"THIS DIALOGUE THING": AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES OF BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN LIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA ENGAGED IN SUSTAINED DIALOGUE

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Declaration

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ABSTRACT

This research is based on a case study of a group of black and white women engaged in sustained dialogue to gain an intimate understanding of what happens in cross-racial dialogue within this group. The purpose of the research is to identify the factors and processes involved in cross-racial conversations that facilitated or hindered transformation in the group. The research is designed as an autoethnographic study and narrated through the researcher's experiences as a member of the group. Semi-structured focus groups were conducted to follow the group's journey over time, and their understanding of their experiences. Data is analysed using thematic analysis through an autoethnographic lens. This allowed the research to be a co-constructed meaning-making process between the researcher in her dual position as researcher and member of the group, and the participants.

The findings of this study reveal that the process of a crisis is an opportunity for deepening cross-racial dialogue work. Furthermore, findings reveal that the avoidance of crisis may create a false sense of harmonious intergroup relations. The process of overcoming the impasse of a crisis can lead to stronger, healthier and more intimate interracial friendships. In addition, findings reveal that safe spaces in intergroup dialogue translate to safe spaces for whiteness, and power imbalances to continue unexamined.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsing is gebaseer op 'n gevallestudie van 'n groep swart en wit vroue betrokke in 'n volgehoue dialoog proses. Die doel van die studie is om 'n dieper begrip te kry van wat gebeur in gesprekke tussen wit en swart vroue in die groep. Die navorsing identifiseer die faktore en prosesse betrokke by inter-ras gesprekke wat transformasie in die groep vergemaklik of belemmer het.

Die navorsing is ontwerp as 'n auto-etnografiese studie vertel deur die navorser se eie ervarings as lid van die groep. Semi-gestruktureerde fokusgroepe volg die groep se begrip van hulle ervarings oor 'n tydperk van gesprekvoering. Die data word tematies ontleed deur 'n outo-etnografiese lens. Dié lens maak dit moontlik om die proses van ko-konstruksie van betekenis tussen die navorser, in haar tweeledige posisie as navorser en lid van die groep, en die deelnemers te ontleed.

Die bevindings van hierdie studie toon dat 'n krisis in gespreksprosesse 'n geleentheid is om die werk van inter-ras dialoog te verdiep. Verder bevind die studie dat die vermyding van krisisse in inter-ras dialoog 'n vals sin van harmonie in intergroepverhoudinge kan skep. Die proses om die impasse van 'n krisis te oorkom, maak sterker, gesonder en en meer intieme inter-ras vriendskappe en verhoudings moontlik. Daarbenewens vind die studie dat sogenaamde veilige ruimtes in inter-ras dialoog neerkom op veilige ruimtes vir wit deelnemers, en dat dit nie 'n ruimte skep om die dieper wanbalans in mag tussen wit en swart deelnemers te ondersoek nie.

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Glossary

Black people is a political term used to describe people that are Black, Coloured and Indian in the South African context.

Dialogues are conversations or discussions where people wrestle with problems and issues with the aim of solving them.

Cross-racial dialogue/interracial dialogue are conversations or discussions between two or more people from different racial groups that want to overcome conflict and build healthy relationships.

Intergroup generally refers to conversations between different group.

Power relations refer to interactions between different social identity groups or individuals. They are associated with race, class, education, gender and other social positions. Power relations can be expressed overtly or covertly.

Race is a social and political construct that divides people according to physical characteristics and serves to privilege all white people.

Racism are intentional or unintentional racial discriminatory acts by White people against Black people that are linked to systems of advantage.

Transformation in the context of this study refers to changes that occurred over time with regards to power relations, cross-racial relations and dynamics within the group.

Whiteness is described by Frankenberg (1993) as a social construct that is ever changing, is normalised, and privileges white people in its operations.

White people a term used to refer to people that were defined as European and later white.

List of Diagrams

Chapter One:

History of Race Relations in South Africa

1.1. Introduction

South Africa's history of racial oppression dates back to the 17th century with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company to the Cape (Elphick & Giliomee, 1979; Guelke, 1989; Maylam, 2001). Initially, the Dutch and indigenous peoples established mutually-beneficial relationships through trading (History of Slavery, 2011). This relationship changed when the Dutch demanded more than what the Africans were willing to give (Guelke, 1989). This subsequently led to the Dutch driving Africans into forced labour and establishing their superiority through institutionalised racism and slavery (Guelke, 1989; Giliomee & Elphick, 1979). It was during this period that ideologies of racial segregation and oppression began to emerge (Dubow, 1989). Dutch rule over the Cape Colony continued for 150 years until 1795, when the British began their rule over South Africa (Maylam, 2001).

After the war between the British and Dutch, the British finally took the Cape under the control of the crown in 1806 (Maylam, 2001). For African people, British rule was no different from being governed by the Dutch. This suggests that racial segregation was not, as some scholars suggest, introduced by apartheid (Dubow, 1989). The Dutch laid the foundations, the British adopted and refined it, and the apartheid government swiftly advanced and legalised it (Dubow, 1989). There are however, contesting views on the history of racial segregation with some scholars viewing the history in successive stages – where segregation and apartheid followed each other in stages (Dubow, 1989), while others view segregation and apartheid as distinctly different formations (Cell, 1982). Notwithstanding contestations over South Africa's historiography, the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 formalised and institutionalised relations between whites and blacks (Maylam, 2001). Apartheid advanced racial segregation through a number of policies, ensuring that different groups could not encounter each other as humans and equals (Maylam, 2001). Some of these policies were the Bantu Land Act (No. 27 of 1913), the Immorality Act (No. 5 of 1927), the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (No. 55 of 1949), the Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950), the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (No. 49 of 1953) and the Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953) (Maylam 2001). These policies advanced social, political, spatial, and

economic segregation of White, Indian, Coloured and Black people (Posel, 2001; Maylam, 2001).

The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (No. 34 of 1995) brought with it the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which, among other things, promoted national unity and reconciliation (Fullard, 2004). Racial problems within South Africa and outside, Fullard (2004) suggests, are an indication that the TRC was the beginning and not the end of a need for social dialogue on race. This view is in line with Steinbugler's (2012) findings that "interracial intimacy represents not the end, but the beginning of a sustained process of negotiating racial difference" (p. 156). This highlights that legal frameworks and policy are not enough in dealing with race and racism (Duncan 2012). Everatt (2012) echoes Duncan's (2012) argument and further states that "it has been left to South Africans themselves to try and muddle their way across racially defined residential segregation and centuries of colonial exploitation" (p. 16). With racial tension on the rise, the importance of addressing race and race relations in more meaningful ways has become evident. The vision for an integrated cohesive society depends on these relations as concrete articulations of policies and values. Gibson and Claasen (2010) capture this aptly in their research on race relations in the workplace: "as intergroup relations go, so goes the future of the country" (p.255). "This Dialogue Thing" offered me an opportunity to undertake research with a group of black and white women who have been engaged in sustained interracial dialogue for five years, grappling with issues of race and how it affects their everyday lives. There is a paucity of literature on how race influences and shapes everyday lived experiences in South Africa. We also do not have literature that gives us insights into what happens in interracial dialogue groups. This study seeks to generate these insights and knowledge.

1.2. Rationale

Many programmes have been implemented to address the injustices of the past and create a united, cohesive country working together towards a shared future (Justice and Constitutional Development, 2015). Despite this, not enough time and energy has been invested in creating spaces that allow black and white people to explore how the past influences how they relate to one another (Matthews, 2012). We are living in a time where white people have learned to hide their bias and judgements behind politically correct

language since "racism has come to be associated as the most radical of evils, as opposed to an acknowledgment of the impact of generations of socialization" (Valji, 2004, para. 8). This prevents black and white people from exploring the ways in which they have been socialized and how their deeply-held beliefs and perceptions inform their behaviour towards each other. Such behaviour includes feelings of inferiority and superiority held by black and white people respectively, through their socialization and the ways in which these attitudes manifest in everyday encounters (Fanon, 1967, 1986).

Some scholars attribute the prevalence of racism to structural issues that have led to growing inequality in South Africafurther straining race relations (Goldberg, 2009). Duncan, for instance, argues that one of the reasons we do not have a united nation is because the government "assumed it could legislate the nation into being, without creating the material conditions for South African's to experience a common identity" (Duncan, 2012, para. 18). Matthews (2012) echoes Duncan's argument and adds that "eradicating racist laws and frameworks does not automatically result in related changes in attitudes and habits" (p. 172). In addition to structural changes, it is my view that we need to invest intellectual and emotional labor in creating and engaging in spaces that promote vulnerability and sharing of uncomfortable feelings, perspectives, experiences and imaginations of our future.

As racial tensions worldwide have become more frequent and complex in nature, Dessel and Rogge (2008) explore intergroup dialogue as a tool to bridge the gap between groups in conflict. The authors argue that new research on how intergroup dialogues may be used to improve race-relations is needed. Gergen, McNamme and Barret further emphasise the importance of undertaking case studies "where people are wrestling with problems of multiple and conflicting realities allow us to locate conversational actions or conditions that have broad transformative potential" (2001, p. 699). This kind of research is especially necessary because of the scarcity of literature that directly deals with anti-racism projects, and particularly in the South African context (Nelson, 2015). The proposed study is, to my knowledge, the first of its kind in South Africa that looks at processes in intergroup relations in a naturalistic setting, as opposed to a laboratory or orchestrated setting, where people have volunteered to be part of an interracial dialogue. This is important as it carries the hope of overcoming some of the limitations of Contact Theory. Because of this, there is not much literature that guides this study. We are in many ways charting unfamiliar territory and asking questions that Contact Theory does not ask. It is in this context of limited research literature on cross-racial dialogues in South Africa, that this study seeks to make a contribution.

1.3. Case Study: This Dialogue Thing

Five years ago, myself and a few other women set out to create a space to allow free and candid conversations about race and how it impacts our lives. We set out to create a space in which we could have interracial conversations without the fear to ask difficult questions, being exposed, embarrassed or challenged. The group consists of women from different racial categories and different backgrounds who meet on a monthly basis in each other's homes. We called these monthly meetings 'This Dialogue Thing'. Most of us started out as strangers and had very different and contrasting views of race, social issues and personal experiences. We often had intense arguments where the group quickly became polarised along racial lines demonstrating how we still see and experience things differently. Five years later, the group is still in conversation. As a member of the group, I am aware that changes and strong relations have formed among the members during the five-year period. My interest in doing this research is to understand the nature of these changes (transformative moments), what (factors) influenced them and how (processes) they occurred over time.

Chapter Two:

A Literature Review

Intergroup Relations and Whiteness Studies

2.1. Introduction

This literature review has two sections. Firstly, I review the history of intergroup relations in the USA and South Africa that overlaps with the development of the Contact Hypothesis and later, Contact Theory. Secondly, I map out a brief historical overview of whiteness studies in the USA and South Africa. Taken together, this gives us the context within and beyond which this study seeks to make a contribution to the present understandings of race relations in South Africa. Due to space limitations and the nature of this study, my review is not exhaustive.

2.2. An Overview of the History of Intergroup Relations

Intergroup studies emerged in the 1920s after scholars from psychology and other disciplines criticised 'race psychology'. This type of psychology sought to prove, through intelligence testing, that black people were inferior to white people (Samelson, 1978). Interest in 'race psychology' moved from (a) intelligence testing; (b) to show differences between black and white people; and (c) to intergroup studies which focused on "the attitudes of the 'racial' groups towards each other" (Samelson 1978, p.268). Sociologists (DuBois ,1901; Thomas, 1904; Ellis, 1915) were among the first to investigate race relations and prejudice in America. Social psychology soon followed in the 1930s with studies on intergroup prejudice (Katz & Allport, 1931, 1946; Kats & Braly, 1932, 1933; Williams, 1947). It was during this time that Gordon Allport (1954) produced his seminal book on intergroup prejudice, The Nature of Prejudice. It is from this study that Allport's 'Contact Hypothesis' was derived. The main proposition of the Contact Hypothesis is that"prejudice (unless deeply-rooted in the character structure of the individual), may be reduced by equal-status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced

if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports, and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups. (1954, p. 281)

It is through the influence of Allport's study that the Brown v Board of Education case in 1954 ruled in favour of greater contact between black and white children in the American school system. Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis has since influenced many 'social experiments' with the belief that "greater contact would quickly produce more positive attitudes" (Forbes, 1997, p. 42). Allport's Contact Hypothesis has since been revised, developed and today appears in the literature as Contact Theory. The theory continues to be used as an intervention between groups in conflict to reduce or eliminate prejudice and improve intergroup relations.

Among many revisions and models, \ Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) 'Contact-Prejudice Model' has been the most dominant and forms the foundation of what has developed into Contact Theory. Pettigrew (2010) points out that the theory does not specifically focus on race relations, but on creating conditions that facilitate harmonious intergroup relations between any groups of people in conflict through their coming into contact (Pettigrew, 2010). However, given its theoretical and social interventionist elements, Contact Theory has had a strong activism component which Cherry (2008) refers to as a "scholar-activist tradition", as it seeks to make society a better place.

Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) contact-prejudice model links intimate contact and accentuated group membership to Allport's conditions to demonstrate *when* intergroup contact leads to positive outcomes. The model reveals that knowledge of the 'other' plays a minor role in reducing prejudice and highlights the importance of emotional processes observed in earlier studies (see Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephen & Stephan 1985, 1989, 1992). Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) argue that even in the absence of Allport's conditions, at times, 'mere exposure' to another group can reduce prejudices amongst group members. Aiming to emphasise the importance of 'emotional processes' in intergroup contact, the authors suggest that Allport's conditions are not a prerequisite, but merely facilitate and support optimal contact outcomes.

This is a small but significant shift from relying on controlled conditions (equal status, common goals and interests) to understanding the importance of emotional processes leading to 'intimate contact' – by forming friendships that allow members to be emotionally

vulnerable and open to each other – the most significant prerequisite for positive group outcomes (Pettigrew, 1998).).

2.3. Intergroup Relations in South Africa

Similar to the USA in the 1920s and 1930s, psychology in South Africa focussed on psychological assessments (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991). Most prominent among these was MacCrone's work on race attitudes, which he produced between the 1930's and 1950's. In his work, MacCrone (1937) introduces the intersectional nature of prejudice by pointing out that religious, social, and political attitudes all play an equal role in prejudice formation.

Social psychology emerged in the 1950s in South Africa and was greatly influenced by North American psychology; (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991). The focus of the discourse was on the relationship between authoritarianism and attitudes, which paved the way for Allport's Contact Hypothesis emerging in South Africa (MacCrone, 1937).

Research focussed on white racial attitudes increased significantly while work on black racial attitudes remained nominal in comparison (see Bloom, de Crespigny & Spence, 1961; Danzinger, 1958; Pettigrew, 1960; Biesheuvel, 1955; Brett, 1963; Crijins, 1958; Mangayi, 1973; 1977). Drawing from Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, research in the form of social experiments was conducted in work-places, schools, residential areas and the military at a time where black and white people were segregated by state policies (Mynhardt & du Toit, 1991). Foster and Fincilescu (1986) summarised some of these findings and concluded that contact between black and white people in South Africa was one of dominance and did not meet Allport's (1954) conditions for positive intergroup contact: that of co-operation, equal status and common goals.

Studies by Orkin and Jowell (2006) on public attitudes after the first democratic elections demonstrate that attitudes of racial division still exist. Results show that most people seem to agree that race relations have improved, while white people felt more anxious about certain changes such as school integration. Findings from surveys conducted between 1991 and 2005 by Durrheim and Dixon (2010) noted different experiences of black and white people in response to the question of "what effects have desegregation and political change had on intergroup relations in the South African context" (p. 274). Results showed that the majority of white people claim to have casual and close contact with black people, whereas

the majority of black people state they have no contact with white people (Durrheim & Dixon, 2010,).

Furthermore, Dixon, Durrheim, Tredoux, Tropp, Clack, & Eaton's (2010) study on how intergroup contact affected perceptions of discrimination among Black South Africans, and the socio-psychological processes that explained this relationship, revealed that "the more positive contact blacks have with whites, the lower their perceptions of group discrimination and relative deprivation" (p. 411); and that "racial attitudes and personal experiences of discrimination" were the psychological processes facilitating this contact relationship (p. 411). Gibson and Claasen's (2010) findings correlate with earlier studies showing a significant difference in how intergroup contact was experienced by black and white participants. White people seemed to experience increased reconciliation with black people, whereas black people felt less reconciliation with white people. More recent research such as the SA Race Relation Barometer reveal that forty four percent of young South Africans rarely or never speak to someone of another race (Lefko-Everett, 2012).

In line with the above studies, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) conducted a qualitative study through a series of focus groups around South Africa (Lefko-Everett, 2012). In the analysis of the data , Lefko-Everett (2012) concluded that

> there has been an increase in level of interaction and engagement between South Africans of different historically defined race groups, particularly in public life. However, less change has occurred within more intimate spaces, such as private homes and among families and close friends, where racialized social divisions appear more resilient. Closed private spaces also appear to be fertile ground for the perpetuation of stereotypes and racism (p. 128).

2.4. Contact Theory and Cross-Group Friendships

Pettigrew (1998) introduced a reformulated Contact Theory which highlighted four processes, namely, (a) learning about the out-group; (b) changing behaviour; (c) generating affective ties; and (d) in-group reappraisal. These processes, he noted, are the outcomes of optimal intergroup contact which facilitate changes in attitude (Pettigrew, 1998). Furthermore, Pettigrew (1998) introduced a fifth condition, (e) 'intergroup friendship',

arguing that it is "potent because it potentially evokes all four mediating processes" (p.75 – 76). Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini and Christ (2007) in their review of cross-group friendships found two emotional mediators for cross-group friendship and positive outgroup attitudes: 'reduced intergroup anxiety' and 'increased self-disclosure'. They further found that "the relationship between self-disclosure and outgroup attitude was further mediated by empathy, trust, and perceived importance of contact" (Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini and Christ, 2007, p. 232).

Research in South Africa on cross-racial friendships has largely been conducted in universities as those institutions often provide the first opportunity for many young adults to interact with members of a different racial group academically and socially in close proximity (Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009). Lefko-Everett (2012) notes that though the interaction between black and white people has increased in public spaces, racialized division still dominate most private and intimate spaces such as homes, families and friendship circle. He further states that private spaces are often a breeding ground for racial bias. More concerning were the results from the 2014 Reconciliation barometer which reveals that the desire for more interracial interaction was decreasing despite the need to continue to address segregation in South Africa. Steinbugler's (2012) argues that interracial intimacy does not mean that people that they have gone beyond race, rather, "interracial intimacy represents not the end, but the beginning of a sustained process of negotiating racial difference" (p. 156).

2.5. Critiques of Contact Theory

Contact Theory has been reformulated and advanced over the years. It has also received much criticism from abroad and locally. Here I point to some of the critiques. Pettigrew (1986) and Dixon, Tredoux, & Clack (2005) raise concerns about the practicalities of Contact Hypotheses and argue that it is abstract and prescribes idealistic and unclear conditions which cannot be tested. Furthermore, the very same conditions which are required for positive intergroup contact in Allport's (1954) theory, are not always necessary for positive intergroup contact to occur (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). According to Pettigrew (1986), this speaks to the untestable nature of the hypothesis). Durrheim and Dixon (2010) and Dixon, et al. (2005) raise concerns about the negative effects contact may have on the subordinate group (also see Reicher, 2007). Erasmus (2010) takes this critique further. Firstly, for her, Contact Theory's methodologies are framed within a "psychometric

imaginary" that treats "socio-political, cultural, [and] discursive phenomena" as things we can think our way out of through reduced prejudice (p. 389).Secondly, she criticises Contact Theory for normalising 'race' and racialized groups as stable and homogenous, thereby giving further credence to apartheid categories. Thirdly, she argues that Contact Theory constructs a framework divorced from South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid that paints a simplistic and narrow contact/non-contact dualism of social formation. Fourthly, because Contact Theory does not question 'race', it makes 'whiteness' invisible, thus leaving "whiteness unquestioned" and by extension, makes blackness hyper-visible and the target of inquiry (p. 391). Erasmus (2010) concludes by claiming that Contact Theory – even with its scholar-activist tradition – is "too timid for race and racism" (p. 391).

Building on Reicher's (2007) critique, Dixon, Levine, Reicher and Durrheim (2012) highlight the narrow and simplistic nature of the conceptualisation of prejudice, by showing that contact theory individualises what is essentially a structural and societal problem and locates it in the realm of emotions. The authors also question the preeminent position given to prejudice reduction as a framework for "improving relations between groups within historically unequal societies" (Dixon, Levine, Reicher and Durrheim, 2012,p. 15). They address the limits of a prejudice reduction model of social change, and question its ability to influence intergroup and institutional relations when the focus of the model is actually on rehabilitating individuals (Dixon, Levine, Reicher and Durrheim, 2012). Similarly, Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001) point out the importance of examining socio-historical circumstances of groups before following set out dialogical processes in order to be able to recognize the limits of any theory. In other words, they argue for a contextualized understanding of groups and their environment before imposing any theory.

The above critiques reveal limitations in the conceptual understanding and analysis of the causes of conflictual relations between dominant and subordinate groups. The simplistic ahistorical diagnosis for conflictual relations – that is, prejudice - subsequently leads to a solution – that is, contact - that Erasmus describes as "too timid" to deal with conflictual group relations (2010). Erasmus' (2010) critique on the limitations of Contact Theory is a good place for us to turn our attention to Whiteness studies.

2.6. An Overview of the History of Whiteness Studies

Whiteness Studies, also known as Critical White Studies emerged in the 1990s in American academia (Nayak, 2007; Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007; Steyn, 2007). The first conference on Whiteness was held at the University of California at Berkeley in 1998 (Nayak, 2007). White scholars felt that research and discourse on race focussed on 'non-whites' and made these groups the sites of investigation, thereby leaving whiteness invisible. This, they felt, "like most social norms is because whiteness is seen as ordinary and is invisible in its operations" (Nayak, 2007, p. 737). The emergence of Whiteness studies served to give us a different lens to think and write about racism. Frankenberg (1993) describes Whiteness as producing and aiming to maintain dominance, normativity and privilege whilst neutralising the realities of subordination, marginality and disadvantage that come with upholding its power. Whiteness Studies therefore seeks to make visible the invisible and challenge what is seen as 'normal'. Nayak (2007) identifies three basic tenets of whiteness:

1. Whiteness is a modern invention, it has changed over time and place.

2. Whiteness is a social norm and has become chained to an index of unspoken privileges.

3. The bonds of whiteness are yet to be broken/deconstructed for the betterment of humanity. (p. 738)

Hale (1998) in Stevens (2007) describes Whiteness Studies as focusing on historical processes involved in creating white identities.

Whiteness Studies has gone through several transitions in the past few decades. In the first wave, whiteness focussed on making visible the 'invisible' dimensions preserved for a privileged 'white' positionality (Distiller & Steyn, 2004; Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007; McIntosh, 2003; Morrison, 1992). The second wave had a more intersectional, 'particularized' approach in understanding whiteness and its expressions (Hill, 1997; Lopez, 2001; Steyn, 2001; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). The third wave forms a global critique by drawing on post-colonial literature (Steyn, 2007; Levine-Rasky, 2012). In the latest wave, scholars are arguing that research needs to move beyond the ideology of white superiority and hegemony, and focus on white identity formations within a broader racist culture (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007).

Nayak (2007) highlights the importance of "extending the gaze to whiteness" in investigations into race by discussing three positions on whiteness (p.738).

The first position is that of abolishing. Writers and activists from the abolitionist framework believe that whiteness should be eradicated. They position whiteness as the core of the problem and argue that the white race as a social formation should be obliterated and not made available as an identity (Ignatiev, 1997). Committing race treason involves white people using their privilege in antiracist work as well as exposing the privilege that comes with being white and the violence committed in its name (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007). Roediger (1994) asks of white people to participate in authentic struggles against oppression. The second position is deconstruction; a mode of analysis used to research the construction of whiteness. This paradigm makes visible the otherwise invisible workings of whiteness and the different intersectional social contexts in which white privilege is produced, reproduced and normalised. The third and last position is rethinking; a psychoanalytical framework to think and write about whiteness. Writers from this paradigm maintain that "white identities are both externally and internally constituted" (Nayak, 2007, p. 746). Psychoanalytic approaches to rethinking whiteness not only focus on language, text and discourse, but expose and investigate "unspoken registers of race thinking" (Nayak, 2007, p. 746). This position focusses its attention on the white psyche and its entangled relation to the Other – the 'non-white'.

Nayak (2007), in line with many sociologist, maintains that whiteness is a fictitious category. I find this assertion in antiracist discourse to be a moot point as it is a well-known fact that race is a social construct. As Oluo (2017) succinctly states;

> a lot of things in our society are social constructs—money, for example—but the impact they have on our lives, and the rules by which they operate, are very real. I cannot undo the evils of capitalism simply by pretending to be a millionaire (para.33).

Investigating race relations focusing on the insight of race as a social construct can be simplistic and does not allow for nuances to further our understanding. To this point, Roediger (1994) argues that the insight that race is socially constructed does not magically inform us with strategies for overcoming race-class oppression" (p. 5). In her study, Frankenberg (1993) moves past the insight of race being a socially constructed phenomenon, and draws on the experiences of "women's daily lives as a resource for analysing society" (p. 7). Looking at micro-level interactions helps us understand macro-level race relations (Steinbugler, 2012).

2.7. Whiteness and Antiracism

Many strategies have been employed in fighting against racism. In this section, I map out the position of Whiteness studies and its role as an antiracist strategy. In his response to Green, Sonn & Matsebula (2007), Ratele (2007) rightly notes that Green, et al. (2007) position Whiteness studies within anti-racism and not racism. On the other hand, Frankenberg (1993) firmly positions whiteness within racism and suggests that it is from this position that antiracism strategies can be developed. This distinction is important as it does not, as Steven (2007) notes, position Whiteness studies as "the silver bullet" to solving racism (p. 425). Frankenberg (1993) locates whiteness as a position to move from when working towards "antiracist forms of whiteness, or at least…strategies for reworking the terrain of whiteness" (p. 7). This suggests that Whiteness studies is not in and of itself a radical antiracist strategy as Green et al (2007) submit. These distinctions speak to the contestation in perspectives of the purpose and motivation for Whiteness studies (Green et al., 2007).

Because whiteness is fluid and thus able to evolve and morph according to changing features of society for its own benefit, Stevens (2007) argues that Whiteness Studies may be reduced to a playing field for intellectual indulgence rather than result in societal change. The author further states that the development of this field could "be highly problematic especially if power relations, antiracist politics and a legacy of white racisms are too quickly glossed over, deconstructed or imploded" (Steven, 2007,p. 744). Some scholars raise concerns about Whiteness Studies morphing into yet another attempt at re-centering and reinscribing white privilege and thus maintaining the status quo (Stevens, 2007). Critical race studies scholars refer to one of the ways whiteness morphs itself according to changing features of society as 'interest convergence' (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Interest convergence is a term coined by Bell (1980) referring to structures put in place that only support black people's interests in racial equality as long as they converge with the interest of white people. In this regard, Stevens (2007) suggests that Whiteness Studies should rather be complementary and co-exist alongside critical 'race' studies with a joint focus on deconstructing blackness and other forms of racialised othering.

2.8. Whiteness Studies in South Africa

"If whiteness is all about power, an analysis of whiteness in any context has to start from examining the power base that whiteness wields in that particular context" (Steyn, 2007,

p. 421). It is for this reason that I now turn to whiteness in the South African context. There has been a growing body of literature on whiteness from different parts of the globe. While whiteness has global dimensions, its expressions are shaped by specific contexts (Steyn, 2007). To avoid superimposing American theory on different contexts, scholars saw the need to "particularize rather than universalize" (Steyn, 2007, p. 146). Whiteness studies in South Africa has been greatly influenced by American theory. To this, Steyn (2007) notes that "whiteness has been theorised from the centres of whiteness, in particular North America" (p. 421). To get a better understanding of whiteness and race relations in South Africa, I give a brief historical overview.

Stevens (2007) suggests that in the colonial context of South Africa, whiteness was initially a defence against the perceived threat of the colonized. Whiteness in the South African context is thus, as Steyn (2004) argues, "best understood as an ideologically supported social positionality accrued as a consequence of unjust advantages gained in colonialism and apartheid, coupled with the normalization of these privileged cultural, socioeconomic, and psychological dimensions" (Steyn, 2004, p. 121). Whiteness in South Africa deviates from whiteness in the North as it has never been invisible in its operations (Steyn, 2007). Ratele (2007) echoes Steyn's assertion by observing that scholars of colour have always been looking at white power. Steyn (2007) extends Ratele's arguments and states that not only has whiteness always been visible to scholars of colour, in South Africa, whiteness has always been visible to those benefiting from it. Keating (1995), in keeping with Ratele (2007) and Steyn (2007), states that whiteness is not so much invisible as it is 'unacknowledged' by those who are privileged by it as there are benefits in choosing not to acknowledge whiteness even when it may be visible. How whites avoid acknowledging whiteness in post-democratic South Africa and the impact of whiteness upon intergroup relations is of particular interest in this study.

2.9. Whiteness in Post-Apartheid South Africa

In 1994, South Africa had its first democratic elections (Kende, 2003). The elections moved the country into a new democratic era which brought about many changes in the laws of the country. Oppressive laws were replaced with new legislation which, among other things, recognized all people as equal citizens (Justice and Constitutional Development, 2016). Some of the most pertinent laws that were replaced were laws pertaining to racial

segregation, an ideology that ensured social, spatial and economic separation between groups for the benefit of white people (Posel, 2001). Post-1994, South Africa's legislation has been recognized as one of the best in the world (Kende, 2003). The country's legislation received international attention for promoting equality, providing socio-economic rights and allowing gay marriage, to name a few (Kende, 2003). Despite South Africa's progressive laws, race and race relations remain a persistent problem (Matthews, 2012; Duncan 2012). Recent racial incidences have been a sobering reminder of how race and race relations have not been adequately addressed (Fullard, 2004). Twenty-four years into democracy and after apartheid has been legally abolished, we still find ourselves confronted and grappling with the issue of race and racism. Between 2015 and 2016, the South African Human Rights Commission received five hundred and five (505) race-related complaints which comprised more than half of the complaints from rights to equality cases (South African Human Rights Commission, 2017). These racial incidences are not isolated or extraordinary occurrences, but point to the existence of every-day normalised racism (Harris, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). They are often simplified, decontextualized and not connected to their "broader spectrum of problematic relations" (Valji, 2004, para. 8). To this, Stevens (2007) suggests that in order to understand whiteness and its social functions, it needs to be deconstructed according to its various manifestations within its historical, material and structural context. Frankenberg (1994) posits that to speak of whiteness is

> to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism. It is to emphasize that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people, that, rather, racism shapes white people's lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life (p. 6).

Put differently, to speak of racism is to speak of whiteness. Racism, she suggests, "is a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self" (Frankenberg, 1994, p. 6).

2.10. Critiques of Whiteness Studies

Whiteness studies is a useful lens in understanding whiteness and how it expresses itself. It critically looks at "empowered positions that normally deflect attention away from their own self-interested operations and keep us believing that the margins are 'the problem' that need to be probed, analysed, and rehabilitated" (Steyn, 2007, p.421). McWhorter (2005) however, critiques this focus on white subjectivity and argues that theorists of Whiteness Studies fail to understand power and its operations as something that cannot simply be put

aside (metaphor of possession) but produces subjectivities that are subsequently not under subjective control. He argues that Whiteness Studies places too much attention on "subjectivity, not in structures or institution or practices" (McWhorter, 2005, p. 545). This, he contends, has narrowed Whiteness studies to "two words: white privilege"(2005, p. 545). As a consequence, this has limited the work of whites in anti-racist work to "ridding oneself of unearned assets" rather than of disrupting and realigning networks of power" (McWhorter, 2005, p. 548).

Ratele (2007) questions whether Whiteness Studies contributes anything to 'anti-racist scholarship' since whiteness has always been part of this discourse. He further argues that turning to "whiteness…closes already opened worlds for indigenous subjects" (Ratele, 2007, p.433). Ahmed (2004) raises similar concerns and further argues that the re-centering of Whiteness Studies does not suffice as an anti-racism strategy. Whiteness is constructed in relation to blackness or racialized groups, yet Whiteness studies places much focus on the white subjectivity alone, with minimal attention on white subjectivity in multiracial settings (Levine-Rasky, 2002). If the operations of whiteness are invisible to white subjects, how do white subjects challenge their socialization of whiteness in isolation? How does whiteness express itself in multiracial settings? What is the role of white subjects in mixed spaces? What is the involvement of black subjects? These are some of the areas this study will attempt to contribute to.

We have over the past few years witnessed Frankenberg's (1994) observation of multiracial spaces deteriorating "into painful, ugly processes in which racial tension and conflict actually seemed to get worse rather than better" (p. 3). She makes this observation based on her personal experiences of her involvement in multiracial feminist spaces, where it became clear that the movement was not benefitting all women. She was confronted with having to interrogate her positionality as a white feminist and recognized that various forms of racism in feminist spaces simply mirror the racist structures of the wider culture. She further suggests that this deterioration in multiracial spaces is caused by the interaction of the two groups, wherein white women seemed to have a collective limited repertoire of responses when accused of racism: confusion over accusation of racism; guilt over racism; anger over repeated criticism; dismissal; stasis (Frankenberg, 1994). In contrast, feminist/radical women of color, it seemed, go through the following phases: anger over racism; efforts to communicate with white women about racism, despite it; frustration; and the temptation (acted upon temporarily or permanently) to withdraw from multiracial work. (Frankenberg,

1994, p. 2-3). One could argue that these responses are shaped by whiteness as socialization. This speaks to the limitations of Whiteness studies where racism is believed to originate in subjectivity and can be solved by abandoning the white privilege knapsack (McWhorter, 2005). If racism, as McWhorter argues, operates even in the absence of identifiable racists, how does turning to Whiteness Studies assist us in addressing questions of power when there are no racists to be held accountable? These are the questions that Whiteness Studies does not seem to explicitly address. It is the conceptual understanding of racism as "racist beliefs" that some scholars find unhelpful (McWhorter, 2005, p. 536)

McWhorter (2005) further points to the overemphasis of individual psychological processes contributing to the persistence of racism rather than a much needed focus on racist structures and institutions. It is my view that structural and psychological accounts are both necessary and can stand together as one of multiple anti-racist strategies. In addition to exposing, disrupting and transforming networks of power, there is a need for individual intellectual and emotional labor in multiracial spaces that promote mutual vulnerability and sharing in order to work toward healthy relations (McWhorter, 2005).

2.11. Conclusion

As racial tensions worldwide have become more frequent and complex in nature, many scholars and activists explore intergroup dialogue as a tool to bridge the gap between groups in conflict (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). Turning to a theory that does not "specifically focus on race relations" (Pettigrew, 2010, p. 426) to improve race relations has not proven to be the best intervention. Contact theory with all its reformulations, including intergroup dialogues, does not adequately address race relations. It is as Erasmus (2010) highlights "too timid to deal with race and racism" because it "leaves whiteness unquestioned" (p. 391). Turning to Stevens (2007) suggestion and using Whiteness studies as a "complimentary and even secondary node" (p. 429) to other anti-racist strategies helps us bridge this gap. Taken together, these two fields, equip us to adequately rise to DuBois' (1901) call to "turn more and more to a conscientious study of the phenomena of race-contact…and ask ourselves: What are the actual relations of whites and blacks…" (p. 122).

White people in intergroup dialogue spaces tend to, as Frankenberg (1994) states, view racism "as an issue that people colour face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us" (p. 5). There is a need to move away from the well-

meaning tendency of white people to empathise with 'black experiences', with a continuous focus on these experiences, thus making 'blackness' the target and immediate-presenting issue within intergroup dialogue spaces. In as much as it is important to acknowledge the multifaceted reality of racism, the work of intergroup dialogue in improving race relations has to go beyond reducing white people's prejudice, an important objective of Contact Theory. It has to move towards challenging the underlying assumptions of a normative whiteness where the "good white person" at their liberal best, fights racism (as a problem that affects black people) and never reflexively and self-critically confronts their whiteness.

There is a need for these interracial dialogue spaces to place the onus on white people to make themselves vulnerable and trace their own racial identity/ racial conditioning back to intimate and personal experiences. Sharing this honestly with the group and thus tolerating the discomfort of being stripped of their "observer/empathizer" privilege, based on a white normative assumption of their inherent goodness.

2.12. Conceptual Framework

As racial tensions worldwide have become more frequent and complex in nature, many scholars and activists explore intergroup dialogue as a tool to bridge the gap between groups in conflict (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). Contact Theory continues to influence many 'social experiments' and is used as an intervention aiming to reduce or eliminate prejudice through greater contact between groups in conflict. (Forbes, 1997). This is particularly so in South Africa where politics have historically always been about friendships (Wale, 2004). Walsh and Soske (2016) point out that affective relations are essential to the social reproduction of power. They conclude that racial hierarchies and multiple forms of power at play need to be exposed within alleged friendship relations in order to deconstruct the "rainbow nation narrative". This narrative, they argue, oftentimes positions people across racial and social divides such as maids, housewives and their children as "family" or "friends", proclaiming "colorblindness" as an essential ingredient of such friendships. Genuine (interracial) friendships however, according to the authors, should not require erasure of differences, but allow for those differences to be made visible through intimate sharing. Emotional processes thus become a key ingredient in intergroup contact. In spite of the limitations of Contact Theory, and without here adopting it wholesale, I have found Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) research on intimate contact and positive group outcomes useful as a starting point. Prior to the Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) meta-analysis study,

Pettigrew (1998) emphasised 'emotional processes' in intergroup contact. He reformulated Contact Theory and included intergroup friendship (intimacy) as a key condition and motivator to bridge intergroup conflict. Cross-group friendship, according to Pettigrew (1998) is the ideal goal in intergroup contact as it has the power to "reduce prejudice and generalise to other outgroups" (p. 76).

This is a small but significant shift from Allport's controlled conditions as prerequisites for positive group outcomes to more internally driven, emotional processes resulting in intimacy - friendship (Pettigrew & Tropp,1998). This shift is salient for the present study since cross-group friendship played a role in the transformation process of *This Dialogue Thing*. While that is the case, I still espouse Erasmus' (2010) critique of Contact Theory as an important aspect of my conceptual framework. Extending the framework to account for Contact Theory's reformulation (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) and Erasmus' (2010) critique, I turn to critical Whiteness Studies. Whiteness studies focusses on whiteness in its investigations on race, thereby not only making whiteness visible but at the same time challenging and questioning white normativity (Frankenberg, 1993; Nayak, 2007). In line with Erasmus' (2010) critique on the limitations of Contact Theory as a white-normative, euro-centric concept, Frankenberg (1993) firmly positions whiteness as the key factor in a racist framework, suggesting that it is from this position that antiracism strategies can be developed. Moreover, positioning Whiteness studies within a racist framework and using it as an antiracist strategy shifts the focus from blackness as the presenting problem – what Du Bois formulated as a question "How does it feel like to be a problem?" (1903,2005, p. 2) – to instead, highlighting whiteness and its role in antiracism strategies.

I therefore extend my conceptual framework using Nayak's (2007) psychoanalytical framework that focuses on whiteness and it's "unspoken registers of race thinking" (p. 746). Whereas post-structuralist methods of deconstruction focus on "language, text and discourse", the psychoanalytical approach seeks to investigate the "psychic landscape upon which white subjectivity is cultivated" (Nayak, 2007, p. 746). Furthermore, this paradigm recognizes that white identities are constituted by both internal and external processes and ought to be understood in relation to other racialized identities (Nayak, 2007). Put differently, the psychoanalytical framework investigates the unconscious ways in which white members deploy whiteness in their interactions with the racialized other. Through this approach, this study moves away from the drama of race which focusses on white subjectivities with extreme views or 'naked racism', which conceal more than it reveals, and instead highlights

seemingly unremarkable mundane interactions. To this, Byrne (2006), posits that this "requires hearing and seeing 'race' in contexts where it is not explicitly felt as present" (p.2).

Critical, psychoanalytic investigations into whiteness allow me to move away from elevating blackness to a hyper-visible target of inquiry and instead highlight the ways in which white subjects' "experience, sense of selves, ways of thinking, speaking and doing" are racialized in intergroup settings (Byrne, 2006, p.2). Conway and Steyn (2010) view this shift in the way of thinking and writing about race as an act of "outing whiteness" which may be "considered a revelatory political act of making 'strange' and deconstructing whiteness" (p.285). Taken together, the following points are noteworthy from the foregoing conceptual exposition:

My study shares with Contact Theory the goal of resolving intergroup conflict, however, the present study attempts to bridge Contact Theory's limitations by drawing on Whiteness Studies and Nayak's (2007) psychoanalytic formulation..

1) . Contact Theory is to a large extent conducted in laboratory or orchestrated settings. This study took place in a naturalistic setting in a voluntarily dialogue between people who are not equal in terms of class and racial histories;

(2) Contact Theory attempts to equalize power relations through Allport's equal status condition. This study focuses on exploring how power dynamics play out rather than ignoring them in a setting of assumed equality (alignment of goals and status).

(3) Whiteness Studies focuses on white subjectivity alone with little attention on white subjectivity in multiracial spaces (Levine-Rasky, 2002). This study acknowledges that whiteness is constructed in relation to 'racialized groups' and focuses on white subjectivity in a cross-racial setting. Whiteness Studies is therefore a crucial component of my conceptual framework.

Chapter Three: Research Method

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present the study objective, central research question, and theory questions. Thereafter, I discuss the steps I have followed in undertaking this study.

3.2. The Research Project

3.2.1. Study Objective

The aim of this research is to identify the factors and processes involved in cross-racial conversations that facilitate or hinder transformation among a group of women engaged in sustained dialogue on race.

3.2.2 Central Research Question

What are the factors that influence transformation and the processes of this transformation in the context of a long-term interracial dialogue group?

3.2.3. Theory Questions/Sub-questions

- In what ways do power relations between black and white members play out in the group?

- What factors need to be in place in order for transformative processes and stages to unfold?

- How is transformation experienced in the context of 'This Dialogue Thing'?

3.3. Study Design

This study seeks to undertake a case study of a group of black and white women engaged in sustained dialogue to gain an intimate understanding of what occurs in cross-racial dialogue within this group. The present research is designed as an autoethnographic

study using the researcher's experience, together with focus group discussions to allow for a co-constructed in-depth understanding (Attridge-Stirling, 2001). Autoethnographic researchers bring their cultural background and or specific identity into their research by writing about insights that are intertwined with and based on their individual cultural connection with the research group and topic (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). The authors further state that there are different forms of autoethnography which differ on "the researcher's self and interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview" (para.12).

Specifically, I use a combination of narrative ethnography and interactive interviews. Narrative ethnography are texts written as stories that include the researcher's experiences in the description and analysis of the data (Tedlock, 1991). Interactive interviews on the other hand, provide "in-depth and intimate understanding of people's experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics" (Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, p.121). Deploying these approaches, I use conventions of storytelling by narrating chronological and at times, fragmented story progression to compare and contrast personal experience against existing literature (Ronai, 1995). This approach to autoethnography allowed the research process to be a collaborative "meaning-making" process between myself as both member and researcher, together with the participants (Johnston & Strong, p. 48). Autoethnographic researchers place utmost importance on their audience, specifically how the research might affect their readers and in which ways it may contribute to further dialogue (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). Autoethnographic research, through accessible text, allows the researcher to access a wider audience that is not usually taken into consideration in traditional research (Ellis, 1995). This gives the research a greater chance at impacting individuals and society.

3.4. Participants

Eight (8) participants, including the researcher, were part of the study. The demographic information of the group is as follows:

Gender: all women (8)

Race: 4 black women and 4 white women

Age: between 30 – 53

Occupation: 3 entrepreneurs, 1 activist, 1 student, 1 web designer, and 2 lecturers.

The researcher has been listed as a participant as her experience is central to the study.

3.5. Sampling

The present research is a case study based on a group of black and white women engaged in sustained dialogue on race. Purposive or judgmental sampling was used to select participants. This type of sampling is used when a researcher selects a case with specific intentions (Ishak & Bakar, 2013). Participants are chosen because of certain characteristics or because of membership into a specific group with the purpose of gaining an intimate understanding of what happens in those particular cases (Ishak & Bakar, 2013). Participants of this study were chosen based on their membership in *This Dialogue Thing*. Since I was already a member of the group, I called each member and shared with them my plans to undertake a study based on the group's experience and asked how they felt about it. Once I had everyone's buy in, I spoke to the group in one of our sessions and asked how the group felt about it. Everyone was in full support and felt it was important that the group's experiences be documented. Once everyone agreed to participate, I formally presented the group with the participant information sheet and consent form.

3.6. Data Collection

Data was collected using two focus group discussions and an individual interview with participants. I conducted two focus group discussions followed by individual interviews. I facilitated the first focus group discussion where it became clear that I could not be both researcher and participant. Participants consistently asked for my contribution as they felt the story was not complete without my voice as a member. Subsequently, in the second focus group discussion, my supervisor led the discussion and I joined the group as a member. I developed an interview schedule for the first focus group and formulated questions for the subsequent focus group and individual interviews from themes that emerged from the initial focus group discussion. The first focus group discussion was conducted at one of the member's offices. We moved the second focus group discussion to a different member's office due to closing times of the first location.

Where I had scheduled individual post focus group interviews, it became clear that participants needed this space to debrief about issues that had come up during the focus group meetings. I therefore decided not to use these interviews to collect new data but rather open

the space for debriefing only. Where there were gaps to be filled or more contextual data needed, I asked the group's permission to use data from previous group sessions, which had contributed to the development and understanding of group processes.

Focus group discussions are ideal for research on group processes as they allow the researcher to observe group members interacting with each other and gather information on factors related to the study (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). Furthermore, focus groups allow for participants to evoke and share ideas and perspectives with each other (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ornston). Focus group discussions also allowed me to observe how the group makes sense of and understands its dialogue experiences over time. Focus groups may also expose how relations at a racial and class level unfold.

Individual interviews, on the other hand, allowed participants to reflect and debrief on their focus group experience. It also allowed for an opportunity to raise and discuss questions or issues that may have been difficult to raise in the focus group. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed with the participants' permission. To ensure the credibility, conformability and dependability of the research and its findings, participants were given an opportunity to verify whether the themes highlighted in the data analysis reflect their experiences and thus agree with the researcher that these themes represent their lived experiences. Furthermore, one of my supervisors co-facilitated the focus group discussions with me to ensure credibility of the study.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data was organised using tools from both thematic analysis as well as autoethnographic processes. I chose thematic analysis because of its flexibility, its ability to work with and produce detailed data, and its freedom from any specific theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is also best suited for a research questions which seek to understand factors and processes that shape and direct a social phenomena.

The thematic analysis process began after the first focus group discussion. I undertook a preliminary analysis of the data by highlighting some of the key points of conversation in relation to the research question – what are the factors that influence transformation and the processes of this transformation in the context of a long-term interracial dialogue group? Following this, the second focus group discussion elaborated on the identified key points of the first group discussion. After the second focus group, thematic analysis, using an

essentialist approach, was undertaken to locate themes which represented the dataset in a thematic map of the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). An essentialist framework focusses on experience and meaning or "motivation or individual psychologies" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 14). During data analysis I had to constantly be aware of and work with my dual role as the researcher as well as a group member and participant of my research with valuable input. To resolve and constructively work with the tension between these two roles, I decided to turn to an autoethnographic method in my research, which had already been suggested by one of the reviewers of my research proposal. I read on this design and I felt it helped resolve my duality in the study. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) point out that the autoethnographic approach allows for the researcher to influence their work by including their subjective, emotional positions rather than pretending these don't exist. This approach made it possible for me to use my positionality as a source of knowledge. I am a black woman who is the youngest in the group and from a working class background. This set me apart from the rest of the group as they were all middle class.

I then proceeded by identifying 'epiphanies' that were significant to the collective journey of the group. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) describe epiphanies as "remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life, times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyse lived experience, and events after which life does not seem quite the same" (para. 6). Based on those moments or epiphanies, I constructed a map of the group's journey. I proceeded by coding extracts that were central to the group's process of transformation and organising these into themes that mapped the journey of the group. Transformation in the context of this study refers to changes that occurred over time with regards to power relations, cross racial relations and dynamics within the group. Self-questioning and self-analysis were employed as analytical techniques in this process (Maydell, 2010). The 'self-questioning and analysis' process involved asking myself the same questions I posed to the group members in the first focus group discussion: what are the power relations that have emerged since the conception of the group? What are the factors which may have facilitated positive change in the ways I relate to others? What are the factors which may have hindered positive changes in the ways I relate to others? What has kept the group going from 2012 to this point? Has interracial co-existence in the group transformed in any way? If so, what have been some of the most critical moments in the group?

Answering these questions as a researcher based on data collected, as well as a participant from my own subjective positionality, I found significant similiarities between my own epiphanies and those of the group as a collective. I took note of moments when those epiphanies were shared between myself and the group and of other times when experiences were particular to me. Where I refer to experiences of black members in the group without naming individual members or myself specifically, those experiences and emotions were shared amongst all black women. In instances where I write from the first-person perspective, these were experiences and emotions that were particular to me, that I included as important steps in the group process. It is worth noting that the seemingly unified voices of the group, particularly of the black members, are, in my view, the result of years of sustained dialogue, during which we achieved a deeper understanding of our own individual journeys and how they each relate and contribute to the different stages of transformation we went through as a group. A significant part of this transformation process was achieved by collectively working through a number of conflicts and disagreements. Furthermore, because of the sustained nature of the dialogue, the overall story and context of the group were important to articulate in order to identify and understand the patterns of meaning. With this in mind I, in part, worked with the group members to co-construct (and reconstruct) the story of *This Dialogue Thing* (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003).

The themes were presented and articulated using a combination of narrative ethnography and interactive interviews. Narrative ethnography are texts written as stories that include the researcher's experiences in the description and analysis of the data (Tedlock, 1991). Interactive interviews   on the other hand, provide "in-depth and intimate understanding of people's experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics" (Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, p.121). With these approaches, I reconstructed the experiences of the group in a combination of chronological events, fragmented memories and contested meanings against existing literature (Ronai, 1995). This was done so that themes could show the development of the transformation that occurred in the group on an individual as well as collective level.

3.8. Reflexivity

In our initial meetings in the group, we circulated reading materials and convened for discussions in our monthly meetings. A member had suggested we read *A human being died that night* by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. After reading the book, the same group member

thought we should invite the author to one of our sessions. It was in this session that the idea of me pursuing studies towards a Masters degree was first articulated. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela encouraged me to think about undertaking a study on the group. It was at this early stage, more than a year before I registered to do my Masters that members of the group were supportive of the idea. They sent emails of the different pieces of documentation we had accumulated over the years and constantly called to express their support before I had made the request to use any of the material. I started this journey knowing I had their full support and willingness to participate. Before conducting the first focus group discussion, I felt anxious about stepping into the group as a researcher as I had become comfortable with my role as a member, which afforded me the space to either engage or sit back depending on my mood. Even though the group had been very supportive and excited about me documenting our experiences, I worried that my new role might put an uncomfortable distance between us. I was not sure how to balance this new "authority" that the role of researcher lent me with my usual self as an outspoken member of this group. Having to conduct the focus group in the presence of my supervisor made it even more stressful for me.

Moreover, the dialogue group had always been an all-female space and I was worried how a male presence would affect the openness and interaction between members. As a result of all these issues, I conducted the first focus group meeting consciously displaying my professional side to the group, hoping this would help my role as a researcher. The result was so foreign to us that we all burst out laughing within the first few minutes, which alleviated a lot of the tension we all carried. As we got into the discussion, I realised that I could quite naturally shift to a more observing role on the periphery by facilitating the conversation rather than participating in the discussion. The challenge for me was the dual role I now had to fill as both the researcher and a long-time member, who was (and still is) central to some of the experiences in the group. Other members kept asking me to fill in gaps when recalling timelines and recapping certain issues. Throughout the group discussion I was aware of this challenge and the sometimes confusing feelings that came up for me, when I felt called to contribute as a member and at the same time the need to observe as a researcher. As challenging as this felt at the time, the conversation flowed with relative ease, which I mostly attribute to the fact that we were familiar and comfortable with each other as a group and managed to preserve this group cohesion throughout the research process.

At the end of the first focus group, members expressed that the focus group had served as a reflective exercise and suggested my supervisor conduct the second focus group

so I could be part of the discussion without being restrained by my researcher position. This suggestion for me, signalled that members of the group were comfortable with the presence of my supervisor in the space. After we discussed the matter in private, my supervisor agreed to facilitate the next focus group discussion. In preparation for that second session, we did a preliminary analysis of the recording identifying some of the key points of conversation that seemed significant to the research question - what are the factors and processes that either hinder or facilitate transformation in the group. My supervisor conducted our second focus group discussion mainly focussing on the identified key points. The session reminded me in some ways of our early dialogue meetings, where, we agreed on topics beforehand, and handed out reading material for the group to discuss what came up for each of us individually. It was both slightly artificial (in that the conversation was restricted to certain "key points" and time was limited) and at the same time we had a familiar and easy flow with each other, reminiscent of early dialogues but with a lot more familiarity and ease amongst us. Me participating as a member enriched the conversation and allowed us, as a group, to reflect on where we came from and where we felt we were at after six years of dialogue. It also allowed us to identity issues that we felt needed to be prioritised in our subsequent meetings. Relieving myself of having to conduct the focus group and participating as a member allowed the group discussion to unfold in a manner that was similar to our meetings. Furthermore, it allowed members to interact with me in the same manner they normally did and freed them from the uncertainty of what role they should engage me in the discussion.

It was useful to have both experiences, firstly as the "auto-ethnic" researcher being able to identify underlying feelings and thoughts in the process, and secondly relieved of that role as a "normal" member, which afforded me to get deeper into the conversation about our past and future as a group. My decision to focus on the white participants was informed by the data. The data suggests that the group in its initial stages focussed mainly on black people's experiences. This was partly therapeutic for some black members, who maybe, for the first time in their lives, were in a room with white people listening to their lived experiences of racism. Over time however, black members experienced the interest in and questioning of their daily struggles with racism as voyeuristic and exploitative. White people only needed to show up and present an interest to hear black stories order to gain and retain membership in the group. Black group members, on the other hand, were constantly put on the spot performing victimhood and granting absolution to the white members, who by virtue of showing, up were supposedly exempt from racism. Without being verbalised and

expressed, those feelings led to a crisis point, which resulted in some black members leaving. Having learned from this crisis, the group underwent a major shift from the experiences of black members to those of white members. I argue that this shift was responsible for the transformation that occurred in the group on an individual as well as collective level. For black members, listening to white people confront their whiteness and seeing them struggle and stumble in coming to terms with their complicity and inherent racist bias, opened the possibility for black members to understand and develop empathy and patience for their white counterparts. For white members, being pushed to critically reflect on their socialization as white and to historicise their whiteness, allowed them to access a part of their psyche which they had disassociated themselves from.

Furthermore, this shift addressed some of the power imbalances in the group without seeking to neutralize them. White members were no longer in control of defining how the dialogue should take place, they could no longer sit back in spectator roles, without making themselves vulnerable, while black members laid themselves bare. It was at this point that white people had to show vulnerability and honesty in order for the group to move to the next level depth in our dialogue.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

As the researcher, I had existing connections with the participants and I had expressed my intention to conduct a study of the group's experiences over time. I received each member's final approval with the understanding that they were free to change their minds at any stage. Participants had the chance to ask questions about the study participation and processes before and throughout the study. All members of 'This Dialogue Thing' who participated in the study were given a consent form for their perusal which outlined the study's objectives. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any given moment. All information obtained from participants will be kept confidential and protected in a locked office space. The audio recorder has been kept in the researcher's office inside a locker, and transcribed data is saved in a password-protected laptop. Participants remain anonymous with the use of pseudonyms. Ethical standards by the Research Ethics Committee and Department of Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch were upheld. See attached Appendix A. Counselling services were provided free of charge for the participants should the need arise. Two qualified psychotherapists from the Historical Trauma and Transformation Unit were commissioned to provide a counselling service. Participants had

the option to see them if counselling services were needed. Participants were not paid for taking part in the study, however refreshments were provided. Lastly, we consider this study to be medium risk since although the participants are emotionally healthy adults, the research does require them to talk intimately about racial experiences which may cause some level of discomfort.

3.10. Limitations

The scope of the research is limited and subsequently limits the findings of the study. The research is a case study and cannot be used to make generalisations beyond the context of the group. Findings from the study might however, generate new insights about race relations in South Africa currently. Positionality refers to "the identity of the researcher in relation to the researched" (Anyidoho, 2006, p.156). I recognise that I am positioned due to, among other things, my involvement in the group as a member. My dual position as a member and researcher impacted the good rapport that I built with the participants. My subjectivity as a young black woman, as opposed to an older white women for instance, influenced the type of data the study produced and the analysis I pursued (Anyidoho, 2006). It is for these reasons I chose to undertake an autoethnographic study. The autoethnographic design of this research recognises my subjectivity as a young black woman as a source to draw insight from, rather than an impediment to the legitimacy of the study.

Chapter Four: Results

The Dialogue Experience

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I detail the fragmented and thematised story of the journey of 'This Dialogue Thing'. The story is co-constructed by myself in my dual position as member/researcher together with the members of the group. The story is told through my experience and incorporates the experiences of others for a more contextualised and reliable account. The selection and presentation of the concepts or themes were informed by the order in which they occurred over time in the group to illustrate developmental stages in transformation.

4.2. Description of Participants

The participants of this study consisted of the members of *This Dialogue Thing*. The group consisted of 4 black women (including the researcher) and 4 white women. The age range at the time of the study was 29 to 53 years old. Below are vignette of each participant.

Amanda: Is a black 35-year-old journalist. She was born in the Eastern Cape, worked in Johannesburg and has been living in Cape Town with her husband and kids for the past 5 years.

Leah: A black identifying 40-year-old PHD student and social activist who shares that she often passes as white. She was born and   grew up in the Cape flats. She moved to Johannesburg for a few years to run away from the racism of Cape Town and eventually came back a few years ago.

Lesh: A black 34-year-old graphic designer from Botswana. Lesh studied at one of the historically white universities in Cape Town and has lived here ever since.

Alexandra: a white 30-year-old American woman. Alexandra came to South Africa in 2010 to study at one of the historically white universities in Cape Town. She now lives here and runs her business from Cape Town.

Denise: A white 42-year-old academic from Austria. Denise has lived in Cape Town for over 10 years and is an academic at a historically black university. She shares that her life is surrounded by black people: at home where she is married to a black man and a mother to children who are black and at work where she is in the minority.

Jane: a white 45-year-old German-South African business woman. Jane moved to South Africa with her family when she was still a child. She attended primary and high school in German schools around South Africa and left to pursue her law degree in Germany. She came back after finishing her studies and has been living in Cape Town ever since. She has citizenship in South Africa and Germany.

Tina: a white 53-year-old German business woman. Tina came to visit Cape Town about 15 years ago and married a South African. They have three adopted children, who are black and run a business together.

Somila: a black 35-year-old activist. Somila was not part of the focus group discussions as she does not regularly attend sessions but is mentioned numerous times in the discussion as she was central to some of the themes She is still involved in a lot of our group activities and consented to being included in the research. Furthermore, she was given the thesis to read and check that what was said was a true reflection of her experience.

4.3. 'This Dialogue Thing'

The group was started in 2012 by a white member, Jane, with the intention to start an interracial dialogue. Together with another white friend, Denise, who is married to a black man, they decided to talk to white people who might be interested in joining such a group and encourage them to invite their black friends (black people they know). The black people that were invited joined because they were hoping for a space where they could vent their daily frustrations of racism, and some were also intrigued by the fact that white people were prepared to engage on such a taboo topic, thereby challenging the white "rainbow nation narrative". It started with a group of 6 women (3 black and 3 white) and grew into a larger group of 12 women.

4.3.1. Setting up the Dialogue Space

The first session of 'This Dialogue Thing' was held at Jane's house and as the concept was still unclear, the session ended up being a social gathering of strangers and a few people who already knew each other. During that first session, it was decided that the group would meet once a month and keep in touch through emails in between the physical meetings. The meetings would always take place in one of the member's homes. Meeting in each other's homes would allow us to take off the different hats we wore in society (business owner, journalist, lecturer, unemployed youth, homemaker etc.) and come together as women, mothers, citizens, and people who were trying to figure things out. The plan was for this space to be different from the spaces we occupied where people were guarded, and discussions on race were shallow and about political correctness. The intention was, as Jane points out, *"to experience each other's lives in all its facets, in all their facets and not only get together in a neutral place and talk and then go back. But really immerse ourselves into each other's spaces."*

The next few sessions were spent discussing the rules of engagement and the importance of creating a safe space for all. It was agreed that each session would have a host and be facilitated by one of the members. A professional facilitator was brought in for one session to speak to the group about group processes, rules of engagement and various tools to avoid conflict. The group eventually came up with a mission statement and a list of what we expected to get from our meetings. The following is the mission statement and expectations that was formulated by all members:

"Mission statement**:** We are trying to create a space to allow conversations about race and how it impacts our lives in this troubled South African context. This space should be safe but we are seeking discomfort. We are not afraid of difficult questions, of being exposed, embarrassed and challenged. We will do so with respect and listening with an open mind, will and heart, with suspended judgment and with the support of the group. We will try to focus on our personal experiences and feelings as opposed to generalizing and stereotyping. We acknowledge that race is linked to power and privilege and that no one of us can escape dominant discourses. However, we believe that personal encounter among women of different backgrounds and with different experiences can help us break through assumptions. Ultimately, we are willing to let go of our personal truths and accept that there are other truths out there."

Expectations:

- Show blind spots

- Create a safe space to talk about race

- Meet diverse women from South Africa

- Break, revert assumptions

- Disrupt without being judged

- Acquire active listening skills

- Overcome racial prejudices to see each other as human beings

- Develop language around race

- Allow topics to come up that are burning, say things as they are, even if they are politically incorrect

- Learning about each other / our communities / background

- Reaffirm our femininity

- Personal growth"

The first few sessions were typically facilitated by one of the members and began with some kind of warm up exercise before introducing a topic. After setting the topic and outlining the context, members were invited to share their own lived experiences. On a few occasions, the facilitator would email an article on a race-related topic before the meeting for everyone to read. Members were asked to bring food, snacks and drinks and sessions would start with everyone eating together and having general conversations before formally engaging on a topic. The eating, drinking and chatting would often take much longer than anticipated and we would at times get so caught up with conversations that we did not get to the 'formal' part of the session. These 'informal' conversations revolved around relationships, sex and our children in a fun and humorous atmosphere, which ultimately helped us to get to know and relate to each other. However, this kind of socialising was seen as a distraction from what the group was supposed to achieve and some members soon asked for the sessions to become more focused.

4.4. Class Labour as a Condition of Possibility for the Group to Exist

Since most of the sessions were hosted in the suburbs, physically getting to some of the sessions was a challenge for myself and Somila, another working-class member, because of mobility. We often had to take taxis and be picked up somewhere in town and have to sleep over at one of the member's homes after the sessions, because public transport was not available late in the evenings. It was only after Somila was able to buy a car that getting to and from the dialogues became easier. Somila and I had to get some form of upward mobility to gain access to private transport which afforded us access to these spaces with more ease. Even then, we would have to discuss petrol issues on some occasions as our financial situation varied from month to month. The group was a middle-class space and not accommodating for working class people because of access to the physical meetings and the language the conversations had to be conducted in (English). The black members were mostly educated, middle-class and "well spoken" - as one of the white members said to me in one of the first meetings - as those were the "kind of black people" white members had access to. I was invited by a black member, Somila, who was invited by a white colleague in senior management in the NGO she worked for. She felt uncomfortable going by herself and asked me to go with her. I was assumed to be in this middle-class bracket because I too "spoke well" which meant I was not a black like their helper or cleaning lady at work. In the eyes of the white members of the group, I was removed from those blacks and therefore did not have challenges like not knowing what my family and I would eat, never mind how I would get to the sessions and still bring food to contribute.

The following excerpts by Denise and Jane illustrate how Somila's and my reality was not something that even occurred to middle-class members in the group (black and white). Denise explains that *"...what we never did is to ask if it was – I don't think we were aware or we thought about how difficult it was to get to some of the places like Eva's place in Constantia for somebody who doesn't have private transport, who has to use public transport. I don't think it was ever put out there or asked or spoken about."*

Moving back and forth from a township to a suburb did not only require a physically moving from one space to another, it also required a mental preparation and shift. One of the conditions for making the dialogue space possible for this group was for black members, especially those from working class, to move physically, mentally and emotionally from one context that was radically different to the one that the dialogue took place in. As a result, I did not only have to move myself physically but also be prepared to embody a particular type of

identity to suit the context. Upon leaving the dialogue space, I would have to switch identities in order to prepare myself for a radically different kind of reality and engagement.

We once had the session at my place and later at Somila's place. This was uncomfortable for everybody. Working on logistics was a nightmare and I could see the uneasiness from the white members in that space. My family also felt uncomfortable at the thought of having white people in their home. They interacted with whites at work and malls but they had never had an intimate relationship with them outside of work. They did not understand my relationship with these white people and why they would want to come to the township. They stayed behind closed doors in the bedroom throughout the session and only came out after everyone had left. When planning for the next sessions, members would point out that having it at Tina's, Jane, Denise or Eva's place was better because of traffic or whatever reason. What they were of course saying without saying it was that having it in one of the suburban homes was easier and better for them. The comfort of the white members and middle-class blacks was prioritised and the labour of being able to participate in this interracial dialogue left to Somila and I. The following extracts by Jane and Denise illustrate this point:

Jane: *"Yeah, it was a conversation that wasn't easily had because we didn't know each other that well yet. And now, you know obviously you can ask okay, what about transport, what about this or that? But you don't want to step on somebody's toes. You don't want to make somebody feel, I don't know, less than inferior also, you know as if they needed help but you also want to offer the help. So that was a bit tricky. I know we did lifts from the station, Somila and things like that. So we did speak about the lift stuff somewhat. But I mean, later it turned out, the one session you didn't come because you couldn't get there and nobody thought that that was for your reason for not being able to come. So you know there is a big, blind spot of course there and but the ability to really name that early and be able to have that conversation I think that could have gone much, much better than it did."*

Denise: "*But I also remember what a big thing it was when we, I think we went to your house and we all had to meet in town and we had to drive in convoy and just the idea of going into Langa was like this big thing and we can't go by ourselves. We have to meet at the petrol station and then we convoy, remember?*

TUMI: "*I don't because I wasn't there."*

Denise: "You told us exactly how to go and yeah, it was interesting, that fear of the township and not knowing where we were going and it became a big thing, remember?"

4.5. Black Vulnerability

With time, the group's mission statement changed and we decided that because most spaces centred whiteness, we would de-centre whiteness and prioritize black voices. The group would be a space where the black members would be able to bring all their frustrations, pain and anger. The space became therapeutic for black members, who felt their experiences of racism were validated. People brought general as well as personal stories about growing up, working and living as a black person in South Africa and Cape Town in particular. This of course meant that it was mostly middle-class black members that were centred and Somila and I would have to deal with our working-class challenges outside the group and focus on the challenges we had in common with middle-class blacks when in the group. White members would mostly listen and empathise. Below are some excerpts from black members that illustrate how prioritising black voices became therapeutic.

Amanda: "*I think I did say, for me, it was, as I always said, like it was good therapy for living in a racist South Africa specifically. A racist Cape Town and it was just sort of a space to gain some strengths, some racial stamina, I suppose, in an opposite direction almost. So white people have to gain racial stamina to be able to able to take the things that black people are saying. I was gaining racial stamina in the sense of becoming more and more confident in being able to say what I wanted to say when in white spaces. And that space was important for the incubation and articulation and crystallization of some of those ideas and thoughts.*" [Laughing].

Leah*: "No, but articulation..".*

Amanda*: "I am building arguments. You know like I'm building arguments around arguing. I'm having fights with Denise. I'm having fights with everyone in the group about the ball that they're doing and that gives me the strength and the ability to know how to argue properly the next time in a way that removes the emotion or keeps the emotion at bay, enough for me to be able to articulate what I'm saying. And then crystallize in the sense that the argument is solid and is clear instead of this like just wanting to punch somebody."*

Leah*: "Amandla!"*

Amanda*: "That one can very easily you know, get into and that was a really great and positive thing. Like it was the one – as much as it's not perfect and there's a lot that we could still do, but for me, it was the one space where I could live this like, I wasn't schizophrenic in that particular moment. I could be black Amanda in a white space and a fully black Asanda without having to suppress myself for appeasing whiteness and being you*

know, a version of a palatable blackness or be the radical, angry black woman and live with that stereotype. Even though I still am the black woman, technically.

Leah*:   "For me, it was definitely around some kind of commitment to and recognition even, from a distance that there was an experimentation going on. So even though I don't remember and I wasn't here last week about what the intentions were specifically but I continue to feel like there's an attempt to keep people in the room while still having difficult conversation. So for me, that brought me back because like I said, I'm in a lot of political space. I'm in a lot of black only space but that's a different thing to what's going on here. And I find that useful and that's why I come back. So I am involved with a white woman so it's not like I don't have to deal with whiteness. [Laughing] the same kind of way because I shout at home. But there is something about the combination of people and the different kinds of issues that come up because of the combination that feels very rich for me, different to engaging whiteness. It's about keeping all these different things in the room and trying to..."*

Tumi*: "I think for me is, I mean, having gone to a white school, the horrible, traumatic experiences in my school and tertiary again, and having white friends you know and actually, later in life realising that these weren't friends because it was a space that couldn't hold all of me. You know, I had to bring pieces of myself that would work for me to keep that relationship. You know, so my friendships with my white friends depended on me, depended on me having to do some kind of performance. So the friendship was basically on me to hold and that meant only bringing pieces of myself that they could take in those spaces and the minute I brought anything about my blackness in that space, the friendship crumbled. So this was literally the first space where I started having the kinds of conversations that we were having here. And that kept me coming back."*

Facilitator: *"Thank you."*

LESH*: "There was always wine so I kept coming back [laughing]. For me, it's a lot of like what Tumi said. I mean I grew up in Botswana so mostly surrounded by black people. But my when I moved to Cape Town and it was just like whiteness everywhere and trying to navigate gay spaces that were shut-filled with Northern suburbs lesbians and trying to integrate in those spaces and Cape Town being so cliquey and all these things so.   So you kind of have to like morph yourself into something palatable, like you were saying and only after university really that I started meeting white people whom I could sort of like be. I could be myself around. Most of them were foreign white people -maybe that's why this group is working [laughing], there are no white South Africans…and then that's the reason why I also*

still come to the meetings. And as, speaking to what Asanda was saying about being able to be in a space where you can basically train yourself how to have these conversations in a way where you don't blow up or just like punch a person in the face. Yeah and be able to take these conversations out to your other friendships and like kind of spread the word or just, you just practice how to deal with racists especially now on the Facebook Group. And I mean it does take its toll on you and you just disappear and you just like – but for the most part, it's really taught me a lot. And I've lost a lot of white friends as well because of like being able to be in this space and realising that like, wait, that wasn't a friendship, you know. I'm not saying I'm your friend. I'm just saying I like it here. [Laughing]."

4.6. The 'good white person'

White members in the group were mostly not South African but have lived in the country for over 20 years. The white members in the group had experienced some kind of cross-racial encounter that made them realize that racism was a serious problem in the country they lived in and wanted to have conversations around it. They were invested in doing something to tackle racism because of how it impacted their lives and the people they loved. They were horrified by the overtly racist acts by some white people and wanted to prove that they were not like those white people. Part of being the good white person meant doing something, and being part of a cross-racial dialogue on race was doing exactly that.

They attended the cross-racial dialogues and listened to story after story from black members about their racist experiences. We cried together, laughed together and started forming friendships. The space became comfortable for all and evolved into something that we were all benefiting from. White people would inquire about black members experiences, how they experienced racism and empathize. As the familiarity with each other grew and friendships strengthened, the conversations became deeper and more difficult as illustrated by the following excerpt.

Jane: *"Yeah, it's like the matrix thing. Once you take the pill you can't go back. It's like once you've figured out there is this world out there that you weren't aware of, this reality, this truth out there that you weren't aware of, as shit as it is to find out that you weren't – that you were that ignorant, you cannot go back to ignorance. You can't. I came here for this. That's what I wanted out of it and I knew it wasn't going to be easy but I didn't know it was going to be that hard. Yeah but there is no option of going back [inaudible]."*

4.7. Racial Voyeurism

This went on for a while until the black members realised that they kept on exposing themselves to a group of white people, who themselves did not share anything personal. Black members realised they did not only need white members to listen and be compassionate but to reciprocate the vulnerability they had shared. Black members expected their fellow white members to expose their whiteness and let it stand in the full inspection of its own psyche. An invite was extended to the white members to make themselves more vulnerable and share personal experiences rather than rely on black people to share their stories. This was met with discomfort and the conversation was constantly derailed. White members were not able to respond to this invitation and would come up with all kinds of strategies to avoid journeying into what I call 'the valley of vulnerability'. The valley of vulnerability is a space that challenges people in a privileged position to turn the reflective gaze on themselves and look deep within, not knowing what they will find down there, and expose what they do find. The concept was developed from the following excerpt which succinctly captures it.

Jane: *"I know personally, honestly, it's taken me four and a half of our five years to understand in my head and in my body what that vulnerability is and what that – what that can look like to show that. It's really – and I remember that I really, it felt like a physical digging and digging and digging and it wouldn't come. It wouldn't come, it wouldn't come and I wonder if that's something also that's part of the programming to always be good and make sure people see you as good and proper and right and I don't know, I don't know"*.

White members deployed rhetoric and rationality to avoid being vulnerable. They could not bring themselves to move past giving cognitive responses by using the right language, displaying empathy and listening. These props provided them with some kind of safety and allowed them to hide behind the illusion of being the good white.

White people started the group and wanted to engage in cross-racial dialogue because this made them feel like they were doing something good. In other words, being the good white and setting themselves apart from the racist whites was their motivation for wanting to participate in a cross-racial conversations. The white members wanted to understand the racism that black people experience and what they could do to make things better. They did not anticipate that this would mean thinking about their own complicity in racism or interrogating their socialisation as white people. Fighting racism meant changing things for

black people, not having to change themselves as "good white" people. Allowing themselves to be vulnerable would disturb the good white image and instead of allowing this to happen, they unconsciously decided to participate in these conversation in a voyeuristic manner.

This voyeuristic participation, what I am calling 'racial voyeurism', is a defence mechanism which allows white people to be onlookers in black people's lives and to take part in deeply personal racialized experiences, without immersing themselves fully in the experience. It is a safety net that allows white people to participate in anti-racism work without ever interrogating their whiteness in a personal way. The following excerpt captures the concept of racial voyeurism and how it unfolded in the group.

Denise: *"Well I think, I was wondering how [inaudible] question that I would never ask, if you're asking questions that I would have liked to know how you felt or how other black people felt when Eva spoke about her experience of racism. You know, so not in compared to me but among black people if class adds a layer or not, if it's useful to talk about that or not. Or if you just say as you said, you're black and that's enough."*

Tina: *"Yeah, but that again, you know, like that was also something that we did a lot as white people, just out of interest sake, let's look at something else. Let's not look at ourselves you know. So then again, there was this sort of like theoretical question out there that was very interesting but that totally..."*

Denise: *"But is that theoretical..."*

Tina: *"Look, let me just finish. But it's not something that has really got to do with you and your emotions. This is something that you were interested in somebody else."*

Denise: *"Yes, that's true."*

Tina: *"And that something that we were struggling with a lot, you know, where do white people stand in this? Where are you? Where are you with your feelings, with your fears, with your inner racism with whatever? And then before we even got there, now we must do inter-sectionality and that was always something – I was also struggling with that. And I think what you said with the hiding like that people could hide behind that. That was not something that was intentionally done but I think that was something that was a sort of white defence mechanism to be able to hide and not to be able to put yourself out there, no – not to want to put ourselves out there. So let's rather talk anything else but our own feelings and our own shit."*

Amanda: *"I think, sorry, I think it also like, it's fascinating that we're having this conversation now actually. But I think it's also like quite undermining from a white perspective that you want us to bring this inter-sectionality when the race that we're bringing*

is already heavy enough. And you're like that's not enough why don't you actually bring how being a woman on top of being a black person is? Why don't you bring how being, you know, like the – it's hard enough just to peel that one layer, which is race. And now you guys are like actually we should have also peeled the class layer. Actually, we should have also peeled the sexuality layer. Actually, we should have also peeled the gender layer because you know, if we're not doing that then we're not really getting to the crux of it, which is easy and comfortable if you're white. But when you are black those layers are multi-layered and it's a complex interweaving, you know to now on top of talking about your racial experience, talk about your financial situation or your lack of financial security. I just think it's quite – I don't have the word but – I don't have a word that's polite actually."

Tina: *"So what we should have talked about is that space between Denise and Eva for instance. You know, what happens there when you suddenly sit there and from being best friends, you're suddenly on two different sides? What happens in this space, in this dialogue space? So – and to dig there and to look there and to like how maybe now you realise actually in your social life you can avoid looking at your whiteness. In this space suddenly you are confronted with your whiteness and instead of talking about this people either then left or we had a big crisis. I don't even remember. I don't even think you brought this up as such; there was hurt feelings and there was defensiveness. And how can you do this? And how can you say this? But we're best friends and then eventually I don't even know what happened. But that is the stuff that eventually I think we managed to somehow without leaving it with you and Eva but somehow we got closer to this, how we are confronted with our whiteness where we normally manage to get away with not because now we're such good friends. And my best friend is black and like I don't even have to look at my whiteness and what I stand for and I have to have the hurt of not being white because why do you look at me now from this side? Why do you sit there, you know and I think we managed to unpack this a little bit after our white pain [inaudible] dialogue, right? But yeah this is really what happened and instead of looking there, we piled some more interesting things to talk about."*

Lesh: *"About black people."*

Tina further explains why they struggled to accept this invitation to immerse themselves in this valley of vulnerability and opted to be voyeurs on black people's experiences.

Tina: *"It was the easiest way for whiteness to participate in any of these conversations because first of all it keeps us safely out of the shot, firing line. Because we can sit back and collectively talk about that racism without having to be a part of it. So, by having a black*

person explain their racist experience, we can all sit and go like, oh wow, that's so bad. And at the same time, distance ourselves because it's not something I would ever do. So, I would not follow a black person through Clicks because I think she would steal. I would not ask a black person to show me their bags at the bookshop. So those are all bad racist events and I'm safely behind that line of, oh no, I'm not that person; I'm a good person. So I think psychologically what it achieves is for us to keep up the good white image and at the same time feeling, we're doing something good because now we're listening. So not only are we good people, we're actually also doing something. So sort of like, it's a great, big bubble of self-deception."

Jane*:   "And we're learning while we're listening like oh shit, okay I mustn't do that you know like when we hear all the stories because we go like, I could have done that but now I know that's not a good idea. Or not only I could have done [talking together]. I did that but luckily I'm not the one having to now disclose that. So I can sit back, go like, [inaudible]. So for future references, thanks guy, for educating us. Don't do that again.*

What made this particularly difficult for the white members was the fact that they never had to question their "white identity" in ways that black people in the group asked of them. They were used to being praised for showing up, participating and listening, as this was sufficient proof of their "goodness". Being the good white had a very low bar. Asking white people to turn a reflective gaze on themselves and expose and exhibit their vulnerable white psyche was too threatening. The group's experience was a typical illustration of Erasmus's (year) critique of how contact theory "makes 'whiteness' invisible" and thus leaves "whiteness unquestioned" and by extension makes blackness hyper visible and the target of inquiry (p. 391). White members could not bring themselves to be vulnerable in that space even though black members had been expected to expose themselves in order for the group to function in a way that would allow them to safely stay within the illusion of their inherent goodness. The following excerpt illustrates the social conditioning of white people as 'good' and how, specifically, as white women they have been taught to believe that they are innocent and how the request to be vulnerable threatened this innocence.

Alexandra: *"to me, it directly relates to innocence and not even whites because we keep talking about whiteness and we're talking about being white liberals. But I think more specifically or not even more specifically but also very much white women conservative or liberal whatever across the board, the innocence of the white woman is so often portrayed that it's insane. And I think that has a lot to do with it that okay, as white women, we experience oppression as women. So now you're in a space where now you're confronted*

with your oppression and I think that it's like how you're oppressive and then it's like this fear. I think it is fear but it's based on – not just reduction but judgement. And that is very much about this innocence. It's being taught to you your whole life and yeah, I think that's a big one and I don't yeah, I think across the board as well that we need to think about not just that we're white or we're liberal or whatever but we're white women specifically". Jane affirms Alexandra's point on how she has been socialized to being the good white and how the threat of this image being shattered prevented her from accepting the challenge of stepping in the valley of vulnerability.

Jane: "it's goodness [inaudible] so for me that being good, being a good person was a big thing and that being shattered was really difficult [inaudible] and you also brought up something when you said, you know being the good white [inaudible]. Sometimes I felt this whole topic can be, has been, can be so overwhelming [inaudible] I sort of remember specifically thinking like, if me, having been so open to having these conversations start [inaudible] want to start a group like this. And I messed up so badly and I am so off the point, like so off the point, then what the hell is with all the other people who are not even wanting to have the conversation. Then how can we ever get anywhere and how is there ever a chance of getting together in any normal way or a positive or a constructive way and that [inaudible] just flattened me a few times and really [inaudible]…Yeah, it was paralysing for a while."

Subsequently, black members felt uncomfortable, frustrated and angry with the power dynamics in a space that constantly required them to expose themselves for white people who fed off our experiences, took our stories and used them to educate themselves. The group had turned into a space where our lives were workshopped for the benefit of whites.

4.8. Friendships

While this was happening in the dialogue space, friendships were forming and strengthening outside the group. Social media played a critical role in the strengthening of our collective friendship. We had created a Facebook group where more people could engage in the conversations we were having. We wanted to open the conversations to the wider public and share some of the lessons we were learning in our face to face meetings. The Facebook group became more active than we anticipated and required a lot of time from us as the administrators to engage in the conversations and ensure that the page remained what we wanted it to be. We had many wonderful, insightful and deep conversations take place on the page and people seemed to appreciate the platform we had created. We also had many violent

conversations by people who had no desire to have meaningful, generative conversations. To manage the Facebook page, we would have conversations on a Whatsapp group to discuss the best way to respond to some of the comments. One of our approaches was for the white members to engage white people who wanted to learn, in order to avoid the labour of educating other white people falling on black members. White people also seemed more responsive when engaged by other white people. We took some of the Facebook conversations to our face to face meetings for further engagement. This pushed us to constantly rethink and refine our stance on issues.

With time, the Whatsapp group became a platform for us to chat about whatever was happening in our lives. We shared jokes, chatted about our day and asked each other for advice. We chatted almost every day throughout the day. In the same way that the 'informal' conversations before we started the face to face sessions allowed us to get to know each other better, this virtual space deepened our closeness, strengthened our bond and created a caring and supportive network. This space held us together and became a bridge that kept us connected and allowed us to move from one difficult conversation to the next. The following excerpt captures the role these platforms played in the development of our collective friendship.

Alexandra: *"...I first started the group I was scared shitless of everybody. I was like really intimidated and I think with the Facebook Group and the WhatsApp and it became like this sort of – we became like a team of like us against the world because of Facebook, [inaudible] at that time. So now everybody was like okay, we are not even just about the only one, our own, in a personal, you know relationships and racisms but now we have to actually come together against this you know like other evil – it's the same evil. But now it's like external and we were like this team. So I think that – and that created also a space where it wasn't just when we were meeting in person to talk about things that we would like, you know, like have this anxiety or this is the next meeting. This is the theme or it was like no, we were constantly in communication, every single day, all day and I felt like yeah, I can at any point come to you guys on the group and just throw something out there and say, 'This is what I'm thinking, what do you guys, I want to know what you guys have to say or whatever.' And I really do think that the friendships in this group have been like, yeah, profound even if it's not like best, best, best friends. I feel like we have certainly like a family".*

Members of the group were attending social events outside the group together, attending each other's birthday parties, having Christmas lunches together, and becoming part of each other's lives. Tina and myself in particular had developed a friendship where we

had created a space for mutual vulnerability. In our private space, we were spending more and more time together and were confronted with situations that forced us to confront issues around our race and class. I was a black working-class woman living in the Cape Flats and Tina an upper middle class white woman who lived in one of the most prestigious suburbs in Cape Town. There was a connection and a fit in personalities that formed between us in the dialogue sessions, and Tina put in a lot of the work in pursuing the relationship outside of the group. The more time we spent together, the more we were exposed to each other's lives and started being there for each other. We made time for debriefing after every dialogue meeting where we would discuss what happened in the session and how we felt about it. I had serious financial issues that affected my participation in the group and did not attend one or two sessions. I did not bring this to the group because I did not want to become a charity case. Tina kept trying to get me to open up and would not give up. I eventually opened up to her and this catapulted us into a difficult space of talking about money which threatened to swallow us whole and spit us out battered and bruised. We navigated this shaky terrain together with Tina always reaching out to me and not allowing me to run. The class issue and challenges around mobility and access that I faced in the group was to a large extent, invisible to the group because Tina's assistance managed to cover it up for the rest of the group. The labour that I had to put in to be able to be part of the dialogue was not something that most members (black and white) were aware of. The friendship between myself and Tina allowed this to be to some extent, a shared labour between the two of us. Our growing friendship became clear to everyone in the group and something that others aspired to. Jane described it as the *"beacon that everybody else tries to imitate and intimidating…It was like can anybody reach that and finds oneself lacking all the time in that way. Like yeah, but at the same time, it's like it's possible so I've got to keep trying."*

4.9. Black Anger and Frustration

Black members started expressing their frustration and anger towards white members, they voiced feelings of being used as lab rats and questions around the reasons and intentions of why the group was started came up. What the black group members did not realise was that the space they thought was created for black members to share their stories, express their frustrations, anger and pain was in fact a white space which helped white members feel good about themselves. Furthermore, what we unwittingly did by creating a space where we centred black pain and black voices (which was useful at the time for black members), was to

help white people maintain their good white image by turning the space into a white voyeuristic experience where whites could participate without giving anything of themselves. What we experienced as a therapeutic space at the time now felt like an exploitative space.

Black members no longer shared stories about the public racism and were expressing displeasure and pain experienced from the whites that were in the room. All of a sudden, the whites in the room were implicated and we were racially polarized into an "us" and "them". The following excerpt illustrates how the group became polarized according to race.
Denise: *"those who knew each other and came in as friends would sit in different corners of the room once they entered and were on opposing sides."*

4.10. White Psyche Defence Mechanisms

We eventually decided to have a session where white people would share their stories and this session was called the 'white pain dialogue'. The expectation was that this would be the session where white members would be vulnerable and expose themselves in the same way black members had. Instead, what we received was white defensiveness. White members used that session to let out all the anger they had hidden under the niceties and 'dialogue ground rules'.

 In this particular session, black members were asked not to take up too much space by being reminded that this was a 'white pain' dialogue every time they tried to get a word in. We were told not to make it about blacks. White members used the session to regain some of the power they felt they were losing over the dialogue process. They invalidated some of the black members stories by reframing some of their experiences as a class question instead of racism because they had experienced something similar. The conversation became about their pain and how difficult it was for them as white people in South Africa. Of course, these feelings were legitimate and their pain valid and important. The problem was that these stories were used to demonstrate that we all go through things as people, that the pain black members experienced was not something that was unique to black people. In this session, we were black people and white people and nothing else seemed to matter. We had been in conversation for years but in that moment, we might as well have been strangers. The gains we all thought we had made were reversed. White members felt that this was no longer a safe space for them. They felt like they were being pushed into a defensive corner and that black people were being too demanding. They felt that their pain was invalidated in relation to black people's pain. The good white image they had been socialized with and their

unconscious belief of white innocence was under threat. They believed they were being judged and attacked. Instead of allowing themselves to take a step back and reflect on why they could not allow themselves to be vulnerable, white members felt the need to reinforce their good white image by deracializing the black members experiences and reframing it as a human and universal thing to experience pain. It was becoming too much for them and not at all what they signed up for.

To protect the good white image, white members deployed every resource available to them to distract and derail the invitation and challenge to strip naked in the gaze of blackness in the same way that black members had exposed themselves. They stressed the importance of having an intersectional conversation where we do not essentialize race in our conversation, and wanted to explore the class question amongst black members and reminded us of the ground rules and importance of a safe space - a faulty concept we had moved away from when it became clear that it was centred around majority (white) identities and interests being protected and unquestioned in the so called "safe space" at the cost of minority voices expressing themselves authentically. As an example, black anger was seen as threatening and judgemental and thus not allowed within the safe space. After what they perceived as threatening expressions of judgement towards them, white people wanted the group to focus on how we could make the space safe again. They wanted to talk about anything and everything that did not involve them looking at themselves and how they have been socialized as white people. As valid as all the things that they wanted to talk about were, these things were used as defence mechanisms to avoid being vulnerable. We reached a crisis point in the group where we could not find each other. People were meeting in their own corners to discuss what was happening. Some expressed that they did not think they could be part of the group anymore. In this process we lost both black and white members. The following excerpt summarizes the events of the white pain dialogue.

Jane: *"That session about the white pain [inaudible] was a yeah, a crisis point. But actually one point in that, in a very long journey of white people being asked to show their vulnerability. There was very often from early on until now the call to show up and be vulnerable and for us, white people and Tina's the one who's figured it out most and earliest I think that to not get what that is, what that means. And when the call was made from the group, yes, you know, white people must now have a session on white pain, I think the intention was to get to that vulnerability that was being looked for, I think. But the answer that came was the answer that had been coming all along and that keeps coming. So either silence because you can't talk about these little examples of where you've been feeling*

oppressed or prejudiced or something. Or then it's that kind of narrative that then came and that then caused the explosion where yeah, it wasn't received well. But I think the call, as I understand it now, it was really for white people to go out and say, "This is where I mess up. This is where I'm racist. This is where, what I'm programmed as. This what, yeah, where I'm evil, where I'm toxic, where I'm you know, all those things. The real, the stuff you don't really want to look at and say and share. And I know personally, honestly, it's taken me four and a half of our five years to understand in my head and in my body what that vulnerability is and what that – what that can look like to show that. It's really – and I remember that I really, it felt like a physical digging and digging and digging and it wouldn't come. It wouldn't come, it wouldn't come and I wonder if that's something also that's part of the programming to always be good and make sure people see you as good and proper and right and I don't know, I don't know. It's a whole, another conversation but I think that white pain dialogue that is what happened. The call was to be vulnerable, the answer was examples of feeling oppressed or something then the group or the black in the group were like, whoa, can't deal with this, sorry. Thank you very much but no thank you and then that blocking was not accepted and there was a lot of, this is our space. We were asked to speak; we will speak and that exploded."

In the following excerpt Denise describes the journey leading to this session and what happened in the session as the creation of a white space.

Denise: *"...So I think the way this dialogue started and the way we ran it unconsciously, blindly at the beginning was in many ways as a white space. And I mean you've mentioned some of the things we did, whether it was location or food or transport or the content, we created a white space. And I think it became paramount in the white pain dialogue where we spoke about white pain and at least, we took a long time to understand what happened. And how what I triggered in that moment and what we had set up and how impossible we have made that space for black people. I think we've created a white space. We've created everything that we didn't want to but we created a violent space for black people without knowing and I think that's what happens; white people set up white spaces. And these white spaces are violent. And it took us a very long time to understand. I'm not even sure if we have fully understood what happened but I think for me, that sums it up. And where I think if [inaudible] whether you need to go through that to understand you know whether you have to have felt what we felt in that moment to understand what it means that white people set up white spaces or whether you can learn that. I mean that's a conversation we had. Can we avoid or is that a learning you actually need to experience even if means violence? How can*

you – I don't know how to avoid that? How can you learn that without feeling it, without experiencing it? I don't know. For me, that was a core learning and it keeps coming. I mean we keep setting up white spaces and we have seen that. It's hard not to and there are some strategies that I think we have developed and still have failed [inaudible]."

4.11. External Influences

This was happening at the same time as the student movement across South African universities began. There was a multitude of articles, opinion pieces and talks on the internet, particularly on social media at the time. There were terms like white fragility, whitesplaining, racial stamina etc. that we had come to learn. Discussions on the problematic nature of white ally-ship and white people's participation in anti-racism work were some of the dominant narratives. The general consensus seemed to be that white allies should silently support black people and not take up space voicing opinions. Their job was to 'shut up' and listen. The ideological approach of the student movement greatly influenced the group and the decisions that were made in the group. Though our experiences and needs as black members in the group went against what was being called for by students and some scholars, we followed their lead. Unifying our voices with the voices of other black people who were also fighting against racism made sense. It was politically correct. As much as black members needed white members to be vulnerable, there was also uneasiness from blacks around this. This was as new to black members as it was to white members. This was a space that was uncomfortable for all of us, albeit for different reasons.

4.12. White People Educating Each Other

The next meeting was arranged and ended up being a white members-only session. All kinds of digestible reasons as to why the black members were not present were given – they wanted to come but could not because of other arrangements. Tina, because of the close friendship we had developed outside the group knew exactly what was going on and was under no illusion as to why there were no black members present for this session. She was consequently tasked with being the 'black voice' in the session. The following excerpt, taken from Tina's reflections, provides an account of this session:

Tina: *"Your expectation of a safe space is absurd and reeks of white entitlement. There has never been a safe space for black women in this group. They are expected to expose themselves, to open themselves up to our prodding, our doubts, our guilt, our*

insensitive questions, or our self-indulgent wishes to be educated by them about how bad it feels to be black. So that at the end of the day we can pat ourselves on the back because we are doing such a good thing and we really care. But we have become a group of abusive voyeurs and what happened in our last session just proves my point."

Jane: *"Jeesh, you think you are so much better than us, sitting in your little clique with Kate and Mimi (Me), excluding everyone else, because we are so far below you and you now know it all, right? And no, Tina, we don't think it is just you doing the judging – or you being at the centre of the issue. There is a whole lot more to this than you seem to understand or even want to acknowledge. This is not about you but about us as a group, about our initial intentions to dialogue and how we can get back to those and do better in future. If we don't respect each other's feelings and opinions, if we don't allow each other to be at different stages in this process, dialogue cannot happen, because people will feel unsafe and they will close up or get defensive. The essence of dialogue is not venting your anger and forcing your opinion down other people's throat but engaging respectfully through inquiry instead of attacking one another."*

Tina: *"You are right, dialogue ideally should be about mutual respect and inquiry but if power is not equally distributed, then respect goes in one direction only and inquiry turns into abuse. We have wielded our white power by refusing to be vulnerable, by demanding safe spaces for ourselves, by guarding our fragile egos and carefully constructed identities. Meanwhile black women in this group are expected to open up about deeply traumatic and personal experiences; experiences who then get questioned and unpacked by white people according to a dialogue manual – that they invented - in so called polite inquiry. And not only do we prod and question and exploit their experiences we also tell them how to react towards us, how to express their feelings so they don't make us feel unsafe. We decide what is acceptable and what is not. And if somebody does get angry, outraged or frustrated, we are quick to call it judgment and demand calm reasoning before we deign to listen, or we change the subject altogether. And look where this got us, there is no one left to dialogue with. As white people in this group it is high time we look beyond our egos, and expose all the tender spots we are trying so hard to hide: the white abuser of undeserved power, the racist that, maybe through no fault of our own, lives in all of us and expects to be pampered and talked to politely and calmly by the very same people we hurt. If we are not making ourselves vulnerable, and expose our own shit, we will never be in an equal space, dialogue will never happen and we might as well go home now."*

Denise: *"I think I do that a lot. I try to stay on the outside of things and don't get too involved so I won't embarrass myself or make myself too vulnerable. I do get now how this could be exploitative and even abusive towards the black women in our group. I don't know if I can stay in the group but I know that if I do, I will have to bring myself in more."*

Jane: *"I never thought about it this way. It didn't even occur to me that the way we white people interact in this group could be harmful to black people. I thought it was my right to stay distant and uninvolved, or that it was ok for white people to leave this space whenever it got too uncomfortable. I realize now that black women don't have that option, they can never take a break from racism…"*

White people having a session amongst themselves in the absence of black people may have allowed them to open up. They were suddenly able to display the vulnerability that black members had been asking for as there was no threat of their good white image being tainted in an all-white group. In this session, white members did not feel the need to protect their good white image from the black gaze and could to some extent hear what Tina was saying and practice introspection. The fact that a white member had taken on the role of "representing" in some way the "black voices" in the group, suddenly enabled white members to listen and even take in some of the critique. Where black members had made those very same points in many different ways in the past, and eventually took a stand in a show of absence, it took a white voice to break through the wall of white defensiveness. This in itself is part of the power dynamic within the dialogue space where white people often seem incapable of hearing black voices but concede the very same points to their white colleagues. It took us a while before we came together again as a group. We at this point did not even know if we would ever have another interracial dialogue session. We did not know where to go from here and left things as they were. Even though the group meetings ended, the friendships that had developed over time kept us connected. It took a racist incident that Tina and I experienced that went viral to get us in the same room again. Our 12 Apostles racist experience received media attention. Tina's blog entry on the experience brought a lot of publicity to the Facebook group which was followed by radio invitations to talk about the work we were doing in the group.[1] Not only were we accountable to each other because of

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[1] The article, radio interview and blog on the 12 Apostles story can be retrieved from the following links:
http://m.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/?articleId=13692019
http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/eating-out-in-cape-town-a-starter-of -racism-anyone/

the friendships we formed, we were also accountable to the Facebook group where black and white people were given a forum to talk and be a part of the anti-racism work we had set out to do.

Tina and I decided we could not publicly talk about the group without the group having a discussion on where we were and why. We arranged a meeting and had our first conversation after a long time. We used that public racist experience to talk about how we felt and why things had gone so horribly wrong in the group. We shared more intimate experiences and lessons learned from bringing our friendship into the space. We shared our journey and what we had individually come to learn about ourselves and how race affected our friendship. We provided a form of modelling of what things could look like on the other side if both black and white people immersed themselves in this space. This opened up the conversation about whether we wanted to continue with 'This Dialogue Thing' or not. We all decided that we wanted to continue but that we would have to change things. We planned for our next session where white members would finally allow themselves to be vulnerable.

Black members watched with great fascination and discomfort as white people attempted to give of themselves and share personal stories. They apologised for not stepping up to the invite and challenge to be vulnerable and shared how difficult this was for them because it was something that they had never had to do before. They shared their fears of not being seen as a good white and need to be liked. They shared their feelings of guilt and shame because of their whiteness and how even though they considered themselves to be different from other whites, they still battled with their inner racist. They shared stories of how they avoided bringing their lives to the space because some of the stories we shared were things their loved ones had said or done. One could see the discomfort in some of the white members as they shared stories of where they are racist, their socialization as white people, where they are toxic and all the things they did not want to look at and share. This process happened over time and was like pulling teeth. Black members had to constantly challenge white members to stay in the valley of vulnerability as they would revert back to racial voyeurism and wanting to protect their good white image whenever they could. Tina would often be the one to demonstrate this vulnerability in the stories that she shared which allowed other whites to do the same.

4.13. Witnessing and Insight

Witnessing white members start what looked like a painful process of internally reflecting on their whiteness, how they had been socialised and acknowledging their inner racist moved the group into a new space. This experience allowed black members to witness how white people struggle to grasp that black people experience the world differently and that their (white?) experiences are not universal. It gave black members insight into why white people struggled to understand and accept that they have white privilege. It was as new for black members as it was for white members. This realisation was like stepping into a whole new world for them. This allowed black members to develop some compassion and patience for the white members. The following excerpt illustrates the insight received from witnessing whites being vulnerable.

Leigh: "I mean what's useful to notice for me, white people struggle with – it's like I could, the group allowed me to be voyeuristic on a white person's struggle to recognise that the world is not their white experience. Like that's the – so then you realise, fuck people really think this is the real truth. This is like they – they actually can't see something different. So really useful. It actually made me be more compassionate with some of my other white friends when they weren't able to. I could actually say more explicitly, this is what you, just put it into words. Like you're doing this because the whole world confirms your view all the time. So you've never had to seriously understand yourself as bringing a perspective because your perspective is a white perspective. And it's this whole hegemonic thing that everyone can just take for granted. So it was useful for me, voyeuristically to see that happening with people. It's like whoa…"

Amanda: "But it's that..".

Leah: "Or witness that's the word."

Amanda: [Inaudible]. " It's that articulation and crystallization..".

Tumi: "And constipation."

Amanda: "That actually like, this is like that's what it is so when this person is saying this stuff, they really don't get that they really are triggering and really are riling me up in this particular moment and it becomes exactly as she said. But when you are engaging with your other white friends, you're now actually able to have a little bit more patience with them and be a little bit more empathetic towards their struggle. Because you know, as a black person you don't necessarily think of it as really a struggle because your fame has always been divers. You've always know that there's multiple ways of thinking through things and

you never really realise that – for like whereas, as a black person, I know that when I'm in white spaces this is what it means. When I'm in black spaces this is what it means. When I'm in mixed spaces this is what it means. White people are in white spaces everywhere even when they are the only white person because all the black people in the room are going to suddenly all speak English even though there is only one person to speak English for. And so to see that that it's actually like – it's a genuine struggle. Like it's not a, I'm really trying. Like when somebody says I'm really trying, they really are trying because sometimes somebody will say, "You know, I'm really trying, I don't know what to do." And you're like yeah, whatever."

This stage of the process also meant that we had to let go of the rules we had set. We realised that we were entering a new territory for which we did not have guidelines. We had to trust ourselves to do what felt right for the group and that whatever happened, we had been through enough and would be able to stay in the room to work through it.

4.14. Breaking Away from External Influences

This process was happening at a time when lectures and conversations on race around South African universities were being shut down. Students strongly felt that white people did not have the right to take up space in conversations on race and that they needed to experience being silenced and overlooked for them to have a taste of what black people experience all the time.

Black people were seen as having authority speaking on racism because this was their daily experience. White people could not speak on behalf of black people because they have never been marginalised, exploited and oppressed as a people and could thus not talk on an experience that is removed from them.

In the group however, we realised that we were at a different point in our journey and that what we needed in the space was not for white people to sit silently and listen to black voices. What we needed was for white people to talk from a different place. We needed them to step away from engaging from a point of racial voyeurism where blackness becomes a point of inquiry while they stay on the margins safely behind their good white person image. We needed them to put themselves out there, to expose their whiteness, to allow themselves to be vulnerable and be willing to stay in the room when it became difficult.

We needed to get to a space where both black and white stripped themselves naked in order to put on something new. In other words, we needed to move past black consciousness,

and past white consciousness into a consciousness that was shared: a shared consciousness that could be accessed by anyone regardless of pigmentation, to inform our thinking and guide our actions. We realised that what the students were doing and what we were doing did not have to contradict each other, there is a multiplicity of approaches that can stand next to each other. We do not all have to subscribe to one approach.

4.15. Shared Vulnerability

We are now a group of 8 friends currently in a space where we are exploring a shared consciousness that is informed by context, content and an acute awareness of power dynamics. The following excerpt captures the essence of where the group is.

Leah: *"My understanding of what we're trying to create is not a black shell of a person that has a particular consciousness and a white shell that has another kind of consciousness. We're trying to develop a shared, a consciousness that anybody can get to regardless of their pigmentation or their gender whatever, whatever and granted, we're only talking about race here guys. We're not dealing with class questions, we're not doing that. But on the race question, which is an extreme one for us, it feels like we're trying to develop a kind of consciousness that would know the context, the power dynamics, so that you figure out what words you use like that you take, you know when to take someone to the side and say, "Hey listen, I really didn't agree with that" whatever and when to say, "Fuck you because this is not okay, what you said."*

This consciousness is mutually dependent and influenced by our individual friendships, and ultimately driven by values and love. In this new space which is built on our heart connections rather than individual ambition and intellectual striving for a post-racial ideology, we abandon the flawed concept of a "safe space", which has only ever been an attempt to keep whiteness safe from introspection and critique. Instead we rely on the "safety" of our connection which holds us together and allows us to make mistakes, critique each other and learn together.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I build from the previous chapter by drawing on the data in chapter four and comparing and contrasting it with existing literature. I also attempt to draw insight and theorize from these experiences.

5.2. The Dialogue Space and Power Imbalances

As with most intergroup dialogues, in 'This Dialogue Thing', we wanted to reach the goals of dialogue work, namely: "relationship building, civic participation and social change" (Dessel & Rogge, 2008, p. 199). We went through Pettigrew's (1998) processes of "learning about the out-group, changing behaviours, generating affective ties, and in-group reappraisal" (p. 75-76). The group could, in many ways, be seen as a successful intergroup dialogue experience. This success was however, interrupted by a crisis that almost ended the group and left us all wounded. Prior to the crisis 'This Dialogue Thing' could have been seen as the ideal poster group for interracial dialogue according to theory. Empathy had been developed through immersion in each other's worlds, however always with an emphasis on black experiences within predominantly white surroundings. Furthermore, prior to the crisis, both black and white members were preoccupied with the then-new experience of interracial dialogue. We did not pay much attention to the power-imbalances that played out in the group. We were still relative strangers and treaded carefully following the dialogue guidelines.

After three years of conversation and evolving friendships, there eventually came a time when we could no longer avoid addressing the power imbalances that were playing themselves out in the group. In retrospect, the power imbalances within the group aptly reflected the society we live in. For black members, it was the first time in our lives that we experienced white people willing to listen to our experiences. It was initially a cathartic and positive experience. As we got to know each other more and increasingly ventured into intimate conversations, white members were invited to journey with black members by bringing more of themselves (that is, their fears, hopes, vulnerabilities) into the conversation. White members struggled to accept this invitation. We reached an impasse where white

members resisted going deeper and black members continued to ask for depth and vulnerability. Eventually, black members felt angry, frustrated and exploited. Black members felt that white members only wanted to participate on their terms and only when they were in control of the process. To this, white members reacted in what Frankenberg (1994) describes as "a limited repertoire of responses" (p. 3) when black members charged them with racism. White members reacted with "confusion over accusations of racism; guilt over racism; anger over repeated criticism; [and] dismissal; stasis" (Frankenberg, 1994, p. 3). We had reached a point of crisis which closely mirrored Frankenberg's (1994) observation of multiracial spaces deteriorating "into painful, ugly processes in which racial tension and conflict actually seemed to get worse rather than better" (p. 3).

Our point of crisis fell outside the scope of Contact Theory. This speaks to the limitations of Contact Theory which, as illustrated in the literature review, continues to be used in dialogues as an intervention between groups in conflict to reduce or eliminate prejudice and improve intergroup relations. Contact Theory is not only silent on the possibility of a crisis occurring, but it does not promote crisis. Furthermore, the dialogue work guidelines we had employed could not assist us in navigating through this crisis. White members consistently referred to the idea of a 'safe space', which is one of the guidelines we followed when establishing the group. In other words, for white members the request for their honesty and vulnerability was unsafe. It signalled the loss of control over our interracial dialogue process and, to an extent, losing some control over their guarded emotions by moving from intellectualizing about race to interrogating their own emotions and psyche in our presence.

This also speaks to the limitations of whiteness studies which do not talk about vulnerability and its role in interracial encounters, and particularly those of a sustained nature. Instead, it provides white subjects with a list of 'do's and don'ts' and thus limits anti-racism work to, as McWhorter (2005) critiques, ridding oneself of the knapsack of white privilege. Whiteness studies also pays a significant amount of attention to white subjects and little focus on intergroup settings and encounters. It does not offer us much on how white participants may navigate interracial spaces that privileges them. Erwin (2017) notes that dialogues tend to place much attention on "safe space" which promote "sensitivity and gentleness towards white participants" (p. 24). This, she argues, "leaves white privilege unchallenged" and does nothing to address power imbalances (p. 24). Leonardo and Porter (2008) however, suggest a different path for such dialogues and promote a "risk discourse about race which does not assume safety but contradictions and tension" (p. 139). They

suggest we need to abandon the notion of safety if we are to "shift the standards of humanity for people of colour and whites" (p. 141). I read their argument to be linked to the process of allowing a crisis to happen as an opportunity for deepening interracial relationships and advancing to a new phase of shared humanity.

The present work concurs with this view as it was in these moments of having to navigate through tension that we had an opportunity to deepen our dialogue work beyond theory checklists. Consequently, the group delved deeper into how we have been socialized, and our deep-seated beliefs and perceptions. This is not to say tension should be pursued or crisis created. Rather, it suggests that the absence of crisis does not necessarily translate into intimate friendships. Contrary to this, it may create a false sense of harmonious intergroup relations. The process of undergoing a crisis and staying in the room (with all the emotions this spurs) to overcome such an impasse, is precisely what may give rise to stronger, healthier and more intimate interracial friendships. Literature on intergroup relations, while acknowledging the different experiences and narratives within groups, mostly focus on overcoming these differences with various strategies, all aligned to activate optimal outcomes for intergroup contact. The criteria for optimal outcomes for this process is based on the outcomes for white members and not the whole group. For instance, intergroup dialogues are structured to "reduce the dominant group's anxiety and threat that has been shown to positively correlate with negative attitudes toward marginalized groups" (Dessel & Rogge, 2008, p. 213). This ultimately prioritises white participants and ensures their comfort (that is, their safe space) by demanding marginalised people to act in ways that reduce white people's anxieties instead of challenging the basis of this anxiety. White participants are seen to have done enough by showing up and are not challenged any further. In line with this, Erwin (2017) argues that "attempting to challenge racist attitudes while limiting stress and discomfort for white participants can serve to demand forgiveness and understanding from black participants" (p. 25). Safe spaces are thus tantamount to safe spaces for whiteness and power imbalances to continue unexamined. The creation of safe spaces, Leonardo and Porter (2010) argue, undermines "the higher goal of understanding and fighting racism" (p. 139). This gives credence to Erasmus' (2010) critique that Contact Theory is "too timid for race and racism" (p. 391).

The safe space we had created which allowed for whiteness to continue unexamined resulted in two distinctly different narratives. Black people expressed that what once felt like a therapeutic space started to feel exploitative since white members where not reciprocating the vulnerability they had shared. White members felt the wonderful work we had done was

being reversed, that they were being judged and black members were becoming too demanding. It was only after the group experienced a moment of crisis, three years into the dialogue, that these feelings were articulated. It was only at this point that white members were forced to acknowledge and confront their white subjectivities and how their unconscious attitudes and conditioning, as whites, had led them to recreate some of the societal power structures they had hoped to move away from through participating in interracial dialogue. The irony was not lost on any of us.

The process of the crisis we experienced pushed the group, particularly white people, to a space where they had to turn the reflective gaze on themselves. They had to step out of the illusion of a 'safe space' and move towards the centre where they could not simply participate in racial voyeurism. It was, in other words, a shift from racial voyeurism - the peak of privilege - to stepping into the valley of vulnerability - the valley of critical self-reflection. It was in this space, birthed through the process of crisis that mutual vulnerability and authentic interconnectedness were established. This kind of space allowed for race dialogue to happen in what Leonardo and Porter (2010) call a "condition of risk, not safety". The process of creating this space was frightening and difficult for white members but necessary for us to transform the space and deepen our relationships. While the group had issues with the abstract notion of a safe space, we also experienced challenges with the physical space of where we were having our dialogues. As mentioned in the results section by a participant, dialogue sessions were held in each other's homes with the hope that it would allow us to experience each other's lives in all its facets, to not only get together in a neutral place and talk and then go back. but really immerse ourselves into each other's spaces. This happened to an extent but also presented us with its own challenges. Experiencing each other in the context of our homes, sharing home cooked meals and sitting leisurely on couches drinking wine, gave us access to each other in ways that being at a workshop would not have. The unstructured shared facilitation allowed by the physical space helped create a warm, open space for conversations. This however only happened in the sessions where meetings were held in the suburbs. When the time came for a session to be held in one of the black member's home, who lived in the township, there was some distress and panic from those who lived in the suburbs (white and black). These sessions where different from the previous sessions held in suburbia. The atmosphere was not as warm and open, everyone was a little nervous. Sitting in the suburban homes of other members, I was often distracted during conversation by the huge houses, options of which bathrooms to use and overall different way of life. Somila, the other working-class member of the group, and I, on our way back

from suburbia into the township, often questioned our presence in the space and if we belonged there.

Having members of the dialogue group in my home was as uncomfortable for me as it was for them. Somila and I were involved in social activism movements in townships and those spaces looked nothing like 'This Dialogue Thing'. There were no white people or middle-class blacks. I felt exposed and inferior because my reality was so clearly different from theirs. I could easily assimilate in multiracial middle-class spaces with my acquired accent and being 'articulate', which allowed me to blend with everyone else. I had always been the one to travel out of the township into suburbia. Having people travel from the suburbs into the township to come to my home was a new experience. Nothing could shield me from the nakedness I felt. My reality was there for everyone to see. On the day of the meeting at my home, our Whatsapp group was flooded with messages from other members stressing about having to sit in traffic from Town to the Cape Flats. They organised a common meeting place so they could travel together as a safety measure. We had never had such intense logistical planning before. It did not occur to any of them that this was a reality that most working-class people experience in taxi's going to work every day. Furthermore, no one took a moment to reflect and think about what Somila and I have to go through to get to meetings in the evening using public transport. Reflecting on this, being part of 'This Dialogue Thing' felt self-indulgent compared to the more pressing issues we were dealing with in our communities.

Sitting in my home, the atmosphere was tense. My family refused to interact with white people or to have to speak English in their own home at night. They locked themselves in the bedroom until everyone left. Dialogue members looked around the place and asked questions around how many people lived in the house and what my mother did for a living. I told them my mother had been retrenched for some time and had not found work since. I was the one taking care of the family. This completely changed the dialogue space. The discomfort in everyone was almost palpable. I felt I had contaminated the space. We were engulfed in the power-imbalances we were skirting around with nowhere to run. They were alert to every sound that came from outside which had become background noise to me and felt the need to constantly check their cars. We were all extremely uncomfortable and wanted the session to end. We never went back to my home again and cited logistical issues for that fact. I was quite happy with the group not returning to my home again since I did not want to sit through that discomfort again.

In keeping with the idea of safe spaces in race dialogues, continuing to hold the sessions in suburbia allowed the group to continue functioning within the illusion of safety. In other words, the initially sanitized safe dialogue space we created could only be created in an equally physically sanitized location represented by the aesthetically pleasing image of white suburbia. The township environment and everything it represented did not allow us to, as Erasmus (2010) puts it, treat "socio-political, cultural, discursive phenomena" as things we can think our way out of through reduced prejudice (p. 389). We had been meeting for months and getting to know each other but I still had to go back to my reality which was marked by a legacy created by apartheid. A reality that everyone was immersed in when we met at my home. This reality was different from that of middle-class black members in the group, who were also a symbol of how much things had changed. I represented how much things had not changed for many. This class factor further complicated the power-imbalances in the group. Black middle-class members who, through their upward mobility, managed to gain access to white suburbia were now confronted with their own class-privilege. Since the group had not been intersectional in its approach and solely focused on race, middle-class blacks were unable to recognize their positionality and turn the critical gaze on themselves.
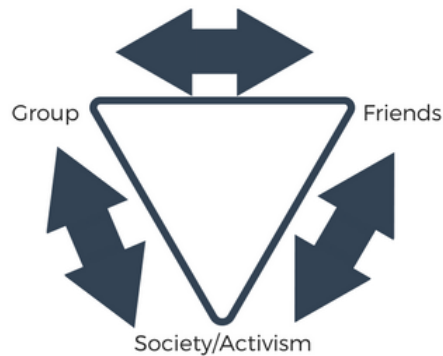
Notably, positions of privilege seemed to create great difficulty in stepping into the valley of vulnerability - the valley of critical self-reflection. This subsequently led to the creation of a space that was imbalanced in both race and class. Though we had recognized and were working through racial power-imbalances, the question of class continued unchallenged. This meant working-class black members had the double duty of race-and-class labour. We had to work through racial power-imbalances and educate white members on racism. Furthermore, we had the added class induced physical and mental labour of having to navigate through an apartheid landscape by moving between these two contradictory spaces. In terms of class, it fell on us to work towards being absorbed into the middle-class bracket. We had to rise to meet the rest of the group where they were. This brings into question the conceptual understanding and analysis of the causes of conflictual relations suggested in Contact Theory. Where Contact Theory attributes causes for conflictual intergroup relations to lack of contact, the present work suggests that it is not the lack of contact between groups, but the type or quality of contact that affects intergroup relations. Subsequently, in line with Dixon, Levine, Reicher and Durrheim (2012), this work also questions the preeminent position given to prejudice reduction as a framework for "improving relations between groups within historically unequal societies" (p.15). When 'friendship potential' is achieved in artificial settings of Contact Theory, it leads to superficial

interracial friendships that do not lead to the dominant group (white members) understanding broad historical issues that affect the subordinate group (black members). Furthermore, this exposes why the work of creating an integrated society has largely fallen on the backs of those most disadvantaged - black working-class people.

5.3. The Development and Role of Cross-Group Friendship

Our crisis led to a temporary shutdown of the group. Two sessions had gone by with no meetings. We were however, all still communicating on our Whatsapp group over administrative issues and on our Facebook page. And though the group processes had temporarily collapsed, our personal friendships, though affected by the group space, continued. We were meeting in smaller groups outside of the dialogue space, interacting around different activities and talking about the position we found ourselves in as a group. The boundaries of the dialogue space had slowly fizzled and overlapped with our day to day lives. By being involved in each other's lives in different ways, constantly chatting on Whatsapp and interacting around projects we started together, we created a collective identity that we were all invested in and willing to put in the required time and effort to further develop. The dialogue space had become more than just a space we stepped into once a month and went back to our 'normal lives' for the rest of the month. We were bound together in a way that did not allow us to easily walk away. These 'outside' the dialogue conversations drew us back to the group and led to a renewed effort to revive our interracial dialogue. The group dialogue was a catalyst that allowed our collective and personal friendships to develop. The friendships sustained the group which led to us feeling the need to impact greater society by developing and engaging in social justice projects. Combined, these processes (group, friendships and activism) ultimately facilitated the transformation that occurred in the group. See figure below for a visual illustration of the above processes.
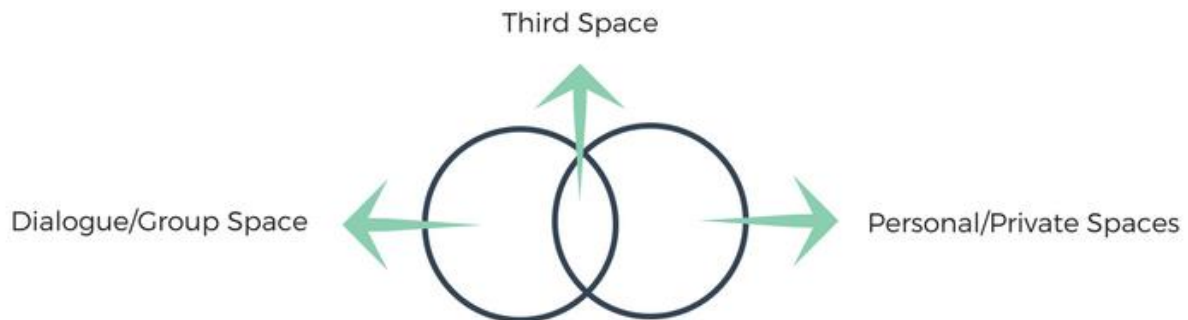
Figure 5.3.1. Tri-processes of Transformation within the Group

Looking back with new awareness, white members were able to recognise how their inability to be vulnerable and examine their whiteness was standing in the way of developing deeper, more meaningful relationships with black members. In their efforts at self-reflection (the valley of vulnerability), white members were able to strip down to their innermost racist indoctrinations and explore how those narratives, imposed by parents, teachers and a white dominant culture, influenced their everyday interactions with people of colour in society and black members in the group.

Furthermore, because of the intimate relationships that extended outside the dialogue space, we were able to hold each other accountable for our actions within and outside of the dialogue space that merged into one. The lines between dialogue space and our personal lives faded and we became a group of friends connected in different ways who still meet for focussed dialogue sessions. In this new space, white people could no longer safely watch on the margins as black people made themselves vulnerable, but had to reciprocate by being vulnerable and exposed in their whiteness. The "after-crisis-stage" was a mutually vulnerable space held together in the safety of intimate friendships and heart connections. It is these friendships and heart connections that became the basis on which growth towards a shared consciousness could take place. See figure below for a visual illustration of this process.

Figure 5.3.2. Third Space Shared Consciousness

The role and importance of intimate friendships is, once again, where Contact Theory falls short. The theory mentions the potential for friendships but does not say much more about it. Friendship is understood within the confines of an artificial setting of Contact Theory that requires everyone to be equal. The intimacy that the group developed was the result of a messy, painful process that lead to a crisis which did not allow us to shy away from our painful history of apartheid and current realities. We had to move past the limitations of Contact Theory by experimenting and exploring new paths by investing in intellectual and emotional labour; creating and engaging in spaces that allowed crisis; and promoting vulnerability and the sharing of uncomfortable feelings, perspectives, experiences and imaginations of our future. We ventured into the concept and practice of transformative dialogue proposed by Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001). Transformative dialogue is "any form of interchange that succeeds in transforming relationships" (p. 698). There are no set out "rules, ethics or practices for all" that govern transformative dialogues for "dialogue itself will alter the character of transformative utility" (p. 698). I read this as encouraging a contextualized exploration and experimentation of dialogical processes which allow crisis and have transformative potential.

However, a closer examination of the group reveals that friendships between individual members developed at dissimilar stages and pace. Tina and I, for example, developed our friendship in the early stages of the dialogue. We got along well in t,dialogue space and had a few things in common, most noticeable at the time was our sense of humour. This led us to talking outside of the group quite early. These chats subsequently led to us spending time together in public and private spaces. Initially, I did not understand why this

white older woman wanted to be my friend. I felt uneasy and suspicious. I constantly wiggled out of invites for coffee or a visit at home. She kept trying. I eventually gave in. Through this, I became close to Tina's children who are black. Because of her children's experiences, race was a constant feature in our conversations. Tina constantly battled with issues of racism and how to deal with it in the best way for her children. My involvement in her children's life exposed her to the different treatment her children receive when they are not with their white mother. Furthermore, I was often assumed to be her helper, someone begging for food from her or her lesbian lover whom I have adopted kids with. We had to navigate our way around dealing with waiters always giving her the bill and deciding who pays for it.

The racism I experienced and reactions we received in public propelled us into having difficult conversations about our friendship and the power-imbalances that clearly existed between us. Through mutual vulnerability we were able to address those power-imbalances in a way that allowed us to not only recognize their existence but to actively work on creating a new space for our relationship. This was a new dimension, in a way, beyond the pre-conditioned social reality of our race and class differences, though these differences were always present. Tina shared with me how she came to understand her whiteness not only as an undeserved passport to opportunity and privilege but also as a severe limitation in her role as a mother to black children. She was simultaneously acutely aware of the pressure she put on me by bringing me into her children's lives, questioning her own intentions and actions as potentially harmful and exploitative. By being open about these vulnerable aspects of her life, she took the first step away from our learned power dynamics and I was able to start claiming my own power back in our friendship. By acknowledging her needing me not only as a friend, but as a black friend, we were able to explore in many intimate and deeply uncomfortable conversations what it was that she lacked and I brought to the table, thereby leaving the familiar ground of white saviourism and black neediness.

The narrative changed from our group focus on black experience and black victimhood to one of white vulnerability, white exploitation of blackness in interracial encounters and – an important point - white guilt. By owning her mistakes, her shortcomings and her "not knowing" she showed me a more complete picture of whiteness, one without the veil of defensiveness and denial. A dimension of whiteness that I felt I could respond to without anger and resentment, but with my own truth. This space of mutual vulnerability allowed me to trust her and allow her fully into my life, which also meant exposing my financial circumstances and navigating the scary terrain of money without feeling like I was a

charity case and she my white saviour. We thus created an intimate space where our love (heart connection) allowed us to see each other as human beings without having to ignore our social and racial realities. The new space however, has not been without its pitfalls and has needed constant re-negotiations as our social and racial conditioning runs deep and goes beyond our reality back to the oppressive relationships of generations before us. We are still learning to reframe what we are to each other in our own language, one that values material contributions not on a higher scale than emotional, spiritual, intellectual presence in our friendship.

Tina and I had journeyed into the valley of vulnerability ahead of the group. Unlike in the group where black members had been the ones to extend an invitation for white members to be vulnerable; in our friendship, Tina took the lead in journeying into the valley of vulnerability by critically self-reflecting and exposing her white psyche to me. She invited me into this valley that allowed us to share a mutual vulnerability between the two of us when the group was not yet at this stage. What was happening in our relationship extended into the group and influenced our group process. This speaks to yet another limitation of Contact Theory. Conceptually, Contact Theory gives the impression that groups move at the same pace and friendships develop at the same stage. Contrary to this, different people in the group were at different stages of forming their friendships. These individual friendships feed back into the group and affect group processes in different ways which help sustain the group.

5.4 Exit Points

Not every member was able to get to "post-crisis-stage". During the development of the group, we lost both black and white members. Eva, a black middle-class member was comfortable in talking about race but extremely challenged in talking about class. She joined the dialogue group with her close white friend, Denise. They would often travel together to the dialogue as friends and sit on opposing sides of the room during dialogue sessions, divided by race. They always managed to leave the dialogue having worked things out. Denise often wanted to raise the issue of class between Eva, who was one of the wealthiest members in the group, and myself, the most financially deprived member of the group. She was often accused of wanting to minimize the effects of race by hiding behind class. Although Denise wanted to raise the class question, she felt she could not do so, as a white person, and chose to rather observe how class affected my relationship with Eva. This was another form of racial voyeurism where she avoided being vulnerable by taking a risk to raise

an uncomfortable subject. This made both Eva and I hyper visible in the group and a site of a muted class conversation. It strained my relationship with Eva and made her uncomfortable with black members in the group. Put next to me, she felt too exposed in her class privilege and was not able to engage in the dialogue space from this position. Though Eva had a pre-existing cross-racial friendship in the group, their friendship did not explore issues of power-imbalance outside of race. Eva always spoke from a point of disadvantage and authority from her black experience and could not turn the reflective gaze and question her class-privilege. Subsequently, she left the group keeping her friendships with the white members and not with black members in the group.

Veronica, another black member left in the process of the group crises. She wrote to the group and informed us that the emotional labour required of her in the dialogue was not something she could handle any longer. She was dealing with racism at work and felt too emotionally exhausted to keep up with the work of educating white members in the group. She was especially triggered by a white member, Donna, who performed the crudest form of racial voyeurism. She would always arrive late, leave early and never invited us into her home for a dialogue session. She always had an excuse. Veronica felt that Donna was exploiting black members and using our stories for personal advancement in her own work. She was not authentically interested or invested in what we were experimenting with. Donna felt she had put in a lot of work in the group and was being unfairly targeted. White members defended Donna and also felt she was being unfairly targeted. Veronica was made out to be the angry unreasonable black while Donna was protected. Donna's comfort and stay in the group was more valued than what Veronica was going through and bringing to the group. Veronica's feelings resonated with black members and Donna's with white members. This polarized the group along racial lines and fuelled the group into crisis where we started questioning what was happening in the group. The racial lines were complicated by Tina who sided with black members. It was no longer about Veronica or Donna but the group itself. Veronica eventually left the group feeling betrayed by the reaction of white members and emotionally exhausted because of how much of herself she had exposed in trying to get white members to understand where she was coming from. Donna eventually left the group feeling persecuted after other white members were beginning to understand where they went wrong and apologised to Veronica. Veronica felt too hurt and was not willing to come back to a space she felt replayed the same dynamics she was experiencing at work, where a white member was blatantly favoured and she was made a problem.

5.5. Conclusion

Using the stories and insights of members of 'This Dialogue Thing' to make meaning of our group experience, I have detailed the journey of this group. I have showed the developments of Contact Theory over time and recent critiques. Similarly, I have mapped out a brief historical overview of Whiteness studies in South Africa and abroad as well as recent critiques. Drawing on the experiences of the group, I explore factors and processes involved in cross-racial dialogues. I have attempted to use personal experiences to contribute to our present understanding of cross-racial dialogues and ultimately race relations in South Africa. Drawing on the journey of 'This Dialogue Thing', I posit that what sustained the group and moved it forward were the dual processes within and outside the 'dialogue space'and the eventual merging of these two spaces. Our intimate friendships, which ultimately kept the group going and transformed us individually and as a collective, occurred because these spaces merged and created a new space. The merging of these spaces was not a smooth transition. Our crisis was like a wave that hit us unprepared and pulled us under. Journeying into the valley of vulnerability allowed us to rise for air and the intimate friendships we developed were the life boats that carried us into a transformative space in which a shared consciousness emerged. In this third space, discomfort is embraced and mistakes are allowed, thus enabling real learning and friendships. This, in my view, is the new ground that our collective humanity may be raised to when authentic, vulnerable and uncomfortable (conflict-inviting) interracial dialogue leads to transformation

This research invites readers into private narratives of a group of women trying to navigate their way around the uncomfortable and uncertain terrain of race relations. It brings readers into personal and vulnerable moments that may be used to reflect on, question and better understand their own experiences. Though we may draw insight from this study, it has limitations. The findings from this study cannot be generalized beyond the specific context of the group. The group is not representative of the South African population and it is also notable that it was solely a group of women. It is also worth mentioning that the white members who stayed in the group are not South African. In terms of future research, more qualitative longitudinal research on cross-racial friendships in natural settings, outside of the University space, is needed. Whereas cross-racial friendship is seen as an end-goal to intergroup dialogues, more research on workings of race in cross-racial friendship is needed.

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APPENDIX A: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Information Sheet and Consent Form

Stellenbosch University

Consent to Participate in a Research Study:

"This Dialogue Thing": An analysis of Black and White women living in South Africa
engaged in sustained interracial dialogue

Dear participant,

Study purpose

You are being asked to participate in a study being conducted by myself; a research masters
student from Stellenbosch University. The aim of the proposed research is to identify the
factors and processes involved in cross-racial conversations that facilitate or hinder
transformation among a group of women engaged in sustained dialogue on race.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your involvement in "This
Dialogue Thing" which is the subject of this research enquiry.

Study procedures

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two focus group
discussions which should take approximately 90 minutes each and one individual interview
which should take approximately 60 minutes. The focus groups and individual interview will

address questions relating to factors and processes in the group. All information obtained will be kept strictly confidential.

Possible risks

There are no known risks to you for participating in this study. Should you however experience any sense of emotional discomfort from participating in the study, please notify me immediately.

Possible benefits

It is my hope that engaging in the focus groups and interviews will be a reflective exercise for the group on the work they have been doing. I also hope that information gathered from the study will produce some insights which will contribute to the body of knowledge on this topic.

Alternatives

You may choose not to participate in this study, and this decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any question. If you decide to participate, you are free to change your mind and discontinue participation at any point.

Confidentiality

Your personal information obtained for this study will be kept confidential. Your name and other identifying information will not be reflected in the study. The consent form and documentation from the discussion will not be made available to anyone besides the researcher and her supervisor and co-supervisor. Any publications about the study will not identify you or any other study participant.

Anonymity

Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. In addition, no other identity revealing information will be used in the study.

Privacy

All information on the study will be kept in a password protected laptop which will be kept in a locked office.

Questions

Any study-related questions, problems or emergencies should be directed to the following researchers:

Zikhona Tumi Mpofu (researcher)

Professor. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (supervisor)   021 808 4018

Dr. Buhle Zuma (co-supervisor)   021 808 9468

If you have any concerns about the way the study was conducted, or your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University 021 808 3464

The discussions will be recorded to assist the researcher in accurately documenting the information. Information from the discussion will be recorded anonymously, and once the discussion has been documented, the recordings will be kept in a safe place.

I have read the above and am satisfied with my understanding of the study, its possible benefits, risks and alternatives. My questions about the study have been answered. I hereby voluntarily consent to participation in the research study as described.

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

_____   _____

       _____

Name of participant   Witness

_____

Signature of researcher

APPENDIX B: Interview Schedule

Questions below are specifically for the first focus group which will influence questions for the second focus group discussion and individual interview.

Power relations

1. I am wondering whether you think there have been power dynamics/relations that have emerged since the conception of the group in 2012?
2. If so, I would be interested to hear more about your experiences.

Conditions of possibility for transformative relations

1. What in your experience have been some of the things that have facilitated positive changes in the ways which you relate to each other?

2. I'm also interested to know what, in your experiences, have been some of the things that have hindered positive changes in the ways which you relate to each other?

3. In your experience, what do you think has kept the group going from 2012 to this point?

Lived experiences of transformed relations in the group

1. Given your experiences to this point, how, if at all, would you describe the transformation of interracial co-existence in the context of the group?

2. What in your experience have been some of the most critical moments in the group?

Standard facilitation prompts:

- Thank you for sharing

- Please elaborate on that

- Would anyone like to respond to the last comment/remark?

APPENDIX C: Interview Schedule

Question Guide Based on Preliminary Analysis of the First Focus Group Discussed

1. <u>Session Venues</u>

Tumi: 'I moved up in the world, became mobile…it kind of just died off.'

Question: What forms of labour have black people had to do as a condition to be part of the group and consequently, forms of labour that have allowed the group to exist as a racial mixed space?

2. <u>Power Dynamics</u>

Tina: '[white people] taking part in an experience that we cannot relate to and even, to some extent, question that experience.' Tina called it 'voyeurism' ~ extending Tina's thought, we are calling it 'racial voyeurism'

Questions: what is it in the emotional and psychological life of white members of this group that makes racial 'voyeurism possible', as a way of being in relationship with black members?

Are there psychological, emotional, social benefits that are derived from 'racial voyeurism? If so, what are these benefits? Or how are they experienced by white members of the group?

3. Intersectionality vs. Whiteness

Tina: 'We have not looked at our whiteness yet, we want to talk about everything else'

Question: What makes whiteness such a difficult subject among white people?

What would need to happen so that white people can stand in the full inspection of their whiteness?

4. The right to call out

Jane: 'What are you, as a white woman, allowed to call out?'

Question: I would like to hear more about the dynamics/experiences in the group that have that lead Jane to even raise this matter as a question.

5. <u>I would like to return to these two questions in the hope that we can reflect on them a bit more deeply.</u>

Tumi: 'What has kept the group going?'

Jane: 'What made the black people stay [in the group]?'

6. <u>Facebook and WhatsApp</u>

Could we please talk a little bit about your Facebook Page and your WhatsApp group?

What are the similarities and differences, in the kinds of experiences, that these platforms create for the group?

Individual interviews

Individual post-focus group sessions were conducted for the purposes of debriefing and not for collected data.