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EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF PREVIOUSLY DISADVANTAGED CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS (CA)

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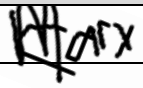
Ciska Marx		16/01/2019

ABSTRACT

This study explored the narratives of previously disadvantaged chartered accountants (CAs) within the unique South African setting in order to identify the impact of context, whiteness, microaggression and structural inequalities on their professional identity construction and negotiation. Although research has been done on how individuals negotiate their identity at work, limited research has been conducted on how professional identity is constructed, especially among professionals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kuafmann, 2006). This study explores the individual's story and the significance of multiple contexts such as culture, resources, education and economic class influencing the construction and negotiation of professional identity on macro, meso and micro levels and how context influences their identity work (Yin, 2009).

The narrative case study approach allowed for a degree of flexibility in capturing each participant's journey of becoming a professional as well as the identity work in which they engaged. It helped to understand each unique story in context and provided rich insights into the professional journeys of black CAs. Although South Africa has been making an effort to change and provide opportunities for previously disadvantaged chartered accountants, they are still faced with various barriers to becoming a professional. This study highlights implications for organisations as well as structural and contextual factors that impact negatively on professional identity development. It also expands on current theoretical knowledge of professional identity and it introduces new understanding and insights on the impact of context on professional identity construction. This research suggests possible interventions that will assist organisations to better understand many factors that play a regulatory role on professional identity construction and negation. The research can contribute to identify and implement strategies to remove barriers that will make the accountancy profession more accessible and ensure more opportunities and support for people coming from a disadvantaged background.

This study used a multiple case study approach to explore and understand the narratives of four black CAs registered with the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA). The participants were interviewed on three different occasions using semi-structured in-depth interviews in order to gain a deep understanding of their life story and experiences. This study was conducted from a critical realist approach using narrative and a form of thematic analysis to analyse and understand the data. The end goal of critical realism is to dissect social issues and make recommendations for social change.

Keywords: microaggression, whiteness, professional identity, identity work, work identity, context, chartered accountants

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

This document is presented in six chapters to explore the professional identity of black chartered accountants. Chapter one is the introduction and provides the basis of this paper by giving the background of the incident that motivated this study, the research objectives, the problem statement and the purpose statement. The second chapter consists of a literature review that presents a brief account of current knowledge on professional identity and identity work. The third chapter outlines the research methodology and explains the research design and the rationale behind it. The findings of the research are presented in the fourth chapter and discussed in Chapter five. Chapter six concludes the paper, discusses the limitations of the study and makes recommendations.

1.2 BACKGROUND

I was born and raised in a small town in Northern Natal, also known as Zululand, where I attended a small Afrikaans government school with just 120 pupils. Attending university was therefore a huge culture shock for me. Fortunately, I was privileged that my undergraduate classes were in my mother tongue, Afrikaans, which offered some relief and familiarity during my period of adjustment. Although the majority of the course work was in English, we were able to discuss and negotiate concepts, terms, opinions and ideas in Afrikaans. Three years later, when I enrolled for my postgraduate degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP), the Afrikaans and English classes merged and all of the subsequent conversations and coursework were done in English. Here we got to know and interact with people from different ethnic groups, languages, cultures and backgrounds.

The above mentioned incident that triggered this study took place before one of our classes when a group of students were chatting casually among themselves. One of the Afrikaans students said to another student, who happened to be black, “I like your accent.” I noticed a change in the black student’s body language and facial expression and she responded in an annoyed tone: “What accent? This is how I speak!” Being Afrikaans and from more or less the same background as the offender, I understood that her intention was to pay a compliment, not an insult. Only later, once I had learnt about microaggression, did I understand why the black student had taken offence.

Microaggression often occurs outside the level of conscious awareness of the offender. It is defined as denigrating verbal or nonverbal messages, whether intentional or not, that are understood as antagonistic, derogatory or negative racial snubs and insults by members of previously disadvantaged groups (Nadal, 2011; Sue, Lin, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). It has been found that racism has a negative effect on ethnic minorities and that microaggression has developed as an outlet for racism, which in its overt forms is unacceptable. In addition to microaggressions, people of colour have to face structural inequalities, marginalisation and organisations structured around whiteness.

Ariss, Ozbilgin and Tatli (2014) define whiteness as “the production and reproduction of dominance, as well as socially constructed normativity and privilege” (p.363). Whiteness can also be referred to as white privilege. An example of whiteness is that I was privileged to receive my tertiary education in my mother tongue, whereas many students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds undergo their university education in English, often their second or even third language, and one that they may not be fully proficient in. When this particular university was established

more than a century ago, the people with power and influence were mostly white Afrikaans speaking males.

As I am building and developing my future career as an industrial and organisational psychologist (IOP), I am also in the process of developing, constructing and negotiating my own identity. I tend to look to mentors and individuals I am familiar with to assist and guide me in this field of study. My recent experience with microaggression and the realisation of the realities of whiteness present in my personal environment, together with the focus of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE) applicable in my line of work, had me wondering how individuals from previously disadvantaged groups construct and negotiate their professional identity. How do black people overcome the barriers of the past? And what should I be aware of as an IOP entering the working world to ensure that I offer sufficient support to fellow professionals?

Being a professional in today's society can be complex, requiring specific qualifications, a technical basis, exclusive jurisdiction and special skills and training (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013). It also comes with high status and recognition due to the role these professionals play in our society, the contribution they make to our country's economy and the value and knowledge they add to the workplace. Society grants professionals' higher levels of prestige and autonomy due to their unique skills and knowledge (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kuafmann, 2006).

However, the journey of becoming a professional is both arduous and expensive. South Africa's complex history of oppression and discrimination resulted generally in situations of privilege being reserved for whites, with individuals of colour being placed in situations of disadvantage and marginalization. Racial stigma is a harsh reality in South Africa as a result of a policy of segregation and inequality institutionalised during

the apartheid era. Under this system, black people of various ethnic groups were deprived of many basic rights and privileges, including a decent education, the freedom to choose an occupation, where to live and with whom.

The Government has made gains towards correcting the wrongdoings of the past and changing the state of affairs within South Africa by acknowledging all 11 official languages and implementing legislation such as the Labour Relations Act and the Employee Equity Act. However, transforming the work place and striving to create an inclusive and developmental environment after years of unfair discrimination and structural oppression has resulted in many challenges for individuals of previously disadvantaged groups wanting to pursue a professional career (Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). Some of these challenges include poor education, a lack of funding and finances to pursue a tertiary education and a lack of guidance and support systems. Hence the importance of this study. The aim is to enable individuals as well as organisations to gain knowledge and insight about the struggles and challenges professionals go through in order to develop their professional identity.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the most popular topics in organisational studies is identity (Ibarra, 1999). Identity is considered "central to issues of meaning, motivation, commitment, loyalty, logics of action and decision-making, stability and change, leadership, group and intergroup relations and organisational collaborations" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1163). There are numerous forms of identity, including individual identity, organisational identity, professional identity and social identity. Sveningsson and Alvesson, (2003) suggest that individuals tend to grow with their jobs, work situations or employers. For one to truly understand individuals in the working environment, one should grasp work identity and identity work, which are both on-going processes.

Work is an inescapable life domain and a significant basis of meaning and self-definition for most people (Dutton, Robers, & Bednar, 2010). Watson (2009) points out that work influences who and what we are. Work plays a big part in one's day-to-day life. It is where one invests the majority of one's time. It is part of what one knows and how one experiences oneself (Saayman & Crafford, 2011).

Becoming a professional is a complex process, as people need to acquire not only the knowledge and skills for professional practice, but also new ways of defining themselves, by conducting and constructing themselves in a professional manner (Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012). Kirpal (2006) claims that work plays a vital role in self-realisation and is an influential intermediate through which professional identity is constructed. Slay and Smith (2011) hold that career success goes hand in hand with successful professional identity construction.

Professional identity is defined as a critical part of a person's sense of self because it connects with the values, roles, responsibilities and ethical standards exclusive to a particular profession (Goltz & Smith, 2014). An individual's professional identity is formulated through on-going interaction with the working environment that provides different representations of self. Pratt et al (2006) identified that even though there is an increased interest in identity construction in organisational studies, that researchers should explore how identities are formed among professionals who carry out critical organisational functions (Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009; Pratt et al., 2006).

According to Slay and Smith (2011), it appears that not much is known about the development of professional identity and how it may be influenced by stigma or a stigmatised cultural identity. There seems to be a need to understand how context influences one's identity work (Brown, 2015), and therefore this study was undertaken to explore the professional identity construction of previously disadvantaged

(stigmatised) professionals by looking at their unique stories and the context that influenced and shaped their professional identity.

As a result of the South African history previously disadvantaged people face significant financial constraints due to exclusion from mainstream economy, sub-standard education systems, underdevelopment and a lack of professional networks and role models. Although South Africa has transformed over the past 24 years, there are still organisations structured around whiteness, where people of colour face contextual barriers in their path to becoming professionals, including structural inequalities, marginalisation, whiteness and microaggressions.

These challenges and historical factors greatly influence the working environment, how people behave and what they believe. Professionals play an important role in our society, and if individuals from previously disadvantaged groups continues to get excluded from opportunities to develop their professional identities, it can have significant consequences for the work place and the people they serve.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Presently, organisations and employers in South Africa are focusing on getting the right people for the right job while at the same time subscribing to BBBEE legislation, meeting their social responsibilities and providing previously disadvantaged individuals with opportunities to proper empowerment and education. This study aims to explore how previously disadvantaged individuals construct and negotiate their professional identity in this context. It focuses on the narratives of accountants from disadvantaged backgrounds by exploring and gaining insight into how they develop and form their professional identity – the identity work they engage in. It also looks at contexts of origin, whiteness and microaggression, and how these affect professional identity construction and development.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study forms part of a larger study with the same research objectives pursued in different professions. My fellow researchers will focus on previously disadvantaged engineers and I/O psychologists. My own study of the professional identity of previously disadvantaged chartered accountants will explore

- how the macro, meso and micro contextual factors shape the construction of professional identity
- how whiteness is experienced by disadvantaged professionals and how it inhibits constructing and maintaining a positive professional identity
- what types of microaggression are experienced by black professionals and how they inhibit constructing and maintaining a positive professional identity.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a brief literature review of published research on identity work and the construction of a professional identity. The scope provided by the research enabled the researcher to keep the topic in view throughout her own research process and to maintain perspective on it. It also provided the basis for a critical analysis of the research data

2.2 IDENTITY

When you introduce yourself to others you start by sharing your name and then asking or answering questions along the lines of “What do you do? Where are you from? Where do you work? What did you study?” These are popular conversation starters; people ask them as a means of getting to know each other and finding commonalities. The answers form part of your identity; they explain who you are.

One's identity refers to one's own perception and understanding of oneself (Brown, 2015; Ezze, 2009). Identity is widely used in social and behavioural research (Bothma, Lloyd, & Khapova, 2015). It can be seen as the connotations and meanings that people attach to themselves, creating and maintaining these meanings through acts of social interaction as they strive to address the question "Who am I?" (Brown, 2015). It refers to those characteristics and traits that distinguish one individual from another. Identity is a complex and fluctuating consequence of reflections and interactions (Ezze, 2009; Kriener, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006).

There tends to be a relationship between one's identity and the society in which one functions. Adams and Crafford (2012) maintain that individuals are frequently in the process of characterising and defining themselves by "drawing on and engaging with various environments and contexts, such as family, work, friends, religious groups and leisure activities. During this process of self-definition people consciously make decisions that allow them to function effectively between and within different and often contradictory contexts, as identity is informed by both personal and social aspects." (p.1)

Work forms a basic part of being an adult for the majority of one's life. It helps in developing a unique sense of self that turns into one's identity (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Through work, individuals discover and develop their identity and build character. People tend to grow with their jobs, work situations or employers. To truly grasp individuals in the working environment and to understand how they manage both personal and social demands, one should consider the influence of work identity and identity work, both of which are on-going and complex processes (Adams and Crafford 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

2.3 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Slay and Smith, (2011) describe professional identity as an individual's professional self-concept based on values, beliefs, characteristics and experiences, while Ibarra (1999) defines professional identity 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" (p.764). In short, professional identity is how individuals see themselves with regard to their profession and their professional role, the value they add and the difference they make in society. It is a critical part of a person's sense of self because it involves connecting with values, roles, responsibilities and ethical standards exclusive to a particular profession (Goltz & Smith, 2014). An individual's professional identity is formed through on-going interaction with the working environment that provides different representations of oneself.

Pratt et al (2006) simplified the concept of professional identity by defining it by what you do rather than where you do it. For example, when a surgical resident was asked to describe what it meant to be a surgeon, he immediately started to explain what he does. Smith and Hatmaker (2014) state that professional identity signals to others that an individual possesses a combination of unique skills or scarce abilities.

Ibarra (1999) found that young professionals construct and develop an identity through three strategies, namely by observing role models, experimenting with provisional selves and evaluating results against internal and external standards. Having a role model or a network of professionals who offer a platform where young professionals can get guidance, gain knowledge and skills and learn appropriate behaviour contributes toward constructing one's professional identity, as it helps one

to visualise the possibility of the future and also what to expect from the profession (Ibarra, 1999).

Professionals are thus seen as individuals with exceptional skills and abilities who contribute to society, deliver a service and perform critical organisational functions under the regulation of a governing body (Ibarra, 1999; Ulrich et al., 2013). Even though there seems to be an emerging interest in professional identity construction, there is still a lack of knowledge about it (Clarke et al., 2009; Pratt et al., 2006). This study hopes to contribute by exploring how professionals from disadvantaged backgrounds negotiate their professional identity along with the influence of structural inequalities.

2.4 IDENTITY WORK

Snow and Anderson (1987) were the first to use the term identity work. According to Adams and Crafford (2012), identity work refers to the complex and continuous “process of negotiating and regulating identity” (p.1). It is also used to describe individuals who are continuously in the process of establishing, fixing, maintaining, strengthening or reviewing the source of their feeling of unity and individuality (Brown, 2015: Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Watson (2008) explains identity work as "the mutually constitutive processes whereby people endeavour to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various environments in which they live their lives" (p.129). This refers to an individual’s own negotiation of their identity to fit in and adapt within an environment.

Even though individuals are unique and have their own identities, they are confined to the multiple social contexts in which they function (Adams & Crafford,

2012). In the workplace they are required to adopt multiple corporate personas that differ from personas that they adopt in other parts of their lives. However, these personas are also of such a nature that the person is required to adapt and change them as global, societal and organizational situations change (Watson, 2008). Negotiating these distinctive personas and identities influences their decision-making within their organisations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and about their careers (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Identity work requires tenacity and involves a process of careful balance of tensions between oneself and the basic demands of the work context in which one's identity is negotiated (Adams & Crafford, 2012). Individuals engage in this balancing act both consciously and subconsciously, depending on the nature of the situation (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Unconscious identity work takes place in environments where the individual feels in control, where the situation is stable and repetitive, and a comprehensible sense of self is initiated without challenges (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). However, when people are faced with challenges to their identity through difficult circumstances and significant life events, identity work is triggered, allowing for the deliberate negotiation of identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Some of these conscious and subconscious identity work actions involve one's selective association with other individuals and groups as well as one's physical appearance, including make-up, hairstyle and clothes (Brown, 2015; Robinson-Wood, Balogun-Mwangi, Fernandes, 2015).

Scholars have found that identity work is shaped by multiple contexts that provide the substance from which human behaviour and identity is shaped and constructed and that subtly shapes how we make sense of our place in the world (Watson, 2008; Atewologun & Singh, 2010; Smith, Crafford, & Schurink, 2015). There is a need to

explore and understand the various contexts that influence and shape identity work (Brown, 2015; Smith et al., 2015). "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 integrative effects of multiple contexts on identity work" (Crafford, Masombuka, Marx, & Carey, 2018, p. 2).

The following table taken from Crafford et al (2018) p3 outlines the possible contexts that may influence identity work.

Table 1:Contexts influencing identity work

Context	Influence on Identity work
Political	The political system determines the measure of freedom a person has in constructing identity and the boundaries that may be set. 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 and genders and promotes (or not) a fair climate for social and economic opportunities.
Historical	The historical context influences systems of domination and oppression, affects the distribution 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. This sets desirable parameters for what is desirable with regard to identity, and thus influences 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, with consequences 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	One's professional field is a significant source of identity as people draw on particular tasks, discourses, values, goals, beliefs, stereotypical traits, knowledge, skills, and abilities to create a professional identity (Ashforth et al., 2013). This is influenced by the value of a particular profession at a given time (Walsh & Gordon, 2008)
Work Organisations	Work organisations provide a significant source of identity work and a context for it. 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. These all play a role in disciplining employees and promoting certain types of behaviours while 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).

2.5 THE ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION

The term professional is used very loosely and many occupations appropriate it. For the purpose of this study the term will be used conservatively by applying certain criteria. Cruess, Johnston, & Cruess, (2004) Dyer (1985); Ulrich et al., (2013); Wilensky, (1964) explains that for any profession to gain professional authority it should, first of all, rely on a unique scientific body of knowledge that defines and recognises a given profession, based on aspects such as exclusive jurisdiction, a technical basis and special skills. Secondly, a profession has an accepted governing body that outlines expectations from professionals in terms of certification, education and training, accepted standards, a code of ethics, discipline and conduct as regards both performance and behaviour, all of which persuades the public that this service is exceptionally trustworthy. Thirdly, its legal status has a statutory basis within the country. Fourthly, professionals operate independently to serve clients, to fund future research and to drive data-based solutions, while also contributing to society through certifying members and offering legislative insight. Lastly, a profession has certain recognition: it is known for its quality of work and trustworthiness (Ulrich et al., 2013).

Greenwood, (1957) reports that there are five main components that separate a profession from other occupations: authority, culture, community sanction, ethical codes and systematic theory. Non-professionals also have these components, but to a lesser degree.

The profession of chartered accountancy complies with these characteristics and is an established and regulated profession in South Africa. Individuals who aspire to become chartered accountants have to ensure that the CA programme of their university of choice is accredited by SAICA (SAICA,2018). Once accepted they have

to undergo a series of education and training programs in order to acquire a Level Seven NQF (National Qualifications Framework), which includes a three-year Bachelor of Commerce degree in Accounting, a one year honours degree referred to as a Certificate in the Theory of Accounting (CTA) in which one has to pass all four modules in the same year in order to continue with the CA journey, failing which one can still qualify as an accountant, but will not be able to continue with the CA route. Once one is studying towards or has obtained a CTA one enters into a three-year training contract with a registered training office. After obtaining a CTA the final part of this professional journey requires one to write two board exams known as the Initial Test of Competence (ITC) and the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC).

These extensive qualifying programs are undertaken while professionals are maintaining a full work program and interacting with clients. This adds additional pressure onto the already full workload of young professionals and the expectation of exceptional performance. These educational and training programs are based on a unique scientific body of knowledge to gain specialised skills, capabilities and practical experience, which are acquired through a formal education process (Ulrich et al., 2013). Individuals who qualify as chartered accountants are required to register with the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants (SAICA) and should maintain their professional competence in the face of increasing change (SAQA, 2009; SAICA, 2018).

According to Chipunza and Kabungaidze (2012), accountants are now viewed not only as professionals but also as knowledge workers. They identified them as highly talented with particular skills that are in high demand. Knowledge workers are individuals with much-needed qualifications and the ability to acquire and apply theoretical and analytical knowledge.

South Africa has a complex history of oppression, cultural inequality, marginalisation and unfair labour practices as a result of apartheid, a system that promoted socio-political and economic power of mainly one race group, which lead to structural inequality, white privilege and economic power (Crafford et al., 2018; Hammond, Clayton & Arnold, 2009; Walker, 2005). During this time the majority of South Africans were virtually excluded from professional sectors, including accounting. Due to discriminatory legislation, unfair labour practices and racial segregation, people who belonged to marginalised ethnic groups were excluded from acquiring the skills and expertise necessary to enter various occupations and work positions, including management and the accounting profession (Hammond et al., 2009; Weil & Wegner, 1997). According to Booysen (2007), prior to 1994 political power in South Africa was almost exclusively vested in white males. Since the dismantling of apartheid there have been structural changes, with political power shifting towards black groups as the political and social context in South Africa changed (Booysen, 2007; Hammond et al., 2009). As a result of transformation a number of legislative acts and requirements have been set in place by the government to ensure greater social justice, address skills gaps and redress past unfair discrimination and underrepresentation within the working environment (Booysen, 2007; Boswell, 2014; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005).

Although South Africa has transformed over the past 24 years, the legacy of apartheid, whiteness and structural inequalities are still evident today (Crafford et al., 2018). As a result there is still a severe shortage of chartered accountants of colour in South Africa (Weil & Wegner, 1997). During the final six years of the 20th-century apartheid gave way to political freedom in South Africa, granting individuals who had been previously disadvantaged opportunities to vote, develop themselves and pursue

a career (Hammond et al., 2009). Nevertheless, according to Hammond et al (2009) “By the turn of the millennium, only 1% of chartered accountants in South Africa were from the designated majority of the population” (p.705).

Even though the accountancy profession has been striving to transform its demographic profile, it remains in dire need of both black and coloured chartered accountants. In 2004 blacks represented a mere 2.03% of chartered accountants in South Africa (Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). SAICAS’ latest statistics reveal that out of 33,000 chartered accountants in the country, blacks make up only 7%, while their coloured counterparts account for only 3%. They acknowledged that there is still a lot that needs to be done in terms of the transformation of the profession (SAICA, 2012).

2.6 RACIAL STIGMA, RACISM AND INTERNALISED RACISM

Racism is a deeply rooted ideology based on a belief in racial inferiority and racial dominance. The systematic mistreatment of specific groups of individuals (generally people of colour) is based on the colour of their skin or other physical characteristics or their genes or culture (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Weissglass, 2015). Racial stigma refers to the process whereby individuals whose physical characteristics race assigns them to a specific ethnic group are systematically excluded from specific social interactions due to perceived “undesired differentness” (Kurzba & Leary, 2001; Williams, Gonzalez, Williams & Mohammed, 2008). It can be viewed as a process of global devaluation of individuals who portray different characteristics and attributes than the “norm” or who do not live up to society’s normative expectations. As a result of these devaluations, these individuals’ social identity (one’s sense of who one is based on one’s group membership) is ruined, and they are perceived as unequipped and incapable of fulfilling the requirements of the role in social interactions (Kurzba & Leary, 2001). This mistreatment is displayed by individuals and the broader society

who act intentionally or unknowingly in a harmful and discriminatory manner towards people of a different race. Perpetrators are usually conditioned by the general public, media, policies and practices to act in this manner (Sue et al., 2008).

Jones (2000) and Jones (2001) describes three levels of racism, namely institutionalised racism, personally mediated racism and internalised racism. *Institutionalised racism* refers to the inherited disadvantages and limited access to quality education, services, goods and opportunities available to individuals from certain ethnic groups. This level of racism is structural and has been codified within our institutions of norm, practice and law, and therefore there cannot be an identifiable culprit. This type of racism manifests in access to power as well as material conditions (Jones, 2000). Material conditions can refer to one's environmental conditions, such as access to decent education, medical facilities and proper housing. Power relates to the access to information and resources including capital, organisational infrastructure and individual agency that include both voting rights and representation along with control in media, organisations and government. One can link the effect of institutionalised racism to the association between socio-economic status and race (Jones, 2000; Jones, 2001).

Personally mediated racism can be both intentional and unintentional as it refers to acts and comments of commission and omission. It refers to prejudice and discrimination towards people based on their ethnicity (Jones, 2000; Jones, 2001). Prejudice can be defined as the differential assumptions about the capabilities, motives and intentions of others based on their race, whereas discrimination refers to the differential actions towards individuals based on their race. One can identify personally mediated racism in someone who shows a lack of respect towards members of a different race, or is overtly suspicious about their motives, behaviour

and intentions or acts in a dehumanizing manner towards them (Jones, 2000; Jones, 2001).

The last level of racism is identified as *internalised racism*.

Bailey, Chung, Williams and Singh (2011) note that if one wishes to explore the outcome and effects of racism one should acknowledge internalised racism. It refers to the process through which people from stigmatised or disadvantaged groups reject their own cultural world views and motives, and accept negative racial remarks, messages and stereotypes of their abilities and intrinsic worth (Bailey et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2008). As a result of internalised racism, these individuals tend to project scepticism onto others who share the same ethnicity as them. They often also do not believe in themselves. An example of internalised racism is the fact that "some black individuals may avoid traveling through or living in predominately black neighbourhoods if they believe the stereotype that black communities are dangerous" (Bailey et al., 2011, p. 482).

Jones (2001) further explains internalised racism as "accepting limitations to one's own full humanity, including one's spectrum of dreams, one's right to self-determination, and one's range of allowable self-expression" (p.300). This form of racism manifests when individuals embrace whiteness and white culture and evince self-devaluation (racial slurs as nicknames, rejection of ancestral culture), resignation, helplessness and hopelessness, for example by partaking in risky health practices, leaving school and failing to vote (Jones, 2000).

2.7 WHITENESS

According to Ariss et al (2014), although there is no one definition of whiteness it is generally considered to be the neutral and invisible norm against which all other identities are measured. It is the state of being notably linked to power and privilege

(Grimes, 2001; Joshi, McCutcheon & Sweet, 2015). Whiteness refers to everyday behaviour that mostly takes place subconsciously and often leads to misunderstandings and confusion (Joshi et al, 2015). Cotton, O'Neill and Griffin (2014) noted that it is expected of minorities entering an organisation to fit in and conform to the general practice of whiteness in order for them to be viewed as professionals. Furthermore, "when whiteness is accepted as an invisible norm, differences are ignored; and white people, their assumptions and ways are empowered" (Grimes, 2002 quoted in Cotton et al., 2014, p. 407). For example, in some black cultures one shows respect towards another person by not looking them in the eye when talking to them, which signals the acknowledgment of authority or seniority often associated with elders. This practice contrasts with that in most Western cultures where such behaviour would appear insulting or rude to the individual being addressed. Due to the impact whiteness has on the status quo in a professional workplace, people of colour have had to adapt or disregard certain cultural practices that to them may have seemed to be the norm.

Whiteness goes hand in hand with privilege, and can be defined as "the production and reproduction of dominance, as well as socially constructed normativity and privilege" (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007 quoted in Ariss et al., 2014, p. 363). White privilege refers to white individuals who enjoy certain benefits or have favour due to their physical attributes and skin colour (Rhameem, 2012).

Whiteness as a form of privilege and power has historically been proven to travel from Western countries to colonies throughout the world, reinventing itself locally upon arrival. This can refer to both the physical travel of white individuals or the neo-colonial travels of cultural products such as fashion, television, products, media, music and academic texts (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). The concepts and values of white privilege

are consistently conflated with Western culture, rendering whiteness white by expecting all individuals to accept and adopt a set of normative values. These normative and predominantly white values are nearly invisible to people, yet always present and powerful. People of colour can never enjoy the privileges of whiteness, even if they adopt specified cultural norms that are consciously or subconsciously prescribed by whites (Joshi et al., 2015, p. 302).

Whiteness tends to be unnoticeable to those who inhabit it as well as to those who have grown accustomed to it, even when they are not white (Joshi et al., 2015). It includes the hidden assumption that white individuals do not have a race, as whites are viewed as a universal category, unmarked and ordinary (Grimes, 2001).

The majority of scholars have studied organisations as if race were neutral. However, Nkomo (1992) points out that "The defining group for specifying the science of organisations has been white males, we have amassed a great deal of knowledge about the experience of only one group, yet we generalise our theories and concepts to all people" (p.489). It is therefore noteworthy to explore the structuring of organisations to see whether whiteness still exists today and if it does, what its impact is.

Ariss et al., (2014) explores the different levels of whiteness as seen in the table below:

Table 2:Key levels and themes in tackling Whiteness

Key Levels	Specific Themes
History	Colonialist past, history of migration and anti-migration, of racism and diversity, past and present state of the production and reproduction of ethnic privileges.
Space (geographical and social where intersectionalities occur)	Whiteness analyzed with respect to its context; recognition of how ethnic privileges do not remain confined in space, be it physical or symbolic, but rather transcend across borders between different industries, networks and organizations. Understanding how ethnic privileges are transposed between intersectional determinants including gender and sex, ethnicity, disabilities, age, social status.

	For examples, refer to the work on intersectionality and work-life issues by Ozbilgin et al. (2011).
Macro-context	Legislative, political, legal frameworks at regional, national and international levels that institutionalize and spread ethnic privileges in employment, education and other fields both formally and informally; policies relating to discrimination and diversity.
Organizational level	Practices – both conscious and unconscious – and strategies in human resources management that serve to maintain ethnic privileges, discrimination and the power of whiteness.
Individual 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.

This study explores the professional identity construction of professional accountants who form part of a racially stigmatised group, who experience barriers and challenges like microaggression and whiteness. I aim to explore the manner in which whiteness has impacted the historical, macro, meso and micro environments and contexts of the individuals, and how this influenced their journey to becoming professionals.

2.8 MICROAGGRESSION

Racism and especially explicit racism is a burning issue nowadays. Society in general frowns upon this behaviour and strives increasingly and actively to avoid, discourage or censure any participation or engagement in racist acts. However, even though people may not consciously be racist, their prejudice and biases may manifest in more subconscious and subtle forms of racism known as microaggression (Nadal, 2011). Microaggression refers to subtle “put-downs” or actions towards members of previously disadvantaged groups. Although it is insulting and offensive, it is typically carried out unconsciously. Perpetrators unknowingly engage in these insults and are usually oblivious of the effect it has on the receiver (Joshi et al., 2015; Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, Wallace & Hayes, 2011; Sue, Copodilupo, Torimo & Bucceri, 2007).

The term "racial microaggression" was first introduced in 1970 by Chester Pierce (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Joshi et al., 2015; Mercer et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007; Tappan, 2004). Pierce used this term to allude to little acts of discrimination that people of colour experience on a day-to-day basis (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015). He defined microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges, which are ‘put downs’ of people of colour by offenders” (Pierce 1978, p.66, in Joshi et al., 2015). This refers to “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of colour” (Sue et al., 2007, p.271).

Microaggression can be identified by subconscious actions and comments, for example assuming that a black doctor is a nurse or telling a black person who wants to board a plane with their first-class ticket that the economy class passengers cannot board yet. Sometimes people will use comments like “those people”, “you are not like them” or “when I look at you I do not see colour”. These comments and actions are usually subtle and can, therefore, leave victims in doubt as to whether they really have been insulted or whether they are merely overly sensitive (Sue et al., 2008). However, these microaggressive acts and comments are offensive to minorities, as they challenge their perceptions of belonging and autonomy in ways that can be harmful to their professional performance. The effect of microaggression has also been linked to stress and other psychological outcomes (Carolissen, Van Wyn, & Pick-Cornelius, 2012; Mercer et al., 2011).

Microaggression tends to take on three different forms, namely micro-insult, micro-assault and micro-invalidation. Sue et al (2007) created a taxonomy of racial microaggression in everyday life. This taxonomy is presented in Figure 1 below, which

illustrates and assists us to better understand the different forms of microaggression, as well as the relationships between them.

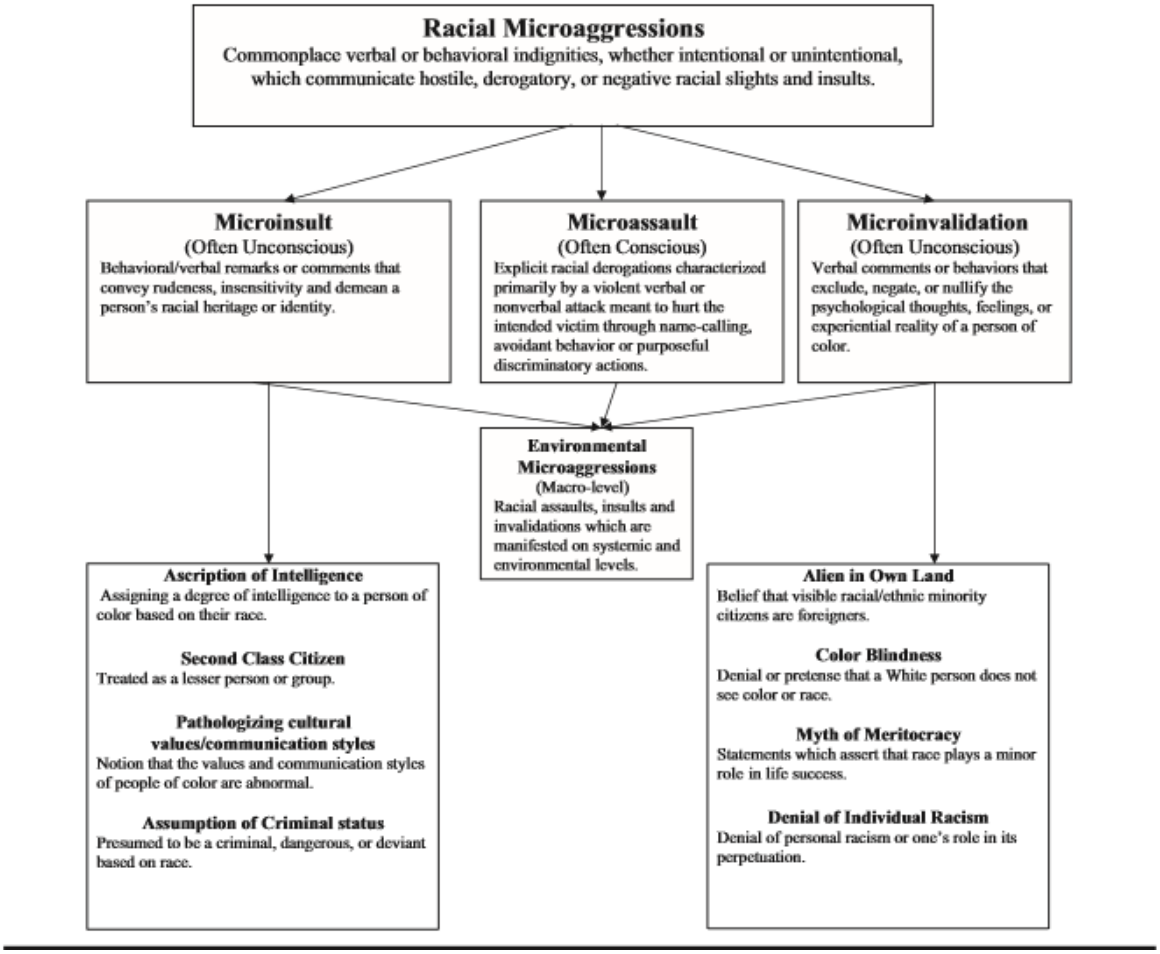

Figure 1: Microaggression Taxonomy (Sue et al., 2007)

- Micro-insults are race-based communications or gestures that convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean an individual's racial heritage or identity. "Micro-insults represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of colour (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274).
    - An example of a verbal micro-insult is when a white employer informs a potential candidate of colour "I believe the most qualified person should get the job, regardless of race". This implies that the people of minority groups obtain

positions through either affirmative action or quota programs, not personal merit or ability (Sue et al., 2007).

- Micro-insults can also be identified through actions and gestures, and although it happens unintentionally, it may still be offensive. For example, a white female crosses over to the other side of the street when a black male is approaching in her direction (Harwood et al., 2012). This suggests that she assumes the black male is likely to be violent, a criminal or both.

- Micro-assaults are explicit racial derogations which are more blatant and are aimed at deliberately hurting or offending the victim through name-calling, avoidant behaviour or purposefully discriminatory actions, while trying to hide one's racist motive (Harwood et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2007). Micro-assaults are very similar to what was known as "old fashioned" racism (Harwood et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2007). These assaults could be verbal (using a racial slur), behavioural (deliberately serving a white person first) or environmental (displaying insensitive posters and signs) (Clark, Mercer, Ziegler-Hill & Dufrene, 2012; Sue et al., 2007).
- Micro-invalidations are actions or statements that invalidate, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality based on a person's ethnicity (Clark et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2007), for example when someone minimises race by telling a black person "I do not see race or colour when I see you; we are all human beings".

The taxonomy created by Sue et al. (2007) depicts the three different types of microaggression and the nine categories of microaggression which contain their own distinct themes while often overlapping one another

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses the research paradigm, design, approach, setting, sampling, data collection, data analysis, validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical considerations. Because of the qualitative approach it was essential that an organised process was used to ensure consistency and to verify the precision of the research output.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is a set of organising principles that acts as the lens through which reality is interpreted (Maree,2016). It refers to the presumptions and convictions about fundamental aspects of reality that give rise to a specific world view. It addresses key assumptions about ontology (the nature of reality and what is real), epistemology (our knowledge of reality), and methodologies (Fletcher, 2016; Maree, 2016; Maree, 2010).

In order to fully explore the influence of multiple levels of context on professional identity with regard to whiteness and microaggression, the study was conducted from a critical realist point of view, which utilizes and combines elements from both a realist ontology and an interpretive epistemology (Fletcher, 2016; Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011). While it is true that the real world exists, our insight into it is socially developed and thus fallible (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011).

Critical realism aims to be explanatory as it searches for causations that permit the researcher to explain social events and to suggest practical policy recommendations to address social problems (Fletcher, 2016). A fundamental principle of critical realism is that ontology is not reducible to epistemology, and human knowledge captures merely a small part of a vaster and more profound reality (Fletcher, 2016). Critical realism regards the world as theory-laden, yet not theory-

determined. It does not disagree that there is a real social world that we can attempt to understand or access through philosophy and social science. However, some knowledge can be closer to reality than other knowledge. Critical realism therefore assumes we can gain knowledge in terms of theories, which can be more or less "truth-like" (Fletcher, 2016). This approach is deemed useful for the purpose of analysing social problems and suggesting solutions for social change as it engages in explanation and causal analysis (Fletcher, 2016).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was conducted by means of a qualitative multiple case study in order to explore and gain in-depth and complex insights into the participants' experiences and professional identity construction and negotiation through narratives.

A qualitative approach ensured a better understanding since some experiences cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers (Maree, 2016; O'Neil, 2011). It aims to grasp 'what it is like' to experience specific events and conditions, and how the individuals make sense of the world and then manage these situations (Willig , 2013). Qualitative research does not aim to predict an outcome. Its objective is to describe and possibly explain events and experiences (Maree, 2016; Willig, 2013).

Even though there are multiple understandings and definitions of case study research, the defining characteristic of a case study is that it draws on numerous viewpoints and is grounded in a specific setting or context that is viewed as crucial to grasping the researched phenomena (Maree, 2010; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The main aim of case study research is to gain a better in-depth understanding of the dynamics of a precise situation or particular unit of analysis: the case (Maree, 2010; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Willig, 2013). According to Yin (1994) , this design allows the researcher to investigate a current phenomenon within its natural setting.

This approach is concerned with the individual's case and not with the methods used for enquiry (White, Drew, & Hay, 2009). It is used when no single point of view can give a full record or clarification of the research issue, and where understanding should be holistic, comprehensive and contextualised (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

According to Willig (2013), a multiple case study design creates the opportunity to generate new theories. She explains that this opportunity is generated when a series of cases are compared and analysed. Multiple case studies are instrumental in nature as they generate insights that extend one's knowledge and understanding of a specific phenomenon as it manifests itself across cases (Willig, 2013).

Investigating the individual stories of the participants' experiences and the influence of various contexts on the individual's identity and identity work are central to case study design (Yin, 2009). The case study method is relatively adaptable, allowing the subject matter to determine the gathering of data and the analysis. I therefore used narrative as the vehicle to conduct the multiple case studies. Following is a description of the components used in this specific narrative approach.

A narrative approach assumes that the stories people tell form the basis by which they recognise and make sense of their lives and actions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kohler Riessman, 1993). This is especially true where the construction of identity is concerned as these stories give importance to human agency and imagination (Kohler Riessman, 1993). A narrative research offers variety as academics can make use of a range of behaviours; narrative is thus largely discipline-related (Kohler Riessman, 2008). A psychological/sociological method was used in this study to capture the narratives as they were 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 et al. (2008) highlight three theoretical divisions in

narrative research: event-centred, experience-centred and those centred on the co-construction of narratives. The experience-centre approached was undertaken for this study. It put the individual at the centre and the narratives are therefore "assumed to be a representation of internal phenomena such as events, thoughts and feelings" (Squire et al., 2008 p. 5). According to Squire et al. (2008), narrative research, unlike other qualitative frameworks, offers no clear methodological procedures, nor are there clear guidelines about suitable sources from which narratives should be gathered.

3.3.1 RESEARCH SETTING

Since the qualitative case studies were conducted to explore the influence of different contexts (economic, history, family, culture and education) on the professional identity construction of previously disadvantaged CAs, it was important to ensure that the participants would feel comfortable and safe to share their stories. As the interviews were recorded, it was vital to ensure that they took place in a quiet place where we would not be interrupted or disturbed. Three of the four interviews were held in a comfortable meeting room at the participant's office. The fourth interview was held in a conference venue at a beautiful golf estate. I ensured that all participants were comfortable, that they had something to drink and that the room temperature was moderate.

3.3.2 SAMPLING

The number of participants was limited to allow for a detailed exploration of the data provided by their narratives (Maree, 2016). When considering a representative sample for qualitative research, the following were kept in mind: the sample should be accessible, the participants must buy into the study and be willing to participate and they should also have experiences in the area under discussion (Maree, 2016; O'Neil, 2011).

The ideal sampling method for this study was purposive, non-probability sampling. This method is non-random, practical and convenient and is used to include individuals who comply with the pre-determined criteria and who are available and willing to participate in the study (Maree, 2016; Wagner et al., 2013; Willig, 2013). I relied on my own experience and knowledge to find suitable participants who were representative of the population and who complied with the selection criteria of race and profession (Wagner et al., 2013).

The sample for this study consisted of four accountants of colour who were registered with SAICA and had substantial years of experience within the CA profession. This allowed me to get rich and comprehensive insight into microaggression and whiteness in the workplace through the experiences of previously disadvantaged individuals who had studied and qualified as registered accountants and had relevant work experience and exposure to the dynamics of the working environment.

In addition, snowball sampling gave me an interconnected group of participants (Maree,2016) who met the criteria and were available and willing to participate. The first was the colleague of an aunt of mine who is employed by a big corporate. She referred me to two of her friends who did articles with her, one of whom referred me to my last candidate. I did not struggle to get them to participate as they were asked by either a friend or a colleague to do so. Although they were really busy and data were collected during Tax Season, they were more than willing to participate as they all value education.

The Participants

The participants' names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. Their names were first ordered according to the sequence of the interviews and then

changed to bird names that match their personalities and how they described themselves. In Chapter four the explanation of each participant and their chosen bird name is described in detail. All four participants are in their thirties and employed in the public and corporate sector. The biographical information of the participants is as follows:

Table 3:Discription of participants

Number	Bird Name	Race	Gender	Age	Nationality
1	Swallow	Black	Female	32	Zimbabwean
2	Parrot	Black	Male	30	RSA
3	Flamingo	Coloured	Female	33	RSA
4	Woodpecker	Black	Female	37	RSA

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Interviewing is a popular data collection method as it allows the researcher to ascertain and understand the participant's context and experiences and to see reality through their eyes. The goal is always to obtain comprehensive descriptive data that will assist in understanding the participant's construction of social reality experiences and knowledge (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Maree, 2010). In order to conduct interviews that have depth and value one needs to prepare well in advance and ensure that one is well informed about the topic. It is also important to listen attentively and to probe when necessary (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Before any data was collected the necessary steps were followed to get ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Departmental Postgraduate Ethics Committee. When ethical clearance was obtained, I began to engage with potential participants based on the sampling criteria stated above. After I had found participants who complied with the sampling criteria, I explained the details and requirements of the study. Once they were comfortable, they gave consent to participate in the research (see Appendix 1). The consent form gave me permission to interview and

record the participants, explain the aim and purpose of this study and assure the participants that their identity would remain anonymous (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Willig, 2013). The interviews were transcribed from the recordings by a professional.

Data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews, one of the most familiar and important strategies used in qualitative data collecting (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Willig, 2013). The interview creates an opportunity to learn about, discuss and understand participants' experiences and events through their own narratives (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). During this particular research, verbal action was used to elicit the interview narratives while participants were free to argue, complain, confirm, challenge, defend, deceive, explain, entertain, inform, justify and persuade (Chase, 2005; Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004; Kohler Riessman, 2008; Squire et al., 2008). This method grants participants a degree of freedom and it permits spontaneity rather than forcing them to select from a set of pre-determined responses, where the description or options may not always accurately describe their thoughts, feelings, attitude or behaviour (Wagner et al., 2013). It furthermore allowed for probing and going beyond the initial responses of the participant, allowing for follow-up questions such as why, how, in what way, and obtaining examples that were tailored to the responses given by the participant (Maree, 2010).

The interview question was centred on one main request: "Tell me your story". I then expanded on this by asking: "Who are you, where do you come from, and how was your journey until this point in time?" This allowed me to get a better understanding of the participant's history and background, family setting and educational and work history (Foldy, 2012). An adaptation of the ten-statement test was also used to gather data on the identities deemed central by the participants and important to their employers. Participants were asked to answer the question "Who am I?" in 10

distinctive ways (Foldy 2012). They then had to sort and rank these identities into two distinct sections – those valued by themselves and those valued by their employer. My supervisor assisted me with my preparations for the interviews and she allowed me to observe her when she conducted the first interview. Once we were done we reflected on the process. She answered any questions I had and gave me further advice and guidance throughout the process.

A total of twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted. The first interview was centred on asking the participants to tell me their story, i.e. the case narrative. I asked them to think about who they were and to provide me with ten "I am" statements. During the second interview we unpacked and discussed their "I am" statements and they explained their importance. In the third interview the question was "Why is it important to the organisation?" Once the interviews were transcribed, case narratives were developed. In preparing these I was guided by the principles of narrative analysis. From this perspective, the narratives shared by the participants were treated as "socially situated interactive performances" formed in a particular setting for a specific audience and with a definite purpose (Chase, 2005, p. 657). The focus was therefore on the "narrative in the context of its telling" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001:12) while the tractability and changeability of the interview location were also considered (Squires et al., 2008). Once a case narrative had been written I sent it to the participants to give them the opportunity to confirm and approve the content and interpretation of the case and also to give their input. This process of member checks ensured that the narratives were truthful to the participant.

As popular as interviewing is as a data collection method, it is not without faults. The biggest criticism of the interview is that the empirical data produced by interviewing may be unreliable, impressionistic and not objective (Wagner et al., 2013).

In this study the problem was countered by ensuring that the research process was carried out with quality and rigour to ensure the credibility of the findings in relation to qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Noble & Smith, 2015; Wagner et al., 2013). These strategies are discussed in section 3.4.2.

3.4.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Before analysing the data thematically (Braun & Clarke 2006) each participant's interview were evaluated individually within the whole data body as the narrative approach dictates. The purpose of this analysis was to explore the participant's experiences within different contexts as narrated to the researcher. At all times I was acutely aware that the individual stories that I was evaluating had already been through the participant's own analysis (Freeman, 2002; Kohler Riessman, 2008). An excel spread sheet was used to examine each participant's data set, with the applicable interconnected identity experiences categorised using the key contexts I hoped to investigate, including the socio-economic, political, educational and family contexts. There were columns included and added for examples of whiteness, microaggression as well as for unique elements of each participant's data set such as religion, materialism and unforeseen events. From these, distinctive and separate case narratives were developed for each participant to analyse and interpret fundamental contexts and identity-relevant incidents. This was done in order to investigate each participant's identity and how it had been regulated by a specific environment, as it is in context that action is rendered meaningful (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ochs, 1997).

When using narratives, the focus is on the storyteller's ability to make a point or to evoke certain feelings and emotions. In order to achieve this, accuracy may be compromised (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). This can happen when the narrator keeps

quiet about matters the researcher may regard as vital and instead concentrates on incidental details. Although accounts or stories could therefore include inconsistencies, imprecisions, lacunae, non-sequiturs and ambiguities, for the narrative researcher, “the truth of a story lies not in its accuracy but in its meaning” (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004 p. 115).

Participants were asked to clarify any aspects that were unclear as well as those that appeared inconsistent. The interpretations contained in the case narratives (Chapter 4) are but one of many possibilities despite being based on careful scrutiny and discussion together with my supervisor (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004).

Due to proper evaluation and clarification of the individual data sets and a careful capture of the case narratives, it was feasible to compare the individual cases thematically. Chapter five gives the results of this particular analysis that served to establish similar configurations across the different cases (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4.2 STRATEGIES FOR QUALITY RESEARCH

Quality and trustworthiness are of the utmost importance as they are central to rigorous qualitative research (Maree, 2010; Qu & Dumay, 2011). The four somewhat overlapping criteria for ensuring quality research suggested by Guba and Lincoln are (1) confirmability, (2) dependability, (3) authenticity and (4) transferability (Miles & Hubuman, 1994; Shenton, 2004; Schurink, 2009: Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). These concepts come from Guba and Lincoln, but this study uses the criteria and guidelines set out by Miles and Huberman (1994)[1].

Confirmability explores whether the conclusions can be deemed to be accurate and valid. The results of this study are vindicated by the reflection and awareness

[1] I am not going to reference then throughout, note that this discussion is guided by their Chapter pages 277 – 279.

maintained by the researcher and by the openness of the study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Detailed descriptions of the study are provided, and detailed documentation of the methods, procedures, decisions and actions taken during the process of the study serve as an audit trail (Maree, 2010; Schurink, 2009. All interactions with the participants were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber and illustrated in such a manner that the research can be understood in terms of what was found as well as how it was discovered (Schurink, 2009).

Furthermore, all interpretations and conclusions in the case narratives are supported by extracts from the data. The section on reflexivity provides reflections on my own values and biases and how doing this research has challenged and changed me. The data of my study has been retained and is available for re-analysis by others. This mini dissertation went through language editing by a professional editor (Appendix 2).

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) dependability is concerned with taking reasonable care. Since the focus was on the participants' narratives and experience, the research question was clear and the study was designed in congruence with the research objectives. As a mechanism for peer review, the transcribed interviews were analysed in collaboration with my supervisor who also closely supervised the writing of the case narratives. Once the narratives were written and interpreted, they were sent to the participants to read through, approve and provide input and clarity where necessary. This ensured that the information was truthful. Once the data had been reviewed, refined and analysed, one of my fellow researchers and my supervisor sat with me and we discussed the data and emerging patterns that demonstrated significant parallels across the various case studies. In order to ensure quality we also did peer debriefing where I was guided by my supervisor during the data collection

process when I observed her conducting the first interview. Being provided with insights into the case narratives and identifying themes throughout the data collection gave me additional support me.

Authenticity asks whether the findings make sense: do they confirm this study's propositions about the effect of whiteness, microaggression and the history of South Africa on professionals from previously disadvantaged race groups? Based on the in-depth and context-rich descriptions, this study found that these factors do have a significant impact on these CA professionals.

Transferability aims at providing the readers with evidence that the research findings could be applied or transferred to other contexts, situations, and populations. My sample includes a foreign national, a coloured female, a black female and a black male. Their mother tongue differed and they grew up in different provinces. The one group not represented is Indian professionals. The aim of case study research is to explore and analyse a limited number of cases in depth in order to understand other similar cases (Gerring, 2007) and to achieve analytical generalisation to them. These findings are therefore limited to providing an understanding of the circumstances of black CAs coming from similar backgrounds to those studied here.

3.4.3 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is a key measure in qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Berger, 2015; Frost, 2011). "Reflexivity has been posited and accepted as a method qualitative researcher can and should use to legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations" (Pillow, 2003, p. 175). It is seen as a continual process of inner interchange and critical self-assessment of a researcher's position that acknowledges that this position might influence the research procedure as well as the outcome (Berger, 2015; Pillow, 2003).

Reflexivity represents self-evaluation throughout the research and implies shifting the researcher's focal point back onto him or herself in order to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situation and the impact that it might have on the setting and individuals being contemplated, the questions being asked, the information being gathered and its interpretation (Berger, 2015). Mauthner and Doucet (2003), hold that "Situating ourselves socially and emotionally in relation to respondents is an important element of reflexivity" (p.419).

During the study I was confronted by the reality of my own white privilege due to my upbringing, background, culture and language. Throughout this process I was able to recognise and acknowledge the advantages offered by my white identity. Coming to this realisation allowed me to be more aware of the disadvantages people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds can experience due to the impact of whiteness and macroaggression. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) explains reflexivity as a process where the researcher deepens the understanding of our own self and our position in the world in order to better understand the social reality of others by being sceptical of our own views, just as we are sceptical of the views of others. There is no one-way road between the researcher and the object of study. Instead, the two influence one another respectively and recurrently over the span of the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). As a result, this allowed me to establish a level of rapport with the participants.

A research fellow who serves on the University of Pretoria's ethics committee was concerned that previously disadvantaged participants might feel uncomfortable in sharing their story and that as someone who represents whiteness and privilege I might not get as valuable information as I would if I were not white.

My participants however proved to be very generous and gave me extremely

detailed and valuable information during 11:48:10 hours' worth of interviews despite their experiences with white people (see Appendix 3 for the breakdown of each participant's interviews). I believe this was due to my openness in accepting my position of privilege as a white person. According to Horsburgh (2003), reflexivity is the "active acknowledgment by the researcher that their own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation" (p.308). The researcher's mindfulness of the manner in which he or she has developed the research question, provoked and gathered the data, analysed it and then presented the research to a wider audience is critically important (Frost, 2011). I also believe that my genuine interest in hearing their story made a difference. I also believe that our research question was asked in a non-threatening manner. Simply asking them to "Tell me your story" created a safe and non-judgmental environment for them to share their experiences. All four participants reflected at the end of the interviews and said that they enjoyed participating immensely and that it was the first time that someone was actually interested in their story as a whole. They furthermore believed this research was important. Interviews are known for their cathartic or healing effect, as they allow participants the rare opportunity to talk about their experiences.

This study changed me in various ways as a white South African but also as an emerging professional. Although I am pursuing a different professional career than my participants, I can relate to some of their challenges and experiences with regards to honours and articles. Reflexivity is understanding the unique circumstance of the researcher's position in relation to the population group as well as how issues in the study might affect the research process and its analytical stance (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity advances self-awareness and helps to establish role distance amongst the

ethnographer-as-individual-of-society and the ethnographer-as-analyst so as to undermine any non-cognitive cathartic of the object. As an IOP you can only qualify once you complete your master's degree, a one-year internship, a dissertation and, finally, board-certified exams. As part of my master's degree, I have to complete a one-year internship, similar to the requirements of articles for CAs. During my internship year, I became more aware of my white privilege and also how organisations are structured around whiteness. I have also noticed some of the challenges with regard to whiteness faced by my participants although we are pursuing different careers. This study allowed me to reflect on my own biases and to be more sensitive. I have learnt to identity comments that portray microaggression, which I may not even have noticed before. This study has also allowed me to be more supportive of people within my own organisation and to act as an agent for change. I will continue to reflect on issues that I have noticed and how the study has changed my awareness of transport, language and corporate life.

For example, although we are not required to travel in our line of work, I have noticed the issues around transport and seen the exasperation of people who were not able to attend functions or work late to complete projects as they did not have alternative transport. Now I gladly offer to drop my colleagues at the mall or taxi rank, aware that this does little to negate my privilege

I have also experienced how one of my black colleagues makes copies of research and completes her projects and proposals by hand as she does not feel safe to travel by taxi and walk in the streets with the company's laptop. She also does not have access to the internet at home. As interns we do a lot of communication around group projects on WhatsApp and I found myself feeling frustrated when some of the interns did not respond. When we addressed this, they said that they do not have

access to Wi-Fi and do not always want to waste money on data. My new awareness of inequality has led me to reflect on my thoughts and frustration, and I now try to think of alternatives that may be more inclusive and better suited to everyone involved.

Although my current place of employment is focusing a lot on transformation and inclusivity we are still predominately white and Afrikaans. Although it is not intentional, I have often caught myself talking to colleagues in Afrikaans. I now try to communicate in English, as it is more inclusive. The opposite is also true of my black colleagues who will speak to each other in an African language. I understand basic Zulu and will sometimes answer them back in Zulu; they then laugh, and we all start conversing in English.

3.4.4 ETHICS

When conducting a qualitative study it is of the utmost importance to comply with all ethical requirements. It was especially important in this study as it required the participants to reveal and reflect on thoughts, events, experiences and views that were sensitive, private or close to their hearts (Davis & Resnik, 2015; Maree, 2016).

Several different measures had to be put in place to ensure that the interviews were conducted in an ethical manner (Davis & Resnik, 2015; Wagner et al., 2013). For example, all participants were informed about the aim of the study and assured of confidentiality. They knew that participation was completely voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw at any time without having to provide a reason. Once they had indicated their willingness to participate they were required to complete an informed consent form which contained important information about the purpose and background of the study, the recording and use of data, and an assurance of, confidentiality (Maree, 2016; O'Neil, 2011; Wagner et al., 2013; Willig, 2013).

It was clear to the participants that the data would be used only for the purpose of this study and nothing else and that their identity would be kept confidential. I anticipated that with the risk of exposure eliminated the participants would elaborate more fully and provide deep data Davis & Resnik, 2015; Maree, 2016).

In order to follow a professional approach during this study and to show respect towards the participants I was careful to avoid rude language and made sure I was always on time and thoroughly well prepared. I behaved with integrity throughout and followed the relevant research approach in order not to jeopardise the physical or emotional well-being of the participants (Maree, 2016; Wagner et al., 2013).

4 FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the findings on each participant's life story are outlined and analysed in the form of case narratives, since each participant's story is unique. In these narratives key moments and contexts relating to identity work and professional identity are highlighted and examples of microaggression and whiteness are discussed. This form of write-up ensured that each individual case was explored in order to discover how each participant's context related to their identity. Some contexts were common to two or more participants whereas others were unique to only one of them. The findings provide sufficient evidence in the form of extracts to support the conclusions made in the analysis. For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity each participant was assigned a bird name that matched their personality and story. A short motivation for the bird name introduces each participant.

4.2 CASE 1: SWALLOW

This participant will be known as Swallow, as a big part of who she is has been shaped by the fact that she is loved by God and by her family. Her confidence and

childlike faith throughout her life story reminds me God's promise that he cares for the smallest Swallow and that we are more valuable than a Swallow. A swallow is called the "bird of freedom" because it cannot endure captivity, and this participant does not get captivated by her nationality or challenges. She is also very fond of her family and spends most of her free time with her husband and family. The fact that she moved countries also inspired the name.

4.2.1 BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

Swallow was born and raised in Harare, Zimbabwe, the only girl in her family, with three brothers. They were a very happy middle-class family (her father was a bio-chemical engineer and her mother a nurse) with a Christian-based faith. A proper education was very important to her parents and they ensured that their children attended the best schools and excelled academically. Swallow attended a government primary school that had high standards and strict discipline aimed at attaining excellence. Her parents were of the same belief that education, homework and results were important. Swallow explained that she was fine with this as she has always been academically bright, the kind of child who would first do her homework and then whatever else she needed to do. It is with humour that she recalls her brothers saying that her eagerness to show her report to their parents showed them in a bad light when they wanted to hide theirs until the end of the holidays.

The four children were raised to be diligent, independent and to do everything to the best of their ability. This is a life lesson and principle that is woven into Swallow 's being. The influence that her family had on her and the value that they placed on education are central to who Swallow is.

When she was 10 Swallow's pursuit of academic excellence was jeopardised when her father passed away. Because of her parents' emphasis on a solid education

her father had made what he thought would be abundant provision in this regard. Zimbabwe's economy spiralled out of control the following year due to social-political issues, however, and the money he had set aside ensured that only one child could barely finish high school. The unforeseen changes in the macro-environment and in the social-political and economic context had a great impact on their micro-environment. Fortunately, Swallow was academically bright and she obtained a full scholarship at a private Christian school.

When two of her brothers were selected to go overseas on a school soccer tour, they decided not to return to Zimbabwe due to the financial situation. Although it was not their preferred occupation, both of them studied nursing as it was subsidised by the UK government and enabled them to earn an income while studying and to send money home. Their money paid all the family's expenses and later on they also paid for Swallow's accommodation, pocket money and university fees. They also encouraged her to enrol for an honours degree and funded her to completion.

INFLUENCE OF FAMILY AND FAITH

Swallow talks about these times of loss, poverty and change without a feeling of being disadvantaged. She emanates a sense of love, support and security that clearly comes from her family and her faith in God. Swallow's family and religious context play a big part in who she is as a professional and as a person. It gives her a profound presence and confidence that leaves you with a feeling that she is completely content in her own skin and she does not need to compete or prove herself to anyone. Her first five "I am..." statements affirm that she is a beloved child of God, a product of God's grace, mercy and favour, a devoted wife, a beloved daughter and sister and a servant in her Church.

Swallow sees herself and her career as a product of God's grace, mercy and favour. It is evident that her faith is integral to her making sense of being a CA.

> *Everything that happens in my life on a daily basis is basically how I feel that God really loves me. I know that He really does love me and it also keeps me in the environment that I live in where it's high pressure and there's lots of stuff that's probably bigger than me in most cases. I know I can conquer anything because I mean I have got God backing me. I feel like every step of my life is really ordered by God and there have been things that seemed impossible, but things still came through because of God's grace and his favour towards me. I'm his favourite daughter*.

Swallow's supportive family environment and her strong religious context contributes greatly to who she is. The fact that she feels loved, secure and supported gives her a grounding and a sense of belonging that makes her secure in her identity as a person and a professional, and this is evident throughout her life story.

Swallow also finds a great deal of her identity in being a devoted wife and she finds great comfort and support from her husband, as he fully supports her career. When she has to stay up late to work he will stay up with her until she is done. *He is the wind beneath my wings*. This is significant from a cultural perspective as a woman's role is traditionally defined as taking care of the family and raising children. Being a professional grant her financial stability and independence which some men find hard to accept as they see themselves as the providers, her supportive husband is an exception to this rule.

4.2.2 TERTIARY EDUCATION AND BECOMING A CA

Swallow laughs when she tells the story of how she decided to become a CA. She based this career decision on the fact that her uncle, who was a CA, had a desirable motor vehicle. She was also good with numbers and thought *well I'm brilliant with maths so that's it for me*. She explains that with hindsight if she had known what

being a CA entailed she might not have chosen this path as the journey so far had been extremely stressful. *The CA journey killed me, so as soon as I finished it [giggles] I was like just – I want out for a while*. This is significant as it shows that in the absence of proper guidance and mentoring important career decisions are based on materialistic considerations (what kind of car a person drives) and stereotypical criteria about a profession that are not necessarily insightful, advisable or helpful, for example that you need to be good with numbers (Ibarra , 1999).

Swallow completed her undergraduate degree at the South African campus of an internationally accredited collage, and her honours at a South African university. She describes her honours year as one of the worst years of her life and said that the course was designed to humble you. Despite putting in up to 12 hours a day studying, she was left despondent as she ended up with an average of 34% in one of her subjects, extremely frustrating for someone used to getting A's. Despite the setback she did manage to pass her honours degree and two board exams on her first attempt. It is evident that the CA journey is not for everyone and that only a handful of professionals manage to complete their articles and pass their boards exams.

4.2.3 BLACK-BLACK DYNAMICS: TERTIARY EDUCATION

At the college Swallow was one of many international students and thus largely unaware of her foreigner status. However, she started to experience the reality of South Africa with all the dynamics of race, culture and diversity during her honours year at university. Where a black South African would experience the black/white dynamic, she experienced the black-Zimbabwean/black-South African dynamic, her nationality obvious due to her inability to speak a South African black language and her English accent. The national context is characterised by xenophobia, which has

at times turned deadly for some foreigners. A central mechanism through which foreigners are identified is language.

> *There's a black/black issue -- because you are black but you are speaking to me in English and in South Africa that is a problem which I never knew was an issue. And I wouldn't have experienced it at the international institution because we were all coming from different spaces, so English was our mode of communication, it was fine. But now I'm in this place where you are not allowed to speak English to a black person and they always insist. So, they won't sort of keep talking to you and judge you quietly, but they will ask you "So what language- do you speak?" When they ask you, what is your home language, it's so that they can speak to you in the language that you speak at home, but they are not going to be able to and they wouldn't speak Shona to me anyway. I would respond, 'I speak English.' 'Oh, but what is your home language?' and I'm like 'English'. And they don't like that…So, you are with 'them' and not with us, because you don't speak the language.*

Swallow's inability to speak a local African language made her easily identifiable as a foreigner in a national context where language is intricately tied to ethnicity, the historical basis for discrimination. Within the national context of South Africa, Swallow automatically was viewed as a "coconut" (her word) because she did not sound like a black South African. She was alienated form the group based on her accent (Sue, et al., 2007). She used different strategies in order to fit in and adapt in these situations and environment and in order to make people comfortable and to avoid being ill-treated by taxi drivers.

> *So I had to teach myself to speak like a South African. Just for the purpose of that I would learn basic stuff like; learn to greet, don't talk too much [giggles], don't answer your phone in the taxi, because then they will know you sound a certain way and you are speaking English. I learned to say "afta robot" [African accent] instead of saying "after the robot" [private school English] which is what I would normally say. But if I do*

that in a taxi the driver is going to ill-treat me…. So ja, I learned to say things like South African friendly terminology.

Swallow's identity issues in black on black relationships was about her foreigner status. Using different strategies to try to pass as a South African was an identity work strategy in which she mimicked what she observed in order to fake similarity with black South Africans and to function undetected as a foreigner (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Slay & Smith, 2011; Walsh & Gordan, 2008). She was adapting and changing parts of her identity and behaviour as a result of her individual context (nationality and accent) to fit into the South African environment (Brown, 2015; Ibarra, 1999; Leonard, 2010).

There was the thing of me being or sounding different, being black but sounding different. So you almost get slotted into uhm – my mom-in-law calls it a "better black bracket" – and I don't like that, I don't like that at all. Swallow regards this as offensive as one can only be a "better black" if you see yourself as superior and other black people as inferior. She is placed in a category where she was excluded from the group and the people that she actually belonged to and there was an implicit accusation, based on the way she spoke, that she was trying to be white.

Swallow was engaging in identity negotiation as she was busy making sense of what was happening to her. She needed to find her fit within the group of people who were like her in appearance. However, because she did not have a typical black African accent she was categorised by those in the group as someone who thought she was superior to them. This social-categorisation causes her to engage in identity work, as she is processing and negotiating the different meanings associated with the ethnic / racial element of her identity (Kirpal, 2006; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson,2008). There was also a strong element of

whiteness in this, as being called a better black is really about black people being judged and measured according to standards of whiteness (Ariss et al.,2014; Boswell, 2014).

> *It is just who I am, it's my upbringing. I just happened to go to a school who taught [me] to speak this way. It is not like I was trying to put on anything. I just ended up speaking this way and there's a lot of Zimbabweans who speak like me it is not anything…I don't aspire to be white. But if you are going to call me a "better Black" it's almost like you treat me like I'm a better Black…*

The name-calling sets up a hierarchy of black people measured and judged against standards of whiteness, creating a class system within black culture. One can pick up on Swallow's frustration at being categorised on the basis of the way she spoke. This categorising can be seen as a micro-assault as it is obvious racial derogation characterised by verbal attacks intended to insult or hurt the victim through name calling (Sue et al., 2007).

4.2.4 BLACK-WHITE DYNAMICS: CAREER

Swallow explains that she also experienced black-white dynamics. An example: she did her CA articles at one of the big four companies in South Africa and needed to get documents from a manager. She phoned and asked to collect the documents. Upon her arrival the manager literally jumped out of her seat and said, "You don't sound the way you look!" alluding to her private school accent that is usually associated with being white. In the South African context Swallow's accent did not match her embodiment. The manager's classification of Swallow was based on the assumption that she was white because she sounded white. This is an example of microaggression, specifically micro-insult, characterised by communication that conveys insensitivity and rudeness and demeans a person's racial heritage (Joshi et

al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007). Although the perpetrator's intention was not to insult or offend Swallow, her comments conveyed a hidden message to the recipient.

Her accent also led to other situations where she was assumed to be white and then forced to be complicit in a racist conversation because of that assumption. For example, on one occasion she had to phone a client to follow up on outstanding documents. The client responded by saying, "My dear, just between you and me, these people are very slow," implying that black people are slow and unable to keep to time frames. Swallow thought to herself: *Excuse me, I'm part of these people actually*, but just let her finish because she needed the document. In this context Swallow was being insulted, but to ensure the speedy flow of work she was forced to keep quiet. Confronting the racist stereotyping would only have delayed the project further. In this way issues are never confronted and racist attitudes and comments continue to be produced and reproduced. I have classified this as an example of a micro-insult, as the lady's comment was rude, insensitive and demeaning to black people (Joshi et al., 2015; Lavender & Dunn, 2016; Sue, et al., 2007).

Swallow's experiences highlight the intricacies of racial dynamics in South Africa. This was something new to her, never having experienced it growing up in Zimbabwe. Initially she thought her black friends were being oversensitive but now that she had experienced it directly she realised that they are not as sensitive: *Now I'm like oh wait, there's a thing there and because of the way I look and speak, I am now part of them (referring to black people) and I'm going to receive it directly, even though I was coming from a neutral base*.

Swallow feels that black people's sensitivity to how white people treat them leads to stereotyping, and white people also have preconceived ideas about black people and tend to generalise accordingly. She shares an experience on an audit where a

manager suggested they order Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC). When Swallow replied that she did not eat KFC, he said she was the first black person he knew who didn't eat KFC. The manager's cultural stereotype for black people was that they all like KFC and he therefore assumed that Swallow would like KFC too (Watson , 2008).

Because Swallow did not experience any of this black-white dynamic while in Zimbabwe, she came to South Africa without preconceived ideas or beliefs. She kept on asking why and *what is it with this black-white story that you guys* (South Africans) *constantly perpetuate?.* She experienced the black-white dynamics and issues as very intense. However, she gradually became more accustomed to these dynamics as she started to experience them herself. Her husband is Xhosa with a distinctly South African accent – *so he sounds like a black South African person*. They were going on holiday and needed accommodation, but when her husband phoned a holiday resort to inquire he was informed that there was none available. The website indicated otherwise, however, and indeed, when Swallow phoned they suddenly had availability. Because of her accent Swallow was assumed to be white and she was thus considered acceptable by the resort. This is an example of micro-assault, as this is an explicit non-verbal racial derogation based on the avoidant behaviour of purposeful discrimination (Joshi et al., 2015; Sue, et al., 2007).

Swallow further explains that based on her own experiences she is now more conscious of this dynamic and sensitive to the point that she sometimes misjudges someone's intentions and engages in stereotyping others as well. She shares a story of being on holiday in Tsitsikamma and going to a restaurant with her mother. An older white Afrikaans lady was the host and Swallow took her quiet, reserved manner as a display of hostility and responded accordingly.

I spoke to the lady in a quite aggressive manner, it wasn't a very friendly tone I must admit, because of the way she appeared to me. And that's where I think the sensitivity came in, it was from my sensitive stance. Where my mom wouldn't have dealt with it like that because she's coming from Zimbabwe and she still doesn't see black and white. So uhm she went up to go ask what muffins they had and all of that and she came back, this lady was still really, she is reserved so she doesn't give a bubbly 'hello, welcome to my shop!' kind of vibe. And then later she started talking to my mom. Then I commented actually when I try and pay. I said to her; I really like the way this place looks, just to see what would happen. Maybe it's sometimes my Christian side takes over more than my hostility. So I said to her 'I just really like how you set up this place, it feels like home' and then she started telling me her story. Like she just opened up and started saying 'I was part of the fire in Knysna and the lodge I was working at completely burnt down, so I have set up something new and I have redone all of this myself' and then she went on and on and she started talking to my mom. Then she eventually said, "You know what, you don't need to pay anything, the coffee is on me, the cake is on me as well. Your mom is a lovely lady." And it turned out that she's such an amazing person, but because of the way I now read people, I missed it completely

Interesting in this piece is the identity work Swallow engages in. As she wrestled with her interaction with the woman she was aware of two identities within herself – what she call "her Christian side" and the other more cynical side that has been influenced by racial dynamics in ways that have clouded her judgement with regard to mixed race interactions (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Brown, 2015). She contrasts her own perceptions based on her experiences since coming to South Africa with those of her mother, who, fresh out of Zimbabwe, "does not see black and white". Leonard (2010) states that one's nationality, gender, whiteness and race affects the way in which one engages and manages identity work.

Swallow attributes part of her shift in attitude to the family into which she married. Her husband's mother is an ANC comrade and he was raised in a family with strong political connections which she suggests have influenced the way they see the world. *I think because of their experiences and if you understand their experiences then that sensitivity and the sort of stereotype makes sense because of what they went through. But I didn't go through it, but because it's what I'm hearing constantly.*

4.2.5 DURING ARTICLES: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN RELATION TO LANGUAGE

One of the main contexts influencing the development of a CA's professional identity is the completion of articles with an accounting firm. Once Swallow had completed her university studies, she signed with one of the big four audit companies in South Africa. She describes her experience as "a nightmare" because of the long hours, difficult managers, having to work on different projects and do a lot of traveling. However, while many interns struggled with the more demeaning parts of the role (like photocopying), Swallow was quite pragmatic about performing these tasks: *I did whatever I was told to do and because of that you have this – managers like you and if managers like you then the rest of your articles goes smoothly*.

She realised that articled clerks who had a bad attitude stopped getting jobs and would then be unable to complete all the sections of their articles as no one would want to work with them. This suggests that identity work should take the form of playing a role in the awareness that the associated tasks and behaviours are role-based rather than an inherent part of one's identity (Brown , 2015; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Slay & Smith, 2011).

Swallow explains that language also seems to be a challenge within the working environment. She mentions that sometimes in meetings or work-related conversations

people would start speaking to each other in Afrikaans or even in an African language that she does not understand. She once again formed part of the minority group where she got excluded unintentionally from conversations based on language. Although English is the universal business language, the dynamics within South Africa is such that people talk to each other in their mother tongue without considering the effect that it may have on those around them who do not understand the language. Swallow justifies this action by saying,

> *It's not intended to be offensive in any way, it's not like they are deliberately trying to exclude you but once you understand that, every race group in South Africa, radiates towards their own language. In their own inner setting, then you don't take offence anymore*."

This exclusion does have an impact on her professional identity, however. Implicit in "you don't take offense anymore" is the identity work necessary to make peace with the fact that this was a norm within the working environment (Boswell, 2014; Brown, 2015; Ibarra, 1999).

An example of whiteness within the organisational context is that a meeting starts off in English, but because most of the people around the table are Afrikaans it changes to Afrikaans, excluding people who are the minority (Ariss et al., 2014; Boswell, 2014). While Swallow is explaining the work environment in terms of language and meetings she engages in identify work, as she is being introspective about the situation (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Brown, 2015). As if to assure me that she accepts this happening in the working environment, she makes a joke of it, saying: *So, I'm quite happy for certain things to pass me because if I didn't hear it, then I don't have to do anything about it – less work for me* [giggles]. Although she jokes about having less work to do, it is a real disadvantage to her as a professional if she does not understand what is transpiring.

Swallow recalls instances when email correspondence was forwarded to her by her boss with the instruction: “Please action the below”, but it was all in Afrikaans. She needed to get the right people to translate it for her in the appropriate context. *So there have been a few of those, but it’s never anything too hectic.* This would affect Swallow’s performance, since the loss of time in getting the document translated would make her appear slower than her counterpart who understands Afrikaans and can action something immediately. These situational demands, are likley to cause frustration and thus mobilise identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

4.2.6 AFTER ARTICLES

During her articles Swallow realised that she did not enjoy auditing at all. Once her contract expired she started looking for another job, but without success. While she enjoyed the break from the stress of studies, she soon ran out of money and certain harsh realities set in. She explains:

> *I think from childhood and even through honours they would sell you this dream that once you get the CA thing, you are done, like you don’t need anything else. The world is your oyster. But there's that dynamic of you are a Zimbabwean in South Africa, in the pro-BEE South Africa. So, no one was hiring foreigners.*

Swallow explains that weeks soon turned into months and the months eventually into a year and three months.

One again national context plays a big role here. She was excluded from job opportunities based on her nationality and due to very strict legislation that made it almost impossible to hire foreigners, although she had obtained the same qualification as most South African citizens. In the light of South African history and context organisations are prevented by legislation from hiring foreigners. Everyone aims to maximize on their BEE scorecard, and foreigners do not contribute towards the scorecard at all. In addition, the whole process of employing a foreigner is complex,

involving a lot of paperwork. Swallow found it stressful to be unemployed, not only financially but also because she felt she had let her family down after all their sacrifices and support.

4.2.7 CURRENT WORK DYNAMICS

Swallow explains that being a qualified CA is not without challenges, you are expected to hit the ground running with little freedom to learn because you are assumed to know it already. While, you may be technically sound and have the technical ability to handle a situation, you most definitely do not know everything. Soon after Swallow found employment her manager went on six months' leave, leaving behind the message that Swallow would hit the ground running. There were thus very high expectations with very little guidance; she had to just figure it out. This added a lot of pressure and frustration, both for management and especially for Swallow who was busy negotiating her professional identity, learning the business and wanting to prove oneself, especially since she knew how difficult it was for a foreigner to find employment (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Brown, 2015; Ibarra, 1999).

4.2.8 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

When Swallow was appointed Group Financial Manager it was evident that this didn't sit well with everyone. When the announcement was made and people were busy congratulating her, one of her colleagues who had been working at the organisation for longer than she had, stormed off in disgust. He was not considered for the role as he was not a CA and that was part of the criteria to be appointed. *I think he probably thought that we were on a par of some sort and it was very unlikely that I would get it.*

This colleague doubted her ability on the grounds that he had been in the organisation longer than she had. Swallow did not get offended by this, however, but instead rationalised his behaviour:

> *There is going to be some resistance along the way, but I think you will have it any way you know. If it is not in your capacity as a foreigner, it will be in your capacity as woman over a man; there's always going to be some sort of resistance.*

Swallow 's confidence and the fact that she was content with the situation plays a vital role in her professional identity, as she knows that she is competent and has developed as a professional (Pratt et al., 2006; Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012). She does not have any complaints or difficulty in terms of clients and fellow employees respecting her. *I know my stuff so if you are apt enough to discuss whatever subject matter needs to be discussed, then I don't think you will get resistance on any level.*

4.2.9 ORGANISATIONAL MINDSET IN TERMS OF BEE

In Swallow's capacity as a manager she is required to attend meetings about their BEE scorecard: how the company is performing and how they can improve on the scorecard. Swallow has strong views on BEE and how it is perceived within the working environment. *If you ask me how BEE is perceived in the corporate world in general – I think it's perceived as a burden by corporate South Africa and it's getting more cumbersome for them*. This is an interesting statement as she herself has been negatively affected by BEE as she could not find employment in South Africa due to her nationality and legislation regarding BEE scorecards.

During one of the meetings about the company's BEE scorecard and legislative changes around BEE scorecard coding comments were made in the line of "Well, we are not interested in window dressing". She comments:

> *So that sort of says that you don't believe there are competent black people who can take up places of leadership in your organisation, if you are calling it 'window*

dressing' automatically without making a deliberate attempt to go like find talent. Then that to me says you know, we are still not where we are supposed to be there's still a lot to be done and changing how people think about it.

Although the comment was not directly aimed at Swallow and even though her employment did not contribute towards the organisation's scorecard, the comment can be seen as offensive. This is an example of micro-insult – where the perpetrators' comments imply that black people are not competent, and they are employed only to window dress the organisation so that their BEE scorecard looks good (Joshi et al., 2015; Mercer et al., 2011; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007).

There has been a lot of focus on providing opportunities and developing people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds but it is still up to the individual to carve out his or her own way. Swallow explains

Nobody is out there trying to deliberately create opportunities for you. And the perception will always be the same. So even though we are governed by the same code of ethics, we have come through the same training, there's still a 'you are probably not going to deliver on the same level as …', you know? And then one gets the impression that certain things won't change because of perception.

This refers to whiteness within the organisation, as there is still a stigma around black people who will never be considered to be as competent as white people. Swallow believes that whiteness dominates the profession: no matter whether you have completed the qualification, gone through all the training and done all that is required of others, your competence as a black professional will still be questioned (Boswell, 2014; Joshi et al., 2015; Leonard, 2010). This persistent perception translates into the types of microaggressive comments she highlights above, in which a BEE scorecard is called window dressing.

4.2.10 FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

One of Swallow 's 10 statements was *I'm not where I aspire to be, but I'm proud of how much I achieved*. Swallow was raised with the mind-set to be diligent and to strive for excellence. She explains that her dreams about her future included becoming a CA and doing masters and doctoral degrees. She says, however,

> *But the CA journey killed me, so as soon as I finished it [giggles] I decided I want out for a while. So ja, I did aspire to be [sigh] to be chasing more career-oriented stuff than where I am now. I'm in a place where I am quite content with where I am now.*

Although she is content she aspires to be the financial chief executive and to obtain the knowledge that will get her there. After being in the corporate world for a few years, however, she learned that from a professional point of view your academic progression is not as important as your ability.

> *It's more about your agility on the job and how you handle yourself professionally and how dynamic you are in decision making, are you able to strategize – that sort of stuff. So, it's more of the hands-on stuff than the stripes academically or in professional qualifications that you got. And if you are a CA then you sort of – you have already earned your stripes, so people will give you the time of day because you are a CA. That's enough of a basis for you to, you know, you have gone through the training you have showed that you are competent and people trust you. Having the title and qualification of a CA opens doors and creates opportunities for you.*

Swallow is conflicted by the fact that she was raised to do and be more.

> *I will maybe continue my studies, just for myself I think I would like to maybe do an MBA, just to have it under my belt. Not because it's a "must have"… I am very proud of what I have achieved, because like I said it was a [chuckle] long, long stressful journey but I'm happy... with where I am now. Because I think as you grow, your priorities shift. I thought I was just going to be chasing, chasing, and chasing the corporate life. But now my family life is also equally important…*

This is an example of professional identity negotiation. Although Swallow aspired to do more in terms of her career, she is negotiating between her aspirations in her work life and the importance of her family life (Brown, 2015; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). She sees the value in education and realises what sacrifices one makes in order to climb the corporate ladder.

4.2 CASE 2: PARROT

This participant will be known as Parrot, as he is a sociable, charming and curious person who enjoys new things. I also experienced him as being transparent and open minded. Parrots are intelligent birds that need to be entertained and stimulated otherwise they become bored. This resonates with this participant as he is a curious person who enjoys new things. He is also very fond of his family.

4.2.1 BACKGROUND AND SCHOOLING

Parrot is a 30-year-old male who grew up in Soweto on the outskirts of Johannesburg. In one of his 10 statements, Parrot describes himself as reflective:

> *I'm one person who likes to think about what has happened in the past, sometimes I feel like I over-analyse things so I always like to think – especially if it's stuff that went wrong and I feel that I could have done good at it. So, I always love to reflect and analyse. I even feel that I'm just a bit too much but – it's inherent, it's just me.*

When he reflects it is mostly to find answers or better ways of doing things. Reflection serves as the cornerstone of identity work, as it is a continuous effort in the process of forming, repairing, maintaining or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Brown, 2015; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). *I always have to reflect just to find out, was I the one that did something wrong or was it them or was there a way I could have handled… especially if things go wrong, I, mull over*

it a lot. Due to his inherently reflective nature, he engages in identity work a lot. This is evident throughout his interview as he reflects on many issues and events.

Parrot starts his story by saying that he comes from humble beginnings. His mother was very young when he was born and for financial reasons she left school, got a job and raised her son. Because she hadn't completed her schooling and it was still during the apartheid years she found it extremely difficult to get employment.

The two stayed with his mother's uncle and aunt until he was three years old. Under a lot of pressure and out of desperation, his mother wanted to give him up for adoption as she did not have the financial resources to provide for him. Fortunately his paternal grandmother, who was a domestic worker for a Jewish family on the East Rand, refused to let her grandchild be adopted. *No, no, no…you cannot give up my grandson for adoption whilst I'm still alive. Yes, I'm also not doing too good from my side, but bring him over.* Although the grandmother was not well off, because of her sense of familial responsibility and the values of her culture she would rather take her grandson in than have him adopted. This provided him with a sense of being loved. As he shares his life story one can hear that he has a great deal of respect for the woman who raised him.

Although he felt loved, Parrot's only wish was to be like any other child and he could not understand why he was not able to live with his mother. He laughs when he admits that he is a bit of a mamma's boy. He spent several periods in his life living with either his mother or his grandmother, depending on the proximity of the school to either one and also because he really wanted to stay with his mother. When he was 12 years old and in Grade 6 he had to travel about 70km by bus and train to school every day, highlighting the incredible challenges many people of colour face in obtaining a decent education.

Parrot visited various family members during school holidays and on some weekends, bearing witness to the statement that 'it takes a village to raise a child', as he grew up loved and influenced by both his family and his extended family. He attended a primary school in Soweto but, as he admits, not all township schools provided a good education (Yamauchi, 2005). Although neither his grandmother nor his mother had a formal education they saw the value in education and wanted to ensure that he got the best education and support that they could provide. They decided to send him to a coloured school from Grade 2 onwards as it was perceived to be better than the township schools. This is an example of racial stratification and black people's inequality under apartheid. Black people had almost no political power and resources were unequally distributed (Adhikar, 2004; Yamauchi, 2005). Although education for coloured people was not exemplary and they did not have special privileges, their schools were better equipped than the township schools. Going to a "coloured school" would provide Parrot with a better education and opportunities than he would have had at the township school.

He also attended a coloured high school, which he describes as a multi-racial school since it included black, coloured and Indian pupils. He explains that although it was a normal Christian school they allowed the school to close at 12h00 on a Friday to enable the Islamic students, who were in the majority, to attend their Mosque prayer services. His summing up of the school captures both the uniqueness and complexity of South Africa (Yamauchi, 2005). The fact that this "coloured" school was actually multi-racial shows that his parents weren't the only ones who defied apartheid barriers to ensure that their children would get a decent education. He refers to the school being a normal Christian school, which makes sense in the national context as the majority religion in South Africa is Christianity, but ironically the majority of students in

this “normal Christian school” were Islamic (Joshi et al., 2015).

Although his school was multi-racial and he grew up aware of different cultures and religions, Parrot never associated with or befriended any coloured people. He had preconceived ideas about them that were ingrained in him from a young age. He explains *In our Black culture like we don’t gel with coloured people because they are normally associated with bad things. Like your drugs, weed and all of that stuff.* While talking about how he is sometimes guilty of being biased or having stereotypically preconceived ideas, he is engaging in identity work by reflecting on what he has believed his whole life and what was transferred to him. He then says: *“I can safely say not interacting with coloured children was the biggest mistake…”* He expands on this by saying that when he was walking in a coloured neighbourhood he would be “freaking out”, thinking, *Oh my goodness, what if they just come and mug me? What if they just come and take my bag or they do whatever?* In the black township he would not feel threatened or scared although he was equally exposed to being mugged. He mentions that he was actually mugged twice in his black neighbourhood, but that he still walked around freely, albeit more aware of his surroundings. This illustrates the influence of the national context on people’s perceptions and stereotypes: prejudice is not just between black and white but is entrenched in all four ethnic groups (Adhikari, 2004; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Apartheid had the effect of structuring everything around race or ethnicity.

4.2.2 UNIVERSITY AND BECOMING A CA

Parrot reveals that he became a CA almost by chance. Ever since he can remember his family and educators ingrained in him the idea of becoming a doctor, saying things like, “Here is our future doctor” whenever they saw him. He adds, *I think maybe because growing up at primary school and the environment… the professional*

career that they would always instil is a lawyer, a doctor, a teacher. Here one can see that although teachers and parents value education and want students to succeed, they have limited information and encourage students to become professionals based on the few that they are aware of. Highlighting the important part that parents, educators and mentors can play in one's life and decisions (Ibarra, 1999).

Interestingly enough, Parrot does not describe himself as being an academic achiever in school. Although he was one of the top five students he never got a distinction for anything. The inequality in the racially differentiated school system in South Africa is obvious here (Yamauchi, 2005). Although he is a top student in the coloured school he never got a distinction, whereas in predominantly white schools the top students all have distinctions. These students have to compete to get into university and to succeed as professionals. Parrot was therefore ecstatic when he finally obtained a distinction in matric (Grade 12).

Parrot is a natural reflector and as he is busy telling his story he reflects back on this school and the quality of education. Although his school was seen as one of the better schools, when he got to university and was exposed to different people and their accounts of their education he realised that his school wasn't as great as he had thought it was.

> *I have to be honest my high school was not too good…. I feel like it didn't really prep me for varsity. Because first and foremost we never used to study long, like I told you in matric we never even used to have extra classes. So, you used to come to school 8 till 2 then you are gone. They never arranged for extra classes. And the worst part that on a Friday we leave at 12. There's not even any additional intervention for grade 12 people who were there – and worst part, we did six - six subjects… I know some schools they do seven, eight, nine, ten. So, for me, I had it like quite easy and like [giggles] and at the same time and then now all of a sudden, you're having this "Oh my*

word, what is going on" [giggles]. So, I was like "I cannot do this" you know it was overwhelming, my first year was quite overwhelming.

Parrot was engaging in identity work when he chose his particular subjects in Grade 10. While his family was disappointed that he didn't choose subjects that would allow him to become a doctor, he himself was busy negotiating what profession he wanted to follow. On the one hand his family had instilled in him the idea of becoming a doctor but on the other hand his ability and interests did not align with his family's expectations.

He was really passionate about drama, he researched what he needed in order to pursue this career, including where he could study and possible bursaries. His family were not fond of the idea at all. Y*ou can imagine my family's reaction from doctor to becoming a performing artiste was just like – "No, no, no, no, no you are not going down that direction."*

Even though he was passionate about drama Parrot decided that he would choose commerce subjects just to keep his family happy. He knew that he did not want to do science as he did not see himself as a doctor. In the back of his mind he thought he might do economics.

He only heard about the CA profession when two well-known audit firms visited their school for their Grade 12 career day. Although his teachers knew about the popular professions they did not know much about the CA profession. *Even teachers who were teaching us commerce, even accounting teachers, they never knew it like the career itself. Some of them were telling us 'It takes five years'.* Here one can see that as a way of pleasing his family and in a sense his educators too he ended up making career-related decisions against his passion and based on limited information.

Although Parrot got a university exemption he had to take a gap year because of

financial constraints and a lack of information, highlighting the lack of communication mentoring when it comes to career-based decisions (Ibarra, 1999). During this year he was fortunate enough to get a job as a teller at a bank.

The following year he managed to get a loan from NSFAS and in his second year he got a bursary from a banking company due to his good results. His plan never was to become a CA, he just wanted to get a normal bachelor's degree and find employment. However, the university where he was enrolled were eager to train CAs and they persuaded him of the merits of the qualification. This is an example of the regulation of identity in the university context (Saayman & Crafford, 2011). He signed a training contract with a big audit company and then realised that there was no turning back.

Although he achieved relatively good grades in his third year, Parrot did not do well enough to qualify to do an honours degree. His family had to help him financially to do a bridging program as the bursary did not cover this. He was then admitted into the honour's program with a partial bursary from a big auditing firm; the rest his family covered.

> *Ugh! Honours was the worst year of my life… I didn't attend anything …and the worst part was, I failed... I actually cried when I got my results. I cried a lot because you know there was a lot of things going into your mind. You are thinking that next year you are going to need funding and where are you going to get that funding from? The general sentiments across my family was like You have been studying for way too long now, so you need to start finding a job and work.*

Although he managed to do well at university the structure of the program and the level of education was new to him. He engaged in identity work as he was busy constructing his identity as a professional (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Saayman &

Crafford, 2011). He used studying and not attending any social activities as a strategy to ensure success (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Brown, 2017; Pratt et al., 2006; Slay & Smith, 2011). It did not work, however. The lack of funding added anxiety to the pressure of trying to make his way in the world and the additional pressure of disappointing his family.

His family did not understand how difficult and long this CA journey was. Parrot explains that he studied so much that there was a point when he did not do his usual chores around the house. This annoyed his aunt and grandmother, who would say to him, *"You don't do anything for this house … we are like your workers … (Okay, not to sound racist but) "You are like a white person, you've employed us to be* you know." His example is indicative of the lived reality of so many black people in South Africa who have worked as domestic workers and who have waited on white people hand and foot. As he is busy telling the story he reflects and engages in identity work where he tries to explain and defend what he is saying (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Slay & Smith, 2011): …*in a way they used to say… okay, not to sound racist but ….*

Fortunately for him he received a 100% bursary from the auditing firm where he signed a training contract. That he did not have the burden of finding the financial means to continue his studies relieved a lot of stress and pressure, allowing him to focus on his studies and to pass the second time round.

University really changed Parrot's way of thinking as well as his perceptions about people from different cultures and religions. This helped him to adjust and later on to adapt in the working environment. He admits that he found it challenging to interact and mingle with people from different cultures at first as he was not sure how to associate with them or what to talk about. He had preconceived ideas or stereotypes about race groups (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). In addition to his stereotypical

perception about coloureds mentioned earlier he had the idea that Indians were okay but white people were superior to you – you must respect them. However, when he got to university and he actually started interacting with people from the different racial groups he realised that not all of these beliefs and stereotypes were true. He ended up having a diverse group of friends. *I'm not saying our parents are wrong but based on their experiences… they ingrained their teachings based on their own experiences and then you would also take up that*. He makes an identity statement as he recalls reflecting on the statements, ideas, and stereotypes that he had been given, only to find when he entered this new environment and started engaging in new ways that the rules were different (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). He was also doing identity work as he formed and negotiated his own reality at the time.

He believes that he was rigid in terms of what his parents and family implanted about what he was allowed to do and not do. His family context, as regulated by the national political context, had an influence on how he thought and perceived things.

Parrot explains that he experienced both social and professional challenges while doing his articles, where he had to adjust to the working environment, the culture, the people, added responsibilities and juggling his work-life and studies. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

4.2.3 TRANSPORT

While still a student Parrot experienced many challenges with regard to transport. The CA program was structured in such a way that one needed to stay late on campus to go to class, write tests or study. Finding appropriate transport late at night was challenging. He did not have his own car, taxis were only available until a certain time and no buses or trains were available that late (Hammond et al., 2009). The South African public transport system does not serve the needs of the majority of its people.

This causes challenges and hindrances as some people have to leave class or plan their activities around the limited and untrustworthy transport available.

Parrot was fortunate enough to buy his own car at the start of his articles. He knew that a big component of being a CA involved driving to clients. He ensured that he was equipped and prepared for articles as it is challenging enough and he wanted to eliminate any additional hurdles. This is an example of professional identity construction, as he was busy forming and defining himself as a professional (Pratt et al., 2006; Slay & Smith, 2011; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). He decided to deal with the material elements that could possibly hinder him from performing his duties as a CA.

However, he did not plan for the unforeseen challenges that came with owning a car. Here one needs to consider his background. He had been a passenger in many taxis, buses and trains but not necessarily in cars. He had never deliberately observed someone driving or driven a car himself and did not have a frame of reference or script when it came to driving and getting from point A to point B.

> *I bought a car in January and it was my first time literally driving on these roads… I didn't have a GPS at that time so I found that sometimes I got lost on my way to clients and the managers would think you are making it up, some would make you feel dumb… like "Are you serious? How hard is it to use a navigation? I mean it tells you turn left, turn right. So, you cannot tell me that you were lost*.

Here there is a stereotypical undertone as his manager twists his reason for being late into incompetence in the use of a GPS. The manager did not even enquire whether he in fact had a GPS, reflecting the whiteness theory that when you own a car you automatically have a GPS. There is also the overall stereotype that black people are usually late or do not care about being punctual (Ariss et al., 2014; Boswell, 2014; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).

4.2.4 ADAPTING TO CULTURES AND FITTING IN

From a social point of view Parrot learnt a lot about different cultures while at university, but in the working environment he had to adapt to the professional world. For example, he had to adjust his way of greeting and addressing people from different cultures. Whether or not to look someone in the eyes is one example of the disjuncture between his cultural beliefs and a profession structured around whiteness (Boswell, 2014; Cotton et al., 2014; Grimes, 2001; Kirpal, 2006). In his culture when one addresses an older person or someone with authority it is considered disrespectful to look them in the eye, whereas in white culture one is perceived as rude if one does not look someone in the eye when greeting them or talking to them. Another form of respect from a black cultural perspective is when you address people as “Sis Pearl” or “Auntie Pearl”, whereas in the working environment it is frowned upon as one should rather address someone as Mister, Miss or by their first name. Here his cultural environment clashed with the whiteness of the organisational context (Ariss et al., 2014; Grimes, 2001; Leonard, 2010). In his own cultural context there is a ritual associated with greeting that he had to put aside in deference to the rules within the organisational context that are structured around European or white culture.

He also had to learn how to engage with his colleagues and clients on a social level as most of their work was done in teams and there were a lot of social events and functions. He found it challenging as he could not relate to most of the conversations as his co-workers did not share the same interests or go to the same places. *I never used to interact with white trainees because I felt like we didn’t have anything in common. And when we chat about it, we will almost in a way bore each other … there's no commonality*… He sometimes got the feeling that his activities or interests were not significant enough to be shared with the greater group. “

It is difficult you know in terms of engaging with people who are totally, totally different to who you are. Even if maybe talk about your own story. "I went to Limpopo" - you get the feeling that people are like "Ah this guy, of all the things he could talk about is Limpopo like really,. We are talking of Thailand, Bankok, about going to Europe, or Greece.

He was busy negotiating his identity as he was trying to fit into a profession where one is required to interact with a diverse group of people, but he did not have much in common from a social perspective (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ibarra, 1999; Slay & Smith, 2011; Watson, 2008). For example, traveling to go on holiday is mostly associated with white people as it is seen as a luxury. In the South African context the majority of black people travel within the country's borders and they make use of public transport, for example to go home for the December holidays or to weddings or funerals. Parrot found himself among people who travel for pleasure to places that he had never been to; he could not identify with their experiences nor take part in the conversations.

He tells about his experience traveling to Luxembourg for a secondment after completing his articles and how it was his first time oversees. He has since travelled to Thailand as well. He shares his views on traveling.

I'm trying to plan more trips overseas. Prior to travelling to Luxembourg, I wasn't a big traveller, not because I don't like it but I think because it's not a culture that's instilled growing up with a poor background as well as parents or guardians who just perceive travelling as a waste of money or a luxury. That was until maybe towards the end of my articles when I went to Luxembourg and started traveling there, then my perception change. In fact, that is now one thing I want to do often.

4.2.5 FUNCTIONS

As previously stated, there were a lot of functions and social events that Parrot

had to attend. Although he really enjoyed the social events and the interactions he would always check if any of the black people that he knew would also be attending.

> *I love [giggles] social stuff. But of course, generally I used to go if there's another black person that I know, you'll always have your clique. If none of them are going, then I'm not going. But if some of them are going then you know at least when you get there, there's somebody that you going to chill with.*

Although he is an adventurous person and enjoys social events he does not want to attend these events alone; he does not want to feel alienated. He finds a sense of coherence and comfort when his people or someone who is familiar to him is also there (Watson, 2008).

He reflects back on his statement and engages in identity work as he explains that sometimes his perspective or mentality can be wrong. South Africa is known as the rainbow nation, referring to our diversity and rich cultures. There will be times when you will not be able to satisfy everyone but companies do strive to be as inclusive as possible.

> *I think personally for me, it's just to find a compromise… between both ends. Like yes, I understand going to work functions you must come prepared to say that of course you are going to meet people of a different races and most probably the food is not going to be the normal food that you normally eat, the music is most probably not going to be the music that you … but sometimes, you would be surprised. Some events they'll try and cater for all in regards to music and food.*

For many years white was the norm in organisations: white food, music, values and beliefs. Although organisations have transformed and are striving towards catering for everyone, the norm still leans towards whiteness (Ariss et al., 2014; Boswell, 2014; Grimes, 2001; Joshi et al., 2015).

4.2.6 FOOD

Parrot refers to himself as a ‘foodie”; he just loves food. He had a Portuguese friend in university who use to take him to new restaurants and food markets and cultural festivals and he admits that in the beginning he could not understand why they could not eat normal food. *I used to say why can't we just go to Chicken Licken or KFC? She grew up with, I don’t want to sound racist, but with black people as well. So, she actually helped me to adapt.* His interactions with people from different cultures changed his perception of them and helped him to be more open minded and to adjust.

4.2.7 LANGUAGE

Parrot did not really have any major hurdles with regard to language within the working environment. Attending an English school was to be a great advantage. Even though he worked in a predominantly Afrikaans environment and he was not quite fluent in Afrikaans he knew enough to follow the basics of conversations. He did not let language hamper his work; he understood enough to be able to continue with his work or to know when to ask questions. He would not respond in Afrikaans, however, as he was just not confident enough.

There were minor challenges with regard to pronunciation as one might be comfortable speaking English but may not always pronounce words correctly. Says Parrot

> *People will then, based on your pronunciation, develop a perception about you... That gets associated with he doesn’t know how to speak; but it is there and then you find sometimes you find trainees trying to develop an accent so that they can fit in.*

This is discrimination based on accent; it illustrates regulation around accent, which is an excellent example of whiteness. Because he did not sound a certain way he did not fit in with the norm or with what was acceptable (Ariss et al., 2014; Johnson-

Ahorlu, 2013; Twine & Gallagher, 2008).

4.2.8 WORK CHALLENGES: MENTORING

The company that employed Parrot had no formal support structures in place to support and mentor the new clerks with task-related queries. They were however assigned a supervisor who had to oversee them and ensure that they completed all their competencies in time. Parrot believes that they would have benefited more from having a "buddy" or a mentor who could have supported them with task-related queries as well as from a more social perspective. He explains that their experience was more a case of learning-on-the-job and going to the managers and asking them questions if they did not understand something. He got the feeling that he irritated his managers when he asked them to show him how to do something. Their reaction would be undermining: *'Are you serious? You don't even know how to do a formula?' You know, like people were trying to undermine you and make you feel stupid.* Here one can see that there is a need for support, especially for the first few years (Hammond et al., 2009; Ibarra, 1999; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). Although CAs go through formal university training it is not sufficient to prepare them for the working environment and there is no form of social support such as a mentor or a buddy. The buddy system offers support not only from a task perspective but also from a social perspective. Equipping and supporting first years with tacit knowledge would help them to flourish. The fact that Parrot struggled and had to ask managers questions where they questioned his ability made him feel incompetent and influenced his professional identity. The manager's reactions may lead to clerks not wanting to ask questions, which is not ideal as the whole point behind their articles is to equip and develop them to become qualified CAs.

4.2.9 COMPUTER

Parrot shares some additional challenges that he faced from a working point of view. When he started working it was his first proper acquaintance with a computer and related technology. The university course wasn't really computer driven except for the Pastel course they did. Now in the working environment, everything was computer based. *This is my first time and now you are doing audits, you are sitting the whole day on your laptop, you are quite slow, the managers are not understanding why…* Here one can see elements of white privilege as it was assumed that everybody had a computer (Green et al., 2007; Grimes, 2001). It relates to the political context in which most black people were deprived politically, socially and economically and could not afford resources like computers. Arriving in the working environment one was suddenly expected to do almost all one's work on computers (Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). This was something that Parrot had not been exposed to and the way the environment and profession are structured did not offer sufficient support. When he worked slowly or asked questions one saw white privilege coming through as they could not comprehend that there was another way of being.

4.2.10 CLIENT ALLOCATION AND STRUCTURING OF WORK

Parrot explains that during articles everyone wanted to work with the well-known clients in banking and insurance as it would look good on your CV. However, when he started to noticed that the structuring of work and client allocation was not distributed fairly. *I have to be honest with you, I wasn't too happy with the client allocation. I probably got one client that I felt like this client is the best, it was a well-known bank.* The only time that he got exposure to the big clients in insurance, was when there was an emergency. He feels work was allocated unfairly and based on status and power, on who your father was and what institutions you studied at

(Boswell, 2014; Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). Parrot provides us with some examples.

> *One of our [stutter] trainees his dad, I think, was chairman of a well-known bank, and he used to get great clients… he used to get great ratings as well in terms of top performer... Another trainee's dad … was also a big gun in another bank and he used to get all sorts of amazing clients. Sometimes even if they wanted to change clients around… it was easy. With me… would you jump through hoops, if anybody was to take you seriously you know.,, Yes I did have … the one bank and also a big sugar company. But then the rest was just a joke for me…*

Here are two significant factors to consider. Firstly, the unfair allocation of clients along racial lines or bias according to who your father was or whom you knew. This had an impact on the development of the professionals. The outcome and underlying effect was that companies were reproducing white privilege. While they were not denying anyone the opportunity to work, black trainees were not assigned to clients with status who would provide them with good exposure and add gravitas to a CV (Sadler & Erasmus, 2005).

Secondly, this engaged Parrot in professional identify work, as his identity as a professional was affected by these incidents (Brown, 2015; Cotton et al., 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). He explains that *with me… you would jump hoops, if anybody was to take you seriously you know.* Here he is contrasting his experience with that of his white counterparts. Despite his effort and hard work to break barriers and to be taken seriously he would still get clients that are "a joke". He still doesn't get allocated clients that will show his worth and competence (Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler, 2002; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005).

4.2.11 MICROAGGRESSION

Parrot also faced challenges in the working environment. He provides us with

two examples of micro-invalidation, where his professional opinion and skills were invalidated. The first was where he would be sitting with an audit manager. They would be asking technical questions, but they would not take his answers and professional opinion seriously. "*My white counterpart would give the exact same answer, and then they would say 'I got the answer from Jan*[i]*…' So, for me, it was like clearly whatever I'm saying, people will never trust*. His professional opinion and skills were invalidated until they were confirmed by his white counterparts (Isom, 2016; Joshi et al., 2015; Mercer et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007).

The second example of micro-invalidation was that the managers would double-check the quality of his work even though his work had fewer mistakes than his counterparts'.

> *I always have that thing that people never trust a black person in the work environment. I used to see my work would get way more scrutinized than somebody else's work. So I saw somebody like for example Jan is not really going through what I'm going through. As a black audit trainee, you are always going to work extra hard [giggles]. I don't know, for me, that's exactly the feeling that I got.*

He also experienced micro-insults where communication or behaviour conveyed rudeness and insensitivity (Joshi et al., 2015; Lavender & Dunn, 2016; Sue et al., 2007). His audit managers would be more willing to assist white trainees than black trainees.

> *I experienced it with my audit managers, where sometimes you would find that they would be more willing to assist a white trainee than a black trainee. Or sometimes when you ask a question, they make you feel stupid that you are asking this question. But when a white person asks a similar question, they normally give them a nice answer, they take them through it. You know, yes, of course, this is not the norm, but it happened.*

He also shares some of his experiences where managers helped him but their behaviour insulted or embarrassed him.

> *Sometimes they over explain, talking out loud so that everybody can hear them know. It's like [loud tone of voice] "Hi Parrot, let me show you how you do this, it is really easy" Then people would be shaking their heads at you like - is somebody really explaining this to you? And sometimes they will be explaining something that you didn't even ask for an explanation for. You know because people want to make you look stupid or [chuckle] sound condescending.*

These examples are a form of microaggression and although most of the incidents are subtle or not directly linked to race or colour, the hidden or underlying message invalidates or insults Parrot (Lavender & Dunn, 2016; Mercer et al., 2011; Nadal, 2011; Sue et al., 2007). The actions convey the message that he is not as competent as his white counterparts, or that the manager has to over-explain and raise his voice in order for Parrot to understand him.

He reflects that of course not all people ill-treat you based on your race and gender. He also alludes to some misconceptions and sensitivity from a black person's perspective. *But then again I feel we as black people ourselves, we also like to think as if [pause] people need to feel sorry for us.* He was reporting to three different managers at one point and he only experienced challenges and resistance from one.

I asked Parrot how he dealt with the fact that people would ill-treat him or invalidate his opinions and skills as a professional.

> *I had confrontations. But of course … it did not yield good results, some results, but not the best. It depended on the individual… Some of them would shout at you in front of others… some would apologize … some would make like you are reading too much into it… some would make it a race thing… After articles, it changed… now you have the qualification. People see that now you can follow through on something, you*

do have a certain level of professionalism. The qualifications makes a huge difference…

This is significant as Parrot has internalised the professional identity of being a CA and now values it. It acts as a mechanism for defending his racial identity and allows him to negotiate his working relationship from a position of power and authority.

Parrot reflects on his journey thus far and the lessons he has learned and how his mind-set and perceptions have changed.

> *It's been an interesting journey going through the whole qualification and education part of it… There are the lessons that I have learned and the misconceptions that I have sometimes had. I have to be honest, especially with what our parents ingrained in us about coloured people as well white people that you know you must always come with respect… There was a point in my life where I despised people outside of my race. Due to the way that they either treated me but then I started generalizing… 'All white people are the same, white people think that black people are stupid…' But there's one thing about me, I always like to reflect. When you reflect, then you think, 'No, it's actually not a race thing, it's an individual thing'…*

Although transformation is taking place and structures are in place to support and provide opportunities for previously disadvantaged students there is still work to be done from a national and financial point of view. Parrot sums it up like this:

> When *we start work not all of us are starting on an equal footing. Unfortunately, as a black trainee, you're almost like a step behind. You get people who are still using public transport and … some of them are feeding their families, they become the breadwinners…*

4.2.12 SECONDMENT TO LUXEMBOURG

Parrot is really grateful for the opportunity he was given to go to Luxembourg on a secondment after completing his articles. This was his first trip overseas. He was amazed by the culture, history and people. He shares his experience:

I think it was the first time where all of us were on an equal footing … and when you look at those countries they don't have a history of oppression or anything of that sort. So, you are all equal there… South African Chartered Accountants are generally quite well respected.

He makes an important identity statement when he says *for the first time ever all of us are on equal footing*. One can see the contrast when he found himself in a country that does not have a history of oppression and apartheid. There was no second-guessing or invalidation of skills and opinions; this just shows how abnormal the South African context is. In Luxembourg his skills were respected and admired. South African CAs are actually respected overseas, which endorses the qualification and shows that we do have the potential to compete and function at an international level.

Something else that caught his attention in Luxemburg was the fact that traveling was easy and accessible. I *also travelled a lot, travelled a lot in the country. So, I think that's one of the things I enjoyed a lot. Because traveling was easy there… you don't even need to fly, you are taking a train*.

4.2.13 MONEY AND FAMILY

As one of his ten statements, Parrot identifies himself as a brother, a son and a parent, referring to his social responsibility towards his family from a cultural perspective. He remembers how happy his family was when he started working because it meant that at least now they had an additional income.

Your counterparts are splashing; they are able to afford to go on trips. Your money goes to the car instalment, insurance, support at home... You don't even have enough to treat yourself. You could do the bare minimum with your salary. [sigh] It was a struggle.

He became the main breadwinner in his family when his mother passed away

and his aunt stopped working. He had a responsibility towards his three siblings and the rest of his family. *It's just one of those things, it just means you are not going to live the same lifestyle as your colleagues, so there's going to be those differences, you know?*

Parrot explains that in his culture there is the expectation that you have to care for your family and the elders.

> *They see you and see the jackpot. It's not only your family, it's your neighbour, it is people that you haven't spoken to in ten years, members from the extended family that you hardly ever talk to. I remember in my first or second year of articles there was a time where I was drowning in debt because I was helping a lot of people. But I think there's a point in time where your logic comes in… That's when I started cutting, I'm really not helping with this specific person anymore.*

Here one can see that from a cultural perspective there is a big expectation of supporting the community and sharing your money. This is a big responsibility and, in this case, the professional still has to pay for a car and insurance as it is an inherent job requirement which added even more pressure on him. He explains that now that he is an established professional and earning his own money he has started to travel more, he enjoys the fact that he can take part in conversations and give people advice as to where they should go and what attractions to visit. The majority of this family support his travel but he occasionally gets comments about wasting money on traveling and that they could have used the money for something else. He remarks that funnily enough some of his family members' views on travelling have changed. His aunt started traveling within the borders of South Africa, for example going to Durban, which is something she would never have done before.

Just before ending the interview Parrot's reflective nature once again engages in identity work as he states that he is happy with the interview and does not want to add

more information. He reflects on the interview and ends with *I'm happy... You know you never take the time to actually do this exercise, so it was good.* He then once again engages in identity work as he wants reassurance that I do not think badly of him. *It's so great to share my story. I just hope that don't you think of me in a different light [nervous giggles]*.

4.3 CASE 3: FLAMINGO

This participant will be known as Flamingo, as she stands tall and stood out from the community and the circumstances in which she grew up. She values education and strives to give back to the community and aspiring professionals to try and make the environment more suitable for them. Like a flamingo she also adapts and changes colour as her environment changes.

4.3.1 BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

Flamingo is a 33-year old coloured Christian woman who grew up in a coloured community in Eldorado Park with her two siblings and her parents. The community is known for its gangsters, drugs, alcohol abuse, lack of resources and the norm that very few students pass Matric/Grade 12 (Adhikari, 2006). Flamingo shares stories of incidents that occurred in schools and in the community as a way of explaining her reality and the environment in which she grew up. In one, a student attacked the mathematics teacher just because he reprimanded him for not doing his homework. In another instance in Grade 11, close to the end of the year, someone stole Flamingo's maths study guide with all of her notes. This was extremely frustrating because when they stole her time, effort and preparations for the exams they also stole her means to learn. This incident illustrates the lack of respect from students as well as a lack of discipline in schools.

Flamingo maintains that one's environment can influence the way you think as well as what you expect from life.

The thing is if that's what you see all the time, you are going to think that's life… Now everybody says 'Let's go drinking'. And then you also fall into the trap of 'okay fine, let's go for a drink or two instead of studying'. I succumbed to some of those activities but I think part of me always had the desire to want to try and do better.

Flamingo is engaging in identity work as her circumstances did not support her goals or her idea of what was possible or how she made sense of her place in the world (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008).

The support she got from her family also contributed to Flamingo's way of thinking. She was raised with the saying 'you reap what you sow and hard work pays off'; she therefore kept her focus on that. She always wanted to go to school and university, and listening to others' stories motivated her to work harder.

She would be called a nerd for not participating in activities that might distract her from getting good grades. Instead of saying that she was going home to study, she soon learned to say that she couldn't go with as her mother wanted her at home. This is an example of identity work and although she participated in some of the community activities, "traps" as she refers to them, she knew she wanted more out of life. She had to revise, negotiate and strengthen who and what she wanted to be (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Was she going to get sucked into the popular life of partying or was she going to strive for more? *So that's when I realized you know what? It depends on you. Because if you want to make a change, if you want to do something differently, you just have to grab the opportunity. It's not going to come to you…* Identity work manifests through social processes and is influenced by place, time and context (Smith et al., 2015). She was engaging in identity work through social identity, where she was negotiating her sense of belonging and differentiating herself from the community and its culture of being content with what you have (Watson, 2008).

Flamingo's parents valued education and always supported her wholeheartedly. Her mother would encourage her to work hard. During her university and articles years and until she could afford her own car, her father provided safe transport. Although her parents were very supportive, finances were always a factor and they didn't necessarily have the extra funds for university. She decided to be pro-active by looking for bursaries, as she knew that if she wanted to study anything, she had to work hard to ensure that she had good grades. Through a government funded Girl Learnership Program she got exposure to what resources were available.

4.3.2 TERTIARY EDUCATION AND BECOMING A CA

Flamingo explains how she decided on pursuing a career as a CA. *CA wasn't my first choice. I wanted to be an optometrist or a chiropractor*. Her mathematics teacher encouraged her to consider the CA profession. He said there were very few black CAs in the industry and being a black female in the South Africa's context and with the Employee Equity Act she would have endless opportunities (Booysen, 2007). She believes that they glorify the CA profession and sell it almost as *the world is your oyster type of thing, no one tells you about the detail behind it.*

What decided her to go the CA route was that she got a scholarship from a private college to do so. Her sister pursued a career in radiography also based on funding available. This demonstrates the restrictions imposed on career choices available to individuals from disadvantaged communities, with potential occupational and professional identities dictated by socio-economic circumstances. In addition, Flamingo feels that although government institutions invested time in projects such as the Girl Learnership Program, there is a need for more career guidance and mentorship in disadvantaged areas (Ibarra, 1999).

Flamingo shares her interesting experience at the private college where for the first time she interacted with people from different cultures, religions and backgrounds.

> *I think going to school in your community, you are kind of used to your culture, your way of doing things, your way of thinking. But when you get to varsity, now you really get a taste of the real world. I had to use a taxi while others had cars … things were a bit imbalanced, but that was okay because I thought you know what … this is why I'm doing what I'm doing right now, so that obviously I can have certain things in the future. I was just thankful that I could study*.

Flamingo refers to growing up in a community where she was among people who had the same culture and values as herself. Going to university, she was exposed to various cultures as well as to the material imbalances that existed between herself and others. She had to get up very early in the mornings and take two different taxis to get to university while most other students had their own cars. She engaged in identity work as she saw what others had and used it as a motivation for why she was studying (at the time her 'why' was to own a car and have a comfortable life).

One engages in identity work through encounters and interaction with others, within social contexts as well as in organisations. As part of her new experience and exposure, she became aware of new identity possibilities as she started doing new things that really changed her perspective and broadened her view on life. She believes that if she had not been exposed to different people and activities her mind-set may have remained what it was in the environment that she came from (Alvesson & Willmot, 2002; Atewologun, Kutzer, Doldor, Anderson, & Sealy, 2017; Clarke et al., 2009; Pratt et al, 2006).

> *You were going to think in that one narrow minded way that you were kind of raised to think that you know 'this is how life is – you finish school, you get a job, get married' and then you have kids and then the cycle starts over*.

Flamingo explains that she is the only person within her immediate family who has a degree, although some of her family member obtained certificates or diplomas.

While she was still in first year people informed her that the private college she was attending was not as well-known as most universities and that there was a huge influx of accounting students in the market. Her choice of institution had been based on funding considerations rather than well-informed and accurate career-related information. Institutions are quick to source students and sell them the ideas of becoming a professional but leave out details that later on may have a big impact on their profession. This is an example of professional identity being negotiated and reconstructed through identity work (Ibarra, 1999; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

She applied to a university and managed to get credit for some first-year subjects. Funding was a challenge but over time she managed to get most of it covered. She found herself a bit of a loner in the first year as most people had already formed their cliques. She did not get involved in many of the activities anyway as she was trying to adapt to the environment and the subjects, and had constraints with regard to transport to and from the university.

Although Flamingo qualified for an honours degree, she had no funding and her parents had once again to “make a plan”. She suggests that bursaries and programs like the Thutuka Program should be offered to all and that everybody should be given a fair opportunity. She heard about the Thuthuka Program by chance but when she applied for assistance she was told, *Well, you are not black enough.* She felt frustrated because there wasn’t clarity on the criteria to qualify for this advantageous program. Flamingo was faced with identity related constraints from two perspectives. From a socio-economic perspective she was not “poor” enough to apply for a bursary yet at the same time her family could not afford to fund her. Secondly, from an

ethnicity/embodiment perspective under the regulations of the funding programs she was not “black” enough as she was classified as coloured and thus viewed as supposedly more privileged. Research found that coloured people are seen as more than black but less than white, so they find themselves in a liminal space as neither black nor white (Adhikari, 2004; Adhikari, 2006).

Flamingo continues.

> *And then honours came. That was when I realized [giggles] there’s a difference between accounting and following this whole CA route, it’s like on a different level. You hear about people who are repeating honours three and four times and this got me stressed. And then the other thing was, because my parents paid for it, it was like Flamingo, you can't fail*.

The academic requirements and the structuring of the program is known to be extremely challenging. Only a select few get accepted for the programme and even so the majority of students do not pass the first time.

Flamingo had this in the back of her mind as well as the additional pressure of her family’s limited financial resources. She was determined not to waste her financial resources or the opportunity to develop herself. In response to these challenges, she made a number of decisions, one of which was for her father to pick her up from university so that she could stay until late at the library and cut out any unnecessary distractions. When reflecting back she realises that her “over serious” strategy wasn’t successful: *I was so focused on studying the content and theory and not seeing how practical it is… I think I should have engaged more with other students.* She admits that *Honour’s did not go – because there's not even much I can say of Honours. It came, it took my whole being and then I failed*. She realized only later on that you need to work smarter and listen when the lecturers speak about exam technique. This highlights the fact that honours is difficult and that the standards are high.

The second time around Flamingo kept the bigger picture and the practicality of the profession in mind; she also tapped into the support offered by the university. She went for extra help before one of the supplementary exams and there she realized that all students struggle: *I was standing there, it was me, it was black, it was white, it was coloured. It was all of us you know.* She realised that ethnicity does not determine ability and that all students from all walks of life struggle with a CA honours. According to Flamingo, one encounters various challenges and difficulties while on the journey of becoming a CA; you get sold this idyllic profession without knowing about the difficult parts. This is an example of conscious identity work, as she in the process of developing and negating her identity as an emerging CA but the nature of the process and circumstances is challenging which allows her to deliberately negotiate her identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Saayman & Crafford, 2011). She explained that honours were challenging and that it took her whole being but then articles started: "I was like over the moon and then articles started..." Indicating that articles were even more challenging and tiring than honours. I will explain and unpack various challenges experienced during articles

Transport

Flamingo found it both challenging and exhausting to adapt to the work demands, to the people within the environment, to traveling with various taxis to different clients all over town with all their confidential documents, to corporate dressing, all while still studying for board exams. This involved a fair amount of identity work as she was trying to form, negotiate and establish a sense of distinctiveness from herself within the profession and identification with the profession as a CA (Atewologun et al., 2017; Brown, 2015; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). One of her biggest challenges was the fact that she did not have a car and she soon realised that

owning a car was not a luxury but a necessity that equipped you to adjust to a CA's world of work (Hammond et al., 2009). A big part of one's job involved travelling around Gauteng to clients; Y*ou have a client here, you have a client there and it's work; no one is there to baby you because there's deadlines that need to be met.* Although she was in an environment where she should learn, she was faced with challenges that she was not prepared for. She also realised the responsibility of her work and the consequences should she not deliver. She had to manage these challenges in such a way that she still performed and met her deadlines. Although she had used public transport and taxis throughout university she now needed to get up much earlier to ensure that she was on time for work. She also needed to work out how to travel to the clients with the taxi, what time to leave and how to ensure that it was safe to travel with your laptop and a client's confidential documents and files with you. As she was negotiating and constructing her identity as a professional she realised that a car serves as an enabling mechanism to be successful in this profession.

She found comfort and support in the fact that she knew she was not the only one facing these challenges. A few others also had to navigate their way through the city and figure it out:

> *We are all in the same boat more or less, because remember at that point in time all of us have nothing, besides a dream…. You're still broke, you still [giggles] trying to figure out, like you still trying to qualify as well. So, I think at that point in time, you are then able to pick up good friendships because everybody kind of needs to be supportive toward each other.*

This group provided her with a significant source of support in the process of identity work. As individuals they struggled to maintain a sense of coherence when faced with difficult circumstances, so they formed good friendships and provided social

support for one another. This is an example of identity work through social identity, as she is identifying herself with a particular group and experience a sense of belonging (Kirpal, 2004; Watson, 2008).

Flamingo explains that the company for which she was doing articles had a buddy system and that she had a very supportive second-year buddy. *He coached and guided me nicely in terms of what to do and then the first month of not having a car, he kind of helped me out.* With support from her buddy and colleagues and especially her family she managed to cope and to adapt to the "real world", as she refers to it. Here one can see the significance of a mentor or someone who can provide you with guidance and advice (Hammond et al., 2009; Ibarra, 1999). Her family also played a significant part in supporting her in surviving articles.

Transport and its challenges proved to be a significant source of frustration in Flamingo's attempts to maintain a professional image (Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler, 2002; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). When they were chasing a deadline she felt frustrated to ask to be excused at five o'clock because she needed to catch the five o'clock taxi and get home before dark. As a first year and an emerging professional she wanted to put in the extra hours to make a good impression and to learn as much as she could. She saw herself as a team player and valued the importance of teamwork in an organisation. The transport issue disrupted the dynamics of the team and created tension. She sensed the unspoken thought *you know what, now we need to carry your slack because you always need to leave early.*

The root cause of the issue is that the accounting profession is structured around people having their own cars. This is an example of whiteness arising from our historical context where mainly white people were privileged to have cars. Within this profession the inherent requirements of the job were measured against white norms

(Ariss et al., 2014). In other words, to be equipped as a professional CA you need to have safe and reliable transport at all hours of the day. In South Africa taxis are available only at certain times and they are somewhat unreliable. People who cannot afford cars and whose mode of transport has traditionally been taxis suddenly find that they need to negotiate a sense of professional identity. Because they cannot put in the same long hours as their colleagues they appear to be reneging on their work commitments (Ibarra, 1999). However, people form previously disadvantaged backgrounds have little prestige and social-economic status as a result of oppression (Slay and Smith, 2011).

Flamingo would also get questions or comments like “Why don’t you buy a car? You are earning a good salary now.” She felt frustrated because she had to do a lot more with her money than just pay for a car; she had an additional responsibility towards her parents. No matter how much she struggled she also felt obliged to pay back her student loan in order that the next generation could also benefit from that money to better themselves. In this one sees her strong social responsibility towards her parents as well as the wider community. The tension caused by not having her own transport motivated her even more to get her own car. *I was really determined to get a car … so when everyone else was spending money on random stuff … I had to save for a car.* Flamingo maintains that the profession itself should make students aware of the importance of owning a car by the time they qualify. Here one can see that there is a need for guidance and mentorship (Ibarra, 1999).

Advice

Although Flamingo’s company had a relatively good buddy system in place and her buddy supported her from a work-related perspective, she could have benefited from a mentor who supported her from a social perspective too (Ibarra, 1999).

Remember, some of the guys either their brothers or sisters who are CAs already. So obviously they can then go home and bounce ideas off. But you on the other hand you don't know anybody [giggles] so then you really have to figure out things.

Flamingo believes that although there was sufficient support from a task perspective, there was not enough support for everybody coming from different walks of life. Fortunately, some of the senior clerks and one of the managers provided the new clerks with informal support based on their own challenges within the working environment. Flamingo felt comfortable enough to ask 'stupid' questions, come out with ideas or say that she did not understand knowing that she would not be judged.

Challenges, advice and support relating to corporate wear, lunches and functions are discussed next.

4.3.3 CORPORATE WEAR

In the accounting environment people dress relatively professionally, and since Flamingo's wardrobe was not styled with jackets and corporately appropriate clothes, she knew that she needed to change this. Most clerks rely on their parents to assist them with this, but neither she nor her parents could afford to spend a lot of money on fancy jackets and corporate clothing, especially as she had to focus on saving for a car. *I can't buy this fancy jacket from Truworths or whatever*. Flamingo also had to dress for comfort as she needed to travel far with a lot of additional baggage in a taxi. She refers to her dressing style as ''plain Jane'' and would sometimes hear comments like "Did you forget to dress up this morning or something?". As Flamingo was forming and negotiating her identity as a professional, she was challenged on the degree to which she was able to look the part and embody the look or uniform associated with being a CA. Once again, her disadvantaged background and simply not having money to spend on clothing in addition to her plain Jane dress sense made it difficult for her

to dress appropriately and pull off her role as a CA in training. This does not escape notice, and she was reminded of her inability to adapt successfully to the professional dress code. This reinforces her outsider status and serves as a stark reminder of the additional identity work she needed to embody her professional status (Kirpal, 2004; Slay & Smith, 2011).

In this regard, however, Flamingo was advised by more senior clerks to buy clothing items that she could mix and match. They also advised Flamingo and the other interns to wear comfortable shoes to accommodate traveling on taxis but to have high heels in your handbag to wear instead as soon as you get to the office or to the client. These requirements highlight the many tacit rules and regulations exercised within the accounting profession that had little to do with performing one's duties. They nevertheless require a great deal of work at an identity level especially for aspiring professionals coming from families who have had no exposure to a corporate setting and its rules.

Working in a team, team lunches and functions

Flamingo's disadvantaged status was further highlighted during team lunches where most members could afford to buy lunch as opposed to bringing something from home. Attending these lunches was expected because they discussed work and you needed to show that you were a team player. Flamingo did not always want to be the person in the group who complained about money because as a CA she was earning good money: *Cause now they are like 'but what do you mean you don't have money, you are an accountant, do you not budget properly?' [giggles] Then it's like 'Hello, I had to buy A, B and C'.* Although she was earning a good salary, she was using it to pay back loans and to save for a car; she also needed to build up her wardrobe and she did not want to spend much of her money on food. She was engaging in professional identity

negotiation as she valued teamwork and understood that team lunches and functions form part of what the job entails (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Ibarra, 1999). She also knew that being a CA gave her status and power that did not allow her to say that she did not have the money (Slay & Smith, 2011).

At the same time, Flamingo was very determined not to let other people pay for her or to voice the fact that she did not have money:

> *That's just one thing I was always trying to steer away from is you don't want people to feel like you are disadvantaged if that's the word I can use. Because I think the minute it's like 'oh you are disadvantaged' you feel like 'I'm not going to get the same type of work as what Suzan's going to get' because people are going to feel like 'Flamingo can't handle it because now she's got stories about the car, or the this and that'*.

Flamingo had the pride not to want to appear weak or to have others pity her based on where she came from. She therefore found it difficult to challenge the current practices and instead had to find ways of maintaining her pose in the face of persistent identity challenges. She therefore engaged in conscious identity work negotiation and reconstruction during challenging times, managing them by never using money as an excuse, by always participating in team activities and by making alternative arrangements with regard to transport (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ibarra, 1999; Saayman & Crafford, 2011).

Flamingo found corporate social events another identity challenge because people expected one to be bubbly and interactive at these events whereas she was an introvert. She also hated it that so much was unfamiliar. *I hated it because … the food is obviously not what you wanted it to be … and I needed to start engaging and talking to all these big shot people [giggles].* What helped her to adjust to these events was that being with a group where she fitted in she did not feel alienated. *But uhm I*

think what also helped a lot was that there was a lot of people like me there. So, you just like find your group and in that way, you become comfortable.

4.3.4 LANGUAGE

She also shares her challenges with regards to language; in both social and working environments. She befriended a group of people similar to her, where she felt comfortable and supported. They faced similar challenges and had similar interests. She became aware that she was the only person of colour among a majority of black people, however, and when they used their mother tongue she was once again the outsider and then she had to remind them that she was in the room. She remained in the minority as her co-workers communicated in languages that she understood partially or not at all. When she found herself an outsider or in the minority she engaged in strengthening and revising her identify as she was doing identity work because she was constrained by societal structures that limited her understanding and participating in meetings and conversations (Watson, 2008). She thought the answer would be for everyone to speak one universally inclusive language.

Flamingo found that because her name sounded Afrikaans, people naturally assumed she was Afrikaans. *You would find when the people speak Afrikaans then they naturally assume maybe Afrikaans is my language [giggles]*. Although she grew up around Afrikaans speaking people, she did not feel competent to reply in Afrikaans, especially within the working environment. She still needed someone to assist or interpret some of the conversations. She would also get emails stating “Hallo Mevrou” (Good day Madam) or emails asking her in Afrikaans to attend to an issue. Her reaction would be *Okay fine, how am I supposed to understand what is going on here?*

Stereotypes

Flamingo recalls experiencing stereotypes such as coloureds being known for drinking a lot and partying. An example of this occurred when her group were working overtime to finish a project. When the day's work ended and she was about to go away for the weekend her manager made a comment which offended her greatly:

> *'I hope you are not going to party the whole weekend and drink too much because we have important stuff to finish on Monday'. [giggles] I didn't take note of it at that moment and then I left work. And then I actually phoned my colleague that I am good friends with. 'Did he really just say that?' I'm going away for a weekend, no one spoke about partying or anything and have I ever pitched up hung-over for work on a Monday?*

Was this microaggression or was Flamingo being over-sensitive? It is difficult to know whether the manager made a casual joke or if his intention was to limit her drinking, based on his preconceived ideas about coloured people (Sue et al., 2007). This is an example of a grey area. In one situation a white person can make a comment or a joke with no negative meaning whatsoever, but in a different group where sensitivities are different the same words can have negative and unintended consequences. Flamingo took offence because he passed judgment on her although she had never given him any reason to doubt her professionalism.

She also experienced stereotypical judgments based on her race and background. She provides another stereotype:

> *Coloureds are also known for… the majority they say are stealing and end up being in prison… I'd mention I'm from Eldorado Park then people would be like 'Really? I thought your upbringing is from a different suburb.' When people hear that, they already like stereotype you and say 'Okay you know what? She is from that place … can she really do what she says she does' …I also feel you really have to work extra harder to break that stereotype barrier.*

She feels that she has to work even harder to break the barriers erected by stereotypes and people's perceptions (Clark et al., 2012; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005).

4.3.5 OTHER SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

It took Flamingo some time, but as she developed and grew as a professional, she gained the confidence to participate in boardroom meetings. From an educational and theoretical stance, the playing field was levelling. She felt inferior when colleagues started talking about things other than work, however. It felt as if she did not have a lot to contribute during functions and in general team conversations, especially when interacting with more senior colleagues. She felt she was not experienced enough or equipped to participate in these conversations. She did not want to tell her colleagues about her weekend driving around in Eldorado Park when they were busy talking about their trip to Cape Town or Europe. She explains that *you don't have that common ground where you can like really click on certain things because I mean you don't even eat the same food [sigh]. You don't even go to the same places.*

She never shared any of her stories or struggles with the greater team as she felt that they were there to get the work done and not to listen to your sad stories or to baby you. As time passed, she started gaining confidence and to speak about things she found interesting. She told herself that *You know what, Chris might not want to hear what I did over the weekend, whether it was just driving around in Eldo's or just having a braai in my backyard or something because now you told yourself people are not interested in your culture...* However, she soon learned that once she talked about her stories and traditions people were actually interested in them.

Flamingo started trying different things to understand and connect to people in the working environment. She was also curious and found that her way of thinking and doing changed as she started exploring more. She started reading different books and newspapers, like Finance24, instead of just reading her local newspaper. She found that by listening to others you want to get better, you would get an insight and it would inspire you to try it out. She wanted to be able to fit in and participate in conversations and understand what people within the accounting and corporate world were talking about. She realised that traveling almost played a regulatory function, as if one needed to travel in order to fit in with the prestigious profession (Slay and Smith 2011).

Flamingo started planning different vacations at least every second year: *Let me start seeing the world*. Her first overseas trip was in 2017 and she felt travelling made her a better person. Her professional environment had a big impact and influence on her identity. She started adapting her behaviour and learned new habits, started reading different material and started traveling to new places. She was adapting and changing her behaviour and identity to fit into the profession and its environment.

After articles

Articles ended and Flamingo had to find employment. She experienced the effect of national legislation based on *the whole thing of most companies are looking for coloured or black females*. Some people would comment that she would be hired based on her ethnicity. She was upset about this and the implication that she would not be appointed based on her skills and qualifications: *… not the mere fact that you qualified as a chartered accountant. It's like okay … [giggles] I have studied for so long and now you just telling me that I got the job because I meet that criteria*. Flamingo tried to steer away from small companies because of the perception that

they needed to get their BEE and EE status up to compliance (Booysen, 2007). This is a form of microaggression, specifically micro-insult, because comments were based on her ethnicity in the light of the post-apartheid South African context (Sue et al., 2007). These comments conveyed the hidden insult that the recipient would get a job based on her race and gender, and not on her education and qualifications.

At her current place of employment Flamingo has kept her head down and worked extremely hard, and after five years she was promoted due to her good work ethic. She still gets upset because now that she has succeeded people insinuate that she got the promotion due to BEE regulations. Once again it is as if she cannot win: her success gets attributed to her race, gender or BEE status, in other words her embodiment, and never to her ability, hard work and performance. Although legislation is there to help and support her it ends up affecting her identity as a professional.

What people say has a profound impact on Flamingo and her identity as a professional as she starts to doubt her own ability, value and contributions to the company and especially to the profession. She engages in identity work as people in her environment are not supportive of her success. She is engaging in a process of revising and repairing her identity as a professional (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Saayman & Crafford, 2011). As a strategy to reassure herself that she was worthy and deserved it, Flamingo went to her line manager to ask on what basis she got the promotion. Her manager reassured her that although their BEE scorecard was important, they would always appoint a competent person as they needed to make strategic decisions that would benefit the company. Her colleagues would make comments like 'Maybe you were not ready for it', a micro-insulting statement implying that she was not competent (Nadal, 2011; Sue et al., 2007). Yet she had been a

diligent and hardworking employee for five years. She feels she displayed her skills at work and her teams always spoke about how they valued certain things in her and what she was capable of.

She was frustrated that her colleagues and fellow professionals saw promotion, rather than growth and competence, as evidence of transformation. She believes that transformation has been ongoing for more than twenty years and hopes that the next generation does not experience these challenges.

As she was busy negotiating her professional identify Flamingo felt that she had to prove herself even more.

> *I feel like, now I must work extra hard to prove that I deserve it because, if I do mess up then people are going to be 'Can you see, what does she know, she just got it [giggles] she's not competent'. It's those insecurities that you sometimes start having.*

She used hard work as a strategy to repair and strengthen her identity as a professional.

4.3.6 CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

The company where Flamingo currently works originated in a predominantly white male environment, reflecting the traditional power differentials in the national context. However, with changes in the environment and particularly the Employment Equity Act, there is more diversity within companies. She can see transformation happening in her current environment where a lot of woman are in management positions. Their team is really diverse and includes South Africa's rainbow nations – black, white, Indian and coloured – and they work well as a team. Although Flamingo is proud to see that there is transformation in the company and that inclusivity is

growing, this provides a challenge is to be sensitive and considerate towards people from all cultures and religions in South Africa.

4.3.7 FAMILY CONTEXT

Flamingo's parents provided her with their love and best support. They always encouraged her to study and to strive for greatness. Although they faced financial challenges, they were determined to find the funds to pay for Flamingo's studies when she did not qualify for a bursary or a loan. One can see that the love and support that Flamingo got helped shape her into the driven and responsible person that she is today. She therefore sees herself as a coach and strives to give back to the community; she has a sense of social responsibility to help the next generation.

Flamingo explains that she is the only one in her family who has a formal tertiary education. Her extended family is very proud of her and will usually refer to her as their cousin, the CA. At first her friends and family would ask her for money: *Because people just feel … suddenly you earn these millions and why should you live this life alone.* At the beginning she would help them out and give them money, but now she feels that she works hard for her money and also that by giving them money she is not enabling them: *You're just feeding this empty well*. She believes that they should work for what they want and use the opportunities they get. She knows it is tough to work and study but finally you are the one benefiting from the opportunity. She feels that the youth have an attitude of entitlement: *Ah life is not fair and stuff like that, why can't I study full time as well?* Flamingo's strong sense of social responsibility and her identity as a professional enables her to identify the need to teach her friends and family to fish rather than give them fish.

Flamingo visits her parents in Eldorado Park regularly but driving to and from Eldorado Park is not safe at night: even her tracker warns her that she is entering a

high risk area. Her profession requires her to work late, however, and she has therefore moved closer to work, *a much-needed change,* as she puts it. Her education and professional status provide her with financial independence and stability that allows her to travel and to have her own house and freedom (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Slay & Smith, 2011). She says that she has broken away from some aspects that she was taught at home and has adjusted and found her own way of doing things. She engages in identity work because now she gets to formulate and develop her own way of doing things.

> *Because now I could also redefine who I am… Obviously growing up at home you are taught this is how things are and you know, this is how you need to do things etc. But experiencing life differently from being with different people, different cultures on the work front as well, I think my mind-set changed a lot as well.*

4.4 CASE 4: WOODPECKER

This participant will be known as woodpecker, as hers is a story of perseverance, tenacity and resilience. She did not give up until she shaped and crafted her way into the profession. She sees herself as somewhat of an introvert but resonates with the characteristics of a woodpecker that tends to be shy but will come to the backyard if the environment is right.

4.4.1 BACKGROUND AND SCHOOLING

Woodpecker is a 37-year-old Xhosa speaking woman from a village in the Eastern Cape, where she stayed with her grandparents until she was 13 years old. Even though she was loved and spoiled, a sense of responsibility and a clear set of values and a strong work ethic were instilled by both her grandparents and her parents. Despite growing up in a small village with her grandparents, Woodpecker never felt disadvantaged. She does however mention incidents and materialistic elements that

can be associated with being disadvantaged: they ate basic food and had no electricity, TV or their own transport. She believes that they were nevertheless better off than most other people in the village.

> *I didn't grow up with that mentality that I was disadvantaged and then only when I came back to Jo'burg, I was exposed to the better life. Then I realized, okay maybe I was disadvantaged but even then, I didn't let it get to me because I still believed that given the circumstances, I still received the best*....

The village environment and the life to which Woodpecker was accustomed, with a lack of infrastructure and most people living with the bare minimum, was the result of apartheid policies, which did not promote or support fair social and economic opportunities for people from rural areas (Adhikari, 2006; Boswell, 2014).

When she was 13 years old Woodpecker moved to Soweto to be with her parents and six-year-old sister. She refers to her Soweto years as the good life, although other people would not necessarily refer to life in the township in those terms. Nevertheless, she got to see that there are better education systems, socio-economic classes and infrastructure. This is when she realised that perhaps she had not been as well off as she had thought.

Her father, a policeman, taught her to be humble and kind.

> *My dad always drilled it into me that whatever you do, you must never look down on people because you will never know one day who will help you and just because you have money, doesn't mean you have everything.*

Her mother is a nurse and Woodpecker has a deep love and respect for her. *My mom was always very strict but at the same time she is also my strongest supporter*. Both her parents were always willing to support her financially throughout her studies. While telling her story she remarks frequently about how her mother encouraged her to persevere with the journey of becoming a CA. She explains that she would be

forever grateful to her mother who purposefully enrolled her in an urban school, or the "Indian school", as Woodpecker terms it. She believed that it was the best decision for her, bearing in mind that she was from a village where they mostly communicated in Xhosa, and she was not proficient in English. The significance here is that Woodpecker categorised the schools as Indian, white and village schools, which highlights the ethnic division and structural inequalities as a result of apartheid. Schools were structured around race and ethnicity; although Indians were also oppressed their schools were known for better education and infrastructure compared to the rural or township schools of Bantu education (Adhikari, 2004; Boswell, 2014; Cotton et al., 2014; Hammond et al., 2009; Yamauchi, 2005).

In comparing the two schools she attended, Woodpecker recalls that although she was always one of the bright students in the village, in making the transition from the rural school to the urban school she was forced to go back two years as her level of education and her competence in English were not on par with what was expected of a Grade 8 learner. In the rural school the main medium of communication was Xhosa, and even in their English class the instructions were given in Xhosa. This highlights the difference in standards between rural and urban schools as well as the impact of being educated in one's mother tongue when the language of learning is supposed to be English. She also found it challenging to interact with various cultures and to fit in from a social perspective (Boswell, 2014; Hammond et al., 2009).

I'm coming from a village, this conservative village girl in Jo'burg where you are mixing with other black people with different languages and then there's also the Indians, which you have never mixed with before. The biggest challenge was communication. She refers to communication on two different levels, firstly with the teachers who were Indian and could only communicate in English. When she struggled, they could not translate the

work into Xhosa as some of the teachers in the rural school did. Secondly, she found it challenging to communicate and fit in from a social perspective (Boswell, 2014): *The problem is I can't even relate to my own black people because there's different languages spoken by them which I don't understand.* Here language and culture play a big part as she could not fit into the group of people she belonged with – "my own black people" – as they did not speak the same language. She engaged in identity work as she was forming and negotiating her identity in this new educational environment (Slay & Smith, 2011; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). At first Woodpecker was under the impression that all young black supported each other but she came to a different realisation. In her new school they had to speak in front of the class, something she had never done before, in a new language she had not yet mastered.

> *Obviously, there will be those kids who will tease you in class, especially when I was sent back to Standard 4, even your own fellow black kids… you will answer, and your English when you answer won't be that good and you will be laughed at*.

She realises now that if she had gone to Grade 8 she would have failed and that would have been more depressing since she had always believed that she was one of the clever pupils. Although she justifies her statement by mentioning that she struggled initially, the teachers soon realised that it wasn't because of a lack of potential, but rather due to her background and a lack of quality primary education. She subsequently became one of the high achievers in the class.

In Grade 7 Woodpecker was made a prefect, which provided her with great pride. She started attending high school in 1996, by which time she could understand some of the African languages and was also engaging with her peers. The quality of education and the support of the teachers in the urban school were substantially better

than what she was used to; they even had tutors and ran a Saturday school that she attended.

As she reflects on the differences between the rural and urban schools, knowing what she knows now about the working environment and how life turned out, Woodpecker is intensely aware of how fortunate she is to have been able to attend the urban school system, especially with English as the teaching medium. Woodpecker disliked the rural school and eventually even sports and choir because they applied corporal punishment to an extreme.

> *I felt like I can't be hit in class and then we playing netball, if I make a mistake, I'm going to be hit and then if we practising singing, if we off key, you going to be hit. So, I was like no I can't be beaten everywhere I rather not do it.*

She says that her education was impacted by this punishment, so different from her experience in the urban school where corporal punishment was not used.

> *In the Indian school, there wasn't that barrier of you being scared of the teacher. The teacher was there to help you, so if there was something you couldn't understand, you could easily just go to the teacher and ask them to explain. Whereas back there in the village, if you going to ask the teacher to explain again, which means he was wasting his time while he was teaching you, so you could just get a hiding for going to ask.*

As Woodpecker reflects, she comes to the self-realisation that the system which was supposed to develop, equip and enable her to reach better heights actually put a constraint on her and impacted her identity, confidence and education negatively. The punishment resulted in her withdrawing from activities and interactions. Had she stayed in that environment she may never have been given the opportunity to become a professional, as opportunities for possible identities are influenced by contextual factors (Smith et al., 2015).

I believe that had I continued in the village until matric, I don't think I would be where I am today. When I also look at my peers who continued there up until matric, yes they passed matric and some of them got jobs or went on to study… I feel that I don't think I would have known about the CA profession. So for me going back those two classes, it put a good foundation in place for me going forward."

This suggests that exposure to different environments, a solid education and one's context shapes people, opens their minds, creates opportunities and inspires them to explore and achieve more in life.

4.4.2 TERTIARY STUDIES

Woodpecker was introduced to accounting in Grade 8 and loved it. When representatives from a nearby university visited the school and talked to the Grade 10's about the accounting profession, she took note because she loved accounting. She kept it at the back of her mind because at the time she wanted to be a doctor, because her mother was a nurse. However, in her matric year she was one of the top students, and with support from her mother and her teachers and the limited information received from the university representatives she decided to pursue a career as a CA. This shows that career decisions are based on limited information and immediate exposure and the influence of family and educators (Ibarra, 1999; Sadler, 2002).

Woodpecker's story is one of remarkable perseverance, resilience and commitment. A long period had elapsed since she embarked on this journey of becoming a professional CA. It started at university in 2001 and she finally qualified as a registered CA in 2015. In her ten statements she describes herself as a go-getter, strong-willed with perseverance and resilience. This is evident throughout her journey: although she faced many obstacles and barriers she never quit.

Woodpecker's professional journey started in matric when she decided to pursue the CA profession not really knowing a lot about it nor the requirements. This is evident as she applied to enrol for a diploma in Accounting at a Technicon. Beyond her introduction to the profession, no further information, guidance or mentorship was provided, and as the first one in her family and friends to become a professional, she had no network of professionals who could guide her. (Ibarra, 1999; Hammond et al., 2009;).

She then waited for her matric results to decide on her future. *We got our statements, we passed, and we got exemption like it was the best thing ever in the world.* The exemption meant that she qualified to attend a university, but she did not realise that it would be a struggle to be accepted by a university. She applied to three different universities and was accepted by only one of them. This is significant as she was one of the top achievers in her school yet her results did not meet the universities' minimum requirements for CA. This once again reflects the historical discrepancies in the provision of education to the different ethnic groups during apartheid (Weissglass, 2015; Yamauchi, 2005).

She was accepted to do study BCom Accounting, but it was still not plain sailing. *At least now I knew that okay in order for me to be a CA I must first start with BCom Accounting, but I didn't know that there's different BCom Accountings. There's a certain stream that you had to follow.*

While at university Woodpecker shared a flat with her cousins. She finally had independence, but soon experienced the student life of being responsible and doing a lot with a small budget.

It took some time to adjust to a different type of studying during her first year at university. She did not pass all her subjects and had to carry a module over to the

following year. She struggled especially with her computer module because her school did not have the resources to train students to use technology (Sadler, 2002; Yamauchi, 2005). As a result, Woodpecker completed her three-year degree in four years. Not finishing her course in the prescribed time led to identify work as she started reflecting about where she was, where she wanted to go and whether it was worth it or realistic. She was already two years behind her peers because she had to go back to grade six, and had now added another year and a half to her university degree. At this point she felt that perhaps the CA dream had to end, as she couldn't continue being dependent on her parents.

Her parents did not support this idea at all, however. Her mother associated every crazy decision with a boy and thought that she had fallen in love and did not want to continue studying. Woodpecker smiles when she explains that

You know when your parents are like 'just do whatever you want, you don't want that thing'. With us black people, we want to have our parents' blessings. You get scared because you don't want bad things to start happening to you because you are defying your parents.

This reflects her cultural and family context. Her family loved and supported her, and they wanted her to continue studying and to succeed no matter the cost or sacrifices. Her cultural values and beliefs added pressure on her and also influenced her identity work as she was in a dilemma. Did she give up the CA dream (both her and her parents' dream) or did she stick it out so as not to disrespect her parents?

Woodpecker decided to continue with the CA journey. She re-evaluated her life and decided to register for the CA Accounting degree. She worked really hard and gained a distinction for one of her modules.

In 2006 she registered for a CTA (an honours degree in accounting) to study full time. She was fortunate to get a bursary from one of the big four auditing firms as well as from SAICA. This gave her financial freedom but she was struggling emotionally

as she was afraid of the CTA's reputation for a high failure rate. However, although she worked really hard, she failed the year and as a result her parents had to support her financially from 2007 onwards. Fortunately, they were very supportive and ensured that she had a roof over her head and food to eat. This was a very humbling experience for her: as a 26-year-old she hated being dependent on her parents.

In 2008 Woodpecker started to work in Johannesburg for the auditing firm who had given her the bursary. Although her studies were not complete and she still needed to pass her CTA, ITC and APC exams, she decided to start working in order to have a stable income, gain some experience and continue her studies. Adapting to this new environment came with challenges, as she had to work during the week, learn the traits of the industry, adapt to the working environment and attend classes over the weekend in order to complete her CTA (Sadler, 2002; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). Fortunately, the company paid for the weekend classes as a means of supporting and motivating their future professionals.

She shares some of her challenges and frustrations that she experienced in the new environment in which she found herself. These challenges play out on a professional level as well as a social level.

Woodpecker found the transition into the working environment somewhat of a culture shock.

> *I started working and yes, I did mix with white people before at varsity but I didn't have to socialise with them. Now I have white people who are my managers and it's a bit of a cultural shock as now I'm interacting with them at a high level… Now, you come into this environment where you are expected to be proactive, you must have a questioning mind and it something you didn't grow up with…*

Woodpecker experienced cultural tension as she was confronted with the nature of the profession and her own cultural upbringing and values, where it was instilled in

her from a young age not to question the actions and behaviour of elders or superiors. Now she found herself in a profession that required you to ask questions. It is evident that there were certain elements of her cultural perspectives, background, values and beliefs that were very different from what were required of her within the working environment (Kirpal, 2004; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). She engaged in identity work as she negotiated aspects of her cultural context that were in opposition to the organisational context and expectations (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Walsh & Gordan, 2008). In order to be a good CA and gain confidence, she needed specific skills and traits that would equip her to perform her duties, one of which was engaging with managers, clients and peers. However, in a context of cultural diversity, what is seen as respectful and acceptable in one culture may not necessarily be so in all cultures. What made this even more challenging was that she saw herself as an introvert, and engaging with others did not come naturally to her.

In addition to being naturally reserved, Woodpecker also found it challenging to relate to her diverse range of colleagues and to participate in conversations. She made a deliberate attempt at being more engaging; even if she did not know what they were talking about, she would ask questions so that they could see that she was showing an interest (Clark et al., 2012; Hammond et al., 2009; Watson, 2008). She also started gaining confidence in sharing her own stories and experiences. She found it easier to contribute to conversations after she had started traveling overseas. *I also felt like being exposed to all these other things, now you have stuff to talk about.* It was almost as if one did not fit in with the culture of the profession if one had not travelled. Surely there should be more to talk about, but the norm in the profession was to travel.

In the corporate environment, organisations have a lot of functions and social events. This was something to get use to as the events would usually take place after hours, the venue would be somewhere unfamiliar and the food and music would also be strange to her. Transport was Woodpecker's biggest challenge as taxis did not travel late at night (Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler, 2002). Fortunately, she always managed to get a lift from either a friend or her father who would drive her around. This highlights an element of whiteness since the assumption was made that most people had their own transport and would be able to get to the venue and home with ease (Ariss et al., 2014; Joshi et al., 2015).

During these social events, they would be encouraged to participate in games and activities that were unfamiliar to her. It made Woodpecker uncomfortable as she felt she was delaying the team, but she eventually gained the confidence to say *I want to do this, but I don't know how. So, can someone tell me how to go about it*? As she got more exposure to the environment and the people, she was developing her identity by exposing herself to learning experiences.

One of the biggest challenges she experienced in the working environment was not having a car, because the profession is structured around traveling to different clients in various locations (Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). One is expected to take along a lot of confidential documents and a laptop and one should also be punctual (Hammond et al., 2009). This was challenging when traveling with taxis as one does not have the luxury of having a lot of space and cannot control the schedule or route. The profession is structured around the assumptions of privilege as it is assumed that everyone will be able to travel with ease to different clients and functions at all hours of the day. Unfortunately, the South African infrastructure does

not offer enough support to those unable to afford a car, as public transport offers little support by way of bus and train routes.

The organisation at which Woodpecker found herself during this time had a buddy system in place. Each first year got assigned to a buddy to provide guidance and assist with task-related queries and requests. Although she had a really helpful buddy, he did not provide her with sufficient guidance on social matters (Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). Fortunately, one of the black second years gave her sound advice very early in her career.

> *You need to have that attitude that you are not owed anything. Yes, you don't have a car, don't let that be a limitation for you to not go to certain clients or give that as an excuse for not working late. You must always have a plan B' and then he was like 'it is not their fault that you don't have a car, so don't make it their problem. If you can find plan B, then use plan B. If you are going to a certain client, don't always be like I don't have a car. Maybe for the first day, ask one of the people to give you a lift to the client. When you get there, there will be ladies there, the receptionist or the cleaners who work there who use public transport. Ask them how you get to work. So that you can get to work on your own. Otherwise, you are going to be in a situation where they are not going to give you certain clients because you are always that person who has got transport problems. Sometimes even working late, maybe if you can't work that late, maybe say to your manager, can I take work home. Don't say I can't work overtime because I don't have a car. Yes, do mention that you have transport restrictions, but you don't mind taking work home. So that you can work from home and then get the work done.*

This extract highlights how infrastructural elements such as transport had the capacity to influence perceptions regarding professional competence, as working late and being available after hours would influence work allocation. It was also clear that the second year would not share this advice or coping strategies with her if it were not

a big problem, or if he or fellow black clerks did not experience it as challenging. These guidelines served as strategies black professionals must adopt in order to negotiate their identity as a professional (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Brown, 2017; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005; Walsh & Gordan, 2008). *So yes, I think that helped and it also changed my mentality.* These guidelines equipped and prepared her to manage perceptions with regard to her professional identity

4.4.3 MICROAGGRESSION

Woodpecker shared some microaggression experiences that she encountered within the working environment.

The first was where her manager at that time would question her work and its quality. This is an example of micro-invalidation as her behaviour was undermined and insulted Woodpecker's ability (Joshi et al., 2015; Mercer et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007)

> *For example, the manager that I worked with, I will do the work, and then she will write a lot of questions and then I clear out those questions and then she will write more on the same things that you had given her.*

The manager's apparent dissatisfaction with her work invalidated her as a professional. Repeating her questions instead of providing feedback was an additional micro-invalidation. A lack of mentorship (guidance) and feedback has a negative impact on professional identity construction (Ibarra, 1999; Sadler, 2002; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005; Slay & Smith, 2011).

The second scenario is difficult to pin down to microaggression since Woodpecker was unusual with regard to her studies and qualification. She found the work allocation insulting, however. She was senior to the first years in experience but some of them were more highly qualified than she was. She explains that they needed

to realise that study and work were two different worlds. What she did experience was that she would be given easier tasks than some of her more junior colleagues (Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). She felt that this might have been because of her skin colour, and that as a black female she would be perceived as incompetent until she proved her competence. She acknowledges that it may have been as a result of her qualification issue, but it was frustrating as she had gained a lot of experience. Fortunately, she found that most of the clerks still respected her and valued her experience. The fact that she had experience and was starting to take up the role of a professional by adding value and delivering a service that made a difference to the public helped her to gain confidence and also helped her develop her professional identity (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Slay & Smith, 2011).

4.4.4 LANGUAGE

Fortunately for Woodpecker she overcame most language barriers early in her life. While in school she mastered English, learned some African languages and even some Afrikaans. Although she was not comfortable speaking Afrikaans she understood enough to participate in general conversations. She found that some colleagues interacted mostly in Afrikaans, but as soon as they noticed that she was there they switched to English.

> *But I think it happens with everyone because sometimes, you find that if you go to a predominantly black client, automatically they would want to speak Zulu. And then it would be up to me to answer in English because now, there's other people who also need to hear the conversations*.

Here one can see that Woodpecker was aware that language could be either a facilitator or a constraint. She had experienced being an outcast during her school years as she only spoke Xhosa, so when faced with a situation in the working

environment where language could have excluded someone, she took the responsibility to answer in English to ensure inclusivity.

4.4.5 EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

Woodpecker was dealing continually with all of these challenges and barriers while still completing her qualifications. Hers is a story of remarkable tenacity in gaining an education; no setback could ever dampen her spirits. Her resilience on this journey was bolstered by the support of her parents and encouragement and awards from institutions. She was in the Top 20 for two of her modules at UNISA and won the Encore Award at her company, where she was nominated for her tenacity and quality of work. She was accepted to form part of the Thuthuka Training Programme, in which the best 200 black students who failed the ITC exam were provided with extra classes and practical guidelines at a university, enabling her to pass her CTA. Unfortunately, after she had passed the ITC exam her contract ended at the firm where she was doing her articles.

Woodpecker subsequently found that it was not easy to find employment, although she had more than three years' experience and her ITC exam. At first it was nice to 'take a breather', but she soon ran out of money. This is significant in the light of South Africa's political history and the Employment Equity Act (Booysen, 2007).

> *There was always that thing that you are a black female, and then you know there's opportunities… but now you feel that all the doors are closed... It is almost as if people sell you the idea of when you come from a historically disadvantaged background then you will have endless opportunities, however, that is not always the case.*

She engaged in identity work as she reflected that although she had studied for such a long time and had persisted against all odds to qualify, she still struggled to be employed. *I ask myself 'what's the problem, why do I always have to struggle with everything?' I was applying for jobs, going for interviews, nothing happened*.

Woodpecker finally got employed at a government institution in 2012 and that brought with it a different set of challenges: *Now you are reporting to a black guy but the challenges differs from those you had when you were basically working for a predominantly white firm*. Her new manager would criticise everything she did, almost as if he felt threatened by her: *He will try and find your weakness then crush you in your weakness*. He was overbearing towards all five of his employees, including men. On one occasion he said to Woodpecker: "*Maybe SAICA should take away your ITC qualification because you are just not at the right standard"*. Her she is experiencing bulling in the workplace, where her superior is insinuating that she is not worthy of having her qualification. This negatively impacts one morale, self-esteem and professional identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Bell, 1990; Kirpal, 2004; Slay & Smith, 2011; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

The environment was too toxic for her and after 20 months she started looking for another job. Fortunately, she found new employment and has been employed there ever since.

4.4.6 FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL CA

Her mother's drive and dreams for her to become a CA kept her motivated. She tells about how she would sometimes pray at night:

> *Sometimes when I was praying about it to God, I was like... 'I know I'm not a good child, but at least do it for my mother if you can't do it for me [chuckles] just do it for her. Ja just make her happy. I know maybe I don't deserve it but she does*.'

This just shows the significant influence one's family can have. Her mother's desires for her career helped her to push through and not give up. Although her mother really just wanted the best for Woodpecker and knew what potential she had,

she placed a lot of additional pressure on her to qualify so that she did not embarrass or humiliate her mother and family.

Ever since Woodpecker qualified as a CA in February 2015 her mother would always find a way of bringing this fact into conversations. She explains that her mother is really melodramatic. For example, when her mother spoke on behalf of the family at their grandmother's funeral, she spoke about how strict her grandmother was in raising them and as a result she was the proud mother of a CA.

Reflecting about her unique journey of becoming a professional, Woodpecker says

> *When I sit and think back, I'm like it was hard going through all those things that I was going through but at the end, when you pass, you forget, you don't really forget, but you feel like everything was worth it.*

Her journey with all its challenges helped shape her into the professional she is today. She gained the confidence, skills and abilities necessary to survive and thrive as a professional (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Pratt et al., 2006; Walsh & Gordan, 2008).

She explains that she has grown a lot since she started. Her new manager in her current company is a white woman, and they get along really well. *My manager is white and when we are sitting and talking I don't see colour anymore, I'm just talking to a person.* This shows the significance of one's environment and how you change and adapt as you get more exposure to different people from different walks of life. She also gained the confidence to provide new ways of working and to challenge her manager's old ways in order to be more productive and effective.

MONEY

Socio-economic factors determine your access to resources, education and comforts. Although Woodpecker's family's resources were limited, she managed to

study for 14 years through the support of her parents and several bursaries and loans (Clark et al., 2012; Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler, 2002). She values every opportunity that she got and feels that everyone who benefited from bursaries and loans (NASFAS) should pay back their loans as part of a social responsibility to empower, educate and develop the youth of South Africa.

When she started earning a better salary it opened new doors for her. Woodpecker now has financial independence and with it stability and freedom. The most significant thing about earning a good salary was that she could buy a car and thus be better equipped for the CA environment. Being financially independent allowed her access to different "identities". For example, she views herself as a world traveller, which has changed her life and her mind-set. She explained that she enjoyed learning new things, reading new books, going new places and broadening her horizons. This contributed greatly to her professional identity development (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Watson, 2008). Although it does not relate directly to work, traveling is almost an unspoken requirement in order for you to fit in. It helped shape her in terms of having something to talk about and fitting in with her colleagues.

Woodpecker's financial position allowed her to move out of the house in 2015 and now she has her own home. Financial freedom also allowed her to change her lifestyle: Professionals are associated with status, power, financial wellness and a great deal of respect (Pratt et al., 2006; Ulrich et al., 2013; Wright & Ulrich, 2017).

> *Now I have my own money, I can eat whatever I want to. You know when you stay in the village, you like eat the basic stuff and it's not interesting. It is just cooked with salt. When I came to Joburg to stay with my parents, my mom is a very good cook. So, I think when I came to Joburg, now there's all these things available and its nice food and then I started enjoying food.*

As a result she gained a lot of weight over the years, and when she developed knee problems the doctor advised her to lose weight. Because she can afford it, she is able now eat healthily and to exercise. She joined a weight-loss programme and a gym. She also started participating in park runs and half marathons and has lost 24kg. This again shows her perseverance and that when she puts her mind to something she achieves it.

Having this financial freedom also comes with challenges from a cultural perspective, however (Bell, 1990). Woodpecker's extended family has the expectation that now that she is working, she should start providing for them. Some of them will 'borrow' money and just never pay it back, while others would comment about her wasting her money on traveling when she could have given it to them. Her extended family have expectations of her that even her own parents do not have. Some of her cousins have the mind-set that they are owed something, but she tries to motivate and encourage them to make use of opportunities and bursaries to go and study.

Another significant story that she shares is with regard to her relationships and cultural values and beliefs. Although she walked the journey of becoming a professional for 15 years she does not go around telling everyone about it. It may be as a result of her father's advice of being humble and also because she believes *I'm a CA by profession but I don't believe that it describes who I am.* Woodpecker's long educational journey and barriers along the way may have influenced her professional identity as a CA (Clarke et al., 2009; Cohen-Scali, 2003; Pratt et al., 2006). As she puts it: "*I wouldn't just easily say I'm a CA. I would say that is the job that I'm doing*".

This ties in with the view of Pratt et al (2006) that having a professional identity means that one explains what one does rather than where one does it. Smith and Hatmaker (2014) hold that one's professional identity signals to others that you have

a combination of unique skills or scarce abilities. Being a CA also comes with status and power.

Woodpecker shares stories about the influence of her professional self on her personal relationships (Bell, 1990; Kirpal, 2004; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). When she met her boyfriend she told him that she was an auditor and not a CA. Later in their relationship they were talking about university and she shared a story about honours and he asked in surprise why she hadn't become a CA if she had an honours. She eventually informed him that she was a CA. She explains her motive behind not telling him at the start:

> *The thing is, being black and being a CA sometimes guys run away from us [giggles] because of that… Sometimes most of the black guys they don't want [stutter] opinionated woman. I feel we are opinionated because you have got financial independence … for the longest time, black guys believed like they always want a woman to be below them, because they want a woman to depend on them, and then with us, we not really – you have got your own financial freedom so if he walks away okay fine go. Like I have got my own money so and they don't sometimes.*

The significance here is that Woodpecker's financial independence is perceived in her culture as being opinionated (Bell, 1990). Her professional identity thus gets influenced by cultural views and as a result she would rather keep her success to herself. Despite her struggle and the big issue her mother made of her daughter being a CA, due to cultural values she cannot say openly that she is a CA without scaring men away (Bell, 1990; Kirpal, 2006; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015). From a professional point of view she is successful and independent but she uses strategies to appear dependent on her boyfriend. For example, she will leave a broken lamp for him to fix although she is more than able to fix it herself.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings on the research questions, highlighting the similarities and differences in the four narratives. The first research question how the macro, meso and micro contextual factors shape the construction of professional identity. The second and third question examine how whiteness and types of microaggression are experienced by previously disadvantaged professionals and how they influence their professional identity negotiation. Because of the interconnectedness of the findings, and the pervasiveness of whiteness and microaggressions, these three questions are discussed together as part of the three overarching environments identified in the literature review (Crafford et al., 2018; Ariss et al., 2014): macro, meso and micro. Within the overarching environments 'phenomena's such as whiteness and microaggression are discussed where they shape and influence the construction and negotiation of identity work and professional identity.

Another issue faced was that the contexts themselves are inter-related, and overlaps occur within these different environments (micro, meso and micro) for example the political, legislative, economic, educational and organisational contexts were all influenced by Apartheid and contained mechanisms through which it functioned. Another example is legislation supporting the ideology of Apartheid leading to a situation of socio-economic disadvantage for people of colour. Thus, placing a theme in a context is difficult as it could have been discussed in several places. I have therefore chosen what I believe was the best place to discuss the issue but will indicate how it links to other contexts. I created my own model in order to illustrate the complexity of context, history and space and how they influence and

shape one's professional identity. In terms of structuring I drew on Ariss et al (2014) and in terms of defining the specific contexts I drew on Crafford et al (2018).

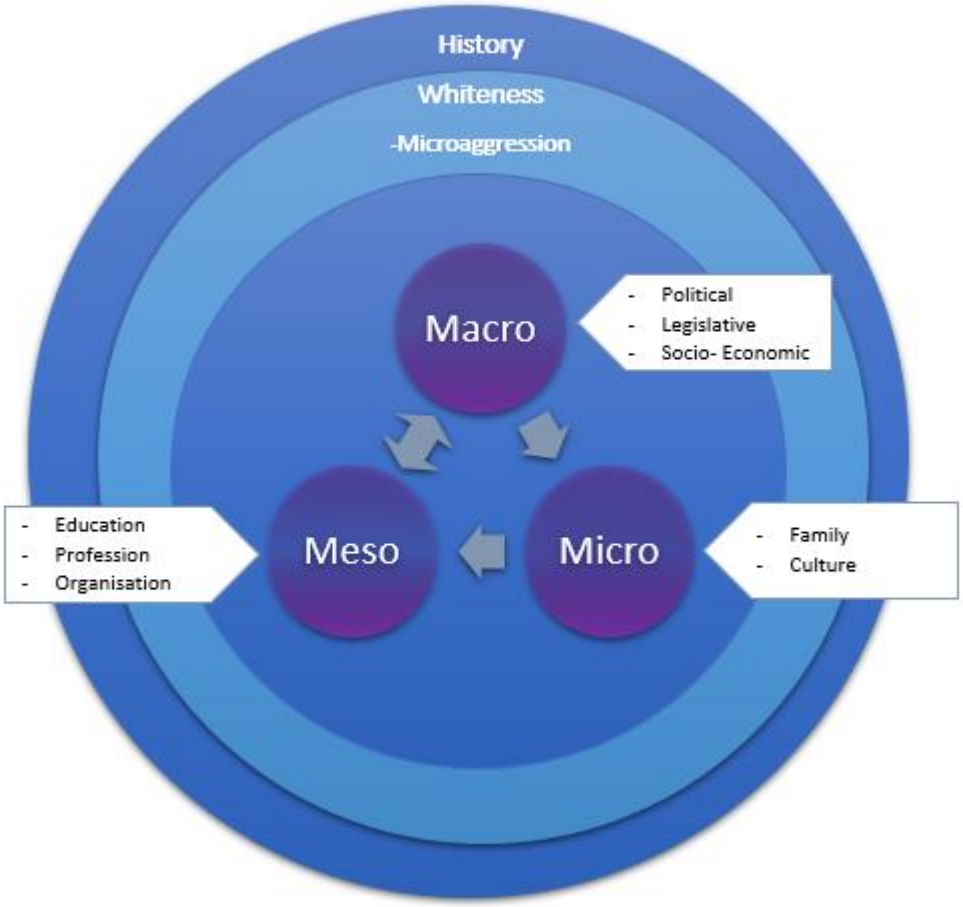

Figure 2 Regulatory role of context on Identity work

The unique South Africa's context is shaped and influenced by our history. "The historical context influence 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" (Crafford et al., 2018 p. 3). It is therefore impossible to understand identity work within the South African context without considering historical influences. As a result of the historical context dominated by Apartheid, Whiteness is the norm. Whiteness therefore has a significant impact in previously disadvantaged CA's professional identity construction, as they are evaluated and measured by white norms and standards. As a result, whiteness microaggressions

accrues, since it is subtle in nature and perpetrators are mostly unaware of their insulting and offensive comments or behaviour. The macro environment was found to influence professional identity through the political, legislative and socio-economic contexts. The meso environment operated within the means of the educational, professional and organisational contexts. However, these two environments are related. The historical and political context of South Africa has influenced education and a lack thereof proper education affects the socio-economic status of individuals. Lastly, the micro environment operated at the level of family and cultural values (as learnt in this context). These environments and contexts will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.2.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.2.1 MACRO

From a macro perspective the South African historical political context, legislation and socio-economic status greatly influence the professional identify construction of previously disadvantaged individuals. The political environment was found to greatly influence the professional identity construction of previously disadvantaged CA's as it plays a regulatory role on relationships between race, ethnic groups, gender and either promotes or constrains a fair climate for social and economic opportunities. As a result of our dynamic political context and apartheid, legislation had to be put in place in order to provide previously disadvantaged people with opportunities. These legislative requirements that are supposed to promote fairness within the working environment tend to have a negative impact on professional identity construction as the stigma exist that black people get employed based on their skin colour rather than competence.

I will discuss each of these contexts in more detail.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

As indicated in the literature review the political environment refers to the government's actions and influences (Crafford et al., 2018). It also refers to the power distribution within the country and its effects at all three levels, involving both social and political factors (Booysen, 2007; Boswell, 2014). The study found that the identity work of professionals of colour continues to be dominated by the legacy of apartheid. While the participants were sharing their stories, the impact and long-term consequences of racial segregation became apparent for example referring to their various schools along racial lines "Indian" school or "Coloured" school.

This dynamic is evident throughout Swallow's story as she mentions several times that she was never much aware of race in Zimbabwe or at the international university. However, the more she engaged and moved within different South African spaces the more she realised that there really is a constant preoccupation with race. Parrot also refers to the black-white dynamic that is always present within the South African space. He points out that the first time he felt on an equal footing with everyone else was when he was outside of the South African space during his secondment in Europe. This highlights the impact of space within context and how space can regulate an environment, beliefs and identity construction (Ariss et al., 2014; Slay & Smith, 2011). It also shows that even after all the years of transformation there is still a strong element of segregation among South Africans. Although it is no longer enforced by legislation, the legacy of apartheid still regulates the lives and identity of South Africans. This has major repercussions especially for emerging professionals as the mind-set around transformation, development and employee equity is negative. As a result, previously disadvantaged groups have to work extra hard to overcome barriers and to break down stereotypes

South Africa's infrastructure does not support the basic needs of the greater public with regards to transport or facilities such as quality schools and libraries. Most universities and organisations are located near urban areas, which means that people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds have to travel long distances in public transport or taxis, which can be time consuming, costly and limiting due to safety concerns. The lack of resources, infrastructure and opportunities can impact the professional's identity work as they need to manage additional challenges as a result of their socio-economic status or lack of materialistic elements, where if they did not have these additional challenges, they could have spent more time developing their skills and knowledge. They also experienced additional pressure form a financial and family point of view as the resources in their family were limited and they had a once in a lifetime opportunity.

In all four cases language was identified as a key contextual factor influencing their identity work. Within the historically political South African context, spaces were governed by language, as a lot of identification, assumptions and conclusions about where one comes from and to what ethnic group or culture one belongs are based on accent and language. Examples from this study includes schools, university, taxis and the working environment. Swallow learned to mimic an African accent in order to blend in to her environment. Parrot and Flamingo also experience that conversations gets dominated by language.

Language can also be associated with privilege, for example in South Africa Afrikaans is also associated with oppression, privilege and whiteness. Part of white privilege is the use of language without considering the implications, especially within historically white organisational structures. Language is central to professional identity construction as it can either be a facilitator or a barrier. Language becomes a barrier

when professionals are hindered from performing their tasks as a result of not understanding instructions. For example, both Swallow and Flamingo would get written instructions in Afrikaans, which they did not fully understand. This affected their professional identity as they took longer to get their work done and might have been perceived as lazy or unwilling to assist.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

As indicated in the literature review, legislation has been introduced to redress unfair labour practices of the past and to ensure that people from designated groups are absorbed into organisations and the economic hub of the country. It also strives to ensure equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce (Booysen, 2007). Acts such as the EE Act provide for additional reporting requirements, where all designated employers must submit their annual report. Although the new legislation is intended to empower previously disadvantaged groups, only 10 % of CAs in South Africa are from previously disadvantaged groups (SAICA, 2012). The pool of previously disadvantaged professionals is therefere extremely small, which means that much needs to be done to achieve employment equity in all occupational catagories, especially the CA profession.

The purpose of legislation such as the EE Act is to facilitate and empower historically disadvantaged individuals and create access to organisations dominated by whiteness. Several of the participants said they were led to believe that endless opportunities awaited them as black professionals – *the world is your oyste*r – especially as an accountant and in the light of AA and EE. This preconceived idea impacts these professionals' expectations and identity as the reality has proven to be quite different.

While Employment Equity has as its goal to facilitate entry into organisation's for people of colour, the latter has inadvertently been used as "weapon" against people from designated groups by framing preferential treatment as a lack of competence. Swallow explains that her organisation perceives EE regulations as window-dressing, which undermines the competence of black employees, emphasising their embodiment at the expense of their ability, and it fosters the idea that EE entails hiring incompetent people. Not only do these statements undermine black employees' competence but it also serves as a micro-insult (Joshi et al., 2015; Mercer et al., 2011; Robinson-Wood et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007). What the legislation intends is that in order to correct the injustice of the past one should appoint a previously disadvantaged person above an applicant with the same qualifications and experiences who was advantaged during apartheid. Thus, in the organisational context the onus falls on both management and human resource managers to do what is right for the organisation and their employees and still comply with legislation.

These legislative regulatory factors and perceived incompetence impact identity work as Black professionals have to consistently prove themselves in light of the assumption of having gained employment based on their equity status. Parrot mentions that managers do not trust a black person's work and some of the other participants said that their professional opinion would not be taken as seriously as that of their white counterpart and their work would be scrutinised far more thoroughly. These actions of undermining and perceived incompetence form part of microaggression, as they are invalidating and insulting to black professionals who have gone through the same training as their white counterparts (Boswell, 2014; Clark et al., 2012; Lavender & Dunn, 2016; Orelus, 2013;Sue et al., 2007).

As a result of this link between legislation and perceived incompetence some of the participants sometimes doubt the motivation behind their employment or a promotion, as their colleagues would respond negatively to their success (Bell, 1990; Clark et al., 2012;). The participants had to work extremely hard to adapt to the working environment and to overcome obstacles and stereotypical barriers. However as soon as they succeeded people insinuate that they get the promotion due to BEE regulations and race and not skills, competence or hard work. This negatively impacts professional identity construction. because you never have a chance to be equals, you are automatically viewed as not on par with the rest of the professionals in the industry.

Another significant finding with regard to legislative regulations is that Swallow, unlike other candidates, found herself in a liminal space as her embodiment suited the criteria of being disadvantaged but her nationality as a Zimbabwean erected a barrier to employment. Legislation hampered her efforts to gain employment despite the fact that she had been through the same training as all the other candidates.

SOCIO-ECONOMICAL CONTEXT

The socio-economic environment refers to the global capitalist system that defines the value of success largely in economic terms. It determines the way in which wealth, resources and economic power are derived and established. The socio-political history of South Africa greatly influenced the socio-economic position of previously disadvantaged groups. As mentioned earlier, becoming a professional takes year of study and is expensive, which causes a barrier for emerging professionals from constrained socio-economic backgrounds.

All of the participants came from families that valued education but lacked the financial resources to provide worthwhile opportunities. This had an impact on their

identity as professionals as they had limited information and opportunities open to them to acquire quality education, skills and knowledge, especially regarding different professions (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Pratt, et al., 2006; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). The majority of the participants knew little about the CA profession except what they heard through corporate institutions and university marketing strategies, and were strongly influenced by teachers, the availability of funding and the financial benefits of the CA profession, such as owning a nice car. All of them had to rely on scholarships, bursaries, study loans or older siblings working abroad to fund their professional journey. Access to institutional funding was influenced by race, as in the case of Flamingo who found herself in a liminal space, being economically disadvantaged but "not black enough" for a bursary (Adhikari, 2004). This higlights the complex dynamic of South Africa and how the political context directly influences the economic context.

The other South African participants also alluded to the fact that they were dependent on bursaries if they wanted to study. These bursaries were not guaranteed throughout their studies, however, and at times all of them had to rely on their family to support them financially or get a study loan. Although all of the participants are extremely grateful for the opportunities they received and the sacrifices their families made in order to support them, they admit that funding placed them under tremendous pressure. They did not want to waste their opportunity nor their family's resources. As a result of this added pressure all of them engaged in identity work and used studying and not taking part in social activities as strategies to ensure success. These strategies did not always work, however, and most of them did not pass their honours at their first attempt.

Being employed as a CA has not ended the role of finances in their identity work. Two of the four participants are still paying off their study debt, which means that the

pressure of obtaining funds for their education has been replaced by the need to repay their study debt and thereby meet their responsibility to give back to future professionals.

5.2.2 MESO

The Meso context refers to the factors that influence or regulate a particular environment or sector. Three such factors are discussed below: education, the CA profession and organisations, all of which were found to be influenced by socio economic status and race.

EDUCATION

Education also plays a significant role in professional development as it both promotes and constrains opportunities for identity work, work-related choices and access to resources (Clark et al., 2012; Cohen-Scali, 2003; Yamauchi, 2005). In the narratives, the educational context was influenced by many factors, of which corporal punishment, language and resources are discussed below.

From the narratives it is evident that education gets impacted by punishment as it creates a barrier of fear. Although punishment is usually used to instil discipline and to create a culture of excellence, severe corporal punishment has a negative effect on confidence, causing students to withdraw from academic, sporting, cultural and social activities. Students engage in identity work as they negotiate whether to risk a hiding by asking questions, which the teacher might view as wasting time, or to ask their peers or simply keep quiet. This leads to an educational barrier as students who are struggling are afraid to seek help.

Language also plays a significant role in the development of professional identity at school level. The apartheid segregation of schools along racial lines meant that a child in a rural or township primary school would have little or no English proficiency

to cope with a move to an English medium school. For example, Woodpecker was one of the bright students in her rural school, but had to move down two grades because the standards in education differed greatly and her English was not at the required level in a city-based school. This highlights the difference in quality between rural and urban schools, requiring social, educational and professional identity work in learners who moved to urban schools.

PROFESSIONAL FIELD

One's profession serves as a significant foundation of identity. People draw on particular tasks, discourses, values, goals, beliefs, stereotypical traits, knowledge, skills and abilities to create a professional identity (Brown, 2015; Crafford et al.,2018; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006; Walsh & Gordan, 2008).

The narratives suggest that the CA profession continues to be structured around socio-economic privilege, which given the history of South Africa, is primarily White. Within this professional field there are inherent requirements, linked to socio-economic status that enable one to fulfil the role of a CA successfully. These requirements influence identity work.

One of the most significant findings of this study was that the lack of transport is a hindrance to professionals of colour and thus impacts their identity work. While Hammond et al., (2009) highlighted that transportation was a problem in the 80's and 90's, this study showed how it impacts professional's identity work, as they ensure it does not come in the way of them performing their jobs and taking care to maintain a positive professional image.

Because of a lack of awareness, people assume that all professionals have their own transport, but this is not the case. Unfortunately, the South African infrastructure and public transport do not support the needs of the majority of the population.

Previously disadvantaged professionals who are expected to support their families cannot easily afford to buy a decent car as well. A car is not merely a mode of transport but rather an enabling mechanism to fulfil the CA role and to be perceived as "professional" as the nature of the profession requires one to travel to clients, to be punctual and to attend social events (Hammond et al., 2009). Because most of the events take place during the evening, transport becomes a challenge. As an emerging professional one wants to ensure that you put your best foot forward, you want to show your willingness to learn and put in the extra hours to make a good impression. Having or not having one's own transport can therefore be seen as a regulatory factor in their ability to produce a professional image.

Background plays an important role in how we relate to one another in a social setting. Participants referred to the disconnect they experienced at work-related functions as the provision of food, music and entertainment catered predominantly for white tastes. Furthermore, differences in background provided few social commonalities between previously disadvantaged groups and their peers (Boswell, 2014; Clark et al.,2012; Hammond et al., 2009). They did not share the same hobbies or face the same challenges and they could not participate in conversations about international holidays or topics that they could not relate to. To fit in they were obliged to identify with the norms and tastes of the predominantly white members of the profession, something not required of their white peers. The identity work required of these young professionals was significant, and it was challenging to adapt, both socially and professionally.

This causes the aspiring Black professionals to feel socially isolated and demonstrates the strong element of whiteness within South African Auditing firms. Professionals of colour and disadvantaged individuals have to adapt their behaviour

and, in some cases, their cultural values in order to fit in the working environment structured around whiteness; having to dress a certain way, having to call elders by their name, and speaking Afrikaans during meetings or in response to written communication.

What further contributes to this feeling of isolation, is the fact that previously disadvantaged professionals are underrepresented in the CA profession, and emerging Black professionals within South Africa do not have a lot of role models, mentors or even professional family members to look up to for support and guidance (Hammond et al., 2009). Pratt et al., (2006) suggest that a crucial part of one's professional identity development is found in having a mentor, someone to provide guidance and set an example. This underrepresentation may consequently have a negative impact on the professional identity construction of previously disadvantaged CA's, as they longed for some form of mentorship in order to be better equipped and adapt more easily.

These young professionals only started traveling during a later stage in their careers when they were financially stable. Once they started traveling and got exposure to different environments, countries and people they found it easier to communicate with their peers, since they had more in common with them. They therefore used to travel as a strategy to better fit in to the organisations and the profession. Thus, while the professional environment certainly exposed these young professionals to new ways of being and doing, and thus to novel material for identity work and choices, the context was highly regulatory.

The effect of BBBEE on the mind-set of most organisations and management in South Africa is negative. Despite meeting the very strenuous requirements and standards associated with professional qualification, these young professionals had

their work invalidated and scrutinized with suspicion, they were assigned easier tasks and their superiors talked down to them.

WORK ORGANISATIONS

As indicated in the literature review, one's organisation is the predominant context in which identity work takes place (Crafford et al., 2018). Most people choose an organisation whose culture, image, policies and procedures fit their values and their aspirations for growth and development. These contextual factors facilitate or constrain these aspirations.

In their narratives three of the participants said that their experience of being assigned a "buddy" highlighted the value of a system that provided social and professional mentorship and guidance. This was necessary because their background had given them limited exposure to the professional world of work. Young professionals, especially for those from rural areas who have had little exposure to the corporate world, require considerable support at an identity level from mentors who can inspire and guide them (Hammond et al., 2009; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). Throughout the study it was highlighted what significant difference a mentor or network of professionals make in one professional identity construction. Flamingo highlighted the fact that some people have mentors or elders who can offer guidance and support with regards to the profession, where she had no one. The lack of Black professionals as role models can also be seen as a form of white privilege (Arris et al., 2014) as historically a lack of resources and quality education excluded most previously disadvantaged people from becoming professionals.

It was clear that basic advice from senior clerks around transport, functions and corporate dressing was much appreciated and contributed to their adapting to the new

professional environment. They could not easily afford to dress the part for this profession, however. Flamingo struggled particularly in this regard, as she had to dress both professionally and also for comfort because she was traveling long distances (Hammond et al.,2009). This highlights the many tacit protocol's experienced in the accounting profession that have little to do with performing one's duty. Professional standards are set in a Western context and reproduced without much consideration for the dynamics of the South African context. The way one dresses arguably has little influence on one's actual competence, yet this serves as an important marker in signifying competence. One could argue that the profession is not unlike a stage production, each player dressed according to the role he or she must play (Goffman, 1969).

Within the organisational context microaggression occurs on various levels, arising from the culture within the organisation. The most frequent type of microaggression experienced throughout this study is micro-insult followed by micro-invalidation. The participants' professional opinions, skills, knowledge and abilities were insulted and invalidated by their white counterparts' rude comments and behaviour. Examples from the narratives include someone explaining basic tasks, or when someone assumes black people are only employed as a result of BBBEE (Lavender & Dunn, 2016; Sue et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2009).

Microaggression contributes to the physical and social isolation of previously disadvantaged people in predominantly white spaces (Joshi et al., 2015). These isolations may seem insignificant in nature but have major repercussions from a professional development and success point of view, especially if they do not have mentors to guide and support them (Clark et al., 2012; Hammond et al., 2009; Joshi et al., 2015;). Some of the consequences identified by Sue et al., (2009) were also

found in this study, an invalidating climate; assumed lower productivity and problem-solving ability and these professionals have to work extra hard to break down stereotypes and prove their worth. Organisations therefore have a responsibility to create a culture of inclusivity that will facilitate one's professional identity construction.

5.2.3 MICRO

In this study one's micro context refers to the factors that have a direct or immediate influence on professional identity construction and identity work. The impact of one's family and culture are the two examples that are discussed below.

FAMILY

One's family context and support in conjunction with socio-economic class plays a significant role in identity and identity work construction, as they determine and influence the nature and quality of one's lifestyle and education. Considering the participants' socio-economic background and family context one would say that the possibility of becoming a professional would most probably not be an option. However, a strong theme in this study was that all of them had the wholehearted support of their family. Although resources in all four families were limited, their parents valued education and ensured that their children got the best education within their ability. Parents acted as education champions and played a motivational role in their journeys to becoming CAs.

The participants' family knew that if they encouraged and enabled their children to study, they had the potential to become professionals and to gain a better quality of life. This just shows that anything is possible with support from one's family, natural ability and personal ambition. Parrot mentioned that he was really passionate about studying drama, but his family knew that the arts do not promote financial wellbeing

and they therefore discouraged his career as an actor. Here one can see how financial constraints and pressure from family influences career decisions.

Three of the four participants were the first in their family to get a degree and to become professionals. Although their families did not know much about the CA profession or have extensive resources or networks to draw from, they nevertheless inspired and motivated their children, and the love and support they provided contributed positively to their professional identity development.

Another significant theme in the narratives is that black people have to do more with their money than just survive, which found consistend with current literature on Souht African accouning profession (Clark et al.,2012; Hammond, et al., 2009; Sadler & Erasmus, 2005). As soon as they earn an income it is expected of them to provide for their family, including distant family. Due to the nature of the profession a CA has the added pressure of having to buy a car, get corporately appropriate clothing and attend team lunches and social functions that can prove costly. Although not a formal requirement, the pressure to travel to be part of the "in-group" is an additional financial demand. Three of the four participants recalled being under financial stress due to their family (mostly extended family) borrowing money from them.

CULTURAL

Within the micro environment culture plays a significant role in identity work. It refers to one's upbringing and includes family values and religious beliefs.

I have highlighted instances throughout the various narratives where the participants experienced inner conflict as a result of their cultural upbringing. These clashes occur on both professional and social levels. From a professional point of view the participants' cultural upbringing clashed with the assumptions around which the profession is structured, for example being taught not to question older people or

superior. Now they find themselves in an environment and a profession where they are expected to ask questions and to address people by their first name. This causes them to negotiate their identity continually, trying to determine right from wrong from both cultural and professional points of view.

Professional identity work gets influenced and shaped the time, place, and most importantly the context in which it plays out (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Smith et al., 2015). Context provide the material from which identity is constructed and subtly shapes who we make sense of our place in their world, it also influences one's mind-set as well as choices (Brown, 2015; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Watson, 2008).

The participants also experienced cultural difficulty at functions as the food and music was not what they were used to and did not cater for all their needs and taste.

Woodpecker's decision not to tell her boyfriend that she was a CA makes an interesting professional identity statement relating to gender and the status and earning power associated with the profession. The identity associated with the CA profession clashes with her identity as a black woman from a cultural perspective as the woman is usually dependent on the man, who is assumed to earn a bigger salary and to have more status and power than the woman. Her decision to keep this information to herself suggests the cultural context has a regulatory effect on identity work especially with regard to the intersection between culture and race.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is recommended that a more comprehensive study of the professional identity construction of previously disadvantaged CAs should be undertaken. It should include Indian participants and more males. Another recommendation would be to select beyond Gauteng Province and to explore the experiences of CAs who did their articles

at smaller organisations. The sample used in this study consisted mainly of participants in their 30's because of the length of the journey to qualify as a registered CA combined with the sampling criteria. This means that they were born during apartheid and experienced some of its elements and the subsequent changes. It would be interesting to hear the new generation's experience of microaggression and whiteness.

5.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study aimed at adding value of a practical nature and enabling the CA profession to use the findings in order to ensure greater accessibility to the profession for people from previously disadvantaged groups. The most distinct challenges faced by these professionals are limited financial resources, a lack of own transport and access to public or organisational transport at all hours of the day. Although organisations offer funding it is limited and does not cater for all previously disadvantaged groups; for example, the coloured participant did not qualify for funding as she was not disadvantaged or black enough. Unfortunately this study does not include Indians and it is therefore not known if their needs are being met by available funding.

It is further recommended that organisations look into offering support through the implementation of mentorship or buddy programs where aspiring professionals can receive more guidance from experienced professionals. It is also desirable to have a more comprehensive and inclusive on-board programme.

Since language plays such a vital role in South Africa and it can limit inclusivity within the organisation it is recommended that organisations strive to achieve a culture of inclusivity and awareness around communicating in spoken and written English as it is the universal business language.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

This study focused on the unique context of the participants and on the richness and depth of their life stories as opposed to a more comprehensive focus, and therefore it has several limitations. The first limitation concerns the target population for the study. It was restricted to people from previously disadvantaged groups and, due mainly to access, the sample consisted only of black and coloured participants, one male and three females.

Time imposed two different limitations. Firstly, data was collected from the participants during tax season, which meant that their time was limited. This did not impact the quality of the data received, however. Time imposed a limitation on me as well as my deadline for completing the study restricted me to collecting data within the Gauteng province (Johannesburg and Pretoria). Experiences elsewhere in South Africa might be different.

Thirdly, data was collected from participants who completed their articles at one of the big four auditing firms, so the findings cannot be generalised to include experiences at smaller firms.

A final limitation concerns language. English is not my first language nor the first language of any of the participants. Although all of us are comfortable in English there were times where we had to rephrase what we were trying to explain to provide greater clarity.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This research contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to the current body of knowledge on professional identity construction and negotiation which has not yet been widely researched (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). This research contributes to knowledge by illuminating the various challenges, factors

and contexts that influence identity work and the professional identity construction and development of professionals, especially among South African accountants from previously disadvantaged groups (Brown, 2015). Watson (2009) explains that work plays a vital role in one's life, as people associate and identify themselves with their work; it is a vital part of who you are. Slay and Smith (2011) maintain that people tend to associate their career success with successful professional identity construction. Hence the importance of this study, as it provides insight into the career success of disadvantaged accountants through the negotiation of their professional identity.

Professionals add value to society. This study adds practical value and knowledge by revealing how professionals from designated groups construct their professional identity. This study probes their life stories to highlight some of the challenges they have faced. Stories matter as they are deeply revealing and can be used to empower and humanise a particular group or person and repair their dignity. Understanding how professionals from disadvantaged groups experience the workplace and how they think and feel about it will assist organisations, human resource management and IOP's to eliminate some of the challenges and frustrations they experience and to support them more effectively in their work and socially. Organisations can therefore better assist newcomers to their ranks by implementing mentorship programs, offering internship programs, providing transport and improving their induction program.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This study focused on the narratives of four individuals in order to explore and understand individual accounts of professional identity construction by previously disadvantaged CAs in South Africa. The analysis reported on characteristics that were similar, different and unique to each individual case.

Flamingo summarises the contribution of context, experiences, quality education and exposure to different environments in shaping one's mind-set and identity:

> *I believe that had I continued in the village until matric…I would not be where I am today. When I also look at my peers who continued there up until matric, yes, they passed matric and some of them did get jobs or go to tertiary. But I don't think I would have gotten the exposure that I got now and I feel that I don't think I would have known about the CA profession. I feel the foundation is very important and* (by attending the village school) *I didn't have that foundation.*

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APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Dept. of Human Resource Management

Informed consent for participation in an academic research study

EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF ACCOUNTANTS FROM STIGMATISED ETHNIC GROUPS

Research conducted by:

Miss Ciska Marx (11310198)

Cell: 072 452 7707

Dear Participant

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

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

Please note the following:

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

Please sign the form to indicate that:

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

_____ _____

Participant's signature **Date**

APPENDIX 2: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

CERTIFICATE FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

259 Muckleneuk Street
New Muckleneuk
Pretoria
0181
28 December 2018

I hereby confirm that I have edited the language for Miss Ciska Marx of the thesis entitled "Exploring the professional identity construction and negotiation of previously disadvantaged chartered accountants".

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

Peter Southey

082 8504015

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EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF PREVIOUSLY DISADVANTAGED CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS (CA)

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Study leader:	Dr. A Crafford	
Study leader's e-mail address:	anne.crafford@up.ac.za	
Strategy of inquiry:	Qualitative case study research	

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