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Subjectivities in white youth narratives in post-apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

This study examines the subjectivities of white, English speaking youths in post-Apartheid South Africa. It aims to explore how these youths perceive their current role in South Africa and how this role and their experiences may change in the future. Twelve students between the ages of 18 and 25 from the University of the Witwatersrand were recruited and took part in three focus group discussions. The focus groups that were conducted with the participants were semi-structured and recorded. Data was analysed using thematic content analysis which was underpinned by critical race theory. The importance of this study lies in presenting rich and detailed descriptions of what it means to be a member of the youth of a group that has a history of unjust dominance over other groups of people in a society where that dominance has been (formally) overcome. It attempts to understand the difficulties and the privileges that come with being young and white in South Africa approaching 20 years after the Apartheid regime has fallen. The predominant themes that arose from this study include a discussion of language as a marker of whiteness and privilege, the need to be sensitive when dealing with issues of race in post-Apartheid South Africa, the desire to be seen as progressive and valuable in post-Apartheid South Africa, a general sense of positivity about South Africa and a feeling of being misunderstood by people of other race groups.

Key Words: Whiteness, Apartheid, subjectivity, Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, South Africa, Youth