the past few years. One only has to look at the student protests that started in 2015 to see that people are angry that 24 years after apartheid, Historically Disadvantaged groups are still as marginalised as ever. Once all the financial, social and educational barriers are overcome and Historically Disadvantaged individuals can finally enter the workplace as professionals, they then face even more barriers to the negotiation of their professional identity in the form of racial Micro-Aggressions, Whiteness and institutionalised racism. The very context that we live in is a barrier within itself. The aim of this research was to provide a place for Historically Disadvantaged Individuals to tell their stories, and to explore the impact of context, Micro-Aggressions and Whiteness on their professional identity negotiation. The findings are broad and illustrate the profound impact that the Macro context has had on the Meso and Micro context. The impact on professional identity negotiation has been illustrated. These results can be used in the future to try and eradicate these barriers in South African organisations and ultimately make the profession of Engineering more accessible for Historically Disadvantaged groups.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of the research highlighted a number of areas that could possibly be explored in the future. These are discussed briefly below.

- The issue of mentorship in the Engineering industry seems to be of the utmost importance. The profession and the industry would benefit greatly from a more structured approach to mentorship. It is recommended that the lack of mentorship opportunities in Engineering organisations and the impact thereof be studied in more detail. Mentorship is the very basis by which critical skills and knowledge get transferred. It seems from the results of this research that this skills transfer is being limited due to historical political factors in South African organisations.
- BBBEE seems to cause negative stereotyping in organisations. It would be worth conducting possible research into how such an equity scheme could be implemented so as to try and eradicate these barriers.
- It would be recommended that this study be conducted in a wider geographical area with a sample that is more representative of the South African population and the demographics of Engineering professionals of colour.
- It would also be recommended to ensure that any additional study has a sample that represents all disciplines of Engineering. Here, the fields featured included Mechanical Engineering, Electronic Engineering and Aeronautical Engineering.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The results of this research indicate that there is a problem in organisations with regards to language. At times it seems that language is being used as a tool to purposefully exclude People of Colour. It is important that this be handled more proactively and organisations should introduce consequence management for when situations such as these arise. The issue of mentorship and skills transfer was a major theme, with an indication that the lack thereof was causing young professionals of colour to leave organisations for greener pastures, resulting in a lack of talent retention. The recommendation would be to introduce a buddy system, where second or third year graduates look after new graduates in organisations and teach them the ropes, in a formal mentorship relationship. The issue of

BBBEE seems to be causing a large amount of negative stereotyping in organisations. It would be recommended that organisations make employees aware of exactly how Equity programs are implemented so as to try and eradicate this unreasonable stereotyping.

6.5 LIMITATIONS

A limitation as highlighted earlier was that the Researcher was unable to obtain a sample that is representative of the entire Engineering field. That is, the fields of Civil, Industrial, Electrical and Software Engineering were not included in the research. Another limitation is that there were no coloured participants and thus a part of the Historically Disadvantaged population of South Africa is not represented in the study. With regards to the geographic location in which this research took place; the research was only conducted in the region of Pretoria and Johannesburg, which are the two metropolitan areas of the Gauteng region. Thus, other large metropolitan areas and many more rural areas and towns have not been considered in this study.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

APPENDIX B
10 STATEMENTS TEST

APPENDIX C

PROOF OF EDITING & TURNITIN
RECEIPT