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HOW TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED REFLECTIONS SHAPED STUDENTS' CONCEPTUALISATION OF RACISM IN A FULLY-ONLINE MASTER'S PROGRAM

by

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Dedication

For Noah.

I see you. I hear you. I love you.

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"I can do everything by the power of Christ. He gives me strength."
Philippians 4:13 (NIRV)

Abstract

The study investigated how students' learning about racism were shaped in their reflections during enrolment in a fully-online master's program through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Students were enrolled for a module in the program 'Learning Ecosystems B.' The module is one of eight coursework modules in the program and was offered from 6 May 2019 to 23 June 2019. The module explicitly targets the manifestation of racism and sexism on social media. The module content and pedagogical design require students to critically engage educational theories, and specifically in this module, theories on racism and sexism, and to intersect those with how digital technologies and social media are used in society. Ninety-two students were enrolled for the module.

As a compulsory assessment task in the module, students reflect on their learning four times during the seven-week period. For the purposes of his research, 16 students' reflections were purposively sampled for analysis using a phenomenological research design. Data were analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques using *ATLAS.ti* software.

The text data was reduced analytically, and this was achieved through the production of abstracts, coding, and summaries in the form of memoing. Every code has a relevance to the research themes, questions and concepts. Relationships between codes were then identified. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used to assist in coding.

The study affirms that racism emerges from the economic social and legal differences among people of different races. In South Africa, whites have always attempted to maintain their elite status quo by ensuring that they protect their position in politics and the labour market. The laws in many countries, especially predominantly white countries, are biased against people of colour, and the legal institutions also support that kind of bias. With racism ingrained in the social structure of society, in South Africa and much of the world, racism has attained some form or degree of acceptance, and this is often overlooked.

The research question posed was whether students, after having learned about CRT in the module, changed their views on racism. The results of the study show that some

students accepted CRT while others rejected it. Racism goes beyond just bigotry, and individual prejudice since society has embraced it by instilling the vice in its institutions (institutional racism). This is perhaps why, in many cases, racial inequality in South Africa and elsewhere in the world has been wrongly recognised not as a by-product of systems of racial domination, but as a natural process. At the same time, some students did not believe that white privilege exists, and if it does, it is not significant enough to be referred to as a privilege. These students argue that being white does not make it easier for them.

This study found that CRT is a significant and useful framework to utilise for teaching racism in institutions of higher education. At the very least, the study showed that even students who rejected CRT did learn about the meaning of racism and how to identify it. However, the study showed that CRT did not help in changing personal belief systems of students or transferring what was learned to their ecosystems. More research, tools, and time are needed to build a better understanding of racist tenets in white people such as whiteness and white privilege after learning about CRT in higher education.

List of Tables

List of Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CRT	Critical Race Theory
HR	Human Resources
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
NP	National Party
OD	Organisational Development
PoC	People of Colour
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RSQ	Research Sub-question
SA	South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANNC	South African Native National Convention
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UN	United Nations
US	United States
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PRQ	Primary Research Question
UP	University of Pretoria

Table of Contents

1   CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Social injustice is a world-wide phenomenon that manifests in various ways such as sexism, racism, ageism, and class struggles. South Africa (SA) particularly has a historical legacy in which racism featured strongly through a system called 'Apartheid'. The system was characterised by segregation in housing, employment, the justice system, and an array of other social domains (Thurber et al., 2019). Many studies (e.g. Day, 2009; Parham-Payne, 2014) have posited that racism still plagues society.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) may be a useful theory by which racism can be understood. The basic principle or tenets of CRT are that racism is endemic to American society and it has become normalised as a way of life for many people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although white Americans born after the abolishment of slavery might not have been involved in the actual practising of slavery, most of them display racist tendencies because they see themselves as being superior to people of colour (PoC). The second characteristic of the theory is that it explains the support for slavery by both Caucasians and the PoC. Third, the founders of CRT also characterise the theory as recognising the power of words which can lead to alternate realities. More importantly, the experiences of each PoC should be an essential aspect of discussion (Delgado et al., 2017).

Conradie (2016) examined CRT and the narrative around race in SA, and one of the critical issues that was pointed out in his study is that white people in SA deny the existence of racism. DiAngelo (2018) investigated the concept of white fragility and why white people find it very difficult to talk about race. Furthermore, DiAngelo (2018) points out that white people around the world are used to living in social environments that insulate them from race-related stress. This is because whiteness in SA and indeed anywhere in the world accrues privilege and status (DiAngelo, 2018).

In this study, using a phenomenological approach, the reflections of sixteen students on a fully-online master's program will be analysed to explore their learning about racism using a CRT lens.

1.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2017, the University of Johannesburg launched a fully-online master's program in educational ICTs. The program consists of eight modules, one of which targets technology as an enabler of hegemony, and specifically as a perpetuator of racism. Approximately eighty students were enrolled for the module, of which around 50% were white.

In a world still plagued by social injustices like racism and sexism, it has become paramount for education systems to instruct students in the hegemonies inherent in society (Bowman et al., 2018). These hegemonies increasingly manifest on social media, where profound societal injustices such as institutional supremacism, racism, and sexism are purported (Rice, 2018). Currently, *"…3.484 billion active social media users…"* have been reported globally (Hootsuite Media Inc., 2019, p.7). Social media, through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others, provides an avenue where individuals can access an audience. By 2017, there were approximately 3.9 billion Internet users in the world. In other words, in 2017, about 50% of the world population had access to the Internet. China and India led the way with 829 million and 560 million users, respectively, and the United States (US) enjoyed the third position with 293 million users. Gallistl & Nimrod, 2020) have reported 4.57 billion Internet users for 2020.

Theoretically, the module is premised on Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a framework by which racism could be understood as it manifests online. CRT holds that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, and that race is a social construct (Conradie, 2016). CRT, however, advances stances that may be deeply controversial for white people, as it holds the view that white people always have, and still benefit from, institutional racism (Conradie, 2015) that is based on supremacism, exploitation and white privilege. Therefore, CRT propounds that all white people are racist because they are the beneficiaries of racism. To this end, CRT has been criticised as being the work of people of colour (PoC) and thus making this theory highly contested since the viewpoints of the privileged are stacked against the viewpoints and perspectives of the PoC (Hayes & Hartlep, 2013). Naturally, many white people find the tenets of CRT unacceptable, and this constitutes an obstacle to people learning about racism.

There are several ways in which people can learn about racism with the most common being through the undertaking of race and racism courses. Sometimes, teachers resort to didactic, inactive, unengaged pedagogy, especially when teaching the controversial issue of race. Another way that people, particularly students, can learn about race, is through reflexivity; this entails considering the feelings and behaviours of the students with regards to race (Thurber et al., 2019). The current research investigates whether or not students accept CRT, and whether learning about racism has shaped their beliefs and perspectives on the issue of CRT. The focus on a South African setting provides a profound opportunity to examine not just the theory, but also the meanings and role of race in SA; a country where those who consider themselves white have an apparent tendency to preserve positive connotations that are associated with whiteness.

1.3   TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING 'RACISM'

Schmid (1996) defines racism as discrimination, antagonism, or prejudice that is directed towards a person or persons of a different race founded in the belief that one race (mostly one's own race) is superior. Racial discrimination is, as described by Pager and Shepherd (2008), the unequal treatment of people based on their ethnicity or race. Racial discrimination is, however, a complicated social problem. For this reason, legal advocates and many scholars have attempted to differentiate between differential treatment and disparate impact, and this has led to a two-part definition of race discrimination. According to Thurber et al. (2019), differential treatment is what happens when an individual treats others differently, unequally, or unfairly because of their race. Disparate impact, on the other hand, involves treating other people differently on the basis of a given set of rules and procedures constructed in such a way that a particular group is favoured over another.

The second definition demonstrates just how complex the phenomenon of racism could be; this is primarily because in this definition the scope has been broadened to include processes and decisions, which might themselves, not have evident racial characteristics. The processes and decision are instead characterised by the consequences of encouraging or creating racial disadvantages (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). To understand why essential opportunities in society are structured according to race, racism is also viewed beyond individual discrimination, which can broadly be

termed as the conventional forms of racism, to institutional processes. As Sue (2010) explains, one of the critical features of any definition of discrimination is the extent of the focus of that definition on behaviour.

Pager and Shepherd (2008) assert that discrimination is distinct and different from other racial stereotypes (mostly beliefs), racial prejudice (primarily attitudes), and racism (ideologies that in some cases are associated with racial disadvantage). Day (2009) reiterates similar sentiments by pointing out that stereotypes, prejudice or racism often motivate discrimination, and a comprehensive definition of discrimination should not presume any distinctive underlying causes.

The media has played a particularly important role in influencing racism in societies across the globe. The media explicitly and implicitly contributes to racism. According to Kulaszewicz (2015), the media dictates ways in which specific groups of people are presented and portrayed. By way of an example, Sue (2010) draws attention to the negative portrayal of the beliefs, stories, identities, and opinions of black people by the largely white-owned and controlled film industry in the United States of America. The industry has, over the years portrayed black people's beliefs, stories, identities, and opinions in a negative light, and this is an important basis on which the stereotypes against black people are formulated. Kulaszewicz (2015) emphasises that the media, through the messages it relays, has a direct impact on society's belief and value systems.

1.4   RACISM IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In 1910, the two former British colonies, the Cape and Natal, were united with the former Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal to become the Union of South Africa, a self-governing territory in the British Empire (Turton et al., 2006). In the South African context, Feinberg (1993) argues that the dispossession of land has played and continues to play a crucial role in the impoverishment of black South Africans. The majority black South Africans were denied the basic right to own their own land when previous regimes enacted the *Natives Land Act of 1913*, denying black South African's economic safety and security (Modise & Mtshiselwa, 2013; Willan, 1979). This gave rise to the birth of the South African Native National Convention (SANNC), which later became the African National Congress (ANC).

4

Other additional laws such as the *'Ghetto Act'* (also known as *The Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act* of 1946) denied South Africans of Indian origin the right to own their own piece of land (Bagwandeen, 1984). This was part of the National Party's campaign to put in place discriminatory laws that promoted Afrikaner interests in SA. The National Party (NP) won the general election in 1948. The policy of racial segregation that was introduced in 1948 was referred to as 'Apartheid', which means separateness in Afrikaans. Other discriminatory laws that were passed by the NP government (Blamires, 1955; Breckenridge, 2014; Johnson, 1951; Martens, 2007) included:

i.   *The Immorality Act* of 1927;

ii.   *Group Areas Act* of 1950;

iii.   *Population Registration Act* of 1950; and

iv.   *The Bantu Education Act* of 1953.

In 1961 SA became a republic under the governance of the NP, which continued to follow policies of "separate development" thus leading to the ANC taking up the armed struggle and subsequently being banned. The United Nations (UN) declared Apartheid a crime against humanity, and the UN General Assembly argued that Apartheid is contrary to Articles 55 and 56 of the UN Charter (Klotz, 1995). This made SA the pariah state. After 1960, the UN Security Council repeatedly condemned Apartheid (Slye, 1998), thus increasing international pressure on SA to abandon Apartheid.

Many companies disinvested in SA and others instituted sanctions thus resulting in SA staring an economic disaster in the face. In 1987 during a whites-only referendum, the majority "Yes" vote towards a tricameral parliament gave Indian people and 'Coloured' people representation in parliament. This resulted in the three main chambers in parliament, namely: the Indian chamber, the Coloured chamber, and the White chamber. Some of the reformists within the NP, especially Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, were very disillusioned with Apartheid. Dr Slabbert finally quit parliamentary politics after realising that Apartheid ideologies were becoming more and more irrelevant in the South African political future (Cooper, 2014). in the face of international pressure and economic ruin, FW de Klerk's NP decided to unban the

ANC in 1990 (Welsh, 1990). Other political movements that were also unbanned included the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) (Welsh, 1990). This was also followed by the release of South African political prisoners and plans to end minority rule (Fox, 1991). Negotiations were entered into leading to the first democratic elections in 1994, which were won by the ANC (Jung & Shapiro, 1995). The process of dismantling Apartheid began in earnest following the landslide victory of the ANC at the polls.

Examining the issue of race in SA during the post-1994 period, was an exciting time in the country, mainly because this is the time when racism and other issues related to racial discrimination supposedly came to an end (Slater, 2014). Conradie (2016), however, points out that the need for constructive dialogue in SA about the issue of race and racism has been complicated by the fact that race is not a biological fact, but a social construct. Democracy did not mean that white people necessarily abandoned their racist beliefs, and to this day, a substantial portion of white people still believe that they are superior to people of colour (PoC).

In SA, and indeed in other parts of the world, the competing assumptions of what exactly race means during daily interactions, and the influence of race on society and public imagination, is an important topic that is vaguely discussed, primarily because racism in is no longer explicit in SA (Vincent, 2008).

The persistence of new forms of everyday racism and systematic inequality in SA and the racialised dimensions of what can be termed "post-Apartheid South Africa" remains pervasive (Fourie, 2013). The emergence of other racial hostilities in SA has led to Slater (2014) arguing that most of these discriminatory practices and racial hostilities are covert and hard to pin down, particularly from a legal perspective. Furthermore, the racial problems faced by South African society are compounded by the everlasting denial that racism still exists and thus remains a significant societal problem in the country. Such a stance contributes to the avoidance of any constructive dialogue amongst members of the society that is aimed at exposing racial prejudices (Conradie, 2016).

The conflicting interests and the confusion often arise amongst South Africans born during and/or after 1994 when the first democratic elections were held, especially as

they try to create and develop their own epistemologies about racism and race. To this end, this generation of the so-called new SA has found themselves in a situation where their efforts remained conjoined with the perspectives that lean mainly towards essentialism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Essentialism, in the South African context, is the notion that race plays a crucial role in denoting a more or less stable state, especially as far as the essential human traits are concerned, and that race is not a malleable social construct. This has, therefore led to a situation where race is considered a valid and reliable indicator of the similarities and/or differences existing amongst people (Erwin, 2012).

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to identify the issue of racism and determine if students' learning about racism can shape their beliefs and perspectives about white privilege and racism in SA. In this research study, reflections were the online tool used to mediate the conceptualisation by students of what racism means.

1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Racism is a complex and poorly understood phenomenon, not just in SA, but also in many parts of the world. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, the Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used to explain racism. CRT purports that racism takes many forms ranging from racism in our daily conversations to systematic and institutionalised racism. White people find it difficult to understand racism simply because they have never been victims of racism (DiAngelo, 2018). Since they perpetuate racism without necessarily being aware of their actions, many white people do not consider themselves racist.

The question arises: What can be done to change white people's views on racism? It could be argued that formal education about racism could be one of the ways by which people's perspectives on racism could be reshaped. However, how can it be determined whether students have changed their perspectives about racism? To examine whether students have changed their perspectives about racism, the current study analyses the reflections of the students to detect and determine their changes in attitude towards racism.

SA is one of the countries in the world that is still nursing the deep wounds created by institutionalised discrimination and racism. As part of the strategic approach targeted towards healing these wounds, institutions of higher learning are considered to be one of the platforms for providing constructive dialogues about racism. The South African society is still plagued by social injustices such as racism and sexism, and students are often ignorant of the hegemonies that abound in society. Injustices such as institutional supremacism, racism and sexism are still purported implicitly and explicitly, and not much has been done in terms of changing the mindsets (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), perceptions and beliefs of the learners to address these injustices.

1.7   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In an attempt to establish how the student's learning about racism is shaped, the following primary research question (PRQ) was formulated:

How did formal learning about Critical Race Theory *(CRT) shape students in a fully-online master's module perspectives on racism?*

The PRQ cannot be addressed in isolation. For this reason, the following research sub-question (RSQ) was also formulated with the aim of channelling the research study to the PRQ:

How useful are student reflections to detect their learning about racism?

1.8   AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research study aims to investigate how students learning about racism are shaped as exhibited in their reflections in a fully-online master's in education module. It is envisaged that the following specific objectives would facilitate the achievement of the main aim of the study:

a) Determining the extent of students' learning about racism during a master's module that targeted Critical Race Theory (CRT);

b) Establishing whether students' learning about CRT influenced their belief systems;

c) Determining whether students transferred their learning to their learning ecosystems; and

d) Determining whether the analysis of students' -reflections is a useful way to determine their acceptance of CRT.

1.9 ABBREVIATED AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Using a qualitative research paradigm, a phenomenological research design, which attempts to isolate the 'lived experiences' of students during the offering of the module, was adopted for this research study. Using very specific guidelines, students reflected on their learning during the module, and it is within these reflections that an attempt will be made to determine whether their perspectives on racism changed during the module.

For purposes of the study, only the reflections of white students were targeted. This is because, according to Critical Race Theory (CRT), only white people are capable of being racist and are by extension perpetrators of racism. In total, sixteen students' reflections were purposively sampled for analysis. Since CRT specifically targets white people who are deemed to be the beneficiaries of oppression, an initial scan of all white students' reflections was made in order to identify students who, at a 'first read' seemed to have either learned the most and those who seemed to have resisted CRT the most, which according to the researcher learned the least. The white students' reflections were classified by the researcher as being either "Accepts CRT" or "Rejects CRT". Thereafter, eight students were randomly selected from each group. This selection was based on the researcher's belief that an analysis of lived experiences from both 'sides' would be most useful to the study.

A thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the data using Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for the coding of data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data collected, the measures suggested by Krefting (1991) were used to determine the credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability of the research findings.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To comply with the requirements of ethical research, the researcher's access to the 'Learning Ecosystems B' module was revoked by the lecturer of the module. All the students gave consent at the commencement of the module. As this study was an unobtrusive observation, no additional burden was placed on the students. The lecturer provided the researcher with the anonymised texts of all the reflections of the white students as part of this process. The reflections sought to showcase how the experience came to be as it was, and with the very essence of the experience contained in descriptive paragraphs.

1.11 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The research is divided into five chapters, namely:

Chapter 1: Introduction;

Chapter 2: Literature review;

Chapter 3: Methodology;

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion; and

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Limitations, Recommendations, and Future Research.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter critically examines the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its relevance to SA. Specifically, the relevance of CRT to education, Apartheid in SA, and race construction globally and in SA. Such an examination is undertaken through an analysis of the findings emanating from previous studies and arguments put forth by experts and scholars in this area of research.

In particular, an attempt is made to define the concept of racism, as many conceptions of racism exist. This is followed by a description of CRT, as the relevant module was theoretically grounded in CRT. CRT offers a particularly handy lens by which racism in SA could be understood, which in turn points to mechanisms by which white people can 'unlearn' to be racist.

2.2 RACISM

The complexity of the phenomenon of racism that was alluded to in the previous chapter has led to many unanswered questions such as: Do people learn racism? Do people learn how to perpetuate racism? Do people practise racism intentionally? What is the difference between racism and racial prejudice? Kulaszewicz (2015) points out that racism is a complicated issue.

As mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, the media contributes to the propagation of racism. The media, according to Parham-Payne (2014), holds a significant influence on people's lives since it infiltrates people's understanding and perceptions with continuous messages, which then impact beliefs and value systems.

Social media, in particular, has become one of the most important platforms that propagate racial prejudices and discrimination; this is partly because of the unsupervised nature of the content that can be posted on social media. Furthermore, as noted by Parham-Payne (2014), the word 'black' often comes with a negative connotation, and since print and visual media tends to associate black males with violence, they shape people's belief system through the association of black males with social evils. Kulaszewicz (2015) emphasises the importance of understanding the

role of the media as far as racism is concerned and demanding that the media should be radically more inclusive by depicting all people in a positive light.

Following an investigation of the role of the media in racism in different parts of the world, Kulaszewicz (2015) has concluded that the media has the responsibility of ensuring equal representation and proportionate reporting of all cultures as a way of creating a more accurate representation of society at large. Parham-Payne (2014) has reiterated that today the media has become the most crucial source of information, and people's beliefs, values, perceptions and even identities have are highly influenced and shaped by the media.

2.3 CONCEPTIONS OF RACE

The origins of racism can be considered by exploring the various concepts of race, namely: defining race as a construct; racism as a social construct; forms of racism; power and racism; and prejudice, discrimination and racism. These concepts are discussed briefly in the sub-sections that follow.

2.3.1 Defining race as a construct

Various researchers such as Peterson and Hagan (1984) have pointed out that race is simply a social construct that does not have a biological meaning. Scientists have argued that the social interpretations and meaning of race have greatly interfered with the understanding, from a scientific point of view, of human diversity. Therefore, race is, in essence, not biological; this means that fundamentally, there are no set of genes or even a single gene that is common to all white or all people of colour (PoC).

2.3.2 Racism as a social construct

The assumptions that people of different races have different genes have had many historical and social repercussions and have played a key role in fuelling racist beliefs around the world. Racism has been perpetuated by the belief that other races are genetically different, even though this has continually been refuted by science.

The reasons behind the definitions of race, according to Gannon (2016), are social. The definitions are always fuzzy and are often associated with people's experiences and their cultural understandings of these experiences. Race does not have any biological element. Thompson (2006) argues that people who argue that race has a

12

biological element is because they have awarded it such elements. In modern society skin colour no longer determines race as it was thousands of years ago, and throughout history, taking geography, language and many different vague feelings as the basis for race. Race is, therefore an idea and not a fact since it does not need biology. Race is, to this end, a social construct.

2.3.3 Forms of racism

Individual and systematic racism are the two main forms of racism (Forms of Racism, n.d.). Forms of Racism (n.d.) defines individual racism as the racist beliefs, behaviour or assumptions of an individual. This form of racism can also be explained as a type of discrimination that emanates from conscious and unconscious personal prejudice. Systematic racism, on the other hand, is associated with practices and policies that are entrenched in major institutions, and such policies and practices that tend to promote or exclude certain groups of people. The fundamental difference between the two primary forms of racism is that, in systematic racism, individual intent is not necessary (Forms of Racism, n.d.).

2.3.4 Power and racism

As explained in the Grassroots Policy Project (2017), the economy is racialised. The economy is not just about the market, and this is fundamental because markets exist within a country and society, and this reflects the power relations and the social forces in society in what is referred to as the political economy. To understand power, racism, and the political economy, Grassroots Policy Project (2017) has recommended that focus be placed on the relationships between social institutions, markets, culture and history, as well as the role played by government. Just like any other aspects of society, racialisation has specific impacts on the political and economic arrangements of society. Racism could lead to a situation where a particular group of people control most of the resources, while another group is either excluded or marginalised. Such an arrangement could also put a specific group of people at an advantage in terms of accumulating or obtaining political power.

2.3.5 Prejudice, discrimination and racism

Verwey and Quayle (2012) have argued that in SA, the terms 'prejudice', 'discrimination' and 'racism' are terms that have come up in the discussion of the

Afrikaner identity. The researchers point out that most Afrikaners reject a majority of the stereotypes about Afrikaner identity, but at the same time, they recycle key disclosures that underlie the Apartheid ideology. The most significant of these disclosures are 'whites under threat' and 'black incompetence'. SA is famous for its Apartheid history. Verwey and Quayle (2012) posit that the Apartheid system in SA was a policy of segregation and discrimination on the grounds of race. The Apartheid system considered white people as superior to their black counterparts.

A study by Verwey and Quayle (2012) has established that white people in SA were willing to generally claim the status of being 'Africans', they were however strongly resistant to any ideas of assimilation into 'Africa'. In other words, they did not want to be associated with a broader African identity.

Studies such as Adjai and Lazaridis (2013) indicate that the old Apartheid policy still influences how racism is viewed and conceptualised under the new democratic dispensation. In an attempt to analyse contemporary racism in SA, Adjai and Lazaridis (2013) developed hypotheses that could explain the racialised social systems in the country, especially as the country forges its way towards social and cultural change. An attempt was made to examine the reasons behind xenophobia in the country, and it was argued that the racialisation of other African migrants is largely about the politics of access (Adjai and Lazaridis, 2013). In other words, Adjai and Lazaridis (2013) believe that the racialised social systems in SA are as a result of the struggle for political, as well as socio-economic resources.

2.3.6 White privilege and "whiteness"

Due to the normalisation of racism, whiteness is seen as property that is fervently protected by its beneficiaries. Based on historical outcomes, the notion of racism took root in the minds of many white people that only they can possess it as a property, thus giving them the power of exclusion, possession, disposition and ownership (Capper, 2015). Any contradicting measures (i.e. equality) are often perceived as an act of aggression seen to take away these rights (Kumasi, 2011). Thus, educational institutions run and owned by white people, systematically support the idea of advancing the interest of only white students (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015), and this has societal repercussions. The support of white students in education will lead to the

economic and social advancement of white people while black people are, among other things, struggling to pay tuition fees and faced with unfair admission criteria, which limit their access to quality education. This, in turn, contribute towards assisting more white people to accumulate the power and means to own property and thus run institutions where similar decisions that benefit a single race continue to be made. McGee and Stovall (2015) suggest that racist practices such as slavery and the implementation of racist ideologies in educational institutions are carried out at both conscious and sub-continuous levels. Not only is the protection of whiteness undertaken within academic institutions, it is also experienced by specific individuals, thus leading to student relationships being affected. Due to the unawareness of white privilege, white students are more likely to be subconsciously racist, and education could thus be the key to unlocking the real understanding of race to improve race relations (Dixson et al., 2018).

2.3.7 How racism manifests in society

The early discussions about race, especially in terms of what it meant, the role of cultural differences, and skin colours, shaped early scientific research. Direct or indirect contact with an object makes human beings experience the attributes of the said object, and this interaction will, in turn, stir the feelings in that particular individual and the requisite action they can take. This interaction, or the direct and indirect contact, therefore, informs our response and forms beliefs about the object, whether this object is desirable or undesirable. This response will lead to individual tendencies that will be a source of people's beliefs and attitudes. The beliefs and attitudes are shaped based on the information people receive and how they process it (Gabbidon & Greene, 2019). In other words, people learn to be racist by imitation and observation as they interact with society throughout their lives. When children grow up observing racist acts and attitudes, they tend to imitate and emulate, and eventually, racism will manifest in society through a learning process that creates a never-ending cycle. This is a cycle that can be broken by education and efforts direct towards understanding racism as a significant problem in society, especially against people of colour.

Not only does racism manifest through typical day-to-day interactions amongst individual members of communities or societies, it also manifests itself through the media. The media influence the majority of the global population. With the growth in

technology, the impact of the media on society has become very profound. Many people are dependent on some form of media in their day-to-day lives. The media affects our experiences, beliefs, assumptions, and the perception of the public. Therefore, any direct or indirect depiction of PoC in a negative light by the media is bound to influence consumers of such media to be racially biased against PoC.

2.3.8 The myth of reverse racism

Reverse racism could be defined as discrimination against an ethnic or racial majority, and this is often perceived or imagined by white people (Columbia University Libraries, 1970). The term emanates from the US, especially during the time of affirmative action, and race-based policies that were introduced in the 1970s. In the US, reverse racism was defined as a phenomenon that is characterised by giving benefits to black people and other minorities at the expense of white people who had assumed a superior and automatic claim to these benefits, had the issue of race not been taken into consideration. Reverse racism has now become a common grievance in many parts of the world, including SA.

2.4 CRITICAL RACE THEORY

In this subsection, the history and, elements of the CRT as well as, its relevance in respect to racism in SA and other parts of the world are discussed.

2.4.1 History and background

CRT was coined in the 1970s by a group of lawyers who found the rate of racial justice reform in the US unsatisfactory. Alan Freeman and Derrick Bell based the theory on critical legal studies, as a means to identify racism as a societal problem and to address it, but studies such as Cole (2017) and Delgado and Stefancic (2000), acknowledged that the scope of the racism problem is vast and that efforts by Alan Freeman and Derrick Bell did not achieve much in that respect.

The theory was created to highlight the race-based issues that permeate society, by analysing the relationship between marginalised communities and people privileged by race (Connor et al., 2016). CRT and its tenets have also been used to explain the systematic oppression within society, that have created disparities and privileges for some individuals. The theory explains the concept of whiteness and the privilege that

comes with it, and how people have, consciously and subconsciously, enjoyed the privileges of being white, often at the expense of others who are not white.

The creators of CRT focused on past experiences of PoC, and on what was happening at the time, and realised that PoC were severely disadvantaged in society. Due to slavery, black people were treated differently before and after the enactment of the *Civil Rights Act*. Nevertheless, although discrimination and racism were very overt during slavery, the perpetuation of racism and discrimination became less overt and systematic following the passing of the *Civil Rights Act*. Racism and other forms of discrimination practices experienced by PoC became more embedded in the various systems, including education, employment, and healthcare (Dixson et al., 2018). Although the history and background of CRT from the era of slavery (especially in the US, even though slavery was a global trade) define the relationship between white people and PoC across the world, subtle differences in circumstances exist in different countries.

According to Ledesma and Calderón (2015), the era of slavery saw white people creating policies that favoured them while simultaneously side-lining PoC. The first and most prominent policy was property ownership, which extended beyond the ownership of land to include other properties and use of some key services such as transport. Whiteness was established as a property phenomenon that needed protection during and after slavery in a sense that white people were allowed to own land while black people were not. Due to their status as slaves, black people were additionally viewed as property and a form of currency that could be owned, sold, used to gain wealth, and traded without their consent. During the slavery period, almost all black people were captured forcefully or through an initial manipulation process and thereafter sold against their will (Howard & Navarro, 2016). In the white communities, the number of slaves a white person owned was regarded as a status and wealth symbol. The more slaves a white person owned, the higher the likelihood of becoming wealthy from the sale of the slaves or attainment of free labour. As a result, whiteness became an aspect of value that needed to be protected since it provided an avenue for automatic property, land and slave ownership rights.

After the enactment of the *Civil Rights Act*, the history and legacy of slavery were wiped out overnight from the minds of some white people; others opted not to accept

the sweeping changes that afforded every citizen, including PoC, the new regime of civil rights (McGee & Stovall, 2015). The new civil rights laws meant that previous racially based practices relating to slavery were now prohibited, and white people were, at a stroke of a pen, effectively stripped of some of their fundamental and valuable "property" rights. To this end, active opponents of the new civil rights law found it hard to accept the new statutory changes that were sweeping through the country, and they devised means to maintain the status quo by embedding their practices within the law and systematically continuing the racist agenda. For the rest of the white population, racism and racist tendencies became the order of the day (Capper, 2015) because the problem of racism was, as alluded by Parker (2015), not addressed openly.

The CRT foundation thus acknowledges problems that ensued from the time of slavery right up to the time following the enactment of the *Civil Rights Act*. According to Kumasi (2011), CRT has several defining characteristics tied to the ideology. First, the founders of the theory found racism to be endemic to American society and has become normalised as a way of life for many people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although white people born after the era of slavery might not have owned slaves, most of them still have racist tendencies because they see themselves as being superior to PoC. The second characteristic of the theory is that it explains the support given to slavery by, both Caucasians as well as PoC. Third, the founders of CRT recognise the power of words, which can lead to alternate realities. More importantly, the experiences of each individual for the PoC should be an essential aspect of discussion (Delgado et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Elements of CRT and its relevance in education

Many educational institutions, especially institutions in the higher education sector, are looking at expanding their inclusivity portfolio to prepare their graduates for a multicultural world in politics, economics, and other areas (Rector-Aranda, 2016). To achieve this, institutions have incorporated on their agenda the issue of educating white students about their status within the society, and how their actions are a crucial part of determining if they are racist or not (Cole, 2017). To facilitate this online master's program module called 'Learning Ecosystems B', students are often asked to introspect so as to gain a deeper understanding of key issues in society, including

racism and its effect on politics, economics, and culture. While incorporation of issues related to racism into the curriculum is aimed at facilitating the students' understanding of the concept of racism as a key component in accomplishing the outcomes of the course, topics dealing with racial issues are emotionally charged across the US (Patton, 2016) and many other countries across the world such as SA (Sleeter, 2017). Therefore, a careful balance between learning and understanding the emotional outcomes of students is encouraged through self-reflection (Solorzano, 2019). CRT is often used as a conventional theory to assist the learning process in this course, and a discussion on elements of race and racism, and how they permeate education institutions is important.

By incorporating a course on race and racial relations in educational institutions and using theories such as CRT, there is an acknowledgement of the racial issues existing within and outside the educational systems. According to Delgado et al. (2017), CRT has five elements or tenets that can be applied in any context. These elements include a critique of liberalism, whiteness as a property, counter-storytelling, the interest in conversion, and permanence of racism.

The application of counter-storytelling in an educational institution as an element of CRT allows students of colour to understand their marginalised experiences and be able to explain them. The element exposes the dominant ideology that systematically suppresses the success and development of others within the educational setting (Levinson et al., 2016). According to Sleeter (2017), counter-storytelling will assist in critiquing and exposing of any form of suppression and oppression. The creators of CRT realised that if every story of every PoC is not told in detail and listened to, it could lead to the continued effects of racism.

Institutions play a significant role in continuing and supporting counter-storytelling. As part of a strategy to support inclusivity and diversity, academic institutions should ensure the recruitment of more students of colour and encourage equal opportunities by giving these students a platform to tell their stories (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Without the requisite support from the academic institutions, counter-storytelling would not succeed in countering racial stereotypes and racial ideologies and could thus lead to the endurance of racism.

Racism affects the whole spectrum of people's lives, including their political, economic, and social realms (Rector-Aranda, 2016). The construct of CRT explains that racism in SA and many parts of the world are interwoven in the fabric of society by giving specific privileges to white people. Racism has largely been systematised and institutionalised such that it manifests itself in areas such as healthcare, education, and even sport. Black people were initially denied access to education and were later allowed to go to blacks-only schools, and this was especially the case in Apartheid SA (Patton, 2016). After integration, some schools remained predominantly white through social, economic, and cultural restrictions. Educational institutions, especially higher education institutions, still have a smaller number of black students registered across the US (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). To address this problem, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) recommended that educational institutions should recognise that the problem of race has largely been institutionalised and systematised and workable solutions should therefore be devised.

According to Connor et al. (2016), interest convergence is an element of CRT that acknowledges that the fundamental rights that were created to help PoC improve their lives ended up benefiting white people all over again. A good example is affirmative action that allowed minorities, PoC, women, and the disabled the right to access socio-economic opportunities (Parker, 2015). White households ended up benefiting more because of the socio-economic opportunities that were afforded white women. So, a framework that was created with the sole aim of offering equal opportunities to marginalised groups, led to the extra oppression of PoC and black people were attacked for privileges that they were not even accessing fully. For example, in the educational sector, interest convergence in CRT benefits more white people and institutions, since institutions such as educational institutions have put in place policies and rules that align with 'white interests'. In higher education, diversity initiatives encourage international students to be recruited at universities to improve cultural diversity and wellness.

The last element focuses on the critique of liberalism. This tenet allows colour blindness to persist and thus, perpetuate racism. Colour blindness assumes that the law is sufficient to deal with racist tendencies and policies, even though there is proof that the law does not address the problem as expected. Therefore, the racist policies

and lack of inclusivity in educational institutions continue to grow as marginalisation and segregation of the PoC worsens, creating a perfect disguise for one of the world's most critical challenges: racism.

2.5   RACISM IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Many of the South African laws were designed to racially exclude the majority of black South Africans. As Rubin (1974) observes, the word Apartheid did not appear anywhere in the South African status book, or in any of the official texts that were used in the formulation of the myriad of laws that entrenched racism. At the time, Rubin (1974) argued that SA was one of the countries whose long history was characterised by law that was beset by racial overtones. This was exacerbated in 1948 when the NP won the whites-only general elections, and a further period of sustained segregation was entered into which further reduced the rights of black South Africans. A series of laws advanced white people economically and relegated black South Africans to second-class citizens. The long period (1948 – 1994) in which SA was under the rule of the NP government, the ideology of segregation was largely translated into formidable patterns of what Rubin (1974) termed as legalised racial discrimination. This pattern was evident in the entire South African legal system, in the constitution, and the legislature. Rubin (1974) believes that Apartheid culture was at the time deeply entrenched in the South African institutions and statues and argued that this is likely to take many decades before the type of bias in the various systems in the country goes away. Some of these laws were as follows:

i. In 1913, in what was to become the cornerstone of legalised racial discrimination, the Union of South Africa's enactment of the *Natives' Land Act,* which allocated a mere 8% of the land to black South Africans and earmarked 90% of the land for white occupation or ownership (Wickins, 1981).

ii. The *Immorality Act* of 1927 - White people were expected not to have sex with people of other races, especially the natives (i.e. black South Africans) (Martens, 2007).

iii. *Group Areas Act* of 1950 - There were business and residential areas designed to accommodate the respective racial groups, and each racial group was barred

from living or conducting businesses outside their designated areas (Johnson, 1951).

iv. *Population Registration Act* of 1950 - This act required that all people living in SA needed to be classified according to their racial features as part of an essential requirement for the Apartheid system (Breckenridge, 2014).

v. The *Bantu Education Act* of 1953 - Among many other racially discriminatory provisions, this act enforced racially separated educational facilities (Blamires, 1955) for the different races, and the allocation of resources favoured whites by far.

In 1961, the autonomous Union of South Africa, created by the British Empire in 1910, ceased to exist and became the Republic of South Africa (RSA) after a whites-only referendum, and the Republic exited the British Commonwealth (Christopher, 2009). A series of legislation further entrenched the privilege of white South Africans. This sparked armed resistance against the racist government and also caused SA to become the pariah of the world. The international response against Apartheid culminated in the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 declaring Apartheid a "crime against humanity", and this was endorsed by the Security Council in 1984 (Klotz, 1995). In retrospect, eleven crimes against humanity were highlighted. The crimes include enslavement; murder; extermination; compulsory relocation or expatriation of people; and incarceration or other harsh denials of physical liberty in breach of basic rules of international law. Others crimes included Apartheid as a crime; rape; serious injury-causing physical and mental health or to the body, or suffering caused through intentional inhumane acts; torture; and imposed prostitution, sexual servitude, imposed sterilisation, obligatory pregnancy, or any other comparable form of sexual violence. Lastly, the crimes of persecution of any distinguishable group on racial, political, national, cultural, ethnic, religious, enforced disappearance of persons; and gender, or other universally recognised grounds which are impermissible under international law were also highlighted.

It was only after the 1987 referendum, during which the white population voted, that things started opening up the political landscape, which eventually led to democratic elections in 1994 (Fox, 1991).

2.6   UNLEARNING RACISM

Any effort targeted towards changing a belief system faces resistance, mostly because a personal belief goes hand-in-hand with a person's self-image and representation. According to Oinas-Kukkonen (2013), human beings try to rationalise their deeds and beliefs to maintain a specific image in society. What a person believes in can be described as a way that the brain tries to make sense of the environment and can also be termed as a survival tool. People are bombarded on a daily basis with a lot of information, but the brain uses the belief system to filter out specific information and analyse what is essential before making any decision (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). People believe in consistency and adapting to changes means they must abandon a part of themselves. Even though some of the beliefs are not factual, people always believe in what they can see and will use any other unfounded information to disregard facts.

In most cases, people invest a lot on what they believe in; in a society, people's reputations are based on their beliefs. As suggested by Rattan et al. (2012), people even make financial investments or make career decisions based on their belief systems; and for such people, changing their belief system becomes very difficult. For such a particular change to take place, a person who has made a financial investment would have to incur losses. However, for some people, their belief system is learned at an early age from either their family or society in general. Surprisingly, the brain tends to adapt, and people can be persuaded and changed by influential individuals and leave what they believe in. Therefore, racism can be unlearned. Thornton (2016) explains that in many cases, people fear change; this is mainly because they have developed a sense of attachment that has based their self-identities on their beliefs.

Frazer (2011) argues that in order to unlearn racism, people need to have conversations across races. For white people, what this means is focusing on listening, since the messages about racism and race are disproportionally broadcasted through media and other social institutions. The voices of white people are heard incessantly, and this has forged a definition of normalcy. Unlearning racism, therefore, is a process of radical editing (Frazer, 2011). People learn to be racist by observation and imitations of the environment and the society they grow up in, and as such, they need to learn in order to unlearn racism.

2.7   CONCLUSION

The media shapes people's belief system; exposure to CRT through media and technology will shape the people's attitude. This could lead to a significant impact on racial discrimination. People who are always victims will learn to deal with their aggressors. They will be empowered through the legal system and other social support systems to attain an equitable society. On the other hand, white supremacists will also be made aware of the impact of their actions on other people. Sometimes the media may decide to be biased creating content that could promote and propagate racial discrimination. Media and technology remain the most significant sources and shapers of personal beliefs and attitudes. Exposure to privilege can result in the majority of people reframing their experiences relative to that of the majority group. It has been demonstrated that when white people were exposed to the evidence of white privilege, they tend to report high levels of personal suffering by arguing that just like everyone else, they face challenges in society and that they do not feel advantaged at any point. Similarly, when PoC are exposed to CRT, they seem to reframe their experiences. This means that privileged individuals might respond to evidence of their group (a white privilege for white people, and CRT tenets for PoC) by emphasising personal hardship or the extent to which they consider themselves unworthy of that privilege.

3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The choice of a methodology in any research is determined by what the research intends to achieve, or simply the research aim (Atieno, 2009). Other factors determining the choice of a research methodology include, among others, the feasibility of the methodology, the skills of the researcher to implement a particular method, and the availability of the resources. This study aimed to investigate how students' learning about racism was shaped during an online module (see Section 1.8). As students had to reflect on their learning during a reflection assessment, those reflections are expected to be an accurate self-narration of their learning. In this chapter, the research paradigm, methodology, data collection, techniques of data analysis, and the measures undertaken for ensuring the research credibility are described.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The philosophical perspective of a researcher determines the design of the research, how the data is collected, and how the data is analysed (Atieno, 2009). The philosophical perspective is sometimes referred to as the research paradigm. The research paradigm shapes the researcher's comprehension of the research problem and the manner in which the research is conducted.

Chan (2015) argues that, in most cases, most research problems are responded to using a mixture of observational measurement data, or by asking people about their experiences as far as a given phenomenon is concerned. Danermark et al. (2002) reiterate that when research adopts a mixture of approaches, the researcher will be in a pole position to broaden and enrich their understanding of the problem. A philosophical perspective can also help researchers in their thinking and in recognising and acknowledging the value of others. Foster and Bochner (2008) explain that opposing research paradigms represent the disagreements in how knowledge is viewed, phenomena are interpreted and data analysed.

The two opposing philosophical perspectives are positivism and interpretivism or constructivism. The positivist paradigms advocate for objectivity during research, while the interpretive paradigm acknowledges the subjectivity of the human experience

(Beauchaine & Haines, 2019). To understand these two opposing and contentious philosophical perspectives, and to determine which one will be ideal for examining the student reflections on racism as well as, their views on the CRT we examined two concepts related to research paradigms, namely ontology and epistemology.

Ontology and epistemology are essential in explaining how researchers develop a coherent understanding of the real world and the associations or the relationships within this world (Danermark et al., 2002). 'Ontology' is concerned with studying and understanding the nature of reality, as well as the different categories and entities within reality; and 'epistemology' is defined as studying knowledge and how to reach this knowledge. So 'epistemology' is not just the study of knowledge, it is also the justification, rationale of belief, and any other related issues.

Ontology within the positivist paradigm, for example, positions the real world to be apart from the phenomenon being investigated in the research. In other words, there is an objective truth that is independent of what the researcher thinks (Chan, 2015). This means that an 'objective' reality' exists irrespective of the belief or the perspective of the researcher. In other words, the researcher plays no role in how data is interpreted apart from following the rules of the research. Positivism, therefore, requires that a researcher comes up with a research topic, formulate the appropriate hypotheses, design an appropriate research methodology and carry out statistical analyses to confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses (Beauchaine & Haines, 2019). In other words, positivism is about taking a structural and controlled approached in conducting research.

According to positivism, the researcher must stay detached from the participants of the research, and this is to ensure that the biasness of the researcher does not interfere with the objectivity of the results (Chan, 2015). The researcher has to ensure that he or she keeps distance in order to remain emotionally neutral and thus be in a position to distinguish between feeling and reason. What this implies is that fact, value judgment and personal experience can be distinguished from each other. Positivism is associated with quantitative research. Quantitative research is defined as a method that measures variables using numerical systems, and analysing these measurements using different statistical methods, and reporting associations and relationships among the variables studied (Atieno, 2009). The responses from the questionnaires are coded

and quantified to facilitate the use of statistical techniques in *ATLAS.ti* to analyse and interpret the data.

The question, therefore, is whether a positivist perspective can be used to respond to the research question of this study. However, because people's experiences of racism and their interpretation of racism are subjective, it is unlikely that positivist methodologies would be able to develop an understanding of how people's views are shaped. People cannot be separated from what they know and believe, and phenomena such as racism are socially constructed, and as such, cannot objectively be determined (Foster & Bochner, 2008).

Interpretivism or constructivism, on the other hand, argues that reality is subjective and characterised by multiple perspectives (Atieno, 2009). According to this perspective, we cannot interpret meanings based on fixed realities, since reality is intersubjectively constructed through understandings and meanings that have been developed experientially and socially (Foster & Bochner, 2008). Flexible and personal research regimes are required that will be able to capture essential meanings in human interactions (Danermark et al., 2002). For this research, for example, the researcher and the students interact with each other throughout the study; they are interdependent in terms of how they interpret the concept of racism, which might vary based on their experiential and social contexts. In this way, the researcher can understand the context of the information being provided by the students and can examine their reflections having taking into account their experiences and how these experiences have created the knowledge that they now have and how this influences their interpretations. In this study, the researcher's goal is to understand and interpret how students' thinking was shaped. This paradigm is associated with qualitative research. Qualitative research, according to Thanh and Thanh (2015), can be defined as a type of research that uses text or any other non-numerical methods of collecting data, and then uses this data to develop means and interpretations of different phenomena. In this study, for example, data is collected from the written words of the participants.

Pragmatism attempts to sidestep the contentions of objectivity and subjectivity by focusing on what works based on the needs of the research (Beauchaine & Haines, 2019). That is, if the researcher needs explanations and meanings at a particular point

in the research, then the researcher applies a qualitative design. However, if they need to measure or test hypotheses, then a quantitative research design is applied. This is why realism or pragmatism is associated with a mixed-methods research approach. The role of the researcher, in this case, could include being a detached and external observer when a need exists, or a researcher who wants to experience what he or she is studying. As Beauchaine and Haines (2019) explain, pragmatists use objective realities when they need them, but not all the time, since they try not to stick to a particular method.

As the data in this research are to be found in the narrative writing of students as captured in their reflections, this research is undoubtedly qualitative, and therefore situated in the interpretivist paradigm.

3.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

Epistemologically, this research undertaking is framed within a qualitative research paradigm and adopts a phenomenological research design (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenological research design, according to Lester (1999), is a design that targets the 'lived experiences' of a given group of people. 'Lived experiences' refer to representations of the experiences, as well as the choices of a particular person, and the knowledge that this person gains from the experiences and the choices. It could also be defined as the unique and personal perspectives of an individual and how their experiences have been shaped by an array of subjective factors (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

Accordingly, qualitative research entails the empirical world being studied from the point of view of the study participants (Tesch, 1990). This means that the participants whose experiences are recorded are influenced by the socio-cultural and physical environment within which they find themselves and that their 'behaviour' may be influenced beyond what is observed (Krefting, 1991).

In phenomenological research, researchers must embrace the notion of 'epoche,' which refers to the process whereby researchers must "bracket" their preconceived ideas about the unit of analysis. In the case of this study, "bracketing" preconceived ideas refers to "bracketing" the experiences of the researcher when exposed to CRT for the first time, as much as possible in order to be, as Bliss (2016) expresses it –

"totally naïve" when engaging in this type of research. Despite the naivety, it was also a structured study as it was not formulating the experience of CRT but rather using CRT as an organising guide. 'Bracketing' and 'reduction' ensured that the study was conducted as carefully as possible to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings (Groenewald, 2004).

The two broad questions that such a phenomenological research design tries to answer is what the students or the participants have experienced in terms of the phenomenon, and what were the contexts that have typically influenced the experiences of the participants (Reiners, 2012).

The objective of this type of research design is arriving at an understanding and description of a given phenomenon (Reiners, 2012), and in this case, how students understand and view the issue of race and racism. Typically, this research design is associated with qualitative data collection procedures, for example, interviews or focus groups, and the sample often constitutes a group of people who have first-hand understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation.

Consistent with the aim of this study, phenomenology is aimed at extracting raw, most pure, and untainted data and first-hand interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation (Danermark et al., 2002), which in this case are students' perceptions and understanding of racism in SA.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

This subsection details the sample details and the data collection procedure:

3.4.1 Participants

The participants in this study were students who enrolled for an online master's program and were specifically enrolled for a module, 'Learning Ecosystems B.' This module is one of eight coursework modules that was offered from 6 May 2019 to 23 June 2019. Ninety-two students were enrolled for the module.

The module targets the manifestation of racism and sexism in technologies and social media. The module content and pedagogical design require from students to critically

engage educational theories, and specifically in this module, theories on racism and sexism, and to intersect those with digital technologies and social media.

Students were expected to reflect on their learning using the Blackboard journal tool. In the module, reflection was set as an assessment task; therefore, it was compulsory to reflect at least four times during the seven-week module. As the assessment task carried a weighting of 20% of the total mark allocation, most students took the task seriously, and a total of 391 reflections were made in which they documented their learning experiences (368 reflections were expected).

Sixteen students' reflections were purposively and randomly selected for analysis. As Atieno (2009) explains, subject selection in qualitative research is made purposefully: what this means is that the participants that will be included in the research are those that have the information relevant to inform the research questions, as well as to understand the phenomenon under investigation. As CRT specifically target white people who are regarded as the beneficiaries of oppression, an initial scan of all white students' reflections were made in order to identify students who, at a 'first read' seemed to have either learned the most and those who seemed to have resisted CRT the most, which in my view, suggested that they learned the least. During the initial scan of the reflections, the emerging themes in the reflections were students who acknowledged the existence of racism and those who did not.

3.4.2 Data collection procedure

My role in the module is that of a Teaching Assistant for the Master's in Education in Information and Communication Technology in Education program since I had already completed the module during a previous academic cycle. As a teaching assistant, I am privy to the reflections of students, and I am expected to engage students' reflections. It became clear to me that some students struggled to accept the tenets of CRT, which was the theoretical frame by which the module was designed. When I was exposed to CRT for the first time, CRT was novel for me. While I grew up in a family in which racism was not practised nor supported, my exposure to CRT made me acutely aware that I could not escape my white privilege, and that a cloud of racism surrounds white people.

Since the phenomenological method opines that the researcher's perspective cannot be detached from the research endeavour (Groenewald, 2004), it is crucial that I declared my previous lived experiences, especially so in terms of how I was brought up and my previous exposure to the tenets of CRT. According to Foster and Bochner (2008), stating the researcher's experience provides a fundamental understanding of the interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Tentatively, there exists a need for the researcher to explain their experiences with respect to the problem of racism in SA.

As a Teaching Assistant, it was expected that I view the reflections (captured as journal entries) of students, and to engage them. During this period, I was able to quickly identify the way by which students made meaning of CRT (Daher et al., 2017). As a former student, yet now an outsider, I could see myself in how students responded to CRT. Other reflections shocked me because, regardless of the information and data that were presented to them, they persisted in displaying their white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) and refused to accept that they are racist. As I have completed the module already, I was prepared for what seemed to be an onslaught of resistance and denial. I was more sympathetic towards those white students who went through the same process of awakening that I did and accepted that the injustices of the past were real and that they continued to enjoy the fruits of white privilege. My learned experiences allowed me to support the learning journey of these students. They required much hand-holding, during some very volatile, and sometimes, very heated, discussions that ensued on the module discussion boards.

3.5   DATA ANALYSIS

3.5.1 Introduction

As a novice researcher, I adopted the approach whereby I utilised the suspension view of bracketing as part of my data analysis. As such, I followed the six steps proposed by Bliss (2016) when data are analysed during phenomenological research:

- I wrote and reflected on my own experiences, becoming aware of phenomenology as a research approach;
- I developed my research topic in its entirety considering all significant participant views;

- I orientated myself with regards to the research;
- I selected sources of data, selected participants, compiled their data and then reduced the data;
- I sought feedback and analysed this feedback to find points of significance from the respective study; and
- I finally reported my findings and discussions to be used for future studies.

The text data was then reduced analytically, and this was achieved through the production of abstracts, coding, and summaries in the form of memoing (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Memos informed the researcher of the progress with regards to the research. Also, a hybrid inductive coding process was used whereby after initial coding of data, the researcher revisited the codes to break them down. Every code has a relevance to the research themes, questions and concepts. Relationships between codes were then identified.

Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), specifically, *ATLAS.ti version 8*, was used to assist in coding. The reason this software was used is that it allowed me to 'play' with the data, helping develop an organising system and assisting with the exploration of the data (Hesse-Biber, 2010). After the identification of essential themes at the early stage of analysis, the thematic analysis will be used to put these themes together to facilitate the answering of the main research question. This means that during the initial phases of manual coding, essential themes about the topic were searched for. The process entailed firstly reading the reflections carefully and then re-reading the data. This facilitated the grouping of key themes on racism, the perspectives of the students, and how the research process has influenced their view of racism. A linear, step-by-step, reflexive process was used (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Reading the textual data is key to highlighting quotations, codes and themes, which were crucial in addressing the research questions.

3.5.2 Data analysis procedure

I analysed module reflections from 16 participants for qualitative content using the coding strategies adopted by Saldaña (2016). The research question guided me. To this end, the data were broadly classified into those who accepted the practicality of the CRT and those who rejected the practicality of the CRT. Further, I engaged in

coding, data cleaning, and the decoding of analytic processes in the process of analysing and interpreting qualitative data forms (Saldaña, 2016). The processes undertook concurrent and iterative research processes: the collection of data, transcription of collected data and lastly the analysis of data. Throughout the process, I utilised the procedures used by Saldaña (2016).

The analysis using *ATLAS.ti* version 8 first involved reading through the qualitative data and identifying quotations that were then used to generate open codes. The process of open coding includes evaluating the data several times, culminating in the researcher creating tentative labels for chunks of data (Khandkar, 2009). These labels summarise the trends or the patterns that the researcher can observe. These observations or patterns are not based on existing theory, but on what meanings that the researcher extracts from the data. Fundamentally, open coding using *ATLAS.ti* version 8 involved coding every piece of data in any possible way and this resulted in descriptions of many different possible concepts, most of which did not immediately fit in the emerging theories.

Tentatively, I created and utilised codes created inductively (data-driven) and deductively (theory-driven). The theory-driven codes related to CRT and nuances of race, white privilege, hegemony, digital technologies, and the module itself. The inductive, data-driven codes were created for the experiences and perceptions of the module learnings. I created a code list or a codebook of 234 codes, which were reduced to 160 codes, and nine relevant categories, which were, in turn, merged into fourteen codes and clustered into four categories. This was all done in *ATLAS.ti* version 8, with the assistance of a co-coder. According to Smit (2005), the software strives to inculcate transparency through the process of analysis. *ATLAST.ti* is regarded by Smit (2014) as a powerful workbench tool for the analysis of qualitative data.

The next step was to form networks. The networks play an essential role in merging various codes in a particular theme, and as such, play a crucial role in sorting out the complicated coding that the researcher might have done as a result of the size or complexity of the data (Khandkar, 2009). Networks focus on linking appropriate codes using different relations; for example, terms such as 'expands,' 'explains,' 'contradicts,' and 'criticises' among others, are used to indicate the relationship between the

different codes. The networks help in displaying and even explaining the conceptual relationships, which are the basis of any qualitative data analysis. Coding serves as the basis for developing analysis. I clustered codes into categories. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I delve into the data based on the respective categories and relevant theories highlighted in the literature review.

3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF RESEARCH

As qualitative research cannot be held to the standard measures of consistency and validity that reside in quantitative research, qualitative research tends to produce issues of trustworthiness whenever it is implored. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describes "trustworthiness" as including virtues and concepts of impartiality and authenticity (ontological, tactical, catalytic, and educational). It includes strategies such as elimination of researcher bias, triangulation of data sources and explanations of previously used data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With regards to the elimination of researcher bias, I had to bracket myself out in order to grasp and fathom out the views of the participants. This was done to ensure that the quality of the narrative strongly aligned to establish trustworthiness as well as ascertain the credibility of the study (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). This is, however, difficult to achieve, since there would always be elements of bias whenever qualitative research is involved. The study also allowed for some level of transferability, where the study could be applied to another context. This was done by clearly defining the context of the research (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005).

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Foster and Bochner (2008), ethical considerations are crucial in any research, and the principal aim of ethical issue consideration is to ensure the safety of the participants. To comply with the requirements of ethical research, the researcher's access to the module was revoked by the module lecturer. All the students gave consent at the commencement of the module. As this study was an unobtrusive observation, no additional burden was placed on the students. The lecturer provided the researcher with the anonymised texts of all the reflections of the white students. The text showcased the development of the underlying experiences.

4 CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the results of the data analysis conducted on the module reflections are presented. The procedures adopted for the analysis of the data included reading through the data and becoming familiar with the data, applying open coding to identify meanings within the text relevant to the research question, and marking meanings and describing them. Presented in italic typeset are verbatim quoted participant words; language use has not been corrected. Thematic and content analysis, according to Sandler et al. (2018), involves the examination of interview and textual data, extracting patterns and trends in the data, and using these to form themes. This analysis was carried out by identifying themes and sub-themes relevant to the research question.

From the data analysis, four emerging themes have been elicited with interpretations of some of these concerning CRT and nuances of race, white privilege, hegemony, digital technologies, and the impact of the module itself. Data collected from the students was examined through the lenses of CRT and contextualised to answer the main research questions in the study. The main themes identified are:

- Confronting / Challenging Contemporary Tenets of CRT
- How the Module Changed Thinking about Racism was Enabled
- Digital Technologies and Ubiquity of Prejudice
- Profoundly Altered Learning / Belief System / Paradigm Shift

Table 1 provides a brief summary of each theme (category) with a number of sub-themes (codes) identified under each theme. Each theme and sub-theme will be analysed in the following sections. Also, indicated under each sub-theme is the split between those reflections that "Accept CRT" or "Reject CRT" as part of the total number of instances within a specific subtheme (as CRT specifically targets white people who are the beneficiaries of oppression, initially reflections were classified as either "Accept CRT" or "Reject CRT").

Table 1 - Table of themes

THEMES (Categories)	SUBTHEMES (Codes)

Theme 1 – Confronting / Challenging Contemporary Tenets of CRT	a. CRT Provides Context for Understanding Racism and Discrimination (22)
	    i. Accept CRT (22)
	    ii. Reject CRT (0)
	b. Racism: Confronting and Learning (74)
	    i. Accept CRT (27)
	    ii. Reject CRT (47)
	c. Cognisance of Contemporary Hegemony (24)
	    i. Accept CRT (19)
	    ii. Reject CRT (5)
	d. White Privilege: Deconstructing and Challenging (57)
	    i. Accept CRT (27)
	    ii. Reject CRT (30)

Theme 2 – How the Module Changed Thinking about Racism was Enabled	a. Initial Learnings about Racism (6)
	    i. Accept CRT (6)
	    ii. Reject CRT (0)
	b. Module Content Forced me to Confront Issues of Racism (50)
	    i. Accept CRT (14)
	    ii. Reject CRT (36)
	c. Module Content Causes me to Feel Discomfort (13)
	    i. Accept CRT (4)
	    ii. Reject CRT (9)
	d. Impact of Module Discussions and Reflections (41)
	    i. Accept CRT (19)
	    ii. Reject CRT (22)

Theme 3 – Digital Technologies and Ubiquity of Prejudice	a. Racism Perpetuated on Social Media (9)
	    i. Accept CRT (7)
	    ii. Reject CRT (2)

	b. Consciousness of Racism in Social Media (7)
	i. Accept CRT (2)
	ii. Reject CRT (5)
	c. Social Media Manifested Hegemony: Hate Speech (32)
	i. Accept CRT (12)
	ii. Reject CRT (20)
Theme 4 – Profoundly Altered Learning / Belief System / Paradigm Shift	a. Life-changing Learning Concerning Intersectionality (47)
	i. Accept CRT (12)
	ii. Reject CRT (35)
	b. Our Belief Systems are Founded in our Upbringing (8)
	i. Accept CRT (4)
	ii. Reject CRT (4)
	c. Awareness of Institutionalised Workplace Racism (10)
	i. Accept CRT (1)
	ii. Reject CRT (9)
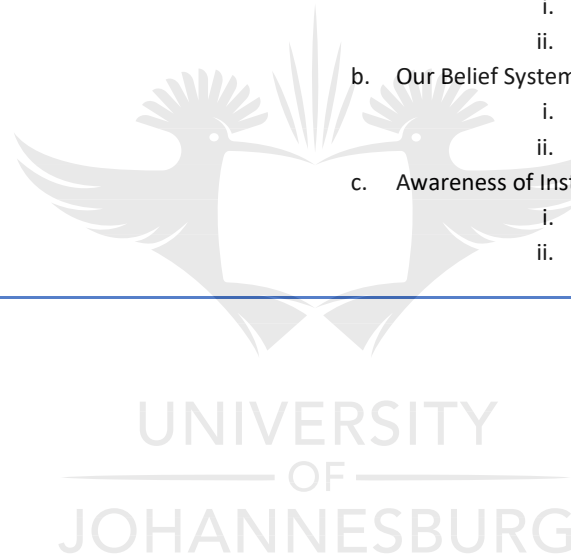
4.2   DISCUSSION OF THEMES

The first theme to be examined in this section is the theme of Confronting / Challenging Contemporary Tenets of CRT, which focuses on the applicability and the relevance of CRT in the explaining of the challenges of race and racism in SA. The second theme focuses on how the module changed thinking about racism, and it examines how the understanding of CRT and seeing racism from a different perspective influenced the students' view of racism in SA. The next theme is about digital technologies and the ubiquity of prejudice, and this will focus on racism on social media. Furthermore, the final theme would examine whether or not the belief systems of the students had been changed by the experience of the model and learning about racism.

4.2.1   Confronting / Challenging contemporary tenets of CRT

Race and racism are at the centre of the CRT critique, especially when explaining social issues, and the relationships within the modern society. As already demonstrated in this study, PoC have been on the receiving end of most injustices, and white people often believe that they are not racist. The denial of the existence of white privilege by some white students reveals that they need to learn more about racism, and perhaps they will be able to understand how consciously and subconsciously they perpetuate racism.

4.2.1.1   *CRT provides context for understanding racism and discrimination*

Some students stated that learning about CRT and other concepts of race played an important role in enabling their understanding of the problem of racism in society. The learning experience put the learners in a better position to challenge their own thinking and beliefs about race and racism in society. Some students, for example, acknowledged that white people are guilty of racism, but still believe they are not racist, simply because they have normalised racism, and that they believe that behaving in a certain way is completely normal, even if it offends other people. An example of the normalisation of racism is illustrated in D4:11(8501:9080)[1] reflection:

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[1] D4 refers to the fourth selected reflection (as D4 in the Atlas.ti version 8 program), 4:11 refers to code 11 in the fourth reflection, (8501:9080) these numerals refer to the character counts of the verbatim quotations. This pattern is followed throughout the dissertation.

"In reading about Critical Race Theory, these users believe that racism is a normal phenomenon among humans who naturally gravitate to their "own kind" and believed that they are not racist. The type of words that they use are common-place - such as savages and animals - and they seem to believe there is nothing wrong with using them to describe people, and more specifically people of colour. This again falls into the arena of casual racism, which I wrote about in my previous journal entry, although some of the comments do fall firmly in the area of full-on, no-holds-barred racism!"

The student wonders how inequality has become the norm around the globe, shaping itself in 'favouring' whiteness. The CRT theory in this case, is primarily supported in the sense that the data shows white privilege almost in every life context, white supremacy attitudes in some contexts, especially where white parents tell their white children that they are superior to any black person, or any other race for that matter.

CRT attempts to explain the source of racism, and what it constitutes, and the theory argues that racism tends to emerge from not just the social and the economic differences, but also from the legal differences that are created by white people to put themselves in an elite and robust position. This is aimed at maintaining their interests in many spheres of life. The current research investigated the issue of race with students as the main participants, and part of the aim of the current research was to investigate and determine whether or not the students accepted the CRT in terms of how it explains racism and its source. This is why one of the broad classifications of the findings in this study was those who Accept CRT and those who Reject CRT.

Some students indicated that through the module, their belief system had changed significantly because they have understood the issue of racism from a different perspective, especially after learning about the theory. The students also indicated their willingness and their action to transfer whatever they have learned thus far to their learning ecosystems.

4.2.1.2 Racism: Confronting and learning

The students indicated that going through this learning experience and being exposed to CRT challenged their thinking. Some of the students indicated that after the learning experience and exposure to CRT, they became more aware of the possible biases about their beliefs and started self-critiquing in an attempt to remain objective and thus understand what other people feel and go through. The discussions of white fragility,

white privilege and CRT clarified why there is need to use theories such as CRT, not just for critiquing the world, but also for changing some if not most of the problematic views that lead to oppression of other people. D1:5 (8501:9080) reflects as follows:

"On the question of whites being racist, I have tussled with this notion for the last couple of days - oscillating between agreeing with it and disagreeing with it. On the one hand, I am insulted to be told that I am racist purely on the basis of my skin colour (again, supreme irony?) but on the other hand, I think that it's a totally rational argument to make - especially when we remember that whites have never (let me say that again, NEVER) been persecuted on the basis of their skin colour. We have always purported to be the superior race, and why."

4.2.1.3   *Cognisance of contemporary hegemony*

Spanierman and Smith (2017) emphasise that the world needs to confront white hegemony. The authors denote the existence of a reduced number of white allies; albeit the existence of progress. As such, there exists a moral need for the confrontation of colour-blind racial ideologies. Powell (1996) argued that white hegemony is a common phenomenon, and that it is socially enacted and that institutions such as schools tend to obscure the existence of white hegemony. This is mainly because society is racially and hierarchically ordered. Powell further argues for a need for multicultural education in many parts of the world, and this is aimed at inculcating the importance of white cultural identity and its underlying values. Dua and Lawrence (2000) reiterate the existence of white hegemony, and the subsequent institutionalisation of the same; something that has adversely affected people of other races since they find themselves discriminated racially not just by individuals, but by institutions as well. D7:3 (1133:1711) reflects as follows:

"In general people do not believe that we can eliminate hegemony but if each one of us can just start in our ecosystem to have an attitude of 'races without faces' celebrating the skills and abilities of each individual, change will become evident. If we really want to have sustainable change, it is important for each one of us to acknowledge the presence of for example cultural hegemony. Task 1 assist me to name some of the issues in my ecosystem – this will assist in finding solutions that will ensure sustainable change. I also realised that this will not happen overnight."

It was also apparent that even though it is not always every white person's fault, white privilege exists, and all white people enjoy it. Some students acknowledged this fact

but indicated that people, especially white people, may become discriminatory, often unconsciously because of what they have grown to understand as normal. D8:17 (12584:13160) reflects as follows:

> *"I guess I wanted to see the change in me evident in all other people out there, but it doesn't work like that. I am more adamant than ever to promote social justice at home and at work and hopefully the small fish I am, will eventually make a difference. I've learned that if we want to dismantle white hegemony, we need to have real, honest and painful conversations about it."*

4.2.1.4   White privilege: Deconstructing and challenging

Capper (2015) has argued that the normalisation of racism has led to a situation where whiteness is seen as property that is fervently protected by its beneficiaries. White people generally enjoy the benefit of the doubt that most other races do not, and the fact that white people have benefited from racism for a long time, has made them normalise enjoying some advantages that other people do not enjoy. The students explain why the few advantages such as people quickly and easily assuming that all white people work hard, are more honest, or a more intelligent do not exempt white people from problems that everyone else goes through. For example, white people also go through problems of money, relationships, depression and other difficulties. The students who rejected CRT argued that white supremacy could exist, but it does not give white people significant advantages over PoC. The students in this section also believed that racism goes both ways and that it is not only white people that can be or are racist; black people are sometimes racist as well. D2:23 (9052:9618) reflects as follows:

> *"I am white and I have often thought I am not a racist. I'd like to think I am not, but … I have been thinking and reading about White Privilege. Being white, I have often wondered what this is about. We don't have anything more than people of colour. However, …Being white allows for certain advantages."*

Some student reflections, however, argued that white privilege does not exist. They acknowledged the existence of some advantages for white people but also reiterated that they face challenges and problems just like any other person. Half of the students accepted CRT, and half of them rejected it. While CRT has been criticised for being controversial, it also can point out the issues within society that perpetuate racism.

The acceptance of CRT was not immediate, as it was a process of learning and accepting. The emotional changes within the journey started with disbelief and discomfort for many, as it seemed unfathomable that such a thing would exist and they would not know about it, however, after learning about the different forms of inequalities including the existence of digital inequality, many re-evaluated their ideas on what they think of racism. D11:1 (58:1339) reflects as follows:

> *"I learned that my eyes and ears have been shut all my life. I have always avoided race and gender talks because I feel 'it isn't my business' or maybe 'I get bored of hearing the same things' but I now realise I wasn't listening and wasn't understanding the meaning behind the words and discussions. I do feel Dr. Robin DiAngelo is speaking TO me, not at me. Watching her videos, what she says makes sense, it makes me understand why I have avoided engaging or participating and acknowledge saying some of the things she says 'we' say. Yes, I am white and I am a female. I do understand and accept I am privileged. I always used to think "but my parents had to work from the bottom up and nothing was given to them, therefore how can I or them be privileged if we had to work hard for what we have and can afford etc." I am seeing now this all goes way beyond that, because if I or my parents were not white, they wouldn't have even been given the opportunity to work and build their way up."*

D11 continues to reflect in D11:15 (20203:20499) as:

> *"I believe there is privilege, but I still do not think there is only white privilege. Carrying out my interviews with the 4 females of colour, they expressed that they were all privileged, to attend the school they did, attend varsity or gain a higher education and feel they are also privileged."*

Students who accepted CRT did so with an open mind to continue learning and continue educating others on the issue. It is also noteworthy that most who accepted CRT had socialist thinking. It would be crucial to try to understand in future if political opinions influence how people view inequality issues like racism and sexism. However, this acceptance was not easy as well because it took a lot of self-introspection and acceptance that every human being is flawed and that based on the colour of their skin alone, it can sometimes determine the number of privileges that will be due to them in society. D1:23 (9052:9618) reflects as follows:

> *"I was born white not of my own accord, but white nonetheless. As a result, I benefit from white privilege daily and this undue enrichment needs to acknowledged and*

actively opposed. Unconscious bias may not be as unconscious as we'd (conveniently) like to believe. I think that with the amount of resources that are out there about racism, unconscious bias is more about ignorance than it is about blameless and 'unknown' prejudice."

4.2.2 How the module changed thinking about racism was enabled

As has been seen throughout the literature (Connor et al., 2016; Delgado et al., 2017; Solorzano, 2019), CRT is a relevant theory to utilise in teaching higher education about racism and racist tendencies related to whiteness, white privilege, and other issues. From the results of the study, it is evident that CRT has contributed significantly to the learning process of the individuals who participated in the module. Whether or not the students accepted CRT, it can be realised that there were numerous moments of learning from the self-reported reflections of the students. Many of the students, as seen, had never heard about or experienced terms like hegemony and being white, cannot experience racism, or thought that in many ways, racism percolates into everyday life all around them.

The units learned each week were a process and a journey for all the students, especially those who accepted CRT. During the early units, the extent of learning that came out was based on emotional reactions to learning about racism and racist behaviour in white people. A wide range of reactions was realised from the start where some expressed discomfort, disbelief, guilt, anger, resentment, rejection, fear, and many others. The display of a wide range of emotions is consistent with previous research conducted that showed that many white people upon learning about white privilege would have a myriad of reactions. The results of the study on emotions are also consistent with other studies that indicate that most white people are not aware of white privilege or their racist behaviour (Sue, 2010).

In a country like SA, where racial issues have been part of the journey for the nation, it seems almost unbelievable that most white people would not be aware of white privilege and racial issues. However, it is vital to conclude that using CRT as a form of framework to impart knowledge in the education system can be useful. The results indicate that the extent of knowledge and learning about racism using CRT was high and that the framework should be recommended for adoption in all higher education institutions. Even for students who ended up rejecting CRT, the reflections indicate

clear thought and in-depth introspection of how this new knowledge is impacting their (students) experiences and knowledge. Many compared their previous situations when they were growing up, their current workplace situations, and the racist aspects they have observed after they learned about white privilege.

One clear thing was their lack of knowledge and information regarding white privilege and outright racism silence. The lack of information about racism right from their formative years, as well as getting information that encouraged racist behaviours contributed to this lack of awareness. Many did not realise over the years how their actions were judged differently, how their access to opportunities was different compared to other people with similar or more experience but of different races. For most of the students in this module, no one had ever challenged their ideas and ideologies of what they knew about racism. This aspect is consistent with the tenets of CRT that mention counter-storytelling. PoC not speaking out and sharing their experiences within the education system are perpetuating silence on the issue of racism and allow subtle and obvious racial injustices and systemic inequalities to flourish. Examples provided by students in their reflections (even by those who rejected CRT) clearly show how the system creates a perpetual and continued vicious cycle that can make even the most learned and experienced PoC doubt their actions, which seeps into the society.

The expansion of CRT to create awareness in the education system would be a highly crucial step towards ensuring that at least white students are aware of white privilege. The choice to accept or reject CRT would be a personal choice made by each individual, but they would have the knowledge, tools, and power to deconstruct white racist ideologies at their hands. Starting the conversation and allowing people to know, think, and reflect on their actions is the first step to increasing diversity, reducing inequality, and promoting a society of acceptance and equal opportunities in all areas.

4.2.2.1   *Module content causes me to feel discomfort*

The students reiterated that their experiences with the unit opened their minds to enable them to critique their own views about race and racism. D2:26 (11073:11268) reflects as follows:

"I have had this discomfort in my stomach since the start of this module. And to be honest, I am not sure what colour I want to be. White means being the oppressor and colour means being oppressed."

D6:3 (1251:1313) reflects as follows:

"I do not think that I am emotionally prepared for this module."

With the CRT experience, the students indicated that they were now ready to question their own viewpoints, since some acts of racism are not premeditated, and are as a result of the normalisation of discrimination, belief systems and how people were raised. D6:28 (19546:20359) reflects as follows:

"This module has been uncomfortable, for many reasons, some personal, and the rest because of the topic of learning. It is one thing to add to an expanding pool of knowledge, or learn a new skill, it is a whole other ball game to question your reality and your point of view - rather to have it questioned. A questioning that you did not invite nor plan. In some ways I feel that this module has forced itself into my carefully constructed and protected frame of reference, yes, sure it has not all been bad, and I suppose I leave better for it. My anger however, stems partly from the uninvited nature of this module, and the forced change it insisted on bringing about. It is a blessing that this is the last module of coursework for me, I am not sure if I would have continued if this were my very first module."

As shown in the quote below, the students acknowledged that as much as there is still a lot to learn, they feel more confident dealing with issues of race and other issues around the victims and the perpetrators. D3:17 (13605:13875) reflects as follows:

"At the end of this module, I feel more aware of what is happening around me. I feel more confident about engaging with people around issues of racism and sexism. There is a lot still to learn, but I feel I have a solid foundational understanding from which to grow."

4.2.2.2   *Impact of module discussions and reflections*

As thus far demonstrated from the data, some students accepted the tenets of CRT, while others rejected them. Those who accepted CRT believed that there is racism and white privilege in society, while those who rejected CRT indicated that even though racial discrimination exists, white privilege does not. This is because they do not believe that white people have any advantages over other races. The issues of

racism were even more difficult and complex to decipher for those who did not accept CRT. Some who rejected CRT did not wholly understand the tenets of CRT and what it attempts to explain. Most of these individuals were also being held back by issues that were not made clear in the reflections. Though, the discomfort that comes with discussing such issues is enough to make most people not want to delve into these issues. Defensiveness was also apparent in those who rejected CRT, with some claiming that while they experienced certain advantages within the system, they have had to work hard for their positions. Some even claimed how they feel angry about the issue but were not part of those who created racist ideologies. These defences and explanations are part of the common excuses offered by white people when they do not accept that they are beneficiaries of white privilege. Guilt is also part of the excuse provided by some, where they mention that their skin colour represents the oppressor. This only shows that they do not see themselves as racist or beneficiaries of racism in any way, but see "others" who created the problem with similar skin colour as the problem. D2:10 (3548:3863) reflects as follows:

"Racism clearly exists, and from the discussions, I have realised that there are still some people that ignore it. However, the feelings are still there. Some posts claim that they are in a racist free environment. Have they become so accustomed to status quo that they are not observant enough to notice the racism?"

Thus, it can be concluded that despite learning a lot from the modules, those who rejected CRT had trouble understanding and synthesising the theory. Due to the complexity of the issue as well as personal prejudices, the point of CRT was entirely missed by those who rejected the theory. The idea that white people benefit from racism was not well accepted as many also launched into defences of not choosing where they were born. Some of these reflections in those who rejected CRT also showed that they confused the idea of oppression and discrimination. D16:16 (11277:12062) reflects as follows:

"To come back to my reflection on this module I think what disturbed me the most about the online discussion with our guest speaker on racism, was the fact how she was treated because she entered a multiracial marriage. I am a fully believer in equality. In my learning ecosystem there are many mixed marriages, especially between black females and people from a white internationally identity. It is very normal and people are used to it. I think staying in the Eastern Cape for four years now made me actually forget how hateful people can still be when they see mixed

marriages. We have many white friends who have adopted a black child and it is not unusual any more. These children are given a chance in a lifetime! To see how they develop and it is taken care of is amazing."

Even for those who rejected CRT in this course, it was realised that there is still room for learning and growth, and many are willing to take it. Therefore, current tendencies towards CRT are not indicators of the future acceptance of the theory. This could be explained through deductive reasoning that for most of the students, this was their first-time experience about hearing and confronting the issue of racism. Given that the time for the course was short, time could allow better reflections and understanding of the problem. However, this is not guaranteed as some might not change their thinking even with more time.

4.2.3   Digital technologies and ubiquity of prejudice

The media, especially social media, has created an alternate world, the digital world. In this digital world, the ugly nature of racism manifests itself more clearly than it does in real life. One of the students insisted that the level of hatred, online racial hatred was too much, and believed it does not reflect the real world.

The student did not believe that such level of hatred exists in the real world, but as Cleland (2013) argues, social media has introduced new racism scopes. To this end, individuals are unable to perpetuate hate in the public domain for fear of legal action or instant retaliation. Racism flourishes online, as Cleland (2013) explains, and white football fans have often rejected multiculturalism and Islam using online platforms. This has mainly been through the presentation of national belonging and whiteness and often, outright resistance and hostility towards people of other cultures. This is consistent with what the student above tries to explain about high levels of online racial hatred. The student acknowledges that most of the hate perpetuated online can hardly be done in the real world, and this is why the student believes that what happens online in terms of racial relations has little to do with what is happening in real life.

4.2.3.1   Racism perpetuated on social media

Social media is largely unsupervised, and perhaps this is why some of the worst forms of racism and hate speech are perpetuated on social media. As Gallistl and Nimrod (2020) reported, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others are

avenues where most people interact today. By 2017, there were approximately 3.9 billion Internet users in the world (Gallistl & Nimrod, 2020). In other words, about 50% of the world population had access to the internet. That number has increased significantly, with almost 60% of the world being on social media (Gallistl & Nimrod, 2020). Social media has, therefore become one of the avenues where racism is perpetuated, mainly because it is mostly unsupervised. The high number of online cases of racism and hatred shocked participants, as evidenced by the following reflection of D1:49 (13547:15374):

> *"I learnt the real meaning of racism and hate speech and understanding how severe it is and how often it is released into the world. (This was only my observation over a few days and I was disgusted with the results, I can only imagine after a few months and years.) It is almost as if people think the projectile vomiting of racism and hate speech online is ok and that no-one else will be affected. This has been a very disturbing topic to learn about and to see. As rule I avoid most social media sites as I do not have thick skin and I do not find judgment and comments people post result in any good discussions or of any valuable substance and most of the time they are misinformed and have egotistical opinions. In my opinion social media is a time waster and avoids contact with the people that are in front of you. As a result of my observation these few days, I realise how, in a site like Twitter is riddled with racist and sexist hate speech."*

4.2.3.2   Consciousness of racism in social media

Racism and hatred on social media, according to this student, is partly because the people perpetrating it are not intelligent enough to be listened to, but acknowledges the significance of this type of hate in a country that is supposed to have healed from the horrors of Apartheid. This is very evident in the reflection of D1:3 (905:1406):

> *"Reading the hateful posts on social media reaffirmed why I hate social media. It also reaffirmed to me that not everyone that is speaking their mind is intelligent, nor worthy of listening to. This seems counterintuitive, given the liberal approaches and ways of life that I've become accustomed to. Something that really stood out for me was when I was talking to my PoC friend about this task and him being genuinely worried about what I was doing (i.e. scouring the Internet for racism and hatred)."*

The students also argued that social media exacerbates the hate and the racism and that social media makes the situation look worse than it is, because very few people, if any, can say explicitly racist words in another person's face. Cleland (2013) believed

48

that even if social media has created a new dimension of racism, people are hardly able to be blatantly making racist remarks offline. D1:3 (1906:2195) continues to reflect as follows:

> *"This level of hatred simply doesn't exist in the real world. I opined in my essay about the divorcing of real life from social media (or digital) life, and I think that this is a more relevant conversation - and again, I wonder about the specific link to racism and sexism in this course."*

Various previous studies, such as Nyamnjoh (2010) and Rice (2018), among others, have investigated the role that the media, especially social media, plays in propagating racism and prejudice. The competing and often conflicting claims of what constitutes prejudice and racism, and the politics of culture and identity are some of the most influencing factors as far as understanding racism and the media is concerned. In other words, challenges such as xenophobia and racism have been associated with culture, identity and an array of socio-economic factors. As Rice (2018) pointed out, the politicisation of culture and identity has complicated the objective examination of the racism and prejudice problem in the media.

Different hierarchies and inequalities serve to fortify political, social citizenship and economic, across the different African countries. The media plays a central role in the production, contestation and enforcement of the inequalities and hierarchies. SA can pride herself with liberal democratic aspirations and/or pretensions. Tentatively, the media is expected to promote a sense of national citizenship. This should be done by reminding the audiences through all media platforms, including social media of the importance of national citizenship, and on the fact that prejudice, racism, and hate speech are counterproductive.

Studies such as Nyamnjoh (2010), however, have argued that the media, through its various platforms including social media, have put most of the emphasis on comprehensive, assimilationist as well as territorially bounded belonging, while at the same time, ignoring the few who fall through the cracks. One of the main reasons why these people 'fall through the cracks' is because of ethnicity, racism, and many other forms of socio-economic prejudice and discrimination. The inherent contradictions and closures within society have created platforms where some people, especially the PoC, are largely discriminated against. Nyamnjoh (2010) believes that countries such

as SA, even with a black majority, are marred by systematic and institutional racism, because the roots of Apartheid are still a reality in the country. This is despite the fact that the country has now put in place anti-discriminatory legislation. Social media, however, remains largely unregulated, just like in many parts of the world, and the hate speech and racism, as the quoted data indicates, is worse on these platforms. D1:3 (2612:3117) reflection further follows:

"I believe that through the assignment, I have seen the extremes of hatred, particularly in the digital context. I think that how hatred manifests itself digitally is very different to how it manifests in real life: most obviously, digital hatred allows for cowardice. An example of this would be calling someone the K-word: many if not most people would never do this in person, but more would be inclined to do it behind the mask of a pseudonym and an avatar and with the option of deleting the post."

Data demonstrates, as in the above quotes, that even though most white South Africans will most likely not act in a racist manner in real life; however, most of the same people would express racist sentiments on social media. Since social media is a free and somewhat anonymous space, and people tend to express their feeling on these avenues; hence the reason why racism and hate speech on social media is more overt than it is in real life. The review of previous literature in this study revealed that even though SA has made significant steps towards equality and non-discrimination, parents who were alive during Apartheid era have played a key role in teaching their children, who are mostly adults now, to be discriminatory and prejudicial towards PoC, and this is why the problem of racism is still an issue in SA.

4.2.3.3   *Social media manifested hegemony: Hate speech*

Most of the racist incidences today are covert, especially those that happen offline. In real life, people are afraid of the repercussions of blatant racism because of anti-discrimination laws, or simply the fear of antagonising the next person. D7:15 (5283:5440) reflects as follows:

"I was also astonished to see how much hate speech are still visible on social media despite various rules and regulations and moderators monitoring the sites."

People believe that they are anonymous on social media, and this is where hate speech is common. The proliferation of the problem is not just in the social sphere such as homes, schools, or the workplace; it has also merged into the online

community. Racism and sexism have contributed to aspects like hate speech that is openly declared online due to the privilege of anonymity. Online companies, primarily social networking sites, have failed to protect those targeted by online social evils. It is thought that courses like the one that is a subject of this study would be a solution to changing the way people see and change their belief system to accommodate different races, genders, and other differences that exist across the human race. The use of technology to mediate the course was a very significant and valid aspect that contributed to a deeper understanding of how the use of technology can be part of the environment that perpetuates the problem. This is evidenced by the following reflection of D1:2 (8625:8857):

> *"An example of this would be calling someone the K-word: many if not most people*
> *would never do this in person, but more would be inclined to do it behind the mask*
> *of a pseudonym and an avatar and with the option of deleting the post."*

4.2.4 Profoundly altered learning / Belief system / Paradigm shift

According to Adams et al. (2007), one of the biggest problems relating to colour blindness is a lack of awareness of white privilege by white students in institutions of higher education. As more emphasis is being placed on diversity, a significant element of this strategy is to focus on educating these students about such a privilege in order to challenge the notions of whiteness to bring about equality. Research points out that to properly implement the strategy of teaching about racism in higher education, especially to white students, it will be necessary to conduct research into the reactions of these students upon learning about the issues surrounding racism. Learning about these reactions, especially emotional reactions, would strengthen how educators deal with and explain the issues of racism to these students.

According to Parker and Villalpando (2007), upon learning about racism and white privilege, a colour-blind student could have strong emotional reactions. These reactions will have an impact on their lives as well as the learning process. Thus, it is crucial to respond to such students appropriately. Iyer et al. (2004) observed two sets of reactions from two different groups of white students who learned about white privilege in the classroom. Those that were aware of their racial privilege experienced moral outrage or guilt, while those who were not aware of racial privilege experienced distress and anger.

Ali (2012) has suggested further teaching of racial issues in educational institutions by expanding some of the tenets being explored, such as the inclusion of race-related responses to one's racial group besides understanding colour-blind attitudes. Spanierman and Soble (2010) have suggested using frameworks such as the social and psychological implications of racism to white students. By understanding the motivations for the reactions of white students, their acceptance of racism within society can be understood.

Some of the reactions displayed by white students after learning about racism, white privilege, colour blindness, whiteness, and other race-related issues include white empathy, white guilt, white fear, sadness, anger, and many others. In educational institutions where there is more diversity, cultural sensitivity, and racial awareness, more white students experience white guilt and empathy than in constructs where there is a lack of focus on multicultural awareness (Spanierman et al., 2008). On the other hand, Spanierman et al. (2008) has found that educational institutions with less focus on racial awareness and multicultural understanding have higher levels of white fear, which prevents continued actions to decrease racial prejudice. According to Cranmer and Harris (2015), one of the most effective ways suggested for dealing with notions of racism such as whiteness and white privilege is the interrogation of whiteness. A myriad of research has established that by embracing silence, the power of whiteness is sustained. Thus, questioning it, speaking out, and addressing the issue in educational institutions and other settings bring awareness and confront the fear emanating from lack of knowledge.

Many experts, researchers, and academics have suggested that both educators and learners have the resources and capabilities to deconstruct the notions of racism based on whiteness (Rossing, 2014). Some have even suggested that the black experience is a result of whiteness activity that is allowed to perpetuate daily and being met with a silent response or lack of any actions. Letting whiteness to continue as a form of power would make it more difficult for other students or educators to deal with it. Instead, both learners and educators are encouraged to view whiteness as a collection of actions that can be challenged and changed through findings of new forms of counteractions (Yancey, 2009). Some of the approaches used to challenge

whiteness could be an enquiry that uses the power of asking questions and demanding justifications to specific actions that are deemed wrong within the society.

According to Thurber et al. (2019), using interrogation to question the notions of whiteness can cause a disturbance to the pervasive attention that is naturally given to whiteness by white people. Since whiteness is identified by how people label themselves, racial privilege seems to be high on the label list of many whites who consider themselves socially privileged. However, this social privilege is not acquired naturally and is thus forced upon marginalised groups within the society (Solorzano, 2019).

While the interrogation approach has received much support, it has also received criticisms because of the various reactions it might evoke among white students (McGee & Stovall, 2015). It has also been noted that students of colour using the interrogation approach could fail to distinguish between being white and whiteness as a tenet of racism. Therefore, in order to question and interrogate this behaviour, it is essential to do it in a well-defined manner, which consists of creating awareness, allowing personal reflection, and then listening and understanding the reactions that will inform the acceptance or lack of acceptance of the racial injustices that exist. Mediating evolving emotions is critical because it helps to show that what is being taught is pedagogy and learning, as well as a conversation on real issues affecting people within the society. One of the frameworks that could be used to educate South Africans is CRT, as applied in this study.

CRT, as a framework for teaching about racial issues in educational institutions, has been hailed as well as criticised. Patton et al. (2007) has recommended that CRT should be used daily within the education system in order to teach about racial issues and gather different perspectives. By using CRT, there is a higher chance of increasing knowledge and awareness of how racial injustices perpetuate inequality. Analysing and reflecting on the impact of CRT and how it continues to change racial awareness – through aspects such as analysing acceptance of the theory and change in beliefs of students – can have a significant impact on eliminating racial challenges and promoting equality and diversity. Further discussions on the impact of CRT in this study are discussed in the subsequent areas.

4.2.4.1 Life-changing learning concerning intersectionality

In some contexts, individuals have become habituated to racism and at times, fail to recognise it in some emergent forms. The CRT, for example, explains that racism is primarily viewed as a natural process today. A student who did not believe that CRT captures the racism situation in the world, acknowledged that racism is ubiquitous, yet some people still want to act like it does not exist. This is captured in the excerpt from the reflection of D2:10 (3548:3863):

> *"Racism clearly exists, and from the discussions, I have realised that there are still some people that ignore it. However, the feelings are still there. Some posts claim that they are in a racist free environment. Have they become so accustomed to status quo that they are not observant enough to notice the racism?"*

The student, however, does not believe that CRT holds, or is a relevant theory in explaining the issue of racism. The student believes that there should be no minority versus majority because once this comes up, it would be one race against the other. Whoever thinks about the notion of minority versus majority is racist according to the reflection of D2:21 (8227:8307):

> *"The moment we think a specific race is right and another is wrong, we are racist."*

The students within the following category did not acknowledge the existence of white privilege because, in their opinion, white people do not have it easier compared to PoC, apart from a few minor things that do not make any economic or social impact. D2:23 (9052:9618) reflects as follows:

> *"I am white and I have often thought I am not a racist. I'd like to think I am not, but … I have been thinking and reading about White Privilege. Being white, I have often wondered what this is about. We don't have anything more than people of colour. However, …Being white allows for certain advantages. A deputy principal from Jeppe High School spoke about white privilege. He said: plasters are designed for the colour of a white skin. Hotels give free shampoo for white hair. Dolls are mostly white, superheroes in movies are mostly white. And many more examples."*

4.2.4.2 Our belief systems are founded in our upbringing

The findings further demonstrate that racism is inherited, and younger whites, mostly aged below the age of 35, might have not actively participated in the inhumane practice of Apartheid, they have grown to understand that they are better than other PoC,

especially black people. Dua and Lawrence (2000) explain that children often inherit the views of those who raise them, who in most cases are parents. This means that a parent with racist views is likely to influence their children to have similar views. This is reiterated by Cleland (2013). The findings in the study indicated that some parents blatantly exposed their children to racist behaviour. As evidenced in the data, and particularly in the quote below, white parents have taught their children to be racist, by telling them that they are superior and that black people are savages. D5:9 (12213:13109) reflects as follows:

> *"In 2005, I entered UJ as a first year student. My parents wanted me to go to RAU, since Wits was 'way too black', and UP was too far. I grew up in an enclave of suburbia whiteness and Afrikaansness. There were maybe 2 black kids in my high school, who were completely ostracised - the rest were white and Afrikaans. My father was extremely conservative - his religious views were extreme, as he subscribed to the Israel Visie, which saw Afrikaners as one of the lost tribes of Israel, and black people as 'animals'. The K-word was used daily, and I was not allowed to have black friends (not that that was possible in my enclave anyway). Even as a young person, I was confused by my dad's racism, and while occasionally I agreed with him (as we do when we are young, impressionable and unaware of the world out there), I usually challenged him about it, and it resulted in a strained relationship."*

4.2.4.3   *Awareness of institutionalised workplace racism*

Racism at the workplace also appears to go beyond personal or individual prejudice to a systematic form of discrimination and racial profiling. Franchi (2003) investigated racism at the workplace in SA and found out that the issue of race continues to occupy the workplace when it is looked at through emotional, as well as the cognitive, lens. Franchi (2003) argued that white South Africans have altered race conversations making it more implicit and subtle. The above has been attained by generally changing the ascribed 'language'.

D2:3 (702:897) reflects as follows:

> *"I am seeing the racism. Although we (and I am including myself in it), pretend that it does not exist, it does. Considering my workplace, it definitely exists. It is just shown in different ways."*

D16:7 (3433:4281) reflects as follows:

"In most of the workshops that I attend we as whites are the minority but we are really respected by our other colleagues. Many of our colleagues speak Xhosa. In the beginning they tend to talk their home language but after we have made them aware that we would like to know what they are talking about, they switch over to English as soon as we are in their presence. I am trying to learn the language and as soon as I try to talk to them, you can see how they appreciate it. Some of them are trying to learn Afrikaans! This just mean that they are trying to connect with us. My one Xhosa colleague was furious with me, since she greeted me in Afrikaans, but I do not make the effort to learn the basic Xhosa words to greet her back! From there on I made an effort to learn how to greet in Xhosa and she totally changed her attitude towards me."

The quotes below describe a situation where the suggestions of a black employee were dismissed by a white manager, only to accept the same suggestions from a white employee. The white manager dismissed more than fifteen years of experience of the black employee, by claiming without a speck of reason, logic or evidence, that she does not know how to provide feedback. This implicitly means that the employee does not have the expertise to contribute value to the conversation at that time. D3:14 (11042:11672) reflects as follows:

"Essentially, this (white male) vendor refused to listen to feedback from my colleague (but accepted the exact same feedback when it was given to him by our HR Exec (white female). We arranged a meeting to resolve some issues we had been experiencing in our interactions with him. During that meeting he basically blamed all the problems on my colleague, dismissing her 15+ years of OD expertise and telling her that she doesn't know how to give feedback - essentially implying that she doesn't have the expertise to add value to a conversation around the coaching module he facilitated for us. I couldn't believe what I was witnessing!"

To offer a solution to conscious and subconscious racism, students indicated that children learn to be racist from their parents and schools. Powell (1996) believed that society is racially and hierarchically ordered, and to address this problem, young people must be taught by society (schools, parents, neighbours, and more) about the need to treat others equally, since racists develop this behaviour by observing others in school and at home.

As shown in the above excerpt, the inability of the white person in that context to see past their prejudices is a demonstration of how difficult it has been for white people to

come to terms with the fact that people of colour can do their jobs as well. The white male refuses to acknowledge the worker's idea despite her experience and race. This is particularly evident when he accepts the exact same idea coming from another white person. The impression created here, therefore, is that even when he knows for a fact that the idea or the proposal by a person of colour is acceptable and informed, his construction of race, and especially where black people are concerned, should not be challenged; even by the facts.

4.3   SUMMARY

The laws in many countries, especially the predominantly white countries, are biased against PoC, and studies such as Cleland (2013) argue that the legal institutions also support this type of bias. The themes discussed in this chapter has shown consistency with most of the reviewed literature. From the findings, it is evident that racism is embedded in the fabric of societies, and has seeped into institutions. The students also insinuated that racism has developed and changed over different times, and this is consistent with Cole (2017) who argue that racism has evolved in the past few decades. The findings also indicate that racism in SA and elsewhere in the world has been ascribed some form or degree of rationality that was sufficient to allow it to continue. This is a demonstration that the students accepted the relevance of CRT since most of these findings are largely constituents of CRT. Just like the student reflections have indicated, racism goes beyond just bigotry and individual prejudice since it is a systematic feature of the social fabric of society. This was perhaps the reason why many cases of racial inequality were misrecognised not as by-products of systems of racial domination, but as natural processes. At the same time, some students did not believe that white privilege exists, and if it does, it is not significant enough to be referred to as a privilege. They argue that being white does not make it easier for them. However, an array of studies such as Cole (2017) and Gabbidon and Greene (2019) have argued that white privilege is a very significant factor that can determine the social or economic success or failure of an individual.

5 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter firstly contains a summary of the study. Thereafter, the conclusory findings of the research are presented, followed by the implication of the research. The chapter also offers recommendations based on the findings emanating from the research study, and the chapter concludes with some potential future research opportunities based on some of the aspects that have not been covered in this study.

5.2 SUMMARY

The research focused on understanding how an online mediated class that taught students about racism through CRT shaped their knowledge, thoughts, and actions by looking at their reflections. After clarifying the precise aim of the study in Chapter 1, the research highlights the extent of the problem of racism in SA. It reiterates that this problem has been exacerbated by discriminatory legislation, especially the ones enacted during Apartheid. Racism is still a problem even after the end of oppressive Apartheid years, and PoC, especially black people, are still highly disadvantaged. Chapter 2 critically examined previous studies on racism, with particular emphasis being placed on CRT, racism in the South African and global contexts, and the concept of whiteness and white supremacy. The chapter also acknowledges the role played by the media in perpetuating racism. The media shapes the people's belief system; exposure to CRT through media and technology will shape the attitude of the people. The biasness of the media has, in some instances led to the creation of content that could promote and propagate racial discrimination. The media and technology remain the most significant sources and shapers of personal beliefs and attitudes. This sentiment is applicable where media and technology create an enabling environment by providing a platform with a broad audience outreach. Exposure to privilege can result in the majority of people reframing their experiences relative to those of the majority group. The review of literature established that sometimes the media might decide to be biased, especially by using the various instruments to create content that could promote and propagate racial discrimination. The media can play a vital role in shaping how people think about a particular group of people by merely portraying them in a certain way.

Chapter 3 highlighted the data collection process, where a qualitative research paradigm is used. The research adopted a phenomenological research design. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data with the help of CAQDAS, *ATLAS.ti* version 8, which was used to assist in coding. The participants of the research were all white, and this is because it is assumed that white people do not experience racism, and are almost always the perpetrators of racism, not just in the South African society, but also in many societies around the world.

Chapter 4 focused on data analysis, and from the data analysis, four emerging themes were elicited with interpretations of some of these offered concerning CRT and nuances of race, white privilege, hegemony, digital technologies, and the impact of the module itself. More specifically, the first theme to be examined in the chapter was the theme of Confronting / Challenging Contemporary Tenets of CRT, and it focused on the applicability and the relevance of CRT in the explaining the challenges of race and racism in SA. The second theme focused on how the module changed thinking about racism, which also examined how understanding CRT and looking at racism from a different perspective influenced the students' view of racism in SA. The next theme was about digital technologies and the ubiquity of prejudice, and this focused on racism on social media. The final theme examined whether or not the belief systems of the students had been changed by the experience of the model and learning about racism. Data collected from the students was examined through the lenses of CRT and contextualised to answer the main research questions of the study. The chapter concluded that privileged individuals, white people, in this case, might respond to evidence of their group by emphasising personal hardship or the extent to which they consider themselves unworthy of that privilege. In the subsequent chapters, particularly the analysis chapter, it was revealed that some white people do not believe that CRT is a valid theory. They argue that their social and economic struggles are the same as anyone and that their whiteness has given them no advantage. There is also an opposing argument, where some of the students acknowledged the existence of white privilege and the advantages that white people enjoy. Most of these privileges, from some white people's perspectives, are small, yet very significant in other people's lives, for example, white people can always benefit from the benefit of the doubt in many parts of the world, including SA. The benefit of the doubt, in this case, is in terms

allowing a person to be presumed innocent, sane, intelligent, etc., until otherwise proven. This is hardly the case for black people and other PoC.

5.3   CONCLUSIONS

The study utilised and examined findings from both primary and secondary sources to investigate CRT and the extent to which white people understand racism, as well as how they act towards ensuring that intrinsic prejudices do not continue plaguing the South African society. The data obtained from the primary sources and the findings from the review of literature are reviewed in this subsection to facilitate the making of conclusions on the overarching questions posed in the current study.

To achieve this, a thematic examination of the data was conducted to facilitate the extent to which the current findings either contradict or are consistent with the findings of previous research. This, according to Anderson et al. (1991), helps to increase the validity and credibility of the research. In simpler terms, triangulation plays a vital role in facilitating the trustworthiness of the research. It also makes the findings of the research more believable. This is primarily because by defining the sample characteristics and detailing out the procedure in designing the research, the researcher gives the findings of the research the required context that can help in making comparisons to other previous studies that either used a similar or different research design (Anderson et al., 1991).

The question of whether or not people can unlearn racism, or whether or not people are racist in the first place has proved to be one of the most contentious issues facing the South African society, and indeed, many societies around the world. It has been demonstrated that some people are outrightly racist, while others try to be covert. There are still others who have no idea that they are racist, even if they engage in racist activities. The fundamental questions asked in this case are whether or not this inherent racism can be unlearned through education and modules such as the one being investigated for this study.

The white male, in particular, enjoys his whiteness, through white privilege, and expectedly, he tried to maintain his elite status quo, primarily through ensuring that he protects his position in politics and the labour market. The current study has demonstrated that laws in many countries, especially those that are predominantly

white, are biased against black people. This is because white people would like to maintain the status quo of elites versus subjects. Black advancement and the rise of the white female is also one of the emerging issues that have fuelled racism as the elitist white male feels that the status quo has been threatened (Kusz, 2020). In retrospect, the research denotes that racism was ingrained in society's fabric, and has subsequently seeped into workplaces, thus negatively affecting PoC. Racism in SA, as this study finds out, is ascribed some form or degree of rationality that was sufficient to allow it to continue, and this is the case in many other parts of the world, especially those plagued with racism and discrimination. The study has further demonstrated that racism goes beyond just bigotry and individual prejudice; it constitutes a systematic feature of the social fabric of society. This was perhaps the reason behind why many cases of racial inequality were misrecognised not as by-products of systems of racial domination, but as natural processes.

The first theme that was identified in this study was the theme of 'Confronting / Challenging Contemporary Tenets of CRT', which focuses on the critical discussions of the issue of racism in SA, especially from white people. The findings of primary research implied that, in general, white people perceive less racism as compared to black people, or any other persons of colour. The notion in the research also, is that all people can be prejudiced, but only those that have the power to act on their prejudices can be racist. This implies that black people and other people of colour in SA could be viewed as the 'powerless' in South African society. These people can be, and from many people's personal experiences, are most prejudiced towards white people on an individual basis. However, they are not racists at the institutional, structural, or systematic level.

Researchers such as Conradie (2015) have argued that for a person to be 'racist', they must possess two fundamental things, and these are:

1. The socio-economic power that can give them the power of making others do what they desire, often forcefully or under duress.
2. The ability to justify the abuse of that power using an ideology of biological supremacy.

Racism is mostly a socially structured power arrangement that has been in existence for too long, and the fact that it works only against blacks and in favour of the whites creates a situation where whites do not view racism as a real problem in the modern society.

Primary research findings on this theme ('Confronting / Challenging Contemporary Tenets of CRT'), have established that white people do not feel like they have any advantages over other races, mainly because they also face the same struggles as any other race in SA. They (white people) believe that their achievements and privileges are as a result of their hard work. Consistent with the findings of previous research, the review of previous literature, by researchers such as Conradie (2015), and Hayes and Hartlep (2013) revealed that white people always have, and still benefit from, institutional racism. This racism emanates from ideologies based on supremacism, exploitation and white privilege. CRT, as has been thus far established in this study, propounds that all white people are, therefore, racist, as they are the beneficiaries of racism. These studies also demonstrated the opposition to CRT and the theme of 'Confronting / Challenging Contemporary Tenets of CRT' by noting that some white people include experts, have criticised the CRT as being the work of PoC. This is, perhaps, why CRT is one of the most contested theories. As argued by Hayes and Hartlep (2013), this is also because the viewpoints of the privilege may be profoundly different from the viewpoints and perspectives of black people and other PoC. Other students who participated in this research study were strongly opposed to CRT, and this is largely consistent with the findings of Hayes and Hartlep (2013) and many other researchers whose work was examined in this study. These researchers argue that many white people find the tenets of CRT unacceptable. When this happens, it becomes challenging for such people to learn and understand racism in society.

An important aspect that should be noted from the many studies and data examined in this study is that there could be many types of racism, with a broad categorisation classifying them as individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism. Although previously not decisively defined in this study, Slater (2014) defines individual racism as the belief that one's race is superior over other races. It also involves going ahead to put in place behavioural enactments that can facilitate the

maintenance of these inferior and superior positions. This implies that any person, regardless of race, can be prejudicial, especially when they set themselves up as inherently superior people. It is noteworthy that such behaviour or belief hardly goes beyond an individual's own behaviour and/or beliefs. However, an extension of these behaviours to institutions and in the formation of social policies that have a direct impact on action can lead to cultural and institutional racism, which is more harmful.

The themes 'How the Module Changed Thinking about Racism was enabled' and 'Profoundly Altered Learning / Belief System / Paradigm Shift' were also discussed. Most of these discussions were found to be intertwined with other themes. The students indicated that CRT had contributed significantly to the learning process. The participants generally indicated that they experienced numerous moments of learning from the self-reported reflections. Some of the students acknowledged their ignorance about the issue of race, and what constituted racism. The units learned each week were a process, and a journey for all the students and the reactions of the students when they went through the learning process revealed how their perspectives about race had been impacted. There are white people who understand and acknowledge that society has given them advantages socially and economically and that black people and other PoC have been discriminated against. The discrimination could be intentional or unintentional, and in some cases, covert or overt. Researchers such as Slater (2014) argue that most of the racial hostilities in SA are hard to pin down, particularly from the legal perspective. This is largely because most of these racial hostilities are covert.

The theme of 'Digital Technologies and Ubiquity of Prejudice' partly examined the role played by technology and the media in the propagation of racism in South Africa. The primary research findings, for example, indicated that in SA, racism is much worse on social media than in real, offline life. The primary data indicates that social media is a representation of the rot in society; especially, as far as racial discrimination is concerned. The fact that social media is mainly unsupervised makes it a perfect platform for those wishing to express their racist tendencies. Researchers such as Parham-Payne (2014) have argued that social media had become one of the most important platforms for propagating racial prejudices and discrimination; this is partly because of the unsupervised nature of the content people can post on social media.

Although the students involved in the primary research believed that the level of hate and racism that exists on social media does not exist in real life; they believe that people say many things on social media platforms and racism is just one of them. They insist that whatever is being mentioned on social media more often than not in cannot be implemented in real life.

The analysis has revealed that both sides of the CRT divide contributed equally to the themes identified; for example, students from both sides acknowledged that there are many contentions as far as the issue of race is concerned. The students also understood that race is socially constructed since there are no genes that are inherently white or inherently black. The study also acknowledges the differences in the economic, social and legal dimensions as some of the critical sources of racism. Studies such as those of Thurber et al. (2019) have argued that when individuals are treated differently, unfairly, or unequally because of their race, the victims feel marginalised and develop their prejudices against their oppressors.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

The identity of a person and place in the world in which that person lives define that person's belief system. The way in which a person sees their role and themselves within the broader context of society is crucial when defining how society treats people. Research evidence exists that indicates that racism is deeply ingrained in society (Kumasi, 2011). Not only has the proliferation of racism occurring in the social sphere such as in homes, schools, or the workplace, it has also merged into the online sphere. Racism and sexism have contributed to other prejudicial practices such as hate speech, which is openly declared online due to the privilege of anonymity. Online companies, primarily social networking sites, have failed to protect those targeted by online social evils. A course such as the one being investigated for this study is thought to be a solution to changing the way people see and change their belief system to accommodate different races, genders, and other differences that exist across the human race. The use of technology to mediate the course was a very significant and valid aspect that helped to gain a deeper understanding of how the use of technology can contribute towards creating an enabling environment that perpetuates racism.

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For those students who rejected CRT, their personal beliefs were not changed because they either did not understand the tenets of CRT or were affected by personal bias and self-defence. However, as mentioned earlier, while these students rejected CRT, it does not mean that they did not learn anything from the course. The students are now able to observe and spot racism; they have, at the very least, also become aware of racism, white privilege, and how issues of racism precipitate into everyday life. This means that whatever they do or choose to do, their thinking is conscious of the problem to some degree that could inspire them to seek more information or be conscious of their actions at the very least.

It was difficult for students who rejected CRT to transfer what they have learned into their ecosystems. Some of them explained that they might consider the issue of implementing equality policies in future or will be more aware of racist issues but were not willing and ready to implement anything. The mere rejection of CRT suggests an ongoing battle with how new knowledge will shape their personal beliefs.

For those who accepted CRT, the change in personal beliefs and transfer of their learning into the ecosystems was not apparent, and at the very least for the few who tried to, the attempts to do so might have experienced significant challenges. Those who accept CRT are only at the beginning of their journey into learning about white privilege, racism, and the various inequalities that exist in society. Their thinking has been stimulated to become aware that they are recipients of racist behaviour and benefit in many ways in society just by being white, even though they did not choose to be born that way. This group shows promise in terms of changing their personal beliefs in a way that ultimately allows them to eliminate both evident and subtle forms of racism, which exist not just in action but even in thought. It is a long process becoming emancipated and aware and then practising what has been learned. Therefore, while successful in accepting CRT, the complete change in personal belief systems is still at the very early stages of awareness and is yet to grow.

With regards to the transfer of learning into their ecosystems, the group that accepted CRT showed significant promise. Some of those who attempted knowledge transfer had little information and/ or ill-timed their delivery, and were thus seriously challenged. For example, one student felt they had an awakening and chose to inform their family members about what they had learned in a rushed and chaotic

environment. This resulted in total misunderstanding and rebuffing of the idea, which does not help the course or the person trying to pass the message. However, one student was successful in observing racism at the workplace and informing the superiors on the issue, which led to coming up with a proper and systematic way of dealing with the issue.

This second example indicates the importance of being rational and following the established channels of dealing with such issues. It would be essential to point out that while the suggestions after reporting the issue were accepted, the systemic barriers still exist and could be a stumbling block for transferring what was learned about CRT into the real world. The student was lucky that the suggestions given were taken under advisement. In a workplace where the leaders or management are sexist, racist, or exhibiting unconscious bias, it is often a challenge to take significant action. Economic, social, and psychological issues are tied into the decisions made after pointing out instances of racism, especially at the workplace. While many companies have spoken out against racism and pointed out that they will not tolerate it (Delgado et al., 2017), subtle instances of racism are labelled as lacking evidence and are among the most perpetual that continue to affect many people (Cole, 2017).

This point suggests that despite CRT being useful, it nevertheless remains a limited concept. It is critical to implement CRT in the education system to create an awareness about racism amongst students and staff and thus ensure that consciousness seeps into their thoughts and actions regarding whiteness and white privilege. However, CRT is limited in assisting students in transferring this knowledge and implementing actions in their various ecosystems. To this end, challenges and barriers will be encountered at the family level, workplaces, and society. CRT is needed in the education system to inform and change the way of thinking, particularly of students. More tools and frameworks are needed to aid CRT in deconstructing racism, whiteness, and white privilege across the whole society. However, CRT remains a starting option within the educational institutions.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the use of CRT in higher learning institutions to help bring an awareness of racism in these institutions. The importance of CRT in imparting

knowledge and creating awareness has been fully displayed in this study by showcasing that all students were unaware of racism, and they all learned at the very least what it means and how to identify some aspects of racism in varying instances. Technology plays a significant role in the spread of racism, especially if it is unregulated; however, it can also be used as a tool for positive messaging and creating awareness. As seen in this study, technology-mediated learning was successful in imparting knowledge about racism. Therefore, technology should be used more positively by those who have learned about racism to counter the effects of racism.

Reactions on acceptance or rejection of CRT in classrooms are varied and come out in many forms. Educators need to understand how to mediate these interactions since racism is a sensitive and emotional topic. As seen throughout the reflections of the students, many students admitted that the journey was challenging and nearly gave up. Only through encouragement, honesty, and communication was their goal achieved. As students learn about racism through CRT, they should also be given the tools to help them spread the message as well as deal with reactions and challenges they will also encounter.

5.6 FUTURE RESEARCH

To create a much more inclusive sample, future research should examine the relevance of CRT in other non-education related institutions settings such as public and private business corporations. Racism is controversial, and its consequences reverberate across society for generations to come. Thus, laying a foundation for understanding what happens in society can serve as an important eye-opener for young people. Thus, research should be undertaken on how and what should be taught as well as the type of approach that should be adopted for the implementation of laying this foundation.

Further research that is geared towards identifying and analysing any change in personal beliefs after students had learned about CRT should also be undertaken. For example, while this study has established that personal beliefs were shaped by the knowledge they have acquired in the unit, it would be prudent to determine what exactly was learned by the students (besides what was learned in class), what actions were taken by the students after learning about CRT, and how their personal beliefs

have transformed since learning about CRT. Other frameworks that can support CRT when transferring into ecosystems what was learned by students should also be probed further. As already mentioned, the study has revealed significant barriers that are existent within the society when trying to implement and/or transfer knowledge about what was learned about CRT. More research is required to identify tools that can be used to facilitate the transformation of knowledge into action for students learning about and willing to accept CRT.

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