

Negotiating 'Race' among South African Internet-Users

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### ABSTRACT

'Race' remains South Africa's most controversial social category almost twenty years into democracy. Although 'race-talk' has undergone extensive study in South Africa, it would appear that such study has been limited to traditional social contexts, with little to no consideration of online platforms where users may feel relatively more at ease discussing such a politically-loaded category. Operating from a social constructionist framework, this study examines a number of online responses to five race-related news articles published on News24, an online newspaper based in South Africa. Relying on the methods proposed by Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discursive psychology, Internet-users were found to draw predominantly on three interpretive repertoires, namely: 'Race' as Entitlement, 'Race' as an Overreaction, and 'Race' as Political. The data appeared to showcase the considerable influence which an 'imagined' online audience holds over discursive 'race' construction. Furthermore, the analysis presented race-talk as acting to re-deploy segregation philosophies characteristic of Apartheid ruling. It is therefore suggested that the accepted or common-sense lexicon of race-talk must be abandoned so that a new form of talk may emerge where the racial subject cannot recognise the 'self' or the 'other' along segregated principles.

[Keywords: race; Internet; racism; South Africa; discourse; discursive psychology.]

## Introduction

South African history has rendered the discursive navigation of 'race' an especially contentious issue within the country's current social climate. Although 'race-talk' has undergone extensive study, it would appear that such study concerning South Africa has been limited to traditional social contexts, with little to no consideration of online platforms (Martin & Durrheim, 2006; Miles, 1989).

Race-talk employs a number of methods so that the speaker may avoid the 'social taboo', or, receiving an accusation of racism from an audience (Billig, 1996). Key techniques in this regard are establishing 'race' as a biological category, as well as identifying 'racism' as a product of the racial other. Indeed, identifying an objective racism in post-Apartheid South Africa has become an increasingly problematic task. Therefore this study conceptualises invocations of 'race' as serving particular political purposes in discourse, rather than exemplifying a quantifiable attitude (Durrheim, Mtose, & Brown, 2011). Constructions of the self and the other are then crucial facets of race-talk which serve a number of rhetorical ends (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006). From these discursive methods, it may be deduced that 'race' in talk cannot operate neutrally\_- that is to say, ['stake' is continually being managed](#) (Edwards & Potter, 1992)\_- and consequentially causes considerable anxiety among speakers (Foster, 2003).

Despite much attention directed toward 'race' constructions within conventional social space, the discursive production of 'race' among South African Internet-users seems relatively absent in the literature. As 'race' is such a politically-charged social category, people often avoid, or are made to feel especially uncomfortable, discussing this issue (Dolby, 2001). In this sense, online forums offer a rich source of data as people may engage with 'race', and indeed use 'race', within a considerably less anxiety-provoking environment than that offered by face-to-face interaction. The Internet therefore offers an anomalously comfortable discursive terrain with regard to race-talk, and is an important avenue of study in this regard. Such study is significant as 'race' remains an undeniably contentious issue in South Africa, and continues to have a material impact in South African society (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Steinfeldt et al., 2010).

## The Social Taboo

Empirically established as falsehood (Miles, 1989), racist rationale based on biological inferiority can no longer function as a credible argument. Indeed, the collapse of

Apartheid has rendered particular racial expression illegal in South Africa (Painter, 2005). As overt racism is no longer socially accepted, an accusation of racism has become a social taboo which an individual must avoid (Billig, 1996). With narrow socially-accepted boundaries of racial expression, almost no public domain - with the exception of the Internet - allows for a platform where an individual may feel relatively comfortable engaging in race-talk, lest risking an accusation of racism (Steinfeldt et al., 2010). Race-talk must then employ an egalitarian, or anti-racist rhetoric as a means of shielding unwanted allegations of racism (Rapley, 1998).

In abandoning overt racist expression, the post-modern era is faced with the difficulty of determining which understanding of racism should be privileged. Identifying racial prejudice then becomes an increasingly problematic task as 'racism' cannot be fixed or defined in advance as it varies with context. Indeed, it may be said that universal racism does not exist. Therefore, rather than conceptualise racism as an identifiable or empirical feature within discourse, the political motivation underscoring accusations of racism should be examined. Accusing another of racism becomes a discursive tool which affects how an individual's rhetoric is perceived. In this sense, the task is not to determine whose racism should be valued, but rather to recognise why, and how allegations of racism are formed (Dolby, 2001; Durrheim et al., 2011).

A simplistic discursive technique in avoiding the social taboo relies on conceptualising 'race' as an organic or natural social category (Allport, 1954). Additionally, evading the social taboo can be undertaken by engaging in what is known as 'reflective racism', which acts to locate racism within the racial other by utilising a liberal, non-racist discourse (Painter, 2005). It is therefore possible to note how discourses use as well as avoid the 'racism' label.

### **'Race' as Natural**

Racial categories call for the taxonomy of human beings. Such classification organises a population into groups, with cultural and historic meanings attributed to physical variation. Despite the clear purpose of such an undertaking, much racial discourse functions within an ahistorical framework, thereby allowing 'race' to seem an organic or natural category (Miles, 1989). In this sense, guarded discourse - alluding to the 'fact' of difference between groups - may be utilised so as to exclude or discredit alternative meaning-

constructions attributed to 'race' (Condor et al., 2006; Rapley, 1998). 'Race' is then amounted to fact, and cannot be effectively challenged as a construct (Ahmed et al., 2000).

One may then consider the Theory of Psychological Essentialism (Medin & Ortony, 1989), which states that discourse constructs social categories as having an underlying essence, thus perpetuating the perception of a group's natural homogeneity as well as the inability of one group to overlap with another. Accordingly, racial discourse functions as a means of attributing a natural essence to an outgroup, thereby forming stereotypes (Allport, 1954). These stereotypes act as a surrogate to an overtly racist lexicon, and contribute to essentialising the racial other (Painter, 2005).

### **Reflective Racism**

Reflective racism is a discursive technique which identifies 'racism' within the unwillingness of others to yield to the standards of a universal 'Us'. By attempting to construct racial discourse within a liberal, anti-racist framework, a speaker may employ reflective racism as a means of inverting the social taboo. Indeed, by locating racism within the other, accusations of racism onto the self are rendered ineffectual non sequiturs (Hook, 2005). Outgroups are then established as structurally defiant of the humanity or non-racism encompassed by an ingroup. An example of this is noted in the French government's banning of the Islamic hijab in 2004. By outlawing minority custom, otherness is established as opposing the 'norm' set up by majority cultures in France. Reflective racism is an especially paradoxical discursive device which may expose an individual's rhetoric to considerable criticism. As a means of circumventing such criticism, speakers often rely on personal anecdote in order to position instances of reflective racism as somewhat difficult to challenge, as the veracity of the discourse cannot be disproven effectively (Martin & Durrheim, 2006; Painter, 2005). Reflective racism therefore remains a significant and widely utilised means of avoiding the social taboo (Dixon & Durrheim, 2005).

### **Notions of the 'Self' within Race-Related Discourse**

A primary concern of racial discourse is the favourable presentation of the 'self', which may be implicitly achieved via the negative presentation of the 'other' as a constructor of racism. Such discourse calls for a dichotomous splitting which contrasts a bestial id-based 'other' against a rational, ego-driven self. The speaker may then assume an apparent neutral tone as a means of situating the self as representative of all 'race' groups, thereby justifying



portrayals of a racist other (Condor et al., 2006). In this regard, the self is able to emerge as a victim of the despotic racial other (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

### **Constructing the 'Self'**

By adopting an apparent neutral or objective tone when participating in race-talk, an individual may attempt to establish the 'self' as representative of the interests of all 'races' (Condor et al., 2006). By employing a liberal discourse when speaking about what is fair, just and possible regarding 'race' relations, the speaker acts to validate his or her claims, while simultaneously denying racism. This is known as anti-racist self-presentation talk (Durrheim et al., 2011). Such talk distances 'race' groups by juxtaposing a neutral 'Us' with an irrational - often racist - 'them' (Painter, 2005). Utilised in this regard is a relational cognition, whereby the solidarity of an ingroup assumes no shared social framework with a homogenously racist outgroup (Haslam, 2006).

### **Victim Construction**

If reflective racism - or the notion a particular 'race' as representative of a universal standard - meets overt challenge, a sense of victimhood often proceeds. For instance in South Africa, discourses which construct the minority white self as helpless against economic reparations (such as Black Economic Empowerment) that favour the black majority attempt to establish a sense of white victimhood (Martin & Durrheim, 2006; Rohrer, 2008). Conversely, the black self may insist that he or she is still oppressed by the white other in post-Apartheid South Africa. Such discourse underscores the influence of Apartheid on contemporary society - or political progress since Apartheid - so that the self may emerge as a victim at the mercy of a domineering and cruel system which is too entrenched to effectively challenge. This victimhood rhetoric is then presented for and appraised by an audience (Wambugu, 2005).

### **The Audience of Rhetoric**

The 'success' of rhetorical discourse is said to be dependent on its evaluation by others. Indeed language may be considered as an act of persuasion, constructed against an 'other' (Billig, 1996). Discursive racial constructions then become social accomplishments which rely on an audience's agreement (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 1990). In the case of Internet forums, the audience comprises of those who actively contribute in the

forum, as well as the 'presumed' or imagined audience who do not discursively participate, however have access to and may read the forum. Racial discourse must therefore persuade a real or imagined audience that the speaker is not racist, but rather representative of a particular group's collective or shared experience. Certainly, the speaker may wish to establish the self as representative of those whom he or she wishes to influence. When considering an online audience, the success of a speaker's rhetoric is primarily situated within language, rather than how the self is physically or visually conducted. The Internet then serves as a crucial platform in observing how rhetorical language operates (Condor et al., 2006; Steinfeldt et al., 2010; Rapley, 1998).

Although a number of studies have explored racial constructions on the Internet and extensive research has investigated racial discourse in South Africa, literature examining online discursive construction of 'race' in South Africa is found wanting. Indeed, in South Africa - where 'race' is a site of immense contestation - the anonymity as well as the psychological and physical distance facilitated by online discourse allows individuals both time and comfort when constructing racial discourse, neither of which typifies race-talk within conventional social space (Kraut et al., 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Furthermore, the use of online archival text ensures an absence of experimenter effect, which undoubtedly influences face-to-face study of this nature. Much research concerning online race-talk has taken place in international contexts (Holtz & Wagner, 2009); thereby having limited application in South Africa, where the significance of 'race' is likely associated with the country's incessantly racialised social and political make-up (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005). The construction of 'race' on South African Internet forums is therefore an important, yet neglected, area of study.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aims of this study lie within the broader frameworks of social constructionism and discourse analysis. Discourse analysis does not anticipate immediate transformation, rather it is instrumental in bringing about a climate of change by encouraging people to challenge their preconceptions and explore alternative readings of reality. Discourse analysis intends to bring about critical reflection - of which all people are capable - that may lead to an altered understanding and conceptualisation of the social world. Social constructionism and discourse analysis remain optimistic in this sense, believing that an individual brings about revolution by altering his or her discursive patterns (Burr, 1997; Willig, 2001).

This research aims to present 'race' as a social process utilised for particular purposes - rather than a truism based on empirical fact - by examining which discourses are drawn on when conceptualising 'race', as well as the discursive goals exemplified in race-talk. In this regard, the power contained within discursive techniques surrounding 'race', as well as 'race' as a discursive technique, may be explored. Indeed, this study conceptualises racial categories as holding oppressive and material power, and therefore aims to dismantle such power by examining linguistic racial formation (Dolby, 2001). It may be said that the collapse of Apartheid cannot be attributed to a few individuals, but rather to a society that overcame particular constructions which allowed for an oppressive system (Rogers & Rogers, 1999).

### **Main Research Question**

How is 'race' mobilised discursively on a South African Internet platform?

## **Design and Methods**

### **A Theory-Method**

Although discourse analysis is often considered the accompanying method to the theory of social constructionism, the two cannot be prised apart, and may be regarded as a theory-method. Discourse analysis and social constructionism offer an alternative to mainstream psychology; casting scepticism toward conventional knowledge forms and act to shatter that which has become common-sense understanding (Foster, 2003; Olson & Worsham, 1998). The theory-method rejects notions of realism and essentialism, asserting the impossibility of pure - or objective - fact, and suggests that subjective perspective forms the basis of all knowledge constructs. Knowledge is then situated within a specific historical and cultural period and is sustained via numerous social processes, particularly language (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2003).

Social constructionism positions language as a precondition for thought, with all representations of the social world rooted in language. Rather than provide a direct link to an individual's thoughts, language is regarded as that which allows the existence of thought (Burr, 1995). In this sense, language constructs reality - rather than reflects it - and refutes the notion of an objective world (Kiguwa, 2006). However, rather than study language in isolation, the manner in which language is utilised will be looked at via the study of discourse (Pujol & Montenegro, 1999).

Discourses are a system of symbols which create objects, such as 'race'. Different discourses aim to produce a particular version of events, with a single text orientated toward a variety of goals and persuasions. As a result of this, discourses are characterised by much variability and frequent contradictions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Understanding the social world is then linguistically selected, with the limitations of understanding reflecting the limitations of language. Discourse analysis explores these limitations as well as how language is utilised for specific purposes (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Burr, 1995; Pujol & Montenegro, 1999). In this regard, discourses are distinguished by the speaker's warranting voice, that is, the attempt to establish a version of events which prevails over others (Gergen, 1989). Studying online discourse is particularly suited to social constructionist frameworks which privilege the use of language over other variables. Indeed, online speakers quite literally do not exist beyond the language that they use (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Kraut et al., 2004).

Social constructionism is not value-free, and has the political intent of aspiring toward change (Foster, 2003). Although discourse constructs knowledge, individuals are capable of critical historical reflection, and can exercise choice with regard to the discourse that they draw on. Discourse analysis facilitates change as it critically examines language as a phenomenon that shapes the social world (Burr, 1995). By exploring knowledge-production, discourse analysis and social constructionism aim to challenge various knowledge forms (Kiguwa, 2006).

The discursive construction and representation of 'race' is perhaps best studied utilising social constructionism and discourse analysis (Burr, 1995). This study aims to identify the discursive process of developing 'race' as well as its function within discourse, thereby challenging a number of racial constructions. Indeed, to assume that a category like 'race' is organic is to undermine its discursive function (Foster, 2003; Kiguwa, 2006; Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

## **Design**

This study will incorporate a qualitative research design. Qualitative research utilises a variety of methods which focus on language rather than statistical data in order to explore meaning. Indeed, statistics are not suited in analysing the manner in which 'race' discursively operates. Individual constructions negotiated via language - rather than a singular truth - are

of paramount importance within a qualitative paradigm (Babbie & Mouton, 2006; Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2008).

The flexibility of qualitative techniques allow for new or unexpected data discovered during the analysis to be adequately attended to. Results are by no means preconceived, and the research acts more as a loose guide than a fixed recipe. Indeed, the open-ended nature of the qualitative research question allows it to be moulded by the analysis, which is particularly suitable in the context of this study as 'race' is negotiated in myriad forms (Willig, 2001). Added to this, qualitative results promote alternative interpretations, thereby providing an on-going analysis and understanding of the data (Marecek, 2003). By analysing different discourses, the nature of racial constructions may be adequately explored within a broader South African sociopolitical context. Situated within a social constructionist paradigm, this study will utilise discourse analysis - or more specifically - the ideas proposed by 'discursive psychology' (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

**Discursive psychology.** The method of discourse analysis proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) - later dubbed 'discursive psychology' by Edwards and Potter (1992) - conceptualises discourse as a means of constructing reality. An individual's attitudes are therefore not considered to be stable characteristics, but rather evaluative expressions which are features of his or her discursive practice. 'Attitude' is then understood to be context-based, and discourses will vary according to the demands of particular contexts (Durrheim et al., 2011).

Language is said to negotiate meaning within discourse, and is utilised to manage the interests of its user. By emphasising the action-orientation of language, discourse - rather than cognition - becomes the locus of discursive action (Willig, 2001). Discursive psychology is then an approach - rather than a method - embedded within social constructionism (Potter, 2003). The primary commitment of discursive psychology is to examine how people do things with language, within a context of interaction. Indeed, examining how language acts may be the most suitable means of providing alternative understandings of psychological functioning (Wetherell, 2007).

Discursive psychology is primarily concerned with identifying interpretive repertoires. Interpretive repertoires are linguistic devices that people draw on when constructing actions and events. They are usually organised around a metaphor, and encompass grammatical regularity. Such repertoires are not concerned with the content of

discourse and may be regarded as toolkits, utilised for creating a seemingly factual or stable reality. They are flexibly drawn upon to perform a number of functions, which [consequently](#) results in much variability within discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This variability is the rule rather than the exception and signifies that language aims to achieve different things at different points in a text. Interpretive repertoires allow for a kind of order to emerge from the seemingly chaotic and arbitrary form of everyday language. It is because of this order that discourse can be studied (Wetherell, 2007). However, identifying interpretive repertoires is not enough; researchers must recognise the use and function of these repertoires as well as the problems generated by their existence (Burr, 1995).

Examining the construction of 'race' through language in 'mundane' or everyday settings is important as this is the dominant context in which people conduct social [intercourse](#). The online textual production of dialogue incorporates various dimensions of everyday social interaction. These common settings promote an environment in which an individual may feel comfortable, and is thereby able to allocate the necessary time required to produce the text out of which his or her various discourses may emerge. By observing naturalistic data of this sort, novel or unanticipated topics are likely to arise, which the flexible nature of qualitative research - as well as discursive psychology - may accommodate. On the Internet, people are less visible and feel less judged by others, thereby allowing a kind of freedom when constructing one's discourse to an audience which is not possible with face-to-face interaction (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Wiggins & Potter, 2008; Willig, 2001).

### **Data [Collection](#)**

The data corpus will comprise of online responses to five 'race'-related news articles (See Appendix 1) featured on News24, an online South African newspaper. An individual may only respond on News24's comment board by logging in via his or her Facebook account which - according to News24's Comments Policy - is to ensure that if a user violates policy in any way, his or her account can be traced and subsequently barred from the comment board.

Articles were selected on the basis of the responses which they generated from users, meaning that the content of each article is irrelevant to this study. The bulk of responses to Article 1 debate whether racism of any kind is justifiable in South Africa. Many of these comments also question that which constitutes as racism in contemporary South Africa. Article 2 generates a number of responses concerning its provocative images. Generally,

these responses discuss the implications of a racially-divided post-Apartheid South Africa, with many users blaming particular 'races' for the country's stunted economic condition. There appears to be a distinct dichotomy with regard to the responses to Article 3; whereby some users argue that racism is not to be tolerated under any circumstances, and others contend that much discourse is unfairly branded as 'racism', and many people are unconstitutionally silenced because of this. Similarly, users' responses to Article 4 brought into question the circumstances - if any - that justify the expression of racism. These responses also discuss why racism in South Africa is so prevalent. Finally, the considerable response to Article 5 (far more than any of the other articles) examined: the implications of South Africa's racially-divided political and social spheres, utilising 'race' as a kind of scapegoat, as well as accusing the racism residing in others as detrimental to South Africa's social development. As the responses to each article differed somewhat, many kinds of racial discourse emerged, allowing for a relatively diverse data corpus.

All of the above articles are written by News24 personnel, rather than MyNews24 articles which are written by News24 readers and may be considered opinion pieces. News24 articles do not explicitly 'side' with a particular argument, as a MyNews24 article may do. Indeed, the comparatively less proactive tone of articles written by News24 personnel allows for a platform where race-talk may emerge somewhat naturalistically.

### **Data Corpus and Sample Bias**

The nature of the data corpus in this study contains a number of advantageous aspects. Firstly, as the data is archival, there is an absence of researcher influence. Added to this, gathering the data did not require time-consuming transcription of any sort. All participants presumably construct discourse within an environment that allows a sense of comfort not afforded in traditional interviews or focus groups (Kraut et al., 2004). Indeed, Potter and Wetherell (1987) state that all discourse collected should be naturally occurring, and take place within familiar settings. Such 'natural' discourse allows the researcher a means to study the various ways in which participants undermine one another's discursive constructions and accredit their own warranting voice (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004; Gergen, 1989).

Within qualitative research and discursive psychology, a study's research question dictates its sample selection, as well as the kind of discourse which is available for study. As discourse analysis is primarily concerned with language - rather than its speaker - a small sample size is considered adequate. It is the depth of analysis, rather than amount of data,

which is important (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Although this study does not employ specific participant selection criteria, there are a number of considerations which concern the socioeconomic status as well as the identity of participants.

**Socioeconomic status.** There is an inherent sample bias when examining online discourse (Kraut et al., 2004). This is especially true in South Africa, where an enormous disparity in access to Information Communication Technology - known as the 'digital divide' - is noted. The severity of South Africa's digital divide is attributed to the lasting economic effects of Apartheid, which promoted separate development, thereby resulting in poor learning opportunities for black South Africans. In 2007, 5.3 million personal computers and 5.1 million Internet subscribers were noted among South Africa's total population of 47.3 million people (Mphidi, 2007; Singh, 2004). Specifically, only 10 percent of the South African population has Internet access. Although mobile phone technology has considerably lessened South Africa's digital divide, it may be assumed that News24 comments are conducted on a computer for a number of administrative reasons, such as download speed and the ability to observe user responses with ease (Guðmundsdóttir, 2005). This study therefore acknowledges the presumed high socioeconomic status of its participants.

**Participant identity.** People may create Facebook accounts which comprise of a pseudo-identity - that is, fictitious photographs, information and contact details - in an attempt to remain anonymous on the News24 comment board. However, this will not significantly affect the study as its primary focus is on language, not the speaker. Another argument in this regard may assert that the anonymity which these 'pseudo-accounts' allow for may result in users displaying overtly derogatory comments as a means of inciting strong reactions from others (Kraut et al., 2004). These comments may in fact be of considerable value with regard to the reactions which they ignite. Added to this, News24's Comments Policy states that if flagged, overtly racist comments will be removed. Therefore, as the study privileges language over the speaker, fake user profiles do not serve as any kind of hindrance to reliable data.

### **Data Analysis**

The study makes use of a revised version of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) ten stages of discourse analysis. Rather than a set of definitive steps, these stages serve as a loose guide



for conducting discourse analysis, and are continually revisited and adjusted throughout the analysis.

The first step in the analysis is coding the data. Coding entails condensing a large body of discourse into smaller fragments and serves as a prerequisite for the main analysis. Indeed, the research question may develop or alter considerably throughout the coding process. Coding must be as comprehensive as possible, admitting all vague or ambiguous cases that may relate to the research question so that potentially relevant accounts are adequately considered. In the context of this study, the coding process admits all responses which overtly or implicitly engage in race-talk (Willig, 2001). All comments that are selected for data analysis are in no way anomalous, and are somewhat representative of a number of other similar comments which could not be included because of space restraints.

The next stage is the main analysis, which does not encompass a single methodological procedure. It would appear that the only prerequisite for discursive psychology is examining various uses of interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Willig, 2001). Therefore, identifying interpretive repertoires pertaining to 'race' as well as questioning my reading of these data form the primary focus of this stage. Reading and rereading is crucial in this sense, with an emphasis on detail rather than developing a general overview. Indeed, the analysis considers language [in its own right](#), rather than a route to that which lies beyond the text. Finally, the variability and consistency of identifiable patterns in discourse is noted, as well as the function and consequence that such discourse serves. Additional literature is drawn on in order to aid the analysing process (most notably Wetherell and Potter, 1992; and Edwards and Potter, 1992).

The final step, known as validation, employs two prominent techniques. Firstly, the coherence of the discourse - which relates to the researcher's own understanding of a response - indicates whether a text can be considered for analysis at all. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, fruitfulness refers to the value of the discourse with regard to the researcher's ability to produce a relevant interpretation of it. Validation is then crucial in determining which data is fit for analysis.

All findings are presented in a report which emphasises its stance as an interpretation, and therefore encourages the reader's own assessment and rereading of the data. Furthermore, the report highlights language as the primary constructor of [meaning](#), which may promote further reinterpretation of the findings. Outside assessment is then essential in ensuring that the data analysis does not remain stagnant under the absence of scrutiny.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity - a core methodological issue in qualitative research - refers to the effect that a researcher has on his or her research findings as well as the process of research (Terre Blanche et al., 2008). Social constructionism is then a recipient of its own critique, with the report stressing that the analysis has not offered any kind of definitive truth. Objectivity is indeed an impossibility within a social constructionist framework, with all knowledge claims regarded as positioned. The researcher acknowledges that descriptions of an event aid the formation of the very event described (Burr, 1995). Alternate readings of the research findings are as valuable as those presented in the report (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999).

The social and political locations of the researcher must be acknowledged so that the researcher is aware of that which influences his or her production of knowledge (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Psychodynamic research indicates that all texts affect the researcher in some way (Finlay, 2002), meaning that my own disposition will affect my reading of particular text. Therefore, my 'white' racial classification will likely influence the manner in which I interpret the discourse, and perhaps influence the degree to which I am able to understand the racial-experience of others. Being just twenty two years of age and of relatively high socioeconomic standing, my experience of current and historical implications of 'race' in South Africa is somewhat stunted. Although sufficient research may equip my understanding of such matters to an extent, a degree of genuine empathy may never be awarded to one of my social position. The analysis will therefore attempt an investigation into what particular discourses are aiming to achieve, rather than provide an assessment of the speaker (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

### **Ethical Considerations**

With regard to online research, questions pertaining to [invasions of](#) privacy and informed consent are frequently raised. However in the case of public domains, such as News24's comment board, it may be assumed that users are aware that their comments are not private. This notion of a 'public sphere' is made explicitly clear as access to News24's comment board is granted via a person's Facebook account. With no reasonable expectation of privacy, the study does not require participant consent and ethical regulations which are applicable to private transactions need not be considered (Kraut et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, the study contains a number of other ethical concerns. For instance, some users may not understand what 'public access' entails. Furthermore, many users might

not equate public access with public disclosure, thereby blurring notions of private and public. However copyright law states (Harper, 2007) that all data on public access forums may be used for research-purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged. Indeed, utilising pseudonyms or withholding the source of the discourse is senseless as search engines are able to locate such discourse (Bowker & Tuffin, 2004). A final ethical concern is that participants are not able to comment on my interpretation of their accounts, as is common practice in social constructionist research (Burr, 1995). However, this issue is partially addressed by emphasising the positionality of my interpretation.

### Results and Discussion

The analysis yielded three different interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Firstly, 'Race' as Entitlement establishes 'race' as a kind of symbol which links the individual to various entitlements. Secondly, 'Race' as an Overreaction recognises 'race' as a scapegoat, utilised as a means of evading responsibility. Finally, 'Race' as Political focuses on the social implications of racialised politics in South Africa.

#### 'Race' as Entitlement

The following discourse links racial identity to a number of historical claims, whereby particular responsibilities and entitlements are attached to racial constructs. Conversely, much of the discourse contests such racial entitlement, thereby highlighting the variability contained within interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For instance, where one individual's discourse may argue that modern technology and language belongs to whites, another may construct 'whiteness' as representative of colonisation and the degradation of Africa. An individual's prescribed 'race' therefore indicates his or her discursive claims.

*@Tamaranui - You just said it... "Old School" If you like your traditions so much, then go build your mud and crap huts in your kraals, go herd your sheep and have 7 wives. But this is a modern world and times have changed. You want all the luxury that comes from eh white mans inventions, yet you want to retain your own cultural beliefs. You cannot have both. The modern civilised world doesnt allow it. You choose one or the other. Go back to the bush where you originally came from, or live in the modern world with new cultures accepted to all, not just white South Africans, but the international market! If you want the world's luxury's, you got live byt he world's standards.*

Wade, Article 5, 21 May 2012, 14:54.

In the above extract, 'race' is constructed as representative of historical achievement. The word '*tradition*' is used to refer to that which is not white, and therefore not modern. By use of the following list: '*mud and crap huts in your kraals, go herd your sheep and have 7 wives*', the discourse attempts to convey the speaker's comprehensive understanding of black '*tradition*' (Rapley, 1998). The list's repetition of the word '*your*' establishes a division between the speaker (along with the white 'race' for which the discourse seeks to represent) and crude, anti-modern blackness (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The discourse essentialises stereotypes of primitiveness to 'blackness', thereby engaging in a kind of fact-construction in order to evade accusations of racism (Hook, 2005). In opposition to essentialised black tradition, whiteness is associated with the '*inventions*' which make possible the '*luxury*' of modern living. Therefore, if an individual is to abandon his or her blackness, the luxury of whiteness may be embraced, but never claimed as one's own (Fanon, 1952). By asserting '*You cannot have both*', the extract establishes blackness as incompatible in a modern - and ipso facto white - world. In this sense, the discourse utilises a form of limiting, whereby black tradition is accepted within particular parameters, as embracing such tradition excludes an individual from the somewhat allusive '*luxury that comes from eh white mans inventions*' (Durrheim et al., 2011).

Wade's rhetoric undergoes a kind of variability to suit his argument (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). At first, archaic black tradition is juxtaposed with modern white luxury; an incompatible dichotomy from which one must '*shoose one or the other*'. However, later in the discourse the option of 'luxury' is not the exclusive property of whiteness, but an important facet of a global culture which an individual must embrace if he or she is to be a part of the considerably vague '*international market*'. The discourse then extends its definition of whiteness as the antithesis to primitive blackness, to include a global standard to which all should aspire. Indeed, Wade's discourse concludes with '*If you want the world's luxury's, you got live byt he world's standards.*' With whiteness constructed as a universal norm, the black individual must abandon his or her '*tradition*' if he or she is to participate in the modern world. By insisting that the racial other is to yield to particular standards established by the speaker, the discourse makes use of reflective racism (Ahmed et al., 2000).

*... by the way you have had white people living in africa with their own culture for centuries, don't you think its a little 'racist' of you to say their culture doesn't count? Other people are allowed to have a culture different to yours. Just because I don't share a cheating husband with six other*

*woman doesn't make me any less african. Or are you saying because I'm white I'm not african? You my friend are the racist.*

Jessica, Article 5, 21 May 2012, 13:56.

Contrary to Wade's discourse, Jessica's rhetoric seems to assert that black and white 'cultures' can co-exist, and that believing otherwise is in fact racist. However, the discourse locates such racism exclusively within blacks who assert that whites do not belong in Africa. Indeed, it is insisted that white entitlement to the 'African' category is as valid as black entitlement in this regard. Despite this, a distinction is made between that which constitutes as black African ('*a cheating husband with six other woman*') and white African. However, rather than explicitly state that which encompasses the white African, the discourse implicitly forms this construct via not *sharing* the unflattering components of the black African. By not specifying that which denotes the white African, one may only attach 'moral' attributes to this construct. Although all 'races' are entitled to the category 'African', the discourse dichotomises racial meaning within the category (Durrheim et al., 2011; Edwards & Potter, 1992).

*If it wasn't for colonialism this country wouldn't be much better of as countries like Zimbabwe or other African countries, so just rather so thank you mister European man and be on your way.*

Rohann, Article 4, 4 May 2012, 21:43.

*Ag plz rohann your js another idiot I see so many of you these days. The reason our countries are like this is because of colonialism. Nobody asked white people to come to africa where d sun shines n everything is plentiful.*

Dipzen, Article 4, 4 May 2012, 22:04.

In a somewhat similar fashion to Wade's rhetoric, Rohann's [excerpt](#) relates whiteness to colonial European achievement. Colonialism - to which whites are directly connected via European lineage - is said to be responsible for the gift of whiteness that has rendered South Africa '*much better of as countries like Zimbabwe or other African countries*'. The [excerpt](#) employs a form of historical amnesia by [denying](#) instances of colonialism in '*other African countries*'. Such denial acts to make invisible the text's inherent contradiction, thereby managing how an audience hears the speaker's rhetoric (Durrheim et al., 2011).

Through a form of category entitlement, Rohann's [excerpt](#) excludes blacks from laying any claim to the privileges made possible by white colonialism. Whiteness - that is, the lasting effects of colonialism - is then established as a kind of gift for which blacks are to be grateful (Hook, 2011). By not stating how colonialism places South Africa in a comparatively '*much better*' position, or indeed what such a position encompasses, the discourse resists the formation of counter-arguments from others, and evades the social taboo (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Unlike Rohann's [excerpt](#), which positions South Africa as separate from 'problematic' African countries, Dipzen's text includes South Africa among these countries. Both texts seem to exploit the vagueness of that which Dipzen has termed '*this*'. Where Rohann's discourse establishes '*this*' as South Africa's position of comparative privilege, Dipzen constructs '*this*' as the poor state in which South Africa presently finds itself as a result of colonialism (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Dipzen's final sentence suggests a white corruption of an idyllic Africa as a kind of Eden '*where d sun shine n everything is plentiful*'. This may be considered as 'healthy reserve discourse', where the technology associated with colonial whiteness has ruined simple, healthy Africa (Durrheim et al., 2011). By not specifying or elaborating on such white corruption, Dipzen's discourse appears to redefine the vague definition of whiteness set up in Rohann's rhetoric.

*The problem is white people think they are special. They think certain rules don't apply to them. When it's a black person doing something wrong they are quick to throw the rule book at you.*

C'hle, Article 1, 15 February 2012, 11:54.

C'hle's discourse seems to develop discretely a sense of black victimhood. Utilising words and phrases such as '*you*' and '*a black person*', the discourse primarily refers to black people in the singular. Conversely, white people are referred to in plural form with words such as '*them*', '*people*' and '*they*'. With the single black contrasted against a white plural, blackness appears somewhat helpless alongside overpowering whiteness, and a sense of victimhood is established within the linguistic arrangement of the discourse (Altman, 2004).

Another instance of victimhood in C'hle's discourse is observed when the speaker states that white people '*think certain rules don't apply to them. When it's a black person doing something wrong they are quick to throw the rule book at you*'. Rather than highlight whites not getting the '*rule book*' thrown at them as the problem, the speaker insists that the

problem lies in blacks getting such treatment when *'doing something wrong'*. Indeed, it may be said that *'the problem'* would only suffice if blacks got *'the rule book'* thrown at them when doing something that was not *'wrong'*. The discourse therefore focuses on that which may construct a sense of victimhood at the expense of consistent or convincing rhetoric. Indeed, the *'problem'* positions whites as stereotypically unable to adapt to a post-Apartheid world that will not treat them as *'special'* (Durrheim et al., 2011; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), thereby establishing white entitlement as the root of *'the problem'*.

### **'Race' as an Overreaction**

The discourse which follows attempts to establish 'race' as a kind of overreaction, too readily employed as a means of avoiding responsibility, thereby forming an opposite to 'Race' as Entitlement. Added to this, by presenting 'race' as an overreaction or a discursive scapegoating, such discourse acts to redefine the social taboo as racism is recast as an [inevitable](#) approach in managing 'race' (Martin & Durrheim, 2006).

*So if you accuse a black person of hogging the equipment you are a racist - what are you if you accuse a white person of hogging the equipment? Everything is always made into a racial issue and I agree with what he said. Since my mother and uncles were all murdered by black people which we knew I have become more racist than I ever was. My eyes have certainly been opened to this country going backwards.*

Tracy, Article 1, 15 February 2012, 09:03.

The above discourse displays considerable contradiction. Tracy proclaims that: *'Everything is always made into a racial issue and I agree with what he said... I have become more racist than I ever was.'* By focusing on 'race', and indeed claiming that she is racist, Tracy has interpreted the story along racial lines, and indeed made it *'a racial issue'*. The first part of her discourse condemns those who interpret *'everything'* along racial lines, whereas the second part acts to justify the speaker's own racism as well as racist practice; with racism being a definitive means of perceiving reality along racial lines. In this regard, racism is externally situated, and is the responsibility of those who experience it, thereby alleviating the guilt which typically accompanies racism (Ahmed et al., 2000). By taking ownership of the social taboo, a power shift occurs, from the accuser to the accused, and the speaker becomes a kind of victim (Hook, 2011).

It would appear that Tracy's discourse constructs racism as a kind of truth, and establishes racist practice as an eye-opener. By taking on the social taboo rather than

avoiding it, she attempts to recast racism as insightful, thereby welcoming such an accusation (Wambugu, 2005). She states that her family members were murdered by black people '*that we knew*', perhaps suggesting that personal closeness does not justifiably exempt blacks as receivers of racism. Furthermore, by relying on personal anecdote, Tracy's discourse cannot be disproven and is therefore difficult to challenge. Added to this, such challenge may cause Tracy considerable offence with the implication that her pain and anger are unjustified or untrue (Ahmed et al., 2000).

*I'm black and i can't always be expected to cry everytime some one white says something about black people. I think we're all- both black and white- become too sensitive!*

Pixie86, Article 3, 8 May 2012, 21:45.

The disclaimer '*I'm black*', attempts to accredit the speaker's warranting voice with a kind of authority (Gergen, 1989). The first sentence establishes a distance between the self and those who '*cry everytime some one white says something about black people*'. Furthermore, the overtly racist comments discussed in the news article are somewhat diluted by recasting these comments as merely '*something about black people*'. Therefore '*to cry everytime*' such a trivial matter arises, is made to seem an overreaction. The speaker is then established as a kind of onlooker, or outsider, to those who engage in this overreaction (Condor et al., 2006).

The second sentence comes to contradict the first somewhat. By stating '*I think we're all- both black and white- become too sensitive!*', the text now includes [Pixie86](#) among those [from whom in](#) the first sentence she [sought](#) distance. In an attempt to establish a colour-blind discourse and perhaps reaffirm the status of 'onlooker' set up in the first sentence, Pixie86's second sentence draws the self in, however contradicts the first by doing so (Martin & Durrheim, 2006; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

*Maybe we should all start taking these racist remarks seriously. Like for example when my fiance or i walk outside in our own garden and the people of a different skin colour working on the building site next door, remark and say, "Jy whitey...hallo..jy white". Imagine if i took it seriously, and called up my lawyer and layed a charge against them of defamation of character and got them all fired. Bit extreem i think. But seriously one should just take it from where it comes, and laugh it off!*

Troy, Article 3, 9 May 2012, 10:17.



Rather than state 'black people', Troy's discourse engages in a kind of anti-racist self-presentation talk (Durrheim et al., 2011) by utilising the euphemistic '*people of a different skin colour*', thereby insisting on a somewhat colour-neutral approach, which is contrasted with the overtly racial remarks of the builders. Where the comments of the builders define Troy and his fiancé by their skin colour, Troy's narrative merely notes that there is a difference in skin colour. Indeed, the audience remains unaware of Troy's 'race' until the builders' comments are included, thereby situating racial awareness as a product of the other. It may then be said that the discourse implies that blacks are fixated by a racial society, and whites are moving toward a colour-blind notion of reality (Wambugu, 2005).

Troy then states that although he has the legal right to get the builders fired, he does not exercise this ability as this would be '*extreem*'. Indeed, Troy juxtaposes the actional '*called up my lawyer and layed a charge against them... and got them all fired*' with the comparatively tame spoken words of the workers. Responding to '*racist remarks*' in this sense appears to be a kind of unwarranted over-reaction, and the social taboo is recategorised as excusable (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The discourse attempts to normalise racism by exhibiting the folly of taking such practice '*seriously*'. The last statement: '*one should just take it from where it comes, and laugh it off!*' presents racism as the antithesis of 'serious'. By encouraging people to '*take it from where it comes*', Troy's discourse suggests that racism is akin to the lighted-heartedness associated with humour (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). The discourse then acts to diminish potential guilt which characterises the social taboo by persuading an audience to abandon the seriousness connected to racism. The implication is that racism is non-threatening, and should therefore be tolerated (Condor et al., 2006).

### 'Race' as Political

Many participants appeared to institute a clear racial dichotomy between two South African political parties; namely the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the African National Congress (ANC). The two parties are homogenised in the discourse; the DA is established as a white party supported by whites, and the ANC as a black party supported by blacks, with no consideration of other political parties. By presenting the ANC and the DA as racially divided, the discourse attempts to justify various forms of racial separatism. Indeed, this kind of racial division 'at the top' is said to be reflected among the people of South Africa 'at the

bottom'. 'Race' as Political therefore examines material implications of 'race' rather than the nature of 'race'-based rhetoric which the previous two interpretive repertoires do.

*Glad to see so many black people marching in DA colours.  
Fighting for a cause and not a race. Hopefully they will be the saviours of  
our country.*

kathy.hellyar, Article 2, 16 May 2012, 09:14.

kathy.hellyar's response displays considerable variability (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Taking her cue from the news article's various photographs, the speaker specifies that she is 'Glad to see so many **black** people marching in DA colours'. In doing so, she appears to associate the DA with whites, or even 'whiteness', as she is glad and perhaps surprised to see black people. Seeing black people marching for the DA possibly represents for the speaker a kind of black 'crossing-over' to a white party (Fanon, 1952).

In an attempt to present a concern with colour-blindedness and thus avoid accusations of racism, the speaker states in her second line: 'Fighting for a cause and not a race'. If indeed the ambiguous 'cause' was prioritised over 'race', kathy.hellyar would have been happy to see 'many people' rather than 'black people'. It would appear that the second half of her response is arguing for something different, namely the speaker's own concern with colour-blindedness, whereas the first part expresses her satisfaction with what she perceives as a kind of racial cross-over, thus resulting in a somewhat contradictory response (Martin & Durrheim, 2006; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

*As for DA, they will only win membership of those Blacks with a slavery  
mind, still think of white ppl as supreme, rich en authorities, bt the rest of the  
Blck ppl which are greater in population will stick with ANC no matter wat  
we will not betray Mandela da country will neva eva be governd by white  
ppl, Aget it. COSATU i Salute u, we nid to put DA in their place!*

peacefulmbuso.xulu, Article 2, 22 May 2012, 22:04.

peacefulmbuso.xulu's [response](#) draws a clear racial distinction between the DA and the ANC. However he does so in a manner that is quite different to other responses of this nature. Stake management is carried out in [this excerpt](#) by establishing the DA as functioning in the interest of - what may be assumed from the use of words like 'slavery' and 'supreme' - white superiority (with the obvious inference to the Apartheid regime) as well as colonialism by use

of the historical term '*slavery*'. Conversely, the ANC is presented as acting in the interest of liberation, the antithesis to the racist DA. By referencing Mandela, the speaker draws on a kind of historical authority, thereby alluding to a tradition of views (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Indeed Nelson Mandela has become a figurehead in South African national history; representing freedom from political oppression (Rapley, 1998). Therefore, Mandela - functioning as a symbol rather than a man - is betrayed.

*@Lazlo; you're right about that; i just feel that the only reason that zille [DA leader] hasn't won the election yet its most probably that most blk ppl are still holding on the emotional scars of the past government which in turn leads to lack of trust. And i think that's what the current government is feeding on. Its a pity though cause this country has a lot of potential to not just become good but great; but with the current political climate we're basically going down the drain*

ronzaled, Article 1, 14 February 2012, 09:49.

In the above extract, the speaker divides allegiance to the DA and the ANC along racial lines, with the current governance of the ANC being the result of '*most blk ppl... holding on the emotional scars of the past [Apartheid] government*'. The discourse thereby establishes South Africa's '*potential*' as being held back by black people who do not vote for the DA, a political party which if elected into government, would allow the country '*to not just become good but great*'. By shifting blame onto '*the past*', the white self becomes a victim, powerless against the actions of the black other who acts to prevent a competent political party from assuming governance (Martin & Durrheim, 2006).

The somewhat abstract cause and effect, namely '*emotional scars*' and '*lack of trust*', are considerably vague notions, whose meaning cannot be directly inferred, and therefore resist effective challenge from others. These '*emotional scars*' fix a kind of essence to the black other, which allows the 'black' racial category - and all that this entails - to seem natural. In this regard, a damaged or pathological essence is ascribed to the other by characterising the black psyche via '*emotional scars*'. With the origins of this damage located within the abstract '*emotional*', the discourse evades challenge from an audience (Holtz & Wagner, 2009). Blame for South Africa's apparent political incompetence is therefore shifted onto black people who do not vote for the DA, and are '*the only reason*' just political rule in South Africa is prevented. Ronzaled's discourse closes with '*we're basically going down the drain*', suggesting that black people who are keeping the current government in power, are

(selfishly) barring effective governance in South Africa, thereby affecting all South Africans. Blackness then emerges as the reason for South Africa's stunted progress (Durrheim et al., 2011).

### Summary and Conclusion

In post-Apartheid South Africa, 'race' has become a symbolically-loaded social category. In this regard, race-talk is an inherently self-conscious practice, whereby 'race' and racism are attended to with considerable caution (Durrheim et al., 2011). However, the anonymity and interpersonal distance facilitated by the Internet can allow users a relative sense of ease when attending to 'race' (Steinfeldt et al., 2010). With regard to this study's main research question, Internet-users were found to draw on three interpretive repertoires in their discursive treatment of 'race'. Firstly, in a somewhat contradictory fashion, 'Race' as Entitlement discourse both advocates and contests the linking of racial identity to numerous historical claims. Secondly, in order to redefine the social taboo along socially acceptable principles, 'Race' as an Overreaction constructs 'race' as a kind of rhetorical scapegoat. In a manner quite opposite to 'Race' as Entitlement, 'Race' as an Overreaction conceptualises 'race' as a means of avoiding - rather than claiming - particular meaning and responsibilities. The two interpretive repertoires therefore demonstrate the stark variability encompassed by constructs such as 'race'. Finally, 'Race' as Political establishes two of South Africa's most prominent political parties - the ANC and the DA - as racially divided, thereby reflecting racial tensions within South Africa's social sphere. Unlike the previous two interpretive repertoires, 'Race' as Political examines the material effects of 'race' in the social sphere, thus emphasising the action-orientation of such a discursive construct (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The results of this study appear to contribute to existing theory on discursive racial construction in several ways. To begin with, rather than avoid or employ accusations of racism, many excerpts seem to recast the social taboo as acceptable. This is achieved by essentialising the racial other in an unfavourable manner, thereby offering negative racial evaluations as an acceptable reaction. For example, Jessica's presentation of black culture as '*a cheating husband with six other woman*', resists any kind of positive appraisal.

Furthermore, the victimised self - which appears in all three interpretive repertoires - seems to justify anger or condemnation toward the racial other. Finally, it would seem that the rhetorical, and perhaps defensive, nature of much of the discourse highlights the influence

which even an imagined audience holds over racial discourse construction. Indeed, the speaker does not appear to assume that an audience shares his or her views, and continually strives to win over this audience by use of positive self-presentation talk (Durrheim et al., 2011). This indicates that although an individual may feel considerably more at ease constructing racial discourse online - as opposed to face-to-face communication - the social taboo still maintains a strong influence over such construction.

The three interpretive repertoires identified in this study appear to exemplify the robust nature of Apartheid philosophy. As Wade insists: *'times have changed'*, yet it seems that language has not, as racial segregation in South Africa - no longer existing in law - becomes re-deployed in speech (Dolby, 2001). The analysis appears to present the discursive purpose of 'race' as reminiscent of its function during Apartheid, that is, societal division. Indeed, Jessica's declaration that different 'races' *'don't share'*, coupled with Wade's assertion that *'You cannot have both'* demonstrates the separateness inherent in race-talk. It would seem that 'race' is synonymous with division, and cannot be alternatively considered. Furthermore, the notion of either rightful or contested racial entitlement essentialises particular 'race' differences, resulting in the individual desiring racial separateness from those so fundamentally dissimilar from the self (Allport, 1954). Although utilising 'Race' as an Overreaction acts to avoid any sort of prerogative that 'Race' as Entitlement may attempt to claim or refute, such an interpretive repertoire also acts to segregate 'race' by misplacing the seriousness of the social taboo in order for racism to function unchallenged. Defending racism, or indeed belittling the social taboo, justifies the racialised subject's will to segregate, or maintain a distance from the differentiated - and often unsavoury - racial other. 'Race' as Political then showcases both the DA and the ANC as belonging to either black or white, and implies that South Africa is racially dichotomised from the top down. This is perhaps an attempt at presenting South Africa's leadership as demonstratively practicing the racial compartmentalisation advocated within race-talk.

As racial constructs are so concretely embedded within South Africa's national lexicon, a somewhat radical approach must be adopted in order to address the language which forms racial division, and potentially enable South Africa to move beyond a 'race' society. It is suggested that discursive racial practice must undergo fundamental and holistic change. Indeed, the various conventions and common-sense meanings attributed to 'race' in talk are to be abandoned if a new kind of talk is to emerge, which possibly constructs the racial subject in such a manner that he or she is unable to recognise a racially-distinct self.

Although such idealistic proposals may be somewhat discouraging, one may turn only to South Africa's own history to observe that real and significant change is possible (Durrheim et al., 2011). Studies such as this which attend to race-talk represent an important effort in challenging the discursive constructs which inform the persistent racial division that continues to characterise South African society.

Time constraints as well as a restricted word count resulted in a number of limitations within this research. Firstly, the study utilised just one Internet forum, thereby limiting its applicability to users of a single online community. Added to this, the relative economic privilege of the cohort examined provides a somewhat classist understanding of 'race'-construction in South Africa (Guðmundsdóttir, 2005). Secondly, the discursive conventions surrounding 'race'-construction in South Africa are presumably not adhered to as uniformly in online discourse as is the case in considerably more uncomfortable face-to-face communication. Societal influences likely influence online and physical race-talk somewhat differently. Indeed, discourse analysis is frequently charged for ignoring context in favour of text (Burr, 1995). The method of data analysis utilised in this study therefore resulted in an inadequate social analysis of 'race' in discourse. Although the study was able to demonstrate the action-orientation of the discourse in a more concentrated fashion, it would seem that the nature of the analysis prevented the discourse from being socially-situated.

Future studies may then contrast the manner in which 'race' is negotiated within focus groups, with online race-talk. Indeed, focus group studies may provide a better understanding of the meaning ascribed to 'race' across speakers of varying socioeconomic status, and are able to observe how discursive 'race' conventions are adhered to in the physical presence of the racial other. Additionally, the visual aspects of discursive racial construction - such as fidgeting and smiling - may be observed. Finally, by requiring participants to provide their racial affiliation beforehand, a focus group is - to a limited degree - capable of contextualising race-talk by considering the effects that a speaker's racial-identification has on his or her discursive mobilisation of 'race'.

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## Appendix 1

## News Articles

Article 1. Retrieved 2 June, 2012 from

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Racist-gym-member-banned-from-Virgin-Active-20120213>



Breaking News. First  
LAST UPDATED: 2012-10-25, 11:41

Mandela's children, Angie's orphans  
Finally, 40 years of Apartheid education would be dismantled and the kids of 1994 ought to be the heirs to this glorious legacy. Or not?, writes Sibutho Tinabala.

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### Racist gym member banned from Virgin Active

2012-02-13 17:56

Johannesburg – Virgin Active has banned a member after a racist incident at its Sunninghill gym, **Eyewitness News** reported on Monday.

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Lesley Mofokeng laid a criminal charge after he was insulted at the gym in Johannesburg.

A fellow gym member called Lesley Mofokeng a "boy" and accused him of "hogging the equipment".

**Related Links**

- Virgin Active defends brand in racism row
- Richard Branson weighs in on Virgin racist attack
- Man lays charge over racism at Virgin gym
- Twitter pressure spurs Virgin into action
- Outcry over gym group's response to racism

Mofokeng said: "The guy came and started shouting and said, "You black guys take everything. We know this is your fucking country, but you do not have to control everything."

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Virgin Active notified Mofokeng that the man who hurled abuse at him had his membership cancelled and would be banned from all clubs.

**Justice served**

Mofokeng said justice was served.

"I am relieved that the message has been sent to people who come to gym with the intention of hurting others."

This incident became public after the Star newspaper reported that a patron of Virgin Active Morningside, in Sandton, was racially insulted by another patron during a spinning class on December 31.

Liz Hleza said the man appeared enraged because she shouted "yebo" in her enthusiasm for the music and the exercise.

"I was so scared and thought he was going to hit me, he was very angry. He said I should keep quiet and kept saying this bloody kaffir, you kaffir," Hleza said.

**Dissatisfied**

She said at the time she was dissatisfied with the gym's handling of the matter.

Founder and chief executive of the Virgin group Richard Branson commented on the issue on Virgin Active SA's Facebook page, News24 reported.

"We do not condone any form of discrimination at Virgin - especially racism," he said.

He said Virgin was taking the complaints "extremely seriously".

"[We] intend to look at all the facts to reach the right outcome for all parties concerned," Branson wrote.

- Attempts to contact Virgin Active by News24 were unsuccessful.

- News24

Article 2. Retrieved 2 June, 2012 from <http://www.news24.com/Multimedia/South-Africa/DA-march-turns-violent-20120515>

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**VIDEO: Lekota calls for Zuma impeachment**  
Cope leader Mosiuoa Lekota is adamant President Jacob Zuma should be impeached. Watch.

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**Article 3.** Retrieved 2 June, 2012 from <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Racist-Facebook-post-student-suspended-20120508>



**Breaking News. First**  
LAST UPDATED: 2012-10-25, 11:41



**Mandela's children, Angie's orphans**  
Finally, 40 years of Apartheid education would be dismantled and the kids of 1994 ought to be the heirs to this glorious legacy. Or not?, writes **Sibusiso Tshabalala**.

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## Racist Facebook post - student suspended

2012-05-08 18:35

Johannesburg - A student of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) has been suspended for allegedly posting a racist message on Facebook, the university said on Tuesday.

"[Ken Sinclair] was suspended yesterday [Monday] and won't be attending classes," said spokesperson Thami Nkwanyane.

This was pending the outcome of a disciplinary process.

The City Press website reported that Sinclair posted a message two weeks ago in which he said black people were "fucking brain dead monkeys [who] always skinner [gossip] in their retarded language".


Nkwanyane said CPUT condemned Sinclair's actions in the "strongest possible terms".


The matter was an isolated event and not representative of the mindset of Cput students, he said.


It was not clear how long the disciplinary process would take to complete or what penalties Sinclair could face if found guilty.


Racism on social networks made headlines recently when two models, Jessica Leandra dos Santos and Tshidi Thamana, apologised after public condemnation of racist Twitter posts.


- SAPA



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- [SAHRC: 45 complaints against FHM model](#)
- [SA seething over racist tweet](#)
- [Another model sorry over racist tweet](#)

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**Article 4.** Retrieved 2 June, 2012 from <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/SA-seething-over-racist-tweet-20120504>



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**Mandela's children, Angie's orphans**  
Finally, 40 years of Apartheid education would be dismantled and the kids of 1994 ought to be the heirs to this glorious legacy. Or not?, writes **Sibusiso Tshabalala**.

News Opinion Business Sport Lifestyle Multimedia Focus MyNews


## SA seething over racist tweet

2012-05-04 20:01

Johannesburg - South Africans were seething on social networking site Twitter on Friday after a racist tweet by model Jessica Leandra made the rounds.

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On Thursday evening, Leandra told her 2 591 followers: "Just, well took on an arrogant and disrespectful kaffir inside Spar. Should have punched him, should have [sic]."



Leandra, who was men's magazine FHM model of the year in 2011, has since deleted the post and issued an apology on her blog [jessicaleandra.com](http://jessicaleandra.com).

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"I tweeted rather irresponsibly about an incident I encountered last night [Thursday], using a harsh and unkind word about the gentleman who had confronted me with sexual remarks and sounds," she wrote in her apology.

Related Links  
• FHM strips Jessica Leandra of title  
• FHM model loses sponsorship  
• FHM model apologises for racist tweets

"While most of you would enjoy the opportunity to throw a few vicious words at me, please do understand that I was acting in pure anger and frustration at the time and although we know this is no excuse, it is a lesson learnt and again, I am sincerely apologetic."

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### Stripped of her title

FHM South Africa took to Twitter to voice its distaste at Leandra's comment.

"We're horrified any1 would say such things! Those attitudes have no place in society or FHM! [sic]."

The magazine's editor **Brendan Cooper**, in a statement on the FHM website on Friday, said Leandra had been stripped of her title as winner of the FHM Modelbook 2011 competition with immediate effect.

"It's important to us that it is noted that she in no way represents the magazine; she was merely the winner of an online poll we ran, and that we totally distance ourselves from her blatantly racist comments.

"We have removed all pictures of her from our website and will have nothing to do with her in future."

QuickTrim SA, one of her sponsors, tweeted: "Due to the severity of the remarks by #JessicaLeandra #QuickTrimSA herewith ends our sponsorship to her with immediate effect!"

Despite Leandra's apology, South Africa's Twitter community was still not happy.

### Down with racism

Columnist Mabine Seabe wrote on the social networking site that he had lodged a complaint with the SA Human Rights Commission.

"I have lodged a complaint against Jessica Leandra with the Human Rights Commission on the basis of crimen injuria and libel. #DownWithRacism.

"SAHRC acknowledges my complaint against Jessica Leandra #DownWithRacism."

Another twitter user wrote: "Darling, even if your mangling of language was acceptable, your disgusting racism is not."

Democratic Alliance national spokesperson **Mmusi Maimane** wrote on twitter: "Just heard about racist tweets from Jessica Leandra. Not good enough to say you were angry. Racism can never be justified. #DownWithRacism."

Another user tweeted: "Dear Jessica Leandra, deleting a tweet does not make you any less racist. You made the mistake of publicly announcing you are, deal with it."

By Friday afternoon Leandra was trending on Twitter.

- SAPA

**Article 5.** Retrieved 2 June, 2012 from <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/ANC-brands-Zuma-painting-racist-20120521>

## Zuma painting is racist: ANC

2012-05-21 11:14

Johannesburg - The ANC's national executive committee (NEC) was still smarting over a painting of its president **Jacob Zuma's** genitals, branding it racist on Monday as it prepared for a court challenge to have it removed.

"It's rude, it's crude, it's disrespectful, it's racist," said African National Congress secretary general **Gwede Mantashe** at a post NEC briefing in Johannesburg on Monday.

He said if it had been a white man depicted, the reaction would have been very different. As far as many people were concerned, black people were just objects, he continued.

"I said how about the idea of going to court tomorrow and as we sit there we can take off our trousers... we can walk around with our genitals hanging out... it's crude," he said.

The party was going to the South Gauteng High Court on Tuesday to try and compel the Goodman Gallery to take down the painting, and City Press to remove a photo of it from its website.

"We have not outgrown racism in our 18 years," Mantashe said.

He believed there was widespread condemnation of the painting and felt it was polarising society along racial lines. The only threat to freedom of expression was people who used it without understanding it, thereby destroying it, he said.

- SAPA

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## Appendix 2

### Quotation Key

- ... Ellipsis points indicate that segments of a user's response have been omitted.
- [ ] Words that appear within square brackets have been inserted into a user's quoted response for additional clarification.
- Bold** Bold words indicate the researcher's emphasis.