

# **White Identity and the Education of Development Workers**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis offers an analysis of how white women experience racial privilege in the international development arena. Based on post-structuralist ideas of identity construction and subjectivity formation, I examine the narratives of six white middle class female development workers in order to gain a deeper understanding of white privilege. Using grounded theory to examine the data, I find that the development arena offers an occasion for white women to fulfill their socially mandated subject position and therefore reproduce hierarchical relations across race. Furthermore, the data indicates that white female development workers resist engaging in critical self-reflection that would compromise the “helping” and “good” narrative of self as a development worker, which portrays the self in heroic terms. The lack of critical self-reflection suggests that the performance of whiteness and denial of white privilege exists within the everyday lived experience of white female development workers. I argue that this performance of white subjectivity is problematic because it maintains inequality in the development arena by sustaining white dominance and non-white subordination. This pattern must be broken in order to re-establish relationships in the development arena that reflect equality and justice.

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## **DEDICATION**

To white development workers asking tough questions; don't stop, we have a long way to go.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Why this research?**

I hold a degree in International Development Studies and I have also worked in the international development field in Zimbabwe and Zambia for three years with projects funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). My modest experience in the development arena certainly does not make me any sort of expert in the field, but what I can confidently say about my experience with international development work and study is that I was not once formally challenged to think about my racial identity in the context of participating in development work. Although I may not have understood it then, I was keenly aware that while I was in Africa, my white racial identity was very significant to the non-white local people. Upon reflection I realize that I also felt more aware of my whiteness in the development context than any other time of my life. My white identity seemed in some unidentifiable way to be the source of discomfort to me and my racial identity lingered in my mind as an illusive concept that I could not, or chose not, to unravel and understand. This ‘thing’, my whiteness, was something like an omnipresent taboo that was the source of awkward avoidance and confusion for me. Years later while studying anti-racism at the University of Saskatchewan this same uncomfortable feeling about my white racial identity, that I had previously successfully tucked away into my sub consciousness, once again bubbled up to the surface of my consciousness. This time, rather than tucking this perplexing feeling away and forgetting about it, I wanted to understand it.

### **The problem**

My journey to understanding white racial identity in the context of development work began with seeking out literature on the subject. What I found is a remarkable absence in

international development literature on white racial identity and development. Considering that the development agenda is primarily controlled by the North, which is really a code word for ‘countries populated and controlled by white people’, it is noted by White that “development as a whole may be regarded as a process of racial formation” (2002, p. 417). Despite these politics, a dialogue on how race matters is mostly absent and off-limits in development literature and programs. Kothari (2006) remarks that a racial analysis of development is “curiously untouched.” White (2002) suggests that an absence of dialogue about how race matters in development actually hides the “complicity of development” with the status quo of racial hierarchy. She further explains that the silence on race in development work is, “a determining silence that both masks and marks its centrality to the development project” (p. 408). In other words, this silence both hides and is a demonstration of the importance of race in development work. Sullivan (2006) argues that, “development has become a stealthy way of enacting racist and colonialist practices that supposedly have nothing to do with racism, .... [but is portrayed as] promoting ‘modernization.’” (p. 157). This literature suggests that race is central to development work, and yet it goes largely unmentioned in development practices. The absence of racial analysis is particularly troubling in the development arena due to the historical continuities with colonialism, such as white people from countries outside the host country being in positions of authority.

### **Development and Development Workers**

There is much debate and diversity of perspectives that circulate within the development literature including the term ‘development’. For example, the notion of a “developing country” is contentious as it implies that there is a continuum of development along which countries can

be placed as either farther ahead or behind in this so called development process. Marking the sensitive nature of this term, the United Nations statistics division explains that, “the designations ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgment about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process” (United Nations, 2012). The term “developing country” by default implies that there are therefore “developed countries” or at least something along the lines of “more developed countries,” which nonetheless furthers the notion that there is a final and attainable destination where a nation is “developed.” The language of development, developed and developing suggests a hierarchy that despite United Nations cautionary explanations of how they apply the term still has ideological and political implications.

One way in which efforts have been made to move away from this politics of development language and yet address global inequality is through terms such as “North” and “South.” This is another way to refer to the general divide of unequal resources between the Northern hemisphere and the Southern hemisphere. The North as a place of resources, where primarily white identified people are found occupying places of power and control and the South populated by racialized people of colour of whom many do not enjoy a basic standard of living. Although this thesis cannot explore fully the historical events and politics that have shaped this apparent divide, those historical politics continue to produce complexities in this North-South landscape. Problematic as they are, this thesis continues the use of these terms ‘developed, developing, North and South’.

Defining “the development arena” is a challenge. Simon (1997) states that, “there has never been consensus or unanimity about the meaning or content of ‘development’” (p. 184).

However, a broad and general definition of development work establishes that development seeks to improve the quality of life for people. Development can be understood as, “the process of enhancing individual and collective quality of life in a manner that satisfies basic needs (as a minimum), is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and is empowering in the sense that the people concerned have a substantial degree of control...over the process through access to the means of accumulating social power” (Simon, 1997, p 185). In general, the aim of development work is the improvement of peoples’ lives.

There is much debate in the literature regarding the content and process of development. Numerous development theories abound each offering a distinct perspective on how development will be achieved. For example, dependency theory focuses on the politics of global inequality; alternative development theory concentrates on achieving popular participation; and human development promotes investing in people (Pieterse, 2000). Another body of literature seeks to resist and challenge traditional concepts of development through theorizing a politics of anti-development, beyond development, and post-development (Ridell, 2007). Each of these theories outlines a unique, yet somewhat overlapping, foundation for alternative development practices (Pieterse, 2000).

Furthermore, development activities are also influenced by various funding structures such as multilateral, bilateral, and emergency aid (Ridell, 2007), each determining policies and practices of intervention. In addition, funding for development may come from individual citizens, foundations or governments and each funding avenue has its own set of accountability regulations, policy and practice initiatives. This thesis focuses on development work as it is pursued through international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such NGO’s engage in a

wide range of activities concerned with education, health, technology, empowerment, gender equality, human rights, poverty reduction, food security, environmental sustainability and other areas that relate to the betterment of life. In this thesis, international development work refers to activities carried out by individuals or organizations coming from outside the national country with the intention of improving the lives of local people.

The focus of this research is on the development worker, employed by any number of NGOs who have been mobilized to improve lives in the developing countries. Development workers arrive in the development arena with a wide spectrum of backgrounds. For example, educational differences vary widely. Some may have studied accounting while others hold a degree in women and gender studies. Development workers fill a variety of positions within organizations that require various types of knowledge and training. Engineers Without Borders, for example, hires engineers as development workers. World University Services of Canada (WUSC) may hire an education specialist as a development worker.

Development workers can be found engaged in a wide variety of activities. For example, some development workers may find themselves isolated in an office during the work hours producing project proposals and writing reports, while others work in a community setting interacting with local people at workshops or delivering food aid. So on one hand, the category of ‘development worker’ can encompass a diverse group of people, but on the other hand, there is a considerable amount of homogeneity among the identities of the ‘development worker’. First, development workers tend to be primarily white. Although empirical data is scarce in this regard, one need look no further than the number of job postings for Northerners to participate in development, the number of ‘volunteer abroad’ programs geared towards Northerners and the

quantity of NGOs based in the North and that operate in the South. All this amounts to numerous processes that position white Northerners to participate in development work and even more notable, are the number of white women who participate in development work. As Heron (2007) explains, the development arena is especially appealing to the female subject position as it offers a space for white women to perform what she argues to be socially mandated 'goodness' that is particularly compelling for female subjects. Building on my experience as a white female development worker and Heron's research, the focus of this thesis research is on the experience of white women who intentionally participate in international non-governmental development work.<sup>1</sup>

Participating in development work is a privilege that is not available to just anyone. One must have sufficient access to resources to pursue participation in development work. Therefore it is more likely to find development workers from middle class backgrounds. Although middle class subjectivity is not explored in great detail, it does factor into the subjectivity of the white female development worker. In order to engage in development work one most likely has some higher education, time and resources to go abroad without drawing an income, and/or relational connections within the development arena that allows that individual to pursue this activity. So, although class positionality is relevant, it is not explored to as great an extent as is whiteness and female subjectivity.

### **Relevance of Heron's work**

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<sup>1</sup> Although there maybe other political and personal occasions through which white people from the North participate in the South, this thesis focuses on the NGO female worker.

In seeking out a framework to guide me through this research I encountered the groundbreaking work of Barbara Heron (2007). She is one of a few authors addressing the racial complexity of the development arena in a significant way. In her book *The Desire for Development: Whiteness, gender and the helping imperative* Heron uses the poststructuralist idea of subjectivity to draw meaning from the narratives of white middle class women working in the development arena. Theories such as critical race theory and feminism provide a framework for understanding the meaning of the white women's narratives throughout her literature. Heron demonstrates that the white middle class female subject desires development for purposes more complex and subconscious than what is outwardly presented by these women. The desire for development, according to Heron (2007), is about the making of self. Furthermore, the ability to make oneself in the development arena is achievable by preserving the notion of the "helpless Other." Heron's elaboration on these particular concepts, among others, provides an important framework for my own research since I follow a similar line of research. Not only is her research the most comprehensive account of race in development that I encountered but her findings also gave profound meaning to my own experience as a white middle class development worker in a way that no other piece of literature did. For these reasons I rely heavily on her work to draw meaning from the narratives collected for this research.

### **Rationale for inclusive language**

As Heron (2007) suggests, white middle class women are compelled to participate in the development project for a host of complex reasons that amount to the affirmation of white female subjectivity. The practice of white females situating themselves in the development arena is not a distant and unfamiliar notion to me since I am a part of this phenomenon, as explained

above. For this reason, I use terms such as “we” and “us” throughout the thesis as a way to include myself in the ideas and analysis presented. I am an insider rather than an outsider to the phenomenon of white peoples’ engagement in development and I feel it is respectful and necessary to acknowledge my participation in this fashion. The use of inclusionary language is intended to prevent me from pointing a finger and enable me to be accountable on a personal level to the analysis. This is particularly important to me since, as a white woman who has worked in development, I felt myself putting up some resistance to my own analysis. The analysis of the participants’ narratives is also a personal reflection of my own participation in development. Many times while working in development my own thoughts echoed the narratives of the participants and what I interpret about their narratives in this thesis I am also presenting to myself about myself. Therefore, it is appropriate for me to say “we” since this is the language that authentically positions my voice as the author in the thesis.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to understand the experience of white female Canadians who are currently working abroad in an international development capacity. The narratives that reflect these experiences make up the data that is analyzed with the goal of better understanding in what ways white subjectivity might be performed in the context of international development work.

#### ***Main inquiry question.***

- How is white female subjectivity experienced and performed in the development arena?

#### ***Sub-questions.***

## WHITE IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT WORKERS

- How do white Canadian women understand their racial identity to influence their work abroad?
- In what ways are white female Canadians aware of white privilege and the history of white dominance in the context of their current work?
- How do white Canadian women development workers resist enacting whiteness in the development arena?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review begins with an introduction to the central topics of race and identity formation, illustrating the critical nature of racial identity and how these identities are formed in relation to Others. This is followed by a closer examination of whiteness and white privilege as the white subject position is of central importance to this research. Having established the relevance of race and the dominant position of whiteness (in relation to the perceived subordinate position of non-whites), I then provide an overview of mainstream critique of development. The development literature reveals the prevalence of a Northern dominated agenda within development practice. The development literature also exposes an absence of racial analysis in mainstream development critique. This review then conveys the results of an investigation into the minimal available literature on race and development by presenting ideas on the intersection of whiteness and development work. A comprehensive overview of Heron's (2007) work is then presented by first examining the markers of white middle class female subjectivity followed by a synopsis of key concepts from her work: innocent knowledge, sense of entitlement to intervene, claims to exceptionality and genuine resistance. These concepts provide an important framework for understanding the development landscape and how white female subjectivity is produced in the development arena. Lastly, in light of having established the tenuous nature of the development arena, I offer some remarks from the scholars about the future of development work.

The outcome of this literature review is multi-fold. First, the literature points out that a racial analysis is important for understanding human relations of dominance and subordination; second, that whiteness is a major concern in racial relations because enacting white subjectivity is dominating and disturbingly unidentified; thirdly, that there is concern within mainstream critique of the development arena about the Northern dominated agenda, yet race is scarcely mentioned; fourth, that the enactment of whiteness in the development arena is shown to have destructive outcomes for local non-white people by producing a perception that non-white people are legitimately subordinate to white people; fifth, that the cornerstone of white female subjectivity is a desire to be good and moral which prompts, according to Heron (2007), the enactment of strategies designed to maintain this narrative of self as “good.” These strategies are clinging to innocent knowledge, acting upon a sense of entitlement to intervene, and making claims to exceptionality. Lastly, the literature calls attention to the notion that resistance to enacting whiteness and white female subjectivity is possible. Resistance and change is possible through individual transformation and through a systematic shift in the development arena on a number of levels, generally speaking, by rendering development less of a ‘white space.’

The ideas presented here draw upon large bodies of literature from the areas of international development, identity and subjectivity formation, race and anti-racism, female subjectivity and whiteness. Each of these areas consists of substantially more scholarly work than what is presented in this literature review. Considering the many areas that relate to this research and in the interest of making the literature review relevant to my thesis topic I acknowledge that I chose to put parameters around the literature to encompass only what is pertinent to my study.

## **Race and identity**

According to Omi and Winant (1998) race is used to explain, “perceived differences in intellectual, physical and artistic temperaments, and to justify distinct treatment of racially identified individuals and groups” (p. 17). This means that racialized identities is a powerful determinant of how we decide who is worth listening to, who is rational, who is smart, who is honest, etc. The formation of this racial hierarchy has a complicated history, but one of its origins dates back to the 1700’s when Blumenbach set out a hierarchy of races according to his understanding of the value of humans based on the colour of their skin. According to his hierarchy, white skin colour is more optimal than all other skin colours (Gould, 1981). This concept of race set into motion a structure that would influence racialized power relations for centuries to come. What this means is that race analysis is critical and relevant to understanding human relations since it is a significant factor in determining how we perceive the value of ourselves and others.

According to Omi and Winant (1998), everybody learns some form of racial classification often without any conscious learning or overt teaching, therefore racial power relations are present in all our thoughts and interactions. Coming to understand our own and others racial identities without a thorough investigation of racial privilege we risk the perpetuation of essentialist views of racial groups. Essentialist views perpetuate stereotypes by forming static categories in our minds of how a group of people act, think or generally exist in the world. In the context of race it, “regulates interpretations of who we trust, who we identify with and who we intrinsically see as intelligent, athletic, weak, lazy, etc.” (Dei, Karumanchery, Karumanchery-Luik, 2004, p. 34). If racial analysis is left out of the process of figuring out who

we are, we risk perpetuating stereotypes of non-white people as being less capable than white people because of the current system that allows white people to perform dominance. This dominance becomes perceived as the natural order of things, rather than the result of a legacy of operating from a position of unearned privilege. Furthermore, “our social-psychological commitment to race, as a category that is basic to our everyday lived experience, regulates and manages our ability to function as anything but racialized subjects” (Dei, Karumanchery, Karumanchery-Luik, 2004, p. 35). Therefore, understanding racial norms and its construction is essential to developing critical awareness of racial privilege and to contributing to a more just society.

### **Identity formation**

Post-structuralism refers to a theory or group of theories that are concerned with the production of meaning and the practice of making meaning through the relationships of human beings and the world (Belsey, 2002). According to the ideas presented in post-structuralist thinking, our identities are formed in relation to Others. Post-structuralism understands meaning to be differential, not referential (Belsey, 2002) and this extends into the discussion of identity formation. We need difference in order to identify who we understand ourselves to be. What groups do we belong to? What values do we share with Others? Who am I in contrast with the people around me? According to Hall (1996a) identities are constructed through difference and therefore it is only through the “radically disturbing” understanding that, “the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed” (p. 4). For example, in the male-dominated society, man is the dominant subject and the woman is excluded and opposite.

Therefore by this understanding, Eagleton (1983) explains that, “woman is the opposite, the ‘other’ of man: she is non-man, defective man, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle” (p. 132) and that, “woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond his ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is” (p. 132). In other words, man needs woman as his opposite in order to be secure in his identity as ‘not a woman.’ Hall (1991, as cited in Bauman, 1996a) concurs: “identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself” (p. 89). In other words, diversity and difference create categories that allow us to define and know ourselves by contrasting who we are to those around us.

Laclau (1990) expands on this concept by explaining how the construction of identity is an act of power, since if “an objectivity manages to partially affirm itself it is only by repressing that which threatens it...an identity’s constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles” (p. 5). Therefore, not only is identity constructed in opposition to Others, it forms a hierarchy based on an imbalance of power where identities are produced as superior or inferior.

Post-structuralism also submits that our sense of self is guided by our interpretation of the world around us and the messages that are put forward that we are most often unaware that we are receiving. Belsey (2002) explains:

Constructed to a high degree by the big Other, subjected by meanings outside its control and even its consciousness, divided against itself as the effect of a loss, the subject of

poststructuralism is neither unified nor an origin, and is thus a far cry from the unique individual who has traditionally represented humanity in the Free West. (p. 65)

According to this understanding, we are born organisms and we become subjects by internalizing the meaning of symbols and messages that surround us for the duration of our entire existence. Foucault called this production of meaning discourse. By this he meant, “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Discourse refers to the means by which messages and meaning are transmitted, which we then internalize and interpret as the basis for the conditions that produces our world and our identity within it. We take this set of meanings and use the same signifiers that we and others have been socialized to recognize in order to perform the norms of our subjectivity. As Belsey (2002) explains, we “give an account” of ourselves: “I am...this or that” by how we invoke the terms, meanings, categories that are recognized by ourselves and others. Hall (1996a) further explains that identities are, “the result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ of the subject into the flow of the discourse” (p. 6). We illustrate subjectivity by enacting the norms established as representative of that subjectivity through the discourse that surrounds us. In the case of white middle class subjectivity, discourse establishes socially constructed norms that prescribe characteristics and attributes to produce the most praiseworthy and highly coveted status among this subjectivity group. As will be discussed in further detail, the Northern discourse on international development produced the development arena as an ideal location from which to enact white middle class subjectivity.

Although discourse is a powerful messaging system it is not to say that all human beings have no choice but to enact the subjectivity prescribed by discourse. Resistance is possible.

Power by definition requires the possibility of resistance. By recognizing that subjectivity is politically and culturally constructed (Hall, 1996b) we are able to start a process of disrupting the web of influence and become empowered to subvert it.

In summary, our identities are intricately linked to and formed by messages produced by society. These messages delicately and effectively shape our sense of self by informing how we understand ourselves to fit into our complex social structure in relation to Others. In terms of white identity, the messages received are ones of superiority and dominance. This racial privilege shapes how we, as white people, see our role in society in relation to the Others who are therefore produced as inferior and subordinate.

### **Whiteness**

The literature clearly indicates the importance of having a racial analysis in learning how to promote justice and equality. According to Kendall (2006) this learning must be done by the dominant group in order to begin a process of change. This means that white privilege must be addressed or the struggle for equality will not be successful. We must know ourselves before we can know others. Clarke and O'Donnell (1999) suggest that, "a refocusing of the discussion of racism onto its perpetrators is the first big step in the slaying of this giant" (p. 9). According to Castagna and Dei (2000) "interrogating whiteness" is a starting place for anti-racist practice. This all means that white power and privilege must be understood in order to effectively dismantle, or "slay," it.

However, a focus on whiteness is not without controversy. Bonilla-Silva (2003) cautions that we must be "on guard" to make sure that a focus on whiteness does not become another

opportunity to center dominant white voices. Giroux (1999) suggests maintaining vigilance in studying whiteness so as to ensure that the effects on racialized minorities are not downplayed. There is recognized risk in privileging white voices in this study of racial injustice. However it is the position of this study that white identity must be investigated as a measure to understand the position of dominance it holds, and to use this understanding to further anti-racist practices. Furthermore, as a white researcher, the process of researching and collecting data on white privilege is an act of personal critical reflection.

Since it often goes unacknowledged whiteness is challenging to define and describe (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Whiteness is both ubiquitous and normative in society and therefore often goes unnamed and unidentified (Kendall, 2006; Dyer, 1997; Leonardo, 2009). As Kendall (2006) states, asking white people to acknowledge whiteness is akin to, “asking a fish to notice water” (p. 22). This normalized position is not, however, neutral (although white people may consider it neutral); it is dominant and hegemonic (Leonardo, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Kendall, 2006). The term “whiteness” does not refer to white people directly, but rather it is a term to mark the refusal of white people to acknowledge how they are implicated in privilege, a “social amnesia” (McLaren, 1999) or “masking history” (Leonardo, 2009). Whiteness is what Anderson (2003) refers to as an “illusive concept” that encompasses everything associated with racial dominance.

As already established, identity formation requires the opposite of what that identity is in order to understand what it is not (Eagleton, 1983). We know ourselves in relation to what we are not. From this vein of thought, whiteness depends on the inferiority of non-white in order to maintain superiority. It is a system of privilege and it requires Others to dominate in order to

exist (Anderson, 2003). Whiteness is constructed through discourse that legitimizes the dominant position of white identity in society while ignoring the destructive historical legacy of this racial hierarchy. It establishes that white dominance is biological rather than constructed through inequitable social, political and economic relations. However, McLaren (1999) recognizes that the privileges available to white people represent a complex interplay between both institutional and individual practices. Whiteness is the result of individual acts of reinforcing and accepting unearned privilege and the broader societal structure which positions whiteness as superior and normative. In the words of Kendall (2006), “separating whiteness and white privilege is a bit like trying to unscramble an egg” (p. 41). Whiteness is a system of racial privilege that places white identity at the top of the hierarchy and perpetuates this structure by denying the historical roots and production of white privilege and accepting this position of dominance as normative and natural.

What is evident in the next section of the literature review is the seeming pervasiveness of enacting whiteness in the development arena. Development critique draws attention to the problem of a Northern dominated and controlled agenda within development practices and yet refrains from discussing whiteness and white privilege in this critique. The literature on whiteness appears to suggest that this abstention from naming whiteness in development may be evidence of its existence, rather than its absence, in that it remains unnamed and ubiquitous.

### **Overview of international development**

As the focus of this research is racial relations within the development arena, it is concerned with the literature that addresses this point of intersection between race and

development work. However, as discussed in the introduction, a scarcity of racial analysis within development literature poses a challenge in this regard. In order to illustrate this challenge I draw attention to what is discussed within mainstream development critique. In light of the considerable quantity and diversity of topics relating to development critic, I recognize that this brief overview offers an incomplete picture of development critique. It is beyond the scope of this research to pursue a highly in depth discussion of development critique especially since, for the purpose of this research, the significance of the broader critique is in what it does not mention. What is called upon for consideration here is the minimal mention of race amidst a large body of literature, which serves to deepen the puzzlement as to why and how race is curiously excluded.

The beginning of the development project is ambiguous. President Truman's speech of January 1949 is often cited as the beginning of development (Mohan, 1997) in which he announced a call to action stating, "only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people" (Ridell, 2007, p. 25). Truman's emphasis on a "satisfying life" as a "right of all people" struck a chord in international relations and set in motion initiatives aimed at creating a satisfying life for people around the world. However, Truman's famous speech dates after the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which declares in article 25, "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care" (United Nations, UDHR signed in 1948). Although the UDHR and President Truman's speech offer convenient moments in history to mark the "beginning" of development work, others suggest that the pattern of development work

is a continuance of the colonial legacy and therefore dates back as far as the colonial era (Pieterse, 2000; Heron, 2007; Sullivan, 2006). The notion that development work is a continuation of colonialism is revisited later in this literature review.

Gibson and Ostrom (2005) assert that countless researchers have identified, “hundreds of problems” with international development. This is understandable since, as noted in the introduction, international development encompasses a wide range of practices and theories. Much of these “hundreds of problems” appear to relate to issues involving a top down approach to development work. What this means is that although development practices have evolved and changed over time, what appears to have remained consistent is that the decision making power remains in the domain of Northerners rather than in the hands of local people. One of the most commonly cited examples of this top-down power imbalance is from the era of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980’s. These programs were top down approaches to reconstructing a country’s economy according to bench marks set out by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Access to loans and funding for the country in question was contingent on the country’s ability to fulfill the conditions set out by the World Bank and IMF. This approach to development was deemed equivalent to a “huge irresponsible experiment” (Pieterse, 2000) and there has been a shift in the past decade or more to move away from this approach to development.

Despite this formal shift, the basic notion of externally prescribed development persists. The types of projects and initiatives that are eligible to receive funding are often dictated by political and strategic priorities of the donor countries, not humanitarian considerations (Ridell, 2007; Kothari, 2006). For example, the poorest countries have little to offer donor countries in

terms of political gain; therefore, they are for the most part, left out of the development agenda. According to Ridell (2007) less than half of official aid is directed to the sixty five poorest countries. Furthermore, aid that is provided may be “tied aid” which requires that the “aid” provided must be used solely for the purchase of goods and services originating in the donor country (Ridell 2007). Although tied aid is being scaled down as official policy, staff continue to strongly “encourage” certain policies with aid recipients that essentially produce the same outcome (Ridell, 2007). When tied aid is in use, funds that are allocated for development purposes returns to the donor country in the form of, for example, the purchase of food aid or hiring Northern experts to administer projects, so as to ensure that the donor country receives direct benefits from the aid it provides.

A further example of the Northern top-down agenda in aid is the changing priorities of development as directed by the North. For example, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) may set the priority of funding HIV/AIDS projects in Africa, and then change it to a focus on women’s empowerment in Latin America during the next round of funding. The HIV/AIDS projects are suddenly without funding, not due to any error on their part, but a simple shift in focus from CIDA. Volatility and inconsistency of aid funding such as this may result in communities being unable to make long term plans (Ridell, 2007), which favours the capacity of Northern policy makers to change priorities at short notice rather than seek long term partnerships for lasting change in the South. The priorities shift to align with the Northern agenda rather than to listen and respond to the voices of the South.

The prioritizing of the Northern agenda in development is consistent with the idea that development is a continuation of colonialism (Pieterse, 2000). In addition, the justification used

to intervene parallels that of the “civilizing mission” of the colonial era, meaning that the rationale for intervention is to ameliorate the lives of Others (Heron, 2007; Sullivan, 2006). In this sense, the intervention of Northerners in the space and lives of those living in the South, once known as colonialism, is now called development. According to White (2002), the “continuities with colonialism are striking, the ultimate character of development is post-colonial, recasting the colonial formations in new ways” (p. 413). Although the overt power structure of an empire seeking to control colonies is no longer the premise for Northern intervention in the South, the basic flow of white people who bring with them their knowledge, values, and ideas from the North to the South remains consistent.

The theme within development critique of Northern dominance and control is consistent and noteworthy. It amounts to what Ellerman (2007) refers to as, “doing good in the sense of ‘delivering resources to the poor’ without any real recognition as to how this undercuts the incentives for developing self-reliance” (p. 565). Similarly, Simon (1997) suggests that there is a lack of effective empowerment of local people in development. Mainstream development critique appears to be suggesting that a central challenge with development is the Northern controlled agenda, and the various avenues by which Northern dominance is repeated in development.

Despite widespread criticism of the development industry, there is a call for further research and understanding of how to improve the quality and effectiveness of aid rather than abandon the field of development altogether. Ridell (2007) states, “it’s not that aid never works!” (p. 379) and calls for deeper understanding of the factors that make development effective. Simon, (1997) concurs, “*increased* responsive, co-operative, locally appropriate and

directed resource transfers do and can have a continuing role in meeting the challenge of widespread poverty” (p. 198). In other words, he claims that it is the quality of the intervention that must be examined rather than question whether or not to intervene at all. Mohan (1997) agrees that the approach for development must be altered rather than abandoning it entirely and he draws attention to alternatives to a Northern centered agenda in development such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), derived from Paulo Freire’s work in Brazil.

### **The intersection of whiteness and international development**

This next section offers an overview of what seems to comprise the minimal mention of race in development and how scholars address this absence of a race analysis. Loftsdottir’s (2009) research provides an excellent example of the potentially dangerous outcome of development work that occurs when racial inequality is not sufficiently taken into consideration. She found that the WoDaaBe people in Niger perceived white development workers to be superior. She explains that for the WoDaaBe people it was significant and noteworthy that those who worked in low paying jobs or were the recipients of the projects had dark skin while those in high paying and more powerful positions had light coloured skin (2009). She identified that local Nigerians developed a strong perception of the relationship between prosperity and skin colour; meaning that white skin was related to prosperity while dark skin was not. It was even more disturbing that local people interpreted this hierarchy of prosperity as normal. Loftsdottir, (2009) explains that, “people did not assert this racialized developscape critically, but interpreted it as the natural order of things” (p. 7). Baaz’s 2005 study concurs that images of Northern development workers receiving economic privileges not available to local staff confirms a link between whiteness and competence in the eyes of Africans. For example, she describes how for

one NGO in Tanzania an expatriate salary would amount to one thousand dollars a month plus free accommodation, medical care, education for children and retirement annuity plus the use of a ‘company’ car. A Tanzanian salary would be sixty-four to one hundred and twenty-eight dollars a month with no additional benefits (Baaz, 2005). White (2002) also notes this disparity of wages and concludes that this level of inequality was “taken for granted” as part of the development community culture: “what I was seeing went far beyond individual acts of prejudice or discrimination to a whole system in which advantage and disadvantage were patterned by race” (White, 2002, p. 409). White (2002) finds that this pattern of privileging white development workers is normalized and validates notions of superiority among both whites and non-whites.

Thus far, the literature review suggests that racial analysis is an important lens through which to critique all aspects of human relations due to its significance in how we perceive ourselves and others (Omi and Winant, 1998; Dei, Karumanchery, Karumanchery-Luik, 2004) identities, including racial identity, are constructed in relation to difference (Hall, 1996a; Belsey, 2002); the prevalence of whiteness and white privilege is a destructive force positioning white people as dominant in relation to subordinate non-whites (Kendall, 2006; Sullivan, 2006; Leonardo, 2009); and that development work faces an array of challenges many of which are related to a Northern controlled agenda in development work (Ridell, 2007; Simon 1997; Pieterse, 2000). As mentioned earlier, Barbara Heron’s 2007 work presents a comprehensive analysis of how these themes interact. For this reason, the next section of the literature review is dedicated to the ideas presented in her book *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender and the Helping Imperative*. White female subjectivity is explored first, followed by a presentation of

key concepts from her research which are: innocent knowledge, entitlement to intervene, claims to exceptionality, and genuine resistance. Although I bring in other authors where there is noteworthy or complimentary literature, the emphasis is on Heron's work.

### **White female subjectivity**

The extent to which an individual experiences white privilege may vary depending on how it intersects with other overlapping identities such as gender, religion and class (Kendall, 2006). For example, a white person of low socio-economic background may feel that he or she does not reap the same privileges as a middle class white person. This may be true, but in terms of racial identity the white person, regardless of socio-economic background, has experienced *white* privilege. This study focuses on white female middle class subjectivity. Therefore, it is important to delve deeper into the identity formation of this specific subjectivity to gain perspective on how this is relevant to the context of international development. Heron (2007) establishes that discourse surrounding the female white-middle class identity dates back to the end of the 1700s. One's ability to successfully present a moral portrayal of self and to be considered moral by one's peers set oneself apart from the non-white middle class subjects. This characterization as moral was essential to being fully identified and embraced as a "bourgeois subject"<sup>2</sup> (Heron, 2007). This desire to please others remains particularly entrenched in white middle class women (Heron, 2007; Sullivan, 2006), which is why white female middle class subjectivity is the focus of my research.

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<sup>2</sup> Heron (2007) uses the term "bourgeois" in reference to encompass white middle class women (p. 6).

In order to realize the ‘moral self’ of white female middle class subjectivity, we need Others who are deemed in need of help. As Heron (2007) explains, “operating alongside this sense of comparison and simultaneously authorized by it are a sense of entitlement and an obligation to intervene for the “betterment” of the Other wherever he or she resides” (p. 7). In the case of this research, “he or she” who needs help resides in “developing countries.” Parfitt (1999) explains how identity formation in this context unfolds: “the expatriate nurse working in a minority culture in a development situation gives a sense of identity, self-esteem and reward....feeling of worth associated with being able to make a positive contribution within a needy situation” (p. 375). This feeling of worth validates not only her morality, but also her superiority as the one who ‘helps Others.’

Women are particularly susceptible to desire the safe guarding of our perceived moral character. Choosing to work with people we perceive as the most destitute invokes the gold standard of fulfilling the white middle class female legacy of the “good woman” (Heron, 2007). Femininity is affirmed in one’s selflessness, self-sacrifice, kindness and “goodness” (Heron, 2007). By intervening in the lives of Others in the developing world, one is performing these qualities and fulfilling this mandate. Of course there is need in our own country, Canada, but Heron (2007) explains that:

The racially inscribed development arena, discursively constructed as only problematically suitable as a locus for the enactment of bourgeois feminine goodness, in actuality affords white middle class women a field for forging images of self not available to us in the same terms in Canada. (p. 93)

Engaging in development work produces an elevated status of goodness over that local community development work. This is in part because the human needs abroad are understood to be more acute and the sacrifice to participate in this work abroad is perceived as greater (Heron, 2007). This discourse therefore produces the development worker as superior in relation to Others who participate in 'helping' professions in their home country.

Heron's (2007) research reveals that almost all the participants in her study told stories about their experiences in development that have the effect of casting themselves as heroic figures. Women report that when working abroad they really felt like they were *somebody*, they were more self-confident and they felt like they were making an important contribution to the world. Heron explains that, "these effects are deeply transformative because our incessant relations-of-power experiences as white Northern development workers operate in *mutually strengthening* ways to provide profound affirmations of self" (Heron, 2007, p. 114). The constant validation of ourselves as moral subjects affirms that we are fulfilling our desire to be "good." Furthermore, it affirms our subjectivity by securing the dominant nature of the white middle class subjectivity. For example, when African and Asian women are considered victims of their culture, "western women can rush in to save them and, in doing so, can affirm their own positional superiority" (Heron, 2007, p. 74). The affirmation of dominance and superiority result in 'feeling most like my true self' or feeling 'more confident' because it validates the part of ourselves that believes we are superior and dominant as white middle class subjects. As Heron (2007) explains, "a plethora of forces derived from the era of empire, constructive of bourgeois identity-making and evidently imperceptible to white middle class feminine subjects, are operative in and productive of, what we take as our natural "altruistic" desire for development."

(Heron, 2007, p. 52) This means that although we perceive the source of our desire to work in development as altruistic and natural, our sub-conscious subjectivity is drawn to the affirmation of superiority offered in the development arena. In particular, 'whiteness as superior' is affirmed through, "racialized comparison with the Other" (Heron, 2007, p. 121). Our normalized position of dominance and power in an arena surrounded by Other non-whites affirms the superiority of whiteness. Therefore what the literature suggests is that what we really seek is this affirmation of self as dominant rather than an opportunity to make an altruistically motivated contribution to society. We feel ourselves complete, as in fulfilled in our dominant subject position, in the development arena because of the relation to power and the affirmation of self as superior.

### **Protecting innocent knowledge**

Heron (2007) explains that the tendency to deny historical events that resulted in the current privileges afforded to white people is a form of innocent knowledge. Innocent knowledge refers to, "the discovery of some sort of truth that can tell us how to act in a way that can only do good, not harm, to others" (Heron, 2007, p. 126). This is evident in the many strategies of denial employed by white people. For example, white people may claim to be "colour blind" to racial categories, believing this to be an anti-racist position (Kendall, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). However, "colour blind" is a form of denial of white privilege and the racialized struggles of non-white people. From this perspective, ideas of meritocracy and deficit thinking arise. Deficit thinking refers to a "blame the victim" mentality (Valencia, 2010) whereby one attempts to justify the inequality among whites and non-whites by claiming deficiencies among non-white people. For example, a deficit thinking model would interpret the disproportionately high number of Aboriginal people in the Canadian prison system compared to white people as an indication of

the criminal nature of Aboriginal people, rather than an outcome of the history of colonization and injustice endured by Aboriginal people. Colour-blindness also perpetuates a belief in meritocracy, or earned privilege (Kendall, 2006; Leonardo, 2009). Meaning that white people are understood to have established their hegemonic status in society by virtue of hard work and exceptional skills, denying the history of exploitation and conquest that has resulted in unearned privileges for white people. Leonardo (2009) suggests that white people engage in an investigation to gain a, “thorough historical understanding of ‘how they came to be’ in a position of power” (p. 176). He further notes that, “whites resist such an undertaking and instead focus on individual merit, exceptionalism, or hard work” (p. 176). We resist because we are invested in maintaining the current normative system of racial inequality.

Disassociating from white identity as a denial strategy (Sullivan, 2006; Tatum, 1999) is a further example of protecting innocent knowledge. For example, one might appropriate other cultures in an effort to deny white identity. Or, in the context of international development, one might strive to ‘be local’ and consider this behaviour a sign of having successfully subverted white dominance. Baaz (2005) explains that, based on her research in Tanzania, to be considered one of the locals was a status symbol within the development community. However, this type of denial of whiteness further perpetuates white superiority since the choice to deny white privilege is in itself a privilege of whiteness and it further negates ones responsibility to acknowledge the legacy of white dominance and to consciously and actively engage in the process of dismantling this hierarchy.

The process of interrogating ones position of racial privilege in an effort to dismantle the racial hierarchy requires a willingness to relinquish all understanding of self (Heron, 2007). Frye

explains how this challenging process of giving up the need for innocent knowledge and refusing to protect ones moral identity through denial of dominance impacted her:

It all combined to precipitate me into profound and unnerving distrust of myself. All of my ways of knowing seemed to have failed me – my perception, my common sense, my goodwill, my anger, honor, affection, my intelligence and insight. Just as walking requires something faintly sturdy and firm underfoot, so being an actor in the world requires a foundation of ordinary moral and intellectual confidence. Without that we don't know how to be or how to act; we become strangely stupid...If you want to be good and you don't know good from bad, you can't move. (Heron, 2007, p. 139)

Feelings of uncertainly, of self-doubt and discomfort are positive signs that the white subjectivity is being challenged. A loss of sense of self is necessary in order to dismantle the construction of subjectivity because performing superior racialized subjectivity is a place of security and safety when coupled with denial of racial privilege.

Innocent knowledge plays a key role in the context of this study since development work offers a, “particularly compelling expression of innocent knowledge because it addresses the issue of how to act in the *world*, as well as how to fulfill the imperative to ‘help’ or ‘improve’” (Heron, 2007, p. 126). Furthermore, “participating in some aspect of the development enterprise seems to guarantee a place on the moral high ground of white middle class subjectivity, and speaks particularly to feminine construction of that subjectivity” (Heron, 2007). In other words, development work provides an occasion to perform a full or complete degree of white subjectivity. Development work is an arena where the moral narrative of self is protected and

one can operate from a position of innocent knowledge by denying any enactment of dominance and by justifying ones actions as being of ‘pure good’ intention with only good outcomes. The international aspect of the development arena enhances altruistic notions because it produces a perception that the development arena consists of the *most* needy in the world, compared to the poor or destitute in one’s domestic country.

### **Entitlement to intervene**

Media and other messaging systems emphasize the constitutive elements of international development work, enhancing the ultimate occasion for enacting white subjectivity (Heron, 2007). These messaging systems perpetuate the notion that development work presents the “most needy” landscape for acts of charity. What Plewes and Stuart (2007) refer to as the ‘pornography of poverty’ is a massive body of images that deeply penetrates the consciousness of Canadians and sends the powerful message that Others are desperate, helpless and need our help (Plewes & Stuart, 2007). “These images portray people as helpless victims, dependent and unable to take action; and they convey a sense that development problems can only be solved by Northern charity” (Plewes & Stuart, 2007, p. 24). They ignore how Northern domination is implicated in creating this inequality in the first place (protecting innocent knowledge) and reinforce racist stereotypes (Plewes & Stuart, 2007). These images undermine any effort to establish a broader understanding of the culpability of Northern actions that has led to the current context of global injustice and serves to solidify essentialist thinking. A further consequence of this messaging is that it creates a charitable model of work rather than a justice model (Plewes & Stuart, 2007). In addition, these images perpetuate the notion of, white “cultural superiority” (Mills, 2003). Heron (2007) explains that the effect of this type of media escalates Othering and

because they are portrayed as people without historical analysis: “they appear, rather, as manifestations of culture, and as such are illustrative of the meaning of Othering in poststructural theory, where the “Other,” or difference from the unmarked norm, is conceptualized as produced through discourses that establish opposition, hierarchy, and exclusion” (p.2). The helpless nature of the Others presents white middle class subjects’ “knowledge, values and ways of doing things as at once preferable and right, since the North, especially Canada, appears orderly, clean and well managed in comparison” (Heron, 2007, p. 3).

Discourse and images that perpetuate the helplessness of “Others” (in this case people living in ‘developing countries’) speaks directly to the desire among the white female middle class subjects to be moral and to be considered moral by their peers. The call to “help” the needy fulfills the deep seated requirement to fulfill ones ultimate expression of self as a charitable and moral subject (Heron, 2007). The presence of a “needy Other” and the desire to be “good” give permission for the white middle class subject to enact her sense of entitlement to intervene. In Heron’s (2007) words, “both as individuals and as national subjects, white middle class Canadians and other Northerners continue to construct through the prism of a planetary consciousness a sense of self in moral terms that expressed the entitlement and obligation bourgeois subjects feel to “help” Others” (p. 34). The act of helping Others affirms white racial superiority. The sense of entitlement is itself an act of whiteness in that we assume that we can go and live and be active in other countries “*if we choose*” (Heron, 2007) to engage in this type of work. The normalcy of our choice to intervene and the acceptability and unquestioned nature of this option demonstrate the practice of domination that is constructed in white middle class subjectivity. We feel that our desire to help and do good justifies our actions and intervention in

the South, essentially making altruism our “passport to the South” (Heron, 2007). The sense of obligation among the Northern development worker affirms the superiority of the North, sending the message that “they” await “our” intervention.

### **Claims to exceptionality**

Heron (2007) emphasizes the prevalence of employing what she refers to as “containment strategies” or claims to exceptionality among development workers. She finds that when participants in development have some understanding of unequal power relations in development work they often feel personal discomfort with their role as development workers in promoting inequality. Yet Heron’s (2007) points out that these participants find ways to justify their own participation that excuses them from internalizing their participation in dominance. They choose to see their work as an exception to this problematic arena of development. Heron (2007) explains that, “we are crucially invested in *not* seeing ourselves in these terms because of our need to remain innocent in order to protect our own moral selves, and in order to continue to *make ourselves*” (p. 151). If we admit or acknowledge our participation in dominance, it strips of us our moral status and justification for being there, denying us the context of development work as an arena in which to fulfill our white middle class subjectivity. A feeling of exceptionality in development work justifies the sense of entitlement to intervene in the lives of Others. The necessity to, “maintain a moral narrative of self,” (Heron, 2007) opposes any inclination to critically reflect on ones acts of dominance or to question the moral high ground on which the work of development is justified, further protecting innocent knowledge.

### **Genuine resistance and accountability**

The affirmation of oneself as “good” while engaged in development work, and the necessity to maintain this moral narrative of self (by clinging to innocent knowledge and making claims of exceptionality), impairs one’s ability to develop a critical reflection on one’s participation in oppression. However, this desire to cling to innocent knowledge and make claims of exceptionality is not inevitable and it is not prescribed. According to Hall (1996b), when subjectivity is recognized as constructed, a pathway for dismantling the power structure and becoming empowered to subvert it opens up. This recognition allows for a process of “genuine resistance” (Heron, 2007). This refers to alternative practices as defined by the recipients of aid and a refusal to enact domination in the space of Others by Northern development workers. The result of this resistance renders development as, “less of a white space” (Heron, 2007). Simply put, good will is not sufficient justification to intervene in the lives of Others, it must be accompanied by conscious resistance to enacting dominance.

Heron (2007) proposes that a shift towards justice in development requires a ‘politics of accountability.’ By this she means an awareness of historical power relations, an understanding of Southern critiques of development work, comprehension of subject positions, and recognition of one’s own complicity and investments in perpetuating a process of domination. Heron (2007) further states that, “our self-confidence is a sign that we are positioning ourselves as dominant; whereas when we feel fragmented in anti-oppression learning about relations across differences, this is as it should be” (p. 154). We must be willing to compromise our moral narratives of self and abandon our claims to innocence in order to, “change the performance of subjectivity” (Heron, 2007). This involves a refusal to enact whiteness while becoming actors who subvert

power relations. Razack (1998) proposes that we ask ourselves difficult questions such as: “am I positioning myself as the savior of less fortunate people? As the progressive one? As more subordinated? As innocent?” (p. 170). These questions of self-reflection are critical in the process of dismantling racial power structures since:

These are moves of superiority and we need to move beyond them....Accountability begins with tracing relations of privilege and penalty. It cannot proceed unless we examine our complicity. Only then can we ask questions about how we are understanding differences and for what purpose. (p. 170)

Questions such as these are helpful moves towards achieving accountability. However, achieving accountability is not a one-time “epiphany”; it is an ongoing process of challenging ones position of dominance and habituating critical reflection and action in regards to white subjectivity on a continual basis (Heron, 2007).

Heron’s (2007) analysis represents a comprehensive investigation into the white middle class female subject position and how this subjectivity is performed in the development arena. The ideas of innocent knowledge, entitlement to intervene, claims to exceptionality and genuine resistance are all critical concepts in her work that provide insight into the narratives collected for this research. To complete this literature review, and in light of Heron’s investigation, the question that remains: what does this all mean for the future of development work?

### **The future of development work**

Harsh criticism is met with a push to carry on the work of development by making use of more effective measures. Pieterse (2000) explains that, the problematic history of development

work has resulted in cynicism towards any desire to “change the world.” He further explains that this cynicism does not change the circumstance that the world needs changing and that development work is intended to change the world, despite the downfalls of this endeavor. ” People who live in abject poverty, conflict and strife are experiencing the injustice of the world and those who are in a position to rectify this injustice feel compelled to act. The question is *how* to act in a way that produces justice, equality and respect. When Simon (1997) states that we, “cannot abandon our moral responsibility to the poor” in the name of “fraternal ethical concerns” (p. 198) one must question in what ways the concerns are “fraternal”. According to Loftsdottir (2009), we must, “continue exploring the historical roots of development, and the contexts of relationships between donor and recipient countries, in order to overcome imperialist bias and be able to assess critically what development is and what it should be” (p. 6). This literature indicates that the future of development work is not one of terminating the development agenda. It demonstrates, rather, a future of either continuing to reproduce racial relations of dominance and subordination or undergoing a significant transformation of development practice.

### **Conclusion**

Racial relations have long established a power structure that normalizes white dominance and non-white subordination. Whiteness is invested in sustaining discourse that normalizes white dominance as a means of maintaining power. Denial of historical events and current circumstances that have created and upheld this system of racial injustice are key ways in which this unearned power and privilege are sustained by white subjects. The work of White (2002), Loftsdottir (2009), Baaz (2005) and Heron (2007), illustrate that race does matter in development

as each of these authors call attention to the damaging nature of white subjectivity in the development arena. Yet, much of development critique is focused on the problem of a Northern dominated agenda in development without outright naming whiteness. Since a cornerstone of whiteness is the unnamed nature of this subject position and the investment of white subjects to maintain power (Kendall, 2006), the absence of this topic within development literature would suggest a linkage between the development arena and white dominance.

Heron's (2007) ideas of innocent knowledge, entitlement to intervene, and claims to exceptionality demonstrate the powerful desire among white middle class female subjects to maintain a moral narrative of self. Heron (2007) suggests that the white middle class female subject desires development for complex and subconscious purposes as opposed to what is outwardly acknowledged. The desire for development, according to Heron (2007), is about the making of self. The development arena provides an occasion to "make oneself" by making available the "neediest" people in the world; an arena in which the white subject can help Others and maintain her narrative of self as "good." The necessity to maintain this sense of "goodness" is especially relevant to white female middle class subjects because understanding 'self as moral' is essential to achieve the full realization of white female middle class subjectivity. The desire to present oneself as moral and good blocks us from developing critical awareness of the participation in oppression that may accompany one's participation in development. The block to developing a critical awareness is upheld by protecting innocent knowledge, acting on a sense of entitlement to intervene, and making claims of exceptionality. However, optimism resides in the conclusion that genuine resistance to enacting dominance is possible. This is the crack in the bedrock of white subjectivity which provides the inspiration for this research. Resistance is

possible and therefore the development arena can change to reflect just and equal racial relations. Therefore, with the awareness that international development work will continue into the foreseeable future, and that the landscape of development work is conspicuously white, it is the hope that this research will lead to furthering an understanding of white dominance in development which can be used to ameliorate the current system of racial inequality within development practices.



## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Locating myself in the research

I cannot speak about the methodology for this research without positioning myself in relation to the research because I am not a neutral evaluator. As Flick (2009) explains, in qualitative research, “the subjectivity of the researcher . . . . becomes part of the research process” (p. 16). I am a white middle class female who is engaged in a process of understanding my constructed racial privilege. In other words, my own subjectivity and life experience are weaved into the data analysis and as a result, a different researcher from a different point of view looking at the same narratives may draw different conclusions. At the same time, this is not an auto-ethnographic study. It is, however, a study of personal importance. In essence, I have changed as a result of this research.

The process of formulating the literature review, collecting data and conducting data analysis has challenged me both academically and personally, but the initial spark of interest in this research topic began years before I started work on this thesis. The questions explored in this research first began to surface in my mind twelve years ago when I participated in a volunteer youth abroad program. As I reflect on the contents of my journal from that time I see how my thoughts and actions were, to a large degree, an expression of white subjectivity. By this I mean that I was keen to go “help” needy people and I was in denial of my unearned white privilege and the global historical events that resulted in my privilege. As I set off on this volunteer abroad program, I felt confident and ready to change the world. However, what I experienced was something quite different. I experienced moments of extreme discomfort and

confusion about my role ‘over there.’ Yet these questions and feelings were not accompanied with knowledge that could provide a structure for understanding what I was experiencing. As a result, I returned to Canada filled with disorganized thoughts and loosely defined questions about why this experience, which I had thought would make me feel good about myself, left me feeling unsure and confused. Wanting to better understand my experience abroad, I completed an honours degree in International Development Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. This program exposed me to a lot of development critique and the many ways in which it seemed that development was failing the very countries in which it was intended to help. Not once during this time was ‘the problem’ with development presented to me as an issue of white subjectivity in the development arena. Subsequent to completing this undergraduate degree, I have interned with an organization based in Nicaragua, worked with CIDA funded HIV/AIDS Peer Education projects in Zambia and Zimbabwe and travelled to over twenty countries of which most are considered developing countries. Also, I am currently living in the Middle East. The personal learning that has taken place from this thesis research has re-cast my experiences abroad in more problematic terms and I find myself unsure about at what point I personally am enacting white subjectivity and participating in acts of oppression and where I legitimately have something useful to offer. Where this relates to the methodology is that throughout the course of this research I have endeavoured to personally resist whiteness. Therefore I cannot claim to be a neutral researcher, but nor was I neutral before I embarked on a journey of personal transformation; when I was “just a white person.” The difference is that now I am aware that I am not neutral, whereas before I thought neutrality was possible through my white middle class female lens.

## **Framework**

This is qualitative research in which I gather the narratives of white middle class women engaged in development work. Qualitative research is relevant to the study of social relations, such as this research, in that it is, “oriented towards analyzing concrete cases in the [the subjects] temporal and local particularity and starting from people’s expressions and activities in their local context” (Flick, 2009, p. 15). The “concrete cases” for this research are that each participant is living abroad as a development worker (or was at the time of the research). This is the “local context” from which participants expressions and activities are made relevant. The validity of a qualitative study is, in part, established by whether or not the findings are derived from empirical data (Flick, 2009). Therefore, qualitative research is not expected to exclusively follow “abstract academic criteria of science of as in quantitative research” (Flick, 2009, p. 15). Qualitative research is a process driven form of knowledge making and for this reason it is the process of deriving meaning from the data that is most relevant. In the simplest form, qualitative research is intended to make meaning of the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The complexity of the qualitative research process makes it difficult to divide into clearly defined phases since the process is “circular” (Flick, 2009) rather than linear. The process of making meaning from qualitative data is one of constant comparative analysis.

The transcripts from the interviews create narratives from the participants. This means that the participants are narrators of their own experiences as white middle class females in the development arena. Narratives within qualitative data provide, “a framework in which experiences may be located, presented, and evaluated” (Flick, 2009, p. 81). The researcher and

participant create knowledge through the production of a narrative and this becomes the text that is analyzed to draw meaning.

### **Research Question**

This research is interested in the production of white middle class female subjectivity in the development arena. In order to further the understanding of how this subjectivity is performed in the development arena and the implications this has on racial relations, I interviewed six white middle class women who are currently working in international development. The narratives from the interviews tell the experiences of the participants while working in development, however it is not their experiences themselves that is relevant here. The aim, rather, is to understand the meaning of these experiences beyond what a raw account of the events on their own may offer. If what is 'real' is *not* what is experienced (Eagleton, 1983), then it is understood that this analysis must look beyond the account of an experience in order to draw meaning. The participants offer insights, ideas and thoughts about their own experiences, which is important for what *is* offered as much as for what is *not* offered in these parts of the narratives. For example, if whiteness is unnamed and ubiquitous, it is unreasonable to seek out excerpts from the narratives that overtly explain how the participants may be performing whiteness. Rather, the evidence of whiteness in the narratives is present by the undercurrent or the underlying meaning of what is said. To be more specific, when we position ourselves as progressive, or subordinate, or innocent these are, according to Razack (1998) moves of superiority. Therefore, a piece of narrative may overtly appear to represent a development worker who is progressive, but the analysis according to the literature reveals that this positioning is a move of dominance. The analysis seeks to understand the underlying meaning of

the narratives by examining the overt messages through the lens of the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity. And so this analysis, focuses on how participants are performing their subjectivity through their language and narratives.

### **Participants**

After receiving ethics approval, (approved November 23, 2011 BEH#11-271) participants for this research were selected by contacting various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions with links to international work. Each contact was provided with a third party recruitment package to be given to potential participants so that they can learn more about the research prior to deciding if they agree to participate in the study (see Appendix A: Recruitment Materials). I was in no way informed of the identities of potential participants prior to their agreeing to participate. Participants selected had to meet a pre-determined set of criteria. Participants had to be female; between the ages of twenty to fifty years old; have been living overseas in Central America, South America, Africa, or Asia for six months to two years; identify Canada as their home country; and self-identity as 'white' in their racial identity. Although middle class status is relevant to the subject position for this research, participants were not asked to self-identify their socio-economic status because a certain level of access to resources is required to engage in this type of work. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they are of middle class or upper middle class background by the very circumstance that they are able to engage in international development work. This criteria involving white middle class female subjects was chosen because I wanted to focus on those who, as Heron (2007) explains, are most compelled to work in development..

This research does not involve a vulnerable or dependent population, there is no deception required for this study and there is no institutional power relationship between researcher and participants. When a participant is quoted directly in the thesis all names and references to specific locations have been removed in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. It was not anticipated that participants would experience any discomfort or negative emotions as a result of participating in this research and this proved to be the case. Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix B: Consent Form).

### **Interview schedule**

The data for this study was collected at two points of contact between the researcher and the participants. The first point of data collection was a one-on-one semi-structured interview with each participant. Semi-structured interviews are interviews that use an interview guide, but that also, “allow individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest and importance to them” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102). The researcher is able to decide during each interview if every question from the interview guide is relevant or if adjustments are appropriate (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). For this research I mainly asked the same questions each time. However, over the course of the interviews I learned better ways of asking or phrasing the questions and I often asked probing questions to follow up on an idea or experience that a participant mentioned in her response. These interviews lasted from thirty-one minutes to one hour and five minutes. The second point of data collection occurred while analyzing the data. In order to provide better context to their narratives I wanted to know the educational background of each participant. I sent each participant an email requesting this information and they all replied. This knowledge helped me to understand the narratives by

allowing me to reference the diverse education backgrounds of the participants with the type of discussion that was offered in their narratives. For example, when one participant spoke in complex terms about power and privilege while another did not have similar insight, I wanted to know better what kind of educational background each had in order to understand where their varying degrees of knowledge may have come from.

The rationale for selecting a semi-structured interview format is because the opinions and viewpoints of the participants are relevant data for the study. I wanted to ensure that they would have the opportunity to contribute freely to the discussion without feeling confined to the questions that are a reflection of what I feel are relevant to the study. Also, since the participants recruited were living overseas at the time of the study, the individual interview format was a practical option compared to focus groups, for example, which would not have been possible due to the various geographic locations of the participants.

Data on the participants' experience of race, gender, privilege and power was gathered by asking a range of questions (see Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide). Some examples of these questions are: was there ever a power imbalance in the context of your work? If so, describe this imbalance. In what ways do you feel like a part of the community? In what ways do you feel like an outsider? How do these experiences impact your work? How do you understand the conditions of the local country to have come to be this way (after the participant has described the local conditions)? The questions were designed with the intention of creating an opening in the dialogue for participants to share their knowledge and experiences without leading them in a particular direction. For example, this is why I asked 'in what way do you feel like an outsider?' rather than, 'does being white make you feel like an outsider?' or I asked 'how

do you understand the conditions of the local country to be this way?’ rather than asking ‘do you think colonization has had a significant impact on the context of the local country?’ The questions asked were intended to create as much space in the interview as possible for the participants to provide the responses that are authentic to their thoughts and experiences without guiding their responses with overly direct questions. It needs mentioning as well that the participants were given an overview of the topic of the research and therefore it makes sense that the themes of race, gender, privilege and power were on their minds as they responded to the questions. Also, I ended each interview with a summary of my research topic with a few open ended questions along the lines of ‘is there anything else you would like to say or add to our conversation in relation to my research topic?’ or ‘in light of my topic, do you feel that I have missed anything important in my questions?’ Some participants took this opportunity to add something to their narratives while others felt that there was nothing more to add to what they had already said.

Some interview questions were sensitive and personal. For this reason, participants were informed that they have the option of not responding to any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. What was discussed was entirely voluntary for the participants. Participants were given a transcript of their interview with the opportunity to review and edit their responses. After they reviewed the interview, participants signed a transcript release form (see Appendix D: Transcript Release) prior to conducting the data analysis.

## **Logistics**

Prior to each interview I contacted the participants over email to arrange an interview time that took into consideration the time difference between Canada and the country where participants were located. I was able to record the interviews directly onto skype and I also recorded each interview onto a hand held digital recording device. Some interviews were conducted under excellent audio conditions, by this I mean we could hear each other clearly with no delay in conversation. The skype connection for other interviews was less ideal. At times there was a one or two second delay to the conversation or general difficulty in hearing each other. The interviews lasted between thirty-one minutes to one hour and five minutes. Each interview was transcribed into a word document, omitting specific names of people and places in order to protect the identity of the participants. At the time of transcribing the interviews I assigned each participant a pseudonym and it is by this name that participants are referred to throughout the thesis.

## **Data analysis**

The data is processed using grounded theory method of data analysis. This does not mean that the study is grounded theory research, but rather that I draw on grounded theory method to process the qualitative data. I chose this method of data analysis because it allows for the researcher to draw meaning from the data in order to develop the finding, rather than positioning the researcher as starting from theory and applying the data to this theory or theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The fluidity and applicability of grounded theory methodology immediately resonated with me. The term grounded theory comes from the concept that research

is “grounded” in the data. By this understanding, grounded theory is a general research method and is applicable to both qualitative and quantitative research (Grounded Theory Institute, 2008). Grounded theory is considered a method by which to develop new theories and/or to verify existing ones, but I drew on grounded theory methodology primarily as a way to process qualitative data, rather than pursue developing new theory.

In addition to processing the data using grounded theory methodologies I also drew heavily on the analysis provided by Heron (2007), which I had read prior to conducting the research. Although grounded theory research in its purest form is understood to consist of no preliminary research or literature review, the idea for the focus of this study and the use of grounded theory method arose *after* conducting preliminary literature research. Therefore, there is no doubt that this literature was present in my thinking during the analysis and to some degree compromises the integrity of the grounded theory method, although as previously stated, I was not attempting to develop theory as much as utilizing the initial steps of grounded theory methods to process and sort the data. However, it is recognized by grounded theory scholars that research begins with a general area of interest (Kwok, McCallin & Dickson, 2012) and that this interest develops as the result of acquiring some knowledge on the topic, as in the case of this research with my reading of Heron’s work prior to conducting the study. Therefore, there is no doubt that this literature was present in my thinking during the analysis and to some degree compromises the integrity of developing grounded theory, although my intent as already stated, was not so much to develop ‘original’ theory as much as to utilize a grounded theory method of processing the data.

Using the narratives from the interviews, I applied grounded theory method of data analysis to sort the data and to develop an initial set of themes. The narratives tell of their experience as white middle class development workers and grounded theory method provides a framework from which to categorize the narratives, so that drawing on my literature and understanding of subjectivity I could then interpret and draw meaning from the narratives. To do this, I began with initial coding in broad categories by looking at the data line by line. The purpose of initial coding is to determine fit and relevance (Charmaz, 2006). I examined the content of the data and generated from it broad categories. Some examples of these categories are: 'experiencing privilege,' 'reflecting on the failure of development work,' 'understanding historical factors,' and 'regrets.' From this process the data was sorted into twenty-two categories. In developing these categories, I was intentional about looking for where there was evidence of action from the data, rather than apply pre-existing thematic categories. From the broadly coded data, I then coded data in more narrowly defined areas by looking at the data line by line and assigning a code. For this I used the NVivo 9 program. As explained by Charmaz (2006), "focused coding is the second major phase in coding. These codes are more directed, selective, and conceptual than...line-by-line coding" (p. 57).

After I developed the focused coded sections of data, I moved on to theoretical coding. Theoretical coding is, "a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes you have selected during focused coding" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63). Theoretical coding involved looking for possible relationships between the focused coding data categories. Comparing data was guided by the understanding that, "making comparisons between data about what people say and do...strengthens your assertions about implicit meanings" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 68). Although I

made use of memo writing throughout the data analysis process, it is at this stage when I made the most use of the grounded theory method of memo writing. Memo-writing is a, “crucial method” in grounded theory, since memos, “catch your thoughts, capture the comparison and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72).

After reviewing the memos I began to offer an interpretation of the data. I struggled to complete the chapter and felt all along that it was forced and somehow disconnected from the authentic meaning of the data. I was missing something or perhaps resisting the analysis and initial interpretations. I realized at this stage that I was experiencing what Kwok, McCallin and Dickson (2012) refer to as a common problem among “novice researchers;” forcing analysis rather than letting it emerge. At this stage, I discarded the initial chapter and began fresh. I felt the emergence of the data strengthen as I continuously went back and forth between the data and the literature.

During the back and forth process of mulling over the data and re-reading previously reviewed literature as well as seeking out new literature, the data revealed a need for further research into the female subject position. The initial literature review did not provide me with clarity on some of the themes that arose from the data and it was apparent that I was operating too closely to my preconceived notions of my research topic. According to Kwok, McCallin and Dickson (2012), “attempts to force conceptualisation about the inter-relationship between...categories tended to dissolve the distinctive concepts that were quite clear in the data” (p. 5). They further note, that this problem can be self-correcting. Upon reflection, the divergence they speak of when the researcher using grounded theory attempts to “force

conceptualisation” is the path I also took. However, with guidance from my advisor and my own dissatisfaction with the results, I was motivated to conduct additional research. The additional research that was conducted after gathering the data is found in the data analysis chapter rather than in the literature review. I also spent some time away from the data in order to let my mind wander and, in a sense, ‘swim’ with the data without pushing an agenda of completing the analysis. I took this break from the data because I struggled with the seemingly critical direction the analysis had taken. However, I was encouraged by both my research supervisor and in reading about data analysis, to understand that, “being critical about your data does not necessarily mean being critical of your research participants. Instead, being critical forces asking *yourself* questions about your data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 51). I feel this time away from the data helped me to process the data internally and then upon returning to the narratives and the literature, my mind was in a state of greater clarity to interpret the data.

Upon returning to the data I felt what Glaser refers to as a “readiness to write” (2012). Once the memos are written up, Glaser (2012) emphasizes the relevance of the “readiness” moment, when the researcher feels a strong momentum to write. At this stage of grounded theory research, the researcher should not discuss the research with others but rather he or she should stop and write it down. Talking about the research with others poses the risk that others will interject ideas that do not come directly from the data (Glaser, 2012). Furthermore, talking may diminish the motivation to write, since it is an avenue by which the researcher can gain some satisfaction of sharing the data without engaging in the process of writing (Glaser, 2012). At this stage of readiness, Glaser (2012) recommends that the researcher write without regard for spelling and grammar since what is important at this stage is to get the concepts on paper.

### **Limitations of the study**

It is important to make note of the limitations of this study in order to communicate the limitations of its relevance and also to assist in improving upon this study for future research of a similar nature. For this, I wish to draw attention to several items. First, the diverse geographical areas in which the participants were living and working meant that the participants were not experiencing the same type of racial relations. Some participants were living and working in Africa, while others were in Latin America. Although the regions are all considered to be “developing countries” (Educational Pathways, 2010) the historical context and racial landscape are inconsistent, therefore there is a limitation to the extent to which parallel conclusions can be drawn from their responses. Second, participant education and training for development work varied greatly. For example, one participant held a graduate degree in an area where learning about power and privilege make up a significant part of the program, while another participant attended a two year skill training program, where discussion of power and privilege would not likely be a focus of the program. Therefore, one could state that it is unfair to analyze the participant responses through the same lens since they have undergone varying degrees of formal training and education in the research area. Third, my own interview skills improved over the course of conducting the six interviews. This means that, for example, during the first interview I did not ask as many probing questions and was not as apt at following the flow of conversation. By the final interview I was more relaxed as a researcher and was able to listen more intently during the interview and ask more relevant questions. The result is that I have more data from some participants than from others because I was more prepared to ask deeper and more meaningful questions towards the final interviews. This means that the participants who I

interviewed early on may have made different comments and provided different responses had they been interviewed in the same fashion as the participants towards the end. As a result, I rely more heavily on some narratives over others and this is perhaps a reflection of my novice interview skills rather than participant insight. Fourth, all the interviews were conducted over skype. The result is that I was unable to gather data from body language or make eye contact with the interviewees. This creates a certain distance in the bond between interviewer and interviewee that, if we were interviewing in person, would perhaps have meant participants would feel more free to open up and provide more personal responses. In addition, during some interviews the phone line connection was cutting in and out or had static in the connection, therefore there are points in the interviews when it was difficult to hear each other and some data may have been lost in the poor access to clear channels of communication. Lastly, my own subject position as a white middle class female may obscure my ability to analyze the data since my white racial lens would suggest that I am not likely aware of my own position of privilege. Although I am in the process of concentrating on a critical reflection of my own position of racial privilege, I recognize that I am by no means immune to ‘enacting whiteness.’ I concur with the words of Frankenberg, “but my awakening is never complete. Although the initial transformation was one of earthquake proportions, there is always room for another aftershock, always need for further awakening. White antiracism is, perhaps, a stance requiring lifelong vigilance” (Heron, 2007, p. 143). I hope that this analysis reflects my desire to shatter my own innocent knowledge and move towards a critical race analysis that is honest about my own position of privilege.

For future studies of this nature I would recommend establishing more specific participant criteria in order to have a more homogenous group of participants. This would enable the researcher to draw more meaningful conclusions. I also recommend conducting practice interviews prior to the interviews for the actual research study. This would in a sense “warm up” the interviewer and hopefully have the effect of more evenly styled interviews for the research. It would be worthwhile to consider interviewing participants who have returned from working overseas and who are currently living in Canada where the interviewer may be able to conduct interviews in person or over a clearer phone connection.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REPORTING THE RESULTS

The following paragraphs are an overview of the themes and ideas that emerged from the data collected for this research. It must be acknowledged that each of the women who participated in this research is situated in unique circumstances. For example, they are living in different countries (and in some cases different continents), carrying out different kinds of work, with varying levels of education and experiences leading up to their work abroad. Although the following paragraphs present some thematic responses, it is also the case where at times each participant provided unique responses to questions. I incorporate numerous direct quotes from the participants as a way of accurately presenting their unique contribution to the discussion and to ensure that I am accurately presenting what they intended to express.

What the six participants hold in common is that they are women between the ages of twenty and fifty; they work in the field of international development work to some capacity; at the time of the interview, they were each living abroad in what is considered a ‘developing country’; they are all Canadians; and they self-identify as racially white. Where they differ rather significantly is in their educational backgrounds and geographical locations. Alice holds an honours degree in a field related to international development with a focus on Latin American studies. At the time of the interview she was living in a Latin American country. Eva completed a program in the field of recreation studies and was also living in Latin America at the time of the interview. Kelly completed a masters’ degree in women and gender studies and was living in a country in Africa at the time of the interview. Ruth specialized in political science with a minor in African studies for her undergraduate degree and was living in Africa during the interview. Ana’s academic background is in environmental studies with a masters’ degree in

water resource management and she was also living in Africa at the time of the interview.

Similarly, Mary has a background in science and was also living in Africa when this research was conducted.

The central topics for this research revolve around race, privilege and international development. Whiteness and white privilege in the context of international work remains at the heart of the analysis. Because whiteness is central to all of the research, it is not discussed below as a theme or topic on its own, rather the relevance of all the data relates to whiteness.

Discussion of data in relation to the literature on whiteness and white privilege is presented in chapter five. The interviews that I conducted with the participants touched on whiteness and white privilege and gender by discussing a range of ideas that relate to race, gender, privilege and power. The following paragraphs present a summary of the narratives.

### **White women and gender relations**

Women take significant notice of the perceived gender inequality in the place where they are working. Several comments were made to illustrate this point such as:

- Ruth: “they definitely don’t treat other women in the office whose similar to my age [the same]”
- Alice: “I would say that there is a bit more male/female imbalance even in the workplace. Like, the things we’re still trying to get more equal footing in Canada, are a lot further behind here.”
- Eva: “women here are not seen as, like, equal with men, they’re like, the local man is kind of like the head and the provider and the woman....should be cleaning the house and

doing the dishes and that kind of work and like not really playing sports or living off on your own if you're not married kind of thing.”

- Kelly: “I even find a lot of the times things that I say just aren't even heard, it seems like, and I have to tell a man that I think that this is what we should do and he'll say it's his idea and then it will go through and I have to learn to be okay with that. As long as the thing I want to happen is happening I kind of want, want the praise for having the idea but if no one hears my voice simply because I'm a girl then, yeah, it's a totally different thing.”
- Mary: “for [local] women and [local] men there's more of a difference than the differences that I see in Canada.”

Discussions that focused on gender relations was prevalent in the data. In general, the majority of the language around gender roles signified a perception that local women had lower status than local men, especially compared to what the Canadian women experienced in Canada. So comparisons to Canadian standards of gender relations were common and it was the case that Canadian standards were regarded as more advanced.

Discussing the status of the local women compared to local men brought up the ambiguous nature of the status of the white women in that context. Several of the women expressed feeling like they fall in status somewhere between local men and local women in terms of a power hierarchy, almost taken up as honorary men, but not quite. Women expressed feeling like they are treated with more respect than local women and feeling like they can “get away” with more than local women in terms of “acting like men.” For example, Mary described a situation in which local women who were wearing pants were being stripped in the streets

because it was not considered appropriate clothing. She said that since these incidents occurred, white women were wearing long skirts to avoid harassment:

I don't normally wear pants here anyways but I have been making a point not to, recognizing that, like, I could completely get away with it....I would not be a target for that type of action because I have somehow, like, an in-between status, it wouldn't be an issue.

She further explained that, "I'm somehow, like probably, sort of half way in between those versions of gender here."

This in between status of being an honorary man also creates a barrier in terms of how some white women felt they were able to relate to local women. Both race and gender work to complicate relations with local women. For example, Alice reports that, "as a white woman, you don't really become part of the community." She gave an example of wanting to wash her clothes in the river alongside the local women and goes on to explain that the local women would not bring her to the river to wash her clothes because it's not a, "white woman's job" and that it might be seen as demeaning for her to wash her own clothes or that local women may have wanted to preserve the space of washing clothes as safe place free of white women. The way in which the white women understand the hierarchy of gender and gender layered with their foreign/racial status was remarkably consistent.

### **White women feeling a dilemma**

Several of the women interviewed expressed feeling a tension in wondering to what extent they should express or model their "western" culture and to what extent they should

conform to local customs in regards to what women wear and how women act. For example, in Canada women might feel free to wear clothing that shows their bare shoulders and legs if they chose. Wearing relatively revealing clothing may be considered an expression of a woman's right to choose to wear what she wants to wear; an expression of freedom. However, the narratives indicate that in some of the countries where the participants are living, this type of expression is considered inappropriate for women. Some participants therefore felt uneasy about where to draw the line in terms of being in a position to model women's choices versus conform to expectations of local women. For example Mary explains her dilemma:

I guess I just stick out in so many ways already that I try and minimize as many differences as I can, umm, so I try to dress fairly conservatively....as conservatively as a normal [local] women would, [but] it's like missing an opportunity to make a point that, whatever, women can wear whatever they want, it shouldn't be a big deal.

Again, gender equality as it may be experienced in the North is applied as the standard by which women in the south are assessed as marginalized within their own country and by their communities because there are more restrictions on how women in the south should dress.

Some of the women felt that their status as a foreigner, or as a white woman, allowed them to take greater risks than the local women. Kelly clearly stated that, "there are things that I feel like I can take bigger chances than maybe some local people can." Women felt that they could use this position to model change. For example, Kelly goes on to explain, "I've had to push so hard that, you know....a woman shouldn't push and I am. I've also kind of broken some boundaries." She explains an example of these boundaries:

So that's a little bit hard to deal with sometimes just how they treat women and trying to show the girls at our school, like you know you can do that even though your [a girl] and they're like 'no, it's what the boys do,' and we're like, you can do that too, like we're all equal.

The dilemma in a large part comes from a desire to push for what they believe is right for women; to have choices such as women do in the North. White women development workers struggle internally with the power and influence they have as white women from the North to challenge existing gender relations that limit local Southern women's participation in the public sphere. White women development workers are also unsure about their position to influence the local culture or the potential to promote cultural change that may occur as a result of their pushing boundaries. For example, Mary explains:

At the same time, like me making that statement, it probably isn't really my place and even if it was, it just sort of separates me more from [local] women and sort of puts me more in that sort of in between gender thing than it does actually make a point.

However, there appears to be a line, for at least one participant, at which the tentativeness of participating in promoting cultural change dissolves. Kelly explains:

Sometimes I feel a lot of uncertainty when it comes to changing culture but then again when I think of things like women having, you know, unsafe terminations I think, yeah, I mean change culture if that's what it takes.

Although white women in development fluctuate between experiencing uncertainty and certainty in their position of being able to facilitate cultural change, their position to make choices regarding this level of participation suggests privilege.

The idea that the women are in a position to change culture or not was mostly discussed in terms specific to the lives of the local women, however it was also discussed, to a lesser degree, on a broader level. Eva expresses in her narrative that she feels “we” should not change the culture of the local country, although she also admits that she feels there are aspects of the local culture that she thinks should change. She concludes this thought by stating that, “we don’t want to create mini versions of Canada or the States all around the world.” Understanding the power of development workers from the North to influence and make decisions for local Southern contexts and the dilemmas that arise from that social and political power relations is significant in the lives of development work.

### **Feeling unsafe**

Several women reported feeling unsafe, or at least feeling the need to take safety precautions, while they are abroad. In the words of Alice:

I can be out in the day, but I can only walk around at night as a woman and as a white woman if I’m going, like about a hundred yards, you know. Or if I’m going escorted or if I’m going in a small town where people who know me and will see the whole way that I’m walking and I won’t be out of sight for very long....it’s a whole other world.

Eva echoes this feeling:

Most of us...here are women and it, I don't know, there's just more safety precautions we have to take, like, we're never supposed to be walking alone, it's just a little bit more dangerous because we're the exotic white people.

Mary is similarly concerned as she explains how she worries about the implications of her refusing advances from men and that she is not sure "what sort of implications could come from that."

The women who felt they needed to take more rigorous safety precautions cited the reason being that they were women, and often specified being white women. The concern over safety was often linked to their white racial identity, and it was always linked to gender. The white women development workers did not link their white racial identity and gender when discussing their ambivalence to promote cultural change, but was there when discussing their personal safety.

### **Relationship with local men**

The participants often reported incidents of being sought after or highly complimented by men. For example, Alice explains that:

From a [local] man's perspective, if a white woman is addressing him, this just might be the ticket that I need to get to Canada and live there, you know what I mean so, it sounds very crude of me to say that but I can't tell you the number of marriage proposals I've received also by people whose name I don't even know.

Ruth admitted that a lot of what is said to her is very flattering:

I have to remember not to be arrogant sometimes you know? When people for months are telling you that you're rich, you're elegant, you're pretty, they want to marry you, they love you, you have to remember that that's not actually facts.

There was a tone in the discussion that men compliment white women with the hope that they will attract a white woman who will bring them to Canada, and not because they are genuinely attracted to that white woman.

### **Advantages to being female**

Two women talked about advantages to being a woman, which demonstrate their power and ability to use both sides of their in between status. Kelly, whose job is in part to increase the number of girls participating in clubs, explained that it is much easier for her to accomplish this goal compared to her male counterpart who is working towards the same goal because local families are more inclined to send their girls to a club when another woman is in a leadership position. Therefore, as a woman, she is more effective in her job. Mary also explained that, "it's easier for me to take care of myself and sort of be cooking and cleaning things rather than relying on someone else to do it or offending other people when I do it for myself." These two examples illustrate the ability of white women to take advantage of their in between status by, on one hand, participating in what is considered women's work by doing their own household work without challenging local customs and, on the other hand, being able to take on positions of leadership and use this position to model women and girls engagement in clubs and activities that are not typical for girls to participate in.

In summary, the data at this point consistently shows that women feel a kind of “in between” status of being somehow, on a hierarchy, higher than local women yet below men. They also express feeling awkward or uncomfortable with how they “stick out” as white women. Also as white women, there seems to be a kind of pressure to model “progressive” women’s values. The narratives also express feelings of being able to take risks and be innovative in the development arena. While at the same time, the narratives point to incidences of feeling unsafe or being in a place of danger. The participants also discuss experiences with local men that appear on the surface to be flattering, yet they are hesitant to accept this kind of interaction as sincerely flattering.

### **Value of ones work in international development**

When asked about the value of the contribution the women were making in the local communities, three main themes emerged. These are not strong themes, meaning that only two to three women made related comments per theme. The first theme is feeling that their contribution was being able to share and talk about Canadian culture. Ruth explains, “I think a really large contribution is to give them an understanding of what Canada is like and what America is like which they don’t understand and explain to them in comparison to [local country],” and Mary:

To some extent I think being here and interacting sort of helps make the world a little but smaller and the conversations that I can have with people about similarities between [local country] and Canada and [local people] and Canadians, just sort of makes things a little but less different maybe.

This narrative also suggests that Northerners want Southerners to change and not change at the same time. As if the Northerner wants Southerners to change only in so far as the development arena is sufficiently preserved as an exotic and “needy” space from which to perhaps continue to make oneself.

A second theme that arose from this discussion was one of contributing innovative ideas and providing a critical thinking lens on their work. For example, Ruth explains, “I’m contributing a unique perspective on things sometimes. I’m often critical and I think it’s a cultural thing that people aren’t here so I often bring that critical eye in situations that people appreciate and sometimes they don’t.” Ana similarly states that, “I think the most important contribution I’ve made has been...the thinking process around developing those services...developing ways in which to push the thinking of the members of the cooperative on what they’re trying to do.”

Lastly, women reported feeling that the importance of their work is in their ability to give something tangible to the community in either material goods or education. For example, Alice described a situation where when she returned to a community in which she had previously been when a man approached her and explained that the pump for their well was broken and they needed ten dollars to fix it, which no one in the community had the money to and he wanted to know if she could help them. In this instance she was able to provide the money for the community to help them fix the pump. She also talked about the value of her development work as helping the local people because she saw it as a very, “practical thing for somebody who’s growing up in [local country] right now,” and generally felt that her efforts were about “helping people do what they want to do.” Eva felt similar about her contribution to development:

It's gonna provide so many more opportunities for these kids later down the road. We [do this work] so they can stay in [local country] and get good jobs here and help the country as it's developing and going through those changes.

Overall, participants seem to feel that they are making a contribution in the development arena by sharing Canadian culture, providing a unique or critical perspective on various issues, and by contributing resources that enable the community to improve the quality of life.

### **Perspectives on the historical context**

When participants were asked to explain how, in their view, the disparity between overall living conditions in Canada and those in the local country came to exist, the responses were diverse. Some participants responded by citing historical events such as colonialism and a history of exploitation of the South by the North. For example, Kelly explains that that the unequal distribution of wealth is a result of Northern countries exploiting the South and that overall she identifies capitalism as the central problem: "I see it as capitalism as the big problem and that's what's causing the big difference." Mary similarly stated exploitation as the main challenge to global economic equality and how the history of exploitation meant that some countries were able to make gains while others were not. While on the other hand, Eva suggests that the disparity is the result of more immediate factors. Eva explains it in this way:

I think it's just that's how it's always been for them...jobs are hard enough to come by here because there just aren't enough jobs for the amount of people....it's very very difficult to get any kind of job and to get out of the routine, or not routine, but that pattern that their family has been living in.

Overpopulation was cited as the explanation for the high rates of unemployment. The data shows that there appears to be a broad spectrum of how participants understand the historical factors that have shaped the global context of inequality.

### **Personal growth**

Participants consistently responded that the best part of their experience working overseas was personal growth and learning. As cited by

- (Alice), “I felt like it was a stretching and growing experience for me in a very positive way and teaching me that my preconceived notions were never right....it was a really eye opening experience”
- Eva: “Being in another area has just kind of opened my eyes....here I’ve just found that there are so many different ways of doing things and our way is not necessarily the best way”
- Kelly: “Honestly, I think it’s the challenges to who I am and growing all the time in myself and, yeah, all the best things about working overseas is about my own growth and my own learning about me and being challenged so much and I just learn millions of things every day and I mean, I think that’s it, it’s the incredible amount of learning that can be fit into such a short amount of time.”

The data shows a highly consistent set of responses as to the nature of the participants motivations for working in development. They do not cite altruistic motivations, but rather personal desires as a rationale for this engagement.

### **Returning overseas**

At some point, whether for a short or long term assignment, participants clearly stated a desire to live and work abroad again. However, there was also a sense from the responses that participants were not willing to live abroad for their entire life and that they would like to go and return when it suited them best. For example, Ruth explains, “I’m actually attending a graduate program come September of this year in [name of program] and then I definitely intend to look for a career in development. Whether the work will be permanent overseas is a different story” and Mary explains, “I guess I see myself staying overseas for a couple of years and I don’t really have a plan on a very long term.” A few participants wanted to work abroad again, but when the timing was more suitable for them. They explain it in the following way: Ana, “it’s something I would like to do again in the future but maybe in a few years, not right away,” and Kelly:

I have a tendency to work overseas or in a developing country and then to work for a couple of years in a developed country sort of to give myself a little down time or a little reflection time because it is a constant challenge I find I need a little time to process everything that happened....but then I probably will go again.

One participant did not express a short term interest, but rather sounded more interested in remaining overseas in the long term as a teacher. She felt that the work abroad suited her interests more than what would be available to her in Canada:

I don’t really want to or plan on teaching in the States or in Canada, I’d rather teach overseas. I just like the culture because the way the culture is so relationship oriented it’s more open to and allows teachers to really get involved in their students’ lives and to really get to know them whereas back home in Canada that’s just not really allowed.

Considering that each of the women expressed a desire to work abroad again at some point, this emerges as a very strong theme from the data. Unlike the local men who were eager to get to know white women development workers to increase their mobility across nation states, white women could plan and decide when and how they would exercise their freedom of mobility.

### **Preparation**

Participants engaged in a variety of preparatory measures before departing for their destinations abroad. Some participants underwent extensive preparation programs that involved a month of training. For Mary this involved:

Talking about gender, talking about sort of health and safety types of things, partly being white women in [local country]. And things about race came up mostly around sort of privilege and why we would be understood as privileged and what ways we were privileged and what that meant for how we could interact with people.

Others had little to no formal training. Their preparation included shopping, fundraising and reading some literature on their own about the destination country. Despite the wide ranging difference between pre-trip preparation, participants who had both intense training programs and those who had very little formal preparation expressed concerns about feeling under-prepared upon arrival. Preparation for a similar and major change in life (moving to another country) appears to vary widely.

### **Expectations prior to departure**

Two participants talked about expecting the destination country to be “less developed” than how they felt it was when they arrived. Kelly explains:

I had expectations of what I saw in World Vision commercials. That was exactly, to be honest, the only idea I ever had of Africa period, so that was my expectation and it was not what I encountered at all....now it sounds so naïve and quite dumb actually, but I didn't expect so many cars. World Vision commercials don't have cars. I didn't expect people just to be sort of living their lives in a normal sort of way.

Eva also expressed similar surprise, “the main cities were a lot bigger and more developed than I thought they would be....I was not expecting that.” Although only two of the six participants expressed having this false expectation, the level to which they were surprised about the conditions of the local country compared to what they had expected stands out.

### **Discussing power**

Five out of six of the participants discussed experiencing some sort of power imbalance in which they felt they had more power than the local people, and two went further to explain that they felt strongly that this position of power was unearned. Kelly explained that she experienced a power imbalance due to the nature of the work itself:

There's always a power imbalance in the context of my work....I'm always the one whose trying to empower. No one that I've ever worked with has tried to empower me. If I am trying to do empowerment, clearly someone has power and someone doesn't. I mean, I come from a donor, I have money, money equals power....there's always a power imbalance.

Ruth expressed concern that her position of power is unearned and explained her situation in this way:

I've had very well experienced staff, people working with the Ministry of Agriculture, for over thirty years and with a university or college education will ask me advice on a matter that I'm not near qualified for. It's very easy to act like you know, it's very easy to pretend like you know. But it's, I think, important and something that I try to do is just explain to them that I don't [know]. I get more attention because I'm a foreigner and I'm asked a lot more opinions because I'm a foreigner, and also people try and include me more because I'm a foreigner. Especially in that respect maybe the power is imbalanced.

She went on to explain that this special status might be because she is White or because she has more education. The woman who talked about feeling that they were granted unearned power expressed feeling somewhat uncomfortable with this status, but also seemed to feel unsure about how to manage the situation. It is noteworthy that both participants who expressed this feeling of unearned power felt that it was a result of their foreign or white identity.

Some of the women who discussed experiencing power imbalance also talked about their struggle to reconcile this position of privilege. Alice described her struggle with reconciling what she saw as the disparity in distribution of wealth between Canada and the country she visited:

There were a lot of things that I had to deal with like, why are Canadians wealthier, you know, whether you live below the poverty line or not, technically you're still a lot wealthier than they are, you have a lot more access to education, to food, to resources, to

warmth, to adequate housing, you know....in general I just had to struggle with why do I have so much and why don't they because it seems to me that they don't have enough. And it's hard to reconcile that, but you know, I think, oh boy, I think, like I was saying the historical context of things and just the effects of colonialism and, I kind of reached a point where I think okay, it is what it is, like I'm not saying it was good and I probably shouldn't judge it as being bad, because for the people coming in as colonialists, they kind of thought that they were doing a great job and they wanted to help other people out but of course make them subservient, like, you know, 'we still want to be above you guys cause you're not white.'

Some women had developed strategies on how to deal with the power they experienced. Two examples of these strategies demonstrate the contrast in approaches. Kelly's approach was to talk about it openly with the local people and "generally try to recognize the power imbalance." She felt that putting it out in the open and discussing it as a problem at least helped her to feel better about the situation and that it was "better than nothing." Mary approaches the power imbalance by attempting to make it less obvious:

I'll try to minimize it as much as I can. Trying to learn [local language] trying to know what the prices are for things so that I have a little bit more power and then trying to diminish the power I have by partly explaining that I don't have money and that like my organization is not providing them funding or anything like that, so that would be part of it in terms of taking power away from myself.

Overall, almost all the women felt that they experienced having more power than the people around them, but dealt with this situation in varying ways. However, Eva explained that she felt that there was very little power imbalance in her situation. In her words:

All of us [reference to occupation deleted] and a lot of the [local people], I feel like we're all on the same level. Obviously our bosses are a little bit above us and have more power, but even she has like the board to keep her accountable and things, so I haven't noticed it too much.

Experiencing a heightened level of power also came with some drawbacks for a few participants. Some participants talked about feeling frustrated or misunderstood. For example, Mary explains, "they assume that they can ask me for things which sort of puts me on a sort of a pedestal of having things that I can decide to sort of give or not to give them." Alice also speaks to this point:

If you're white there's an automatic assumption that you'll give them money, and you'll give them clothes and you'll give them something. Like some sort of technological device, like even just your cell phone or whatever....in [local country] white people are so few and far between and most of them do come with money, and do come for short terms and do tend to feel, I don't know if it's out of guilt or if it's out of something, but there's a bit of that, 'hey white girl, you've got money, either pay for my education in another country or just give me something now' and I've had multiple people in [local country] just walk up to me and say, 'hey white girl, I wanna study at this university you

can pay my tuition,' and it's just that blunt, like it's that forward and direct and I don't even know their names.

The data on how women experience power while working internationally clearly demonstrates that most women feel powerful, or at least more power than those around them.

### **Recognizing problems with international development work**

Most of the women, at some point in the interview, discussed what they felt are some problems with development work. These problems varied from concern over the implication of Northern white people working in positions of power in the local country to the impact of so many NGOs and volunteers giving away free resources. For example, Kelly described her concern this way:

I think it's much better to have nationals, the locals, working in the NGO sector than it is to have internationals. Sometimes I actually wonder if I'm doing more harm than good, but sometimes I don't. Also, there are things that I see that I can do differently or in a more innovative way, but I definitely, I mean, it definitely creates a bigger power imbalance to have foreign people coming to "help." Whenever I think about this I think, you are sending me here, it's as though they're saying 'there is no one as smart as me in this entire country' and I really don't think that can possibly be true, but that's essentially what is says to the people who I'm working with. We couldn't find anyone smart enough in your whole country.

She goes on to explain how she struggles with some of her co-workers who do not feel the same way she does:

A lot of the women I work with feel that if they hadn't come, nobody in this country is as smart as them. I find a lot of people aren't feeling this push and pull and that's also difficult for me....I wish that more people that work in development, women, men, everybody would be thinking more critically about the how and why of doing this.

Along a similar vein, Alice felt concerned with what she perceived to be a lack of thoughtfulness among other international workers:

I think a lot of well-intentioned people end up maybe hurting or causing more of a negative impact than what they even have any idea that they're doing or what they even intend to do, you know I think intentions are often really great but if you don't know the actual impact of them, they might not come off that way.

In essence, almost all the women expressed some level of concern with development practices and/or development workers. This concern was expressed as external to themselves and their work.

### **Initial motivation**

Personal knowledge, growth and development arises as the central theme in how the women spoke about their initial motivation for working overseas, which is similar to what participants expressed as the best part of doing development work, as discussed above. For example, Ruth explains,

Originally I never had any intention of working overseas, I just didn't think it was something I could do. I realized it would be something I should do, and wanted to do

with respect to the research and the knowledge I wanted.... I realized to get more specific examples of what I wanted to learn and pursue, I'd have to actually go on the ground and hear what was happening and see what was happening with my own eyes.

Ana explains a similar rationale, "I think understanding it better was my main motivation." And Alice felt that the experience would help her figure out her future career path:

The fact that I was gonna be [doing the type of work that she does] was a motivator because I had been thinking about going into [the field of work that she is doing in the development context]....well, I kinda wanna be sure and I just thought it would be a good opportunity to travel overseas now while I don't have too many commitments and things back home.

And for Mary, whose initial experience overseas was a part of her university program, explains, "I don't really know when I got the idea, it just sort of happened I think;" and further that, "probably the first motivation would be just being curious about other people and what's different and what's the same and how people are living."

The consistency of the women's responses for wanting an opportunity for personal growth as the main reason they pursued international work is striking. This is unlike people from the South who wish to exercise the same level and freedom of mobility.

**White development worker: community member or outsider?**

Each participant expressed feeling at times like part of the local community and at other times like outsiders from the community. Relationships with local people repeatedly came up as the main avenue by which the women felt like part of the community. In the way grocery tellers recognized them, or in how they felt very welcomed by local people who invited them over for meals or through working closely with people in local communities are all ways in which they felt like part of the community. Those who lived with a local family or in a compound with local people felt quite connected, while one woman who lived with a group of other expats felt that she had to go more out of her way to build relationships with local people in order to feel like part of the community.

All the women who talked about the community response to their presence discussed feeling welcomed by the local people. For example, Ruth explains, “[they] have told me that they really value foreigners” and Ana explains as well, “the first thing they’ll say will always be like, ‘we’re happy that you’re here and ‘thank you for coming.’” However, despite feeling mostly welcomed by local people, Alice explained that where she was working, although some people value the presence of foreigners, others did not:

If you drive by in a bus or in a pick-up truck with nineteen white people loaded in the back, you get kids and adults all giving you the finger cause they know that that’s one symbol that doesn’t fly there but at least for Canadians and Americans they know what that means so, that’s kind of their gesture to say, ‘you know we really don’t want you here.’

In terms of feeling like an outsider, language was mentioned as a main barrier to feeling like part of the community by four of the six participants. At the same time, one woman who felt that her ability to speak the local language did not help her feel more a part of the community. The second significant factor resulting in women feeling like outsiders was a sense of “sticking out” or not fitting in because of how they look or think. According to Alice, she realized that, “I’ve got a different mentality and it’s in ways that I don’t even consciously realize until it kind of comes up.” Similarly, Ana explains, “I can feel the difference between the way that we think.”

Women also felt like outsiders because of the way they look. Women expressed this feeling of “sticking out” in various ways.

- Kelly: “I dress differently, everything about me is different....I’ll never be a part of the community I feel like”
- Mary: “I’ll always be sort of singled out, I think is the main thing that I see as not being part of the community”
- Ruth: “when they see me they run and shake my hand and they don’t do that to other people, they just do that for me. There’s just many ways in which I do feel like a foreigner....people perceive me as an outsider no matter how long I stay in one place, I can’t image that I would ever be recognized as an integral part of the community....I’m visibly different, you know, my skin colour is white and their skin colour is black and we’ll call each other brother and sister but they’ll never call me that and if I were to call them that they would say, ‘how? How can we be brother and sister, our skin is different colours.’”

This feeling of being singled out led to some frustration. For example, for Eva it called into question the sincerity of the local people who did try to get to know her, “it makes it harder to decipher if people are like, genuinely want to know you or want to know you because they want to say they know a white person (laughs) or something like that.” For Ruth, being treated with special privileges made her feel misunderstood, “you feel frustrated because you want them to realize that you’re not that way and you want them to realize that they are also better than you are in many ways that you’re learning from them, they’re not always taking from you.

Sometimes I feel annoyed and sometimes I feel very you know, I’m shocked....one person pisses you off and the rest of the day you know that one person that time that man tells you that he’s going to marry you and the rest of the day you’re feeling frustrated and misunderstood.” And Alice explains, “they barely speak to me actually; it’s hard to get a [local woman] to speak with me even if I initiate conversation because there is almost like a reverse racism there.” Some of the women cited their white racial identity as a reason for their feeling like outsiders, yet others did not make this direct link.

### **Conclusion**

After conducting six interviews with white women working abroad in international development, a significant amount of data has been collected. The relevant data is analyzed in the chapter five using literature that relates to the topics raised by the participants. Additional research of the literature was conducted after reviewing the data. This additional research is found in chapter five with the data analysis. It is important to note that although some of the data shows strong themes and consistent responses from the women, there is also data that is contradictory or does not fit into a category. The contradictions are as important as the consistent

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data in terms of attempting to understand how a woman's white identity impacts her work abroad.



## CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS

This research is concerned with the performance of white female middle class subjectivity and the occasion offered by the development arena to perform and affirm this subject position. The data consists of six interviews with white middle class women about their overseas experience working in international development. The aim here is to develop an understanding of the experience of white middle class female development workers with the broader goal of reaching new insights into the processes that sustain or subvert the performance of dominant-subordinate racial power relations in the development arena. If the development project is to move forward in a manner that promotes equality and justice, new patterns steeped in anti-oppressive practices on the part of the Northern development worker must emerge. Therefore, I hope that this analysis will contribute to the current body of knowledge of anti-oppressive practices with the hope of emboldening development workers with the courage to ask critical questions about self, power and race in the context of their work.

### **Generating meaning from the data**

Meaning is derived from the data by layering the narratives with relevant literature. For this I rely heavily on the work of Barbara Heron (2007) and her book titled *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender and the Helping Imperative*. I use a post-structural lens on identity formation as it relates to subjectification as a framework for understanding the subject position of the development worker. By this viewpoint, power is practiced through:

‘Normalization,’ through defining what is usual and habitual and to be expected, as opposed to the deviant and exceptional. This form of power produces subjects, creates

certain kinds of self-knowledge and ‘truths’ about oneself. Thus, one consequence of power is the process of ‘subjectification,’ or becoming subject to particular knowledges of aspects of the self (St. Denis, 2002).

In other words, we engage in certain types of behaviour that we feel is “particularly expressive” of who we think we are. Of interest to this research is the way participation in development work is produced as “particularly expressive” of a moral self, or how development work is affirming to the self-knowledge that one is moral and good. In addition, the post-structural analysis, “undermines the belief that what is most ‘real’ is what is experienced” and it, “rejects the myth that meaning begins and ends in the individuals’ experience” (Eagleton, 1983 in St. Denis, 2002). Therefore more may be going on in our practice than one is able to admit and or acknowledge at a self-conscious level.

In order to understand the meaning, or what is “particularly expressive,” of the experiences relayed in the narratives, this chapter will provide a brief overview of some historical factors that have shaped the white middle class subject position and highlight the relationship between white middle class female subject formation and international work. This relationship between white middle class female subject formation and international work demonstrates how the development arena provides an opportunity to enact dominance and enables constitutive possibilities to produce a desired narrative of self. Affirming goodness and morality are imperative features of the white female subject position and the development arena which is perceived as the site of the most ‘helpless’ Others by Northern discourses,. The seemingly *most* helpless Other who is the object of development work offers the striking contrast necessary to produce the white female development worker as the *most* moral and good. In

addition, the development arena offers the occasion to perform oneself in terms that are “particularly expressive” of her narrative of self, which is found to be one who seeks self-discovery, personal learning, independence and social change. Herein lies the significance of this investigation. The occasion to realize this narrative of self in the development arena comes at the cost of repeating the racial hierarchy that has historically and does presently affirm white superiority. My analysis suggests that the performance of dominance in the development arena undermines the anti-oppressive aims of development work and sustains the production of white middle class subjectivity. It is found that the comfort that resides in the production of the moral self must be compromised in order to break the pattern of hierarchical power relations and to move forward with new “kinds of self-knowledge and ‘truths’ about oneself” in order to achieve relations of greater justice and equality.

It is important to acknowledge that the findings suggest overlapping themes of privilege, race, gender, power and social class. Each of these areas draw upon large bodies of literature and that collectively is beyond the scope of this research. Since it is recognized that the available literature that relates to the relevant topics of this research have not been exhausted, I understand that given a different literature review or a different focus in the research, a different analysis of the narratives is possible. In addition, often the data is layered in such a way that it can be analyzed in a variety of ways. For example, one piece of the narrative may draw simultaneously on literature relating to femininity, dominance, denial of white privilege or power-evasion. Therefore, although this analysis is divided into categories the complex nature of the subject matter means that each category consists of overlapping themes.

### **Positioning female subjectivity**

Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is cited as a publication that initially drew attention to ideas of self-reliance and independence for women in Britain (Caine, 1997). Wollstonecraft argues that women ought to have a position in society that would, "bring them independence from men and a direct role within the community" (Caine, 1997). She placed a strong emphasis on women's minds and souls rather than on their bodies, while attempting to elevate the status of women's role in the home by presenting her domestic duties as something like a profession. "to render [a woman] really virtuous and useful," according to Wollstonecraft (Caine, 1997), "she must not be dependent on her husband's bounty for her subsistence during his life, or support after his death – for how can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? Or virtuous, who is not free?" Wollstonecraft's vision for women was one of independence but without diminishing her 'feminine' qualities as caring and giving. What is suggested here is that at the genesis of the feminist movement in the West women's independence was acceptable in as much as it was not too great a divergence from her traditionally feminine subject position. In my analysis of the interviews I demonstrate that the theme of white middle class females seeking out opportunities to assert their independence without compromising feminine ideals continues to be repeated in the development arena today.

The present-day usage of the international development arena for the production of white female subject position is not the first occurrence of this kind. By the mid-nineteenth century the women's suffrage movement in Britain had gained momentum. In order to help make the case for women's emancipation, British women sought opportunities to prove their capacity to make a meaningful contribution to society. The colonial relationship between Britain and India

presented such an opportunity. India represented an arena by which the British women could establish their capacity for leadership while supporting the empire's mission. This engagement took the shape of British women positioning themselves as, "the saviours of the entire world of women" (Burton, 1994). British women sought to position themselves as valuable and useful contributors to society by using the empire's relationship with India to demonstrate their skills and did so by positioning themselves as "saviours." The colonial relationship provided an ideal arena for British women to concern themselves with philanthropic efforts aimed at bettering the lives of Indian women, thereby producing themselves as leaders and useful. The colonial relationship further provided the occasion to produce British white middle class women as charitable by representing the Indian women as "helpless victims" (Burton, 1994). Through a discourse of "global sisterhood" British women secured themselves a position of dominance abroad in the colony, thereby establishing their competence domestically. In 1868, Mary Carpenter summarized this sentiment when she declared that, "the devoted work of multitudes of English women in that great continent, shows what our sex can do" (Burton, 1994).

The rendering of Indian women as helpless and positioning white women as dominant caregivers served a dual purpose. In addition to providing a platform from which women could make a case for their emancipation by demonstrating their skills as leaders and community contributors, the discourse of the colonial arena served to affirm traditional femininity. This was important since the independence and leadership required for this kind of work posed a threat to the traditionally feminine qualities of being, for example, gentle, obedient and self-less. Women who sought to show their capacity to make a meaningful contribution to society and achieve emancipation were accused of exhibiting 'male-like' traits. As Burton (1994) explains, "feminist

women were targeted as unwomanly, and female emancipation as sterilizing and ‘un-sexing.’” Therefore, the caregiving aspect of their participation in international projects “rendered them traditionally feminine” (Burton, 1994). The affirmation of femininity offered by imperial activities allowed women to both establish their capacity to make a meaningful contribution to society without compromising their ‘good woman’ status. In other words, the white middle class female subject position is steeped in a “socially mandated” (Heron, 2007) requirement to maintain a moral self in her effort to be more independent and self-reliant. As will be examined below, the narratives for this research provide evidence of a similar paralleling between protecting the moral self while seeking to establish an independent self.

It is worthwhile recognizing here that the above review of women’s engagement in international work during the era of empire represents a very small segment of a large body of literature on women’s feminist movements as it relates to international projects. However, this review is meant only to draw attention to some critical highlights as they relate to the data collected for this research and to aid in the analysis. The significant detail here is that in the colonial era international work presented itself as an avenue by which white middle class women could make a case for their usefulness in society in a non-traditional capacity, without relinquishing their traditionally feminine subjectivity. As echoed in the narratives of the development workers interviewed for this research, the notion that a woman’s ‘liberation’ may only go so far as she is tethered to charitable work and that, furthermore, the international arena presents an ideal occasion to merge this blend of independence with femininity.

Antoinette Burton’s (1994) sentiment seems relevant here too:

It is not a question of assessing blame or even of expecting feminists of the past to have been able to transcend the imaginative or ideological limitations of their own historical experiences. It is, rather, part of the work of interdisciplinary feminist theory, which insists on scrutinizing the workings of power and, because of this, requires an examination of the burdens of history which every production is immersed in.

As this research is concerned with the production of the white female middle class development worker, it is noteworthy that the ‘burdens of history’ continue to be constitutive of this subjectivity. In other words, what is offered below is not a critique of the individuals who participated in this research, but rather an analysis of what their narratives tell us about the subject position of white female middle class development workers and the constitutive arena of development work. I would also like to restate that I am a white middle class female who has participated in development work and that my subject position and development experience likely, on one hand, compromises my ability to accurately analyze this data and, on the other hand, may provide me with useful insights.

### **Development work as an expression of freedom and choice**

Consistent with how the colonial arena offered British women an occasion to produce themselves as capable of making a contribution to society while maintaining appropriate femininity, the development arena continues to offer an ideal site from which to affirm the production of a modern day woman as capable and independent while preserving her traditionally feminine status as a “good woman.”

The use of the development arena as a space expressive of our desire to be free to make choices and pursue our own goals is evident in the consistency of the narratives as they relate to the motivation among participants for their engagement in development work. This consistency makes a compelling case for the power of development work to affirm the narrative of self as one who is free to go and do as she chooses. The sense of freedom to “go and do,” or what Heron (2007) describes as “entitlement to intervene,” is validated because the implication here is that self-discovery and personal learning is a virtuous pursuit in itself. A summary of such responses are as follows:

- Mary: “the first motivation [for doing development work] would be just being curious about other people and what’s different and what’s the same and how people are living.”
- Ruth: “I realized, you know, to get more specific examples of what I wanted to learn and pursue, I’d have to actually go on the ground and hear what was happening and see what was happening with my own eyes.”
- Ana: “coming overseas was my way to find out a bit more about how it goes on the ground and then see the challenges. Like I had an interest in it for a long time but it was I think understanding it better was my main motivation.”

These narratives reflect a desire for self-discovery among participants who sought to pursue knowledge or to experience personal growth and development.. The pursuit of self-discovery in itself is an, “actualization of class privilege” (Heron, 2007, p. 51). In other words, it is because of her position of dominance and class privilege that she is able, and feels entitled, to enter the development arena with her own agenda. The idea that this option is considered to be at the

disposal of the white middle class female subject suggests the sense of entitlement to intervene and centering of self in the development narrative.

Eva's response resonates as somewhat divergent from the others. She framed her motivation in terms that imply she had nothing better to do at the time: "all my friends thought it was like a great opportunity and I didn't have anything else to do, which is abnormal for me so it kind of felt like this was the thing that I was supposed to be doing." Here Eva conveys a strong sense of entitlement to intervene as she does not need any justification for her participation other than that it seemed, "a great opportunity." An opportunity for what, though, is unclear. I would propose that the unspecified opportunity is to produce herself as adventurous and free. She is able to seize the opportunity; she is free to 'go and do' as she chooses to. Eva does not seek grandiose justification for her participation in development nor does her narrative suggest that she struggles with the ethics of her desire to be overseas. For her, the opportunity arose and she took it. The unrestrained capacity to indulge an opportunity simply because it presents itself, without pausing to consider a need for critical reflection, is in itself an exercise of class privilege.

Kelly, who struggled the most with her unease at the ethics of her participation in development work explains, as part of her motivation for participation, "a big portion of the reason I work in this is because I feel like I learn so much and I grow so much and I challenge myself so much and so a lot of it is purely selfish." Her use of the term 'selfish,' according to Heron (2007), is enacting a kind of "double-move, whereby acknowledging selfish motives enables the foreclosure of further self-scrutiny, securing the moral self." The distancing of self from altruistic motivations, according to Heron (2007) serves to, "place her further up on the moral high ground in her accounting of herself." Kelly was the most self-critical and also

struggled the most to justify her participation in development work. In a sense, she “let’s herself off the hook” of having to grapple with her morality by claiming her participation in development work to be a selfish act.

What is intriguing here is that the development arena is characterized as a site where the hungry are fed, the uneducated are educated, the homeless are provided homes, and other such “helping” type activities are undertaken. Yet, the participants do not cite “helping” motivations as their initial motivation to engage in development work. However, based on other parts of the narratives, the helping aspect of development work is important to the participants. Heron (2007) argues that Northern discourse has so effectively produced and protected the moral status of development work that it is “assumed to be altruistic.” This assumption of altruism relieves the development worker of the burden of explicitly naming the charitable nature of her endeavour, offering space for other constitutive terms that are harmonious with more contemporary feminist ideas of what it means to be a woman, such as desiring personal growth. The ubiquitous nature of development discourse has made the altruistic claim on her behalf, allowing her to frame her pursuits in terms that reflect what may be perceived as a more modern woman; a woman who values knowledge and adventure and who is not held back by such traditional institutions as family and homemaking. She is free to explore and pursue knowledge in whatever fashion she desires in order to expand her resume as a professional woman. The charitable nature of the development arena, like in the era of empire, allows the white female subject to produce narratives of self that are expressive of who she feels herself to be even when that self-expression is divergent from traditional femininity because the charitable nature of the

work protects her femininity. She can pursue her desire for knowledge and personal growth while affirming her traditionally feminine subject position.

### **Development work as an expression of independence**

As stated earlier, in contrast to Victorian feminist ideals, independence and self-reliance became central issues in the feminist movement's effort to re-define what a woman should be (Caine, 1997). Repeating the constitutive usage of the colonial relationship during the era of empire, development today offers a "particularly expressive" (St. Denis, Ch. 2) occasion for the white female subject position to show herself as independent, while maintaining her traditionally feminine status of a "good woman." For example, Eva explains that, "it's been really cool to just like live on my own and just kind of develop my own independence and ah, just know that I can do that and handle myself." Eva's experience in the development arena is affirming to her narrative of self as independent; she has proven that she can "handle" herself in what she described in other parts of her narrative as a "dangerous place." The development arena similarly provides an occasion for Ruth to assert her desire for independence and self-reliance in relation to her family. Ruth explains that, "I come from a very traditional family...and it's not customary to move away from home before you're married, umm, let alone going to a foreign country in a, what is perceived as a poor, disease ridden, war-torn country. Umm, so I had to do a lot of preparation in trying to dispel some of those myths." Although Ruth's desire to subvert Northern discourse is important, the process of "dispelling those myths" affirms a self-narrative for Ruth that produces herself as strong and independent by positioning herself in contrast to her family's caution and apprehension. The nervousness of her family on her behalf affirms her narrative of self as independent since she must re-assure her family that she is self-reliant enough

to handle the situations that they fear. The undercurrent to her narrative suggests that although her host country may be considered a terrible and dangerous place to be by her family, she is sufficiently self-reliant to pursue this experience despite her family's misgivings. Her family's concern for her is productive of her as independent and brave.

The production of self as independent and self-reliant in the development arena is made more compelling when presented in the context of threat to safety. Safety concerns for the white female development worker in the development arena offer an occasion for the affirmation of narratives of self as not only independent, but brave as well. For example, when Eva explains that she has to carefully manage her safety, she is not only expressing that she feels threatened but also that she is brave enough to manage the danger. By this narrative, the white female subject expresses that she is a strong, brave and risk-taking woman. The production of the development context as dangerous is constitutive of her bravery as an independent woman.

What is relevant here is that the white middle class female development worker is in a position to use her racial dominance as a means to achieve her desired form of self-expression. Because of her class privilege and her racial dominance she is in a position to seek out the "particularly expressive" arena of development to produce herself as independent. As will be explored later, what is problematic here is not the desire for expressing self as independent but rather the positioning of self as dominant in relation to others in the development arena order to realize this expression of self.

### **Development work as an expression of self as a trailblazer**

In addition to the function of affirming independence, my reading suggests that the development arena produces another kind of divergence from the traditional feminine subjectivity. Several participants made statements that are evidence of their feeling a sense of entitlement to challenge traditional norms in the local country; to be, in a sense, frontrunners of 'progress'. What the development arena appears to be offering for the white middle class female subject is an occasion to construct narratives of self as a trailblazer in social justice. The development arena offers these terms in a capacity unique from the domestic realm since the feminist movement in the North has resulted in more women entering positions of leadership. In other words, as our identities are constructed in relation to the Other, or "difference from the unmarked norm" (Heron, 2007), the increasingly normative nature of white women in positions of leadership means that the white female subject seeking experiences that are "particularly expressive" of her avant-garde narrative of self must look beyond her domestic borders. The development arena offers the perception of an occasion for the white middle class woman to perform herself as on the frontier of social change in terms that are unavailable in Canada (Heron, 2007). The Canadian context is limited in avenues by which a white middle class woman can make the potent claims of being the 'first' or the 'only' woman to do anything. In order to produce narratives of self that are sufficiently trailblazing the white middle class female must position herself in an arena that is constitutive of these terms. This means that she must seek out a more Othered group than what is perceived to be available in Canada. She requires sharper contrast in order to construct herself as uniquely heroic and on the vanguard of social justice. The opportunities for a woman to produce herself as *most* outspoken in the name of

injustice or as *most* progressive at the frontier of social change are perceived as more potent at the site of development work.

For example, it is noteworthy how when Kelly explains that she feels she can take “bigger chances” than some local people or be “innovative” in ways that local people could not be she is framing her experience capacity to make a meaningful contribution in relation to local people. The terms by which she describes the value of her own contribution to development work is constructed in *contrast* to the local people. *Than the local people* suggests that her identity as an innovative and risk taking woman is affirmed more powerfully in the development arena than it would be elsewhere. She is surrounded by people who are sufficiently Othered from herself, allowing the production of her own narrative of self as more innovative and willing to take chances in contrast to the local people. Would the Canadian context afford Kelly these same constitutive conditions? I suggest here that if she were working in the area of social justice with a group of other white middle class women in the Northern context that she would not be afforded the same potent terms for her narrative of self.

A less explicit example of this narrative is from Eva when she explains that:

I don't think that we should be trying to change these cultures. I think that there's things about the cultures that maybe would be very beneficial if they changed but we don't want to make everyone look like Canada or the States. Like we don't want to create mini, umm, like mini versions of Canada or the States all around the world because then I think you would lose some of the, umm, the important and things that make this country its own and make it unique.

What is expressed here is a sense that Eva is in a position of power to mold an entire community in the direction of her choosing. Her narrative that, “we don’t want to make everyone look like Canada or the States” suggests that she feels she has the authority to do that if it were what she desired. I propose here that domestic community work would not afford Eva the same authoritative terms that she experiences abroad. In the development context, her narrative of self suggests that she has the power to guide the future of an entire nation, and further that she is a leader; a ‘maker of change.’ I suggest that this narrative of self as an authority of social change, seemingly normative in the development context, would be uncommon in Canada.

The experience of leading social change is also expressed in Alice’s narrative in the following account:

I was maybe an hour off the plane or so and one of the men from the community, an older man comes up to me and says, ‘Miss [Alice], our water well is...the pump is broken and we just need about a ten dollar piece,’ like a little part to fix the whole thing but nobody really has ten dollars just to fork out for that, like the logistics are tricky, so I said, ‘you know what, we will take care of that for you, like I’ll find a way to get that little part and we can get your well working again,’ but you know, let you do it. Give you the tools and you know what you need and how can we just assist in empowering you to do that kind of thing.

By this account Alice’s narrative suggests that within just one hour of being in the development arena she was able to restore drinking water to an entire community with something as simple as giving away ten dollars. Would this same potency for the production of self as singularly

important with such minimal effort be available to Alice in Canada? Again, I suggest that it would not. In order to produce this narrative of self she must seek out a more 'Othered' arena that allows her to realize a more extreme positioning of her privilege and an arena where the constitutive terms are consistent with her production of self as on the vanguard of social change. In other words, the sharper the contrast between herself (namely her privilege) and the community in which she operates the more powerful the terms of production of self as heroic. Furthermore, in this narrative Alice specifies that it was an older man who came to ask her for this piece to fix the water pump. Other parts of her narrative would suggest that men are dominant in the local country. Therefore, the notion that Alice, as a relatively young and foreign woman, has seemingly more power in this scenario than an older man from the community produces a very compelling narrative of authority and leadership. That Alice is in a position to tell an elder man from the community that she will, "let you do it" positions herself as dominant, even though her narrative is an attempt to subvert this dominance by "empowering" them to fix their own well. Alice is attempting to position herself as a servant to the local people. However, as Razack suggests (2009), positioning oneself as subordinate is also a move of superiority.

In the same way that, "the Other are necessary to our stories of manifesting and attaining goodness through development work" (Heron, 2007), the Other are also necessary for white middle class women to position themselves as trailblazers and uniquely heroic. The constitutive terms available in development work for this positioning are a function of unequal racial relations. The production of an avant-garde narrative of self is available in the development arena in part because of the racial privilege afforded the white female development worker. This privilege sanctions a feeling of authority that in turn produces an experience of leadership and

influence on the part of the development worker. By acting on this sense of authority the development worker produce a narrative of self that is reflective of one who is an innovator in the field of social justice. The sense that the white middle class female development worker can “get away with more” is a function of her white privilege, and productive of her narrative of self as pioneering social change in terms that are not available to her in Canada. Heron (2007) explains how this is problematic in these terms:

Previously self-conceived in positive terms such as “strong” and “confident,” these words now seem to convey fresh and fuller meanings as we demonstrate an able-to-do anything attitude....this internalization of changed self-images is produced through the operation of white women development workers’ positioning in relations of power and attendant material benefits in the sites of development, *together with* affirmations of the self as superior – through racialized comparisons with the Other – and as normal (pp. 120-121).

What this suggests is that the desire to be an agent of social change and the expression of self in these terms is not the problem. Where this desire turns from something noble to problematic is in the use of dominant and subordinate relations across race in order to realize this narrative of self in the development arena.

### **Development work as an expression of the moral self**

The moral affirming nature of development work is tied directly to the images of the Southern Other produced in the North as helpless and awaiting the intervention of the development worker. The pervasiveness of these images is evident in the participants’ narratives

by the way in which they discuss their expectations prior to departure. For example, Kelly's notion that watching World Vision commercials, which typically show children struggling to survive was the single experience that formed her entire impression of Africa. Eva also implies that prior to departure she held ideas that the development context was more bereft than what she encountered and that she was surprised to find that the main city had everything that "Toronto or something would have." Alice explains her initial thinking along the lines of, "I went down there, I mean looking back, with the mentality of 'yes! I'm gonna help these poor [local people] and I'm really gonna teach them stuff!'" Expectations of what will be encountered in the development arena are forged from the plethora of images made available in the North that depict Southern contexts and cultures as homogeneously helpless. The cumulative effect of this discourse results in the development worker departing their Northern homeland with 'saviour-esque' ideas about their role in the development arena. The production of the Southern context as helpless by Northern discourse in turn produces the development worker as good and moral, since she is going to help the seemingly helpless.

Set in the colonial era, the pattern of discourse of the 'helpless Other' in the development arena is repeated today. What is being protected here is much more than Northern discourse itself, but moreover the constitutive opportunities offered to the white female middle class development worker to make herself through her engagement in development. As the British women used the plight of the Indian women to produce themselves as capable and charitable in the colonial context, so too does the white middle class female development worker use the development arena as a site from which to produce herself in terms that are "particularly expressive" of her narrative of self as independent, self-reliant, strong and brave. As she

constructs these narratives of self that are traditionally characterized as male, she maintains her “socially mandated” (Heron, 2007) femininity by preserving the charitable discourse of development work.

### **Denial of racial privilege among development workers**

Although Northern discourse effectively produced the image of the ‘helpless Other’ in the minds of the development worker prior to departure, there is a complexity here in that once the participants are in the development arena the narrative of the ‘helpless Other’ is minimized. Rather than awakening to their position of dominance, the former narrative is replaced by power-evasion strategies (Frankenberg, 2001) aimed at constructing the development arena that make the development worker feel better, or distance themselves from any link to racial oppression. For example, after Kelly explains that she imagined encountering what she saw in World Vision commercials upon arrival in the development arena, she says, “it was not what I encountered at all.” She goes on to describe the affluence of some of her co-workers:

Honestly they were living fine....my boss had, she was very rich actually....she was living a very posh life actually (laughs) umm, and then my, the secretary who I worked the most closely with, she also had a very nice life. She was getting married while I was there so I attended her wedding and spent a lot of time at her house around that time and, yeah, she, she, yeah, they had carpet in their home (laughs), I mean it was kind of overwhelming for me to see that in Africa but, yeah, everyone was living quite nicely.

This narrative may produce the effect of diminishing the ‘helpless’ nature of development discourse, yet upon closer examination it reveals another subtext of discourse, one of a subtle

form of denial of white privilege. The undertone of this narrative is that the power imbalance lies only in class order rather than along racial lines as well. One could read Kelly's narrative as producing herself as someone who is 'just like' the affluent local people. This effectively allows Kelly to deny her position of racial privilege and instead focus on class order as a framework for understanding her experience of a power hierarchy.

Ruth also gives an account of the living conditions in terms that negate the 'poor and helpless Others' nature of Northern discourse:

It's just, you know, the way people live, it's not positive, it's not negative. It's just life and people when you live in those certain conditions aren't worse off than people who don't necessarily have those conditions....I never understood them to be of poverty, I never understood them to be deprived I felt like this was just the conditions and I understood them as such.

Ruth's statement that, "I never understood them to be of poverty" can be read as a direct attempt to challenge the Northern discourse. Her attempt to disrupt the dominant discourse is important and valuable, yet what it fails to do is re-articulate her position of white dominance. In other words, by presenting the Other as living in neutral conditions, she avoids any need to confront her own position of dominance, since by this narrative there is no noteworthy contrast between the local people and herself.

Both Ruth and Kelly here are making an attempt at producing the development arena as one of people working as equals alongside each other in an attempt to resist enacting dominance. However, rather than effectively constructing self as subverting dominance, these narratives

produce an undercurrent of “power-evasion” (Frankenberg, 2001). Power-evasion refers to a process of selecting what differences to notice and which ones to ignore. This means that the speaker chooses to notice differences that make the speaker “feel good” and avoids any conscious analysis of the differences that make a speaker “feel bad” (Frankenberg, 2001). By selecting terms to describe local living conditions that diminish the notion of a power hierarchy in racial relations the participants are practicing power-evasion since this narrative avoids making the speaker “feel bad” about being in a position of dominance. The notion that the development worker is not in a position of power undermines the necessary re-articulation of whiteness in forming more equitable power relations.

The power the development worker holds is experienced by way of privileges. The narratives present a variety of responses and frameworks for understanding the experience of privilege in the development context. For the most part, where the participants understand their experience of privilege to be unearned, it is linked to a sense of discomfort at that experience. Where the experience is not framed within an unearned context to the privilege, it is presented as a function of local hospitality. And a third theme within the discussion of privilege is a sense of frustration or irritation when the participants perceive that they are being used, due to their position of privilege, by local people.

In the accounts where privilege is considered an unearned experience there was a sense from tone of voice and general hesitation of discomfort with the privilege they experienced in so far as it was linked to their racial or foreign identity. Ruth articulates the complexity of emotions she feels at the experience of unearned privilege in the following account:

A lot of it's very flattering, umm, sometimes I struggle with, I have to remember not to be arrogant sometimes, you know? When people for months are telling you that you're rich, you're elegant, you're pretty, they want to marry you, they love you, you have to remember that that's not actually facts and that you don't need to live up to that expectation and infatuation more to show that that might not be the case. I feel like I'm given a lot of credit where it's not deserved and that's hard to deal with because you want them to realize that you're not that way and you want them to realize that they are also better than you are in many ways that you're learning from them, they're not always taking from you. Umm, sometimes I feel like, I feel annoyed, ah, and sometimes I feel very you know, I'm shocked, so it's, it's definitely a range of emotions.

Ruth expresses how it is “hard to deal with” and that at times it is frustrating for her to experience this level of privilege. The meaning of this narrative suggests that her discomfort and lack of analysis as to this discomfort is an expression of performing whiteness. By this it is meant that the discomfort arises from subconscious understanding that her experience of privilege compromises the self-sacrificing narrative of self that is constructed in the development arena. Furthermore, that on some level she senses that her experience of privilege is an affirmation of her racial dominance and that the suggestion that she may be associated with oppression is not “particularly expressive” (St. Denis, Ch. 2) of her narrative of self. This awareness threatens the narrative of self as moral and good; therefore there is a discomfort in the lingering and underlying thought that one may have to reconcile one's participation in dominance.

Ana gives a similar account of privilege, although whether she feels this privilege is unearned remains more ambiguous, yet her discomfort is clear:

I noticed on many occasions that the consultants or those other organizations will often be often, often tempted to talk to me for answers to their questions rather than talk to members of the cooperative and it always, it always seems a little bit...often like I'm always trying to direct them back to the members of the cooperative because I'm not, like that's not, that's not my role and so I feel like often in interactions with other people I feel like even, I don't know if it's me as a, as a white person or just as someone that has more education but I feel like sometimes they feel like the information coming from me might be more, ah, like valuable.

In this account Ana sensed that her experience of privilege is linked to her racial identity, but it is likely a more comforting position to understand it as a function of her having "more education." Perhaps because to offer further analysis into the racial hierarchy risks compromising the narrative of self that is constitutive of having earned the position of privilege by one's own merit alone. In essence, this denial of the historical and current political power imbalance, or "clinging to innocent knowledge" (Heron, 2007), affirms the notion of meritocracy which is productive of self as having earned the position of privilege that is being experienced. This affirmation of earned privilege authorizes one's participation in development by validating dominance. The narratives suggest, therefore, that the participants are simultaneously uncomfortable with their position of privileged on a conscious level and on a subconscious level affirmed by it. The result of this threat to one's narrative of self as good and moral requires enacting innocent knowledge.

Other forms of privilege are experienced as a function of local hospitality. To be clear, the experience of hospitality is not what is problematic here. It is rather the opportunity that this experience affords the development worker to narrate their experience of privilege in terms that evade any reference to their participation in dominance. For example, Ruth explains that:

[local people] really hold [foreigners] high in respect, umm, and make a point to do a good job of welcoming them. So, from the moment that I arrived here, they have been nothing but helpful and welcoming and making sure that I had everything, as much as possible, taken care of me. Even if those people have enough for just us. So, if they, you know, never eat with rice before, they would make a point to go out and get it for me, or, and, so in terms of, do I feel like I'm in a community.

In this account, the experience of privilege, rather than equal reciprocity, is what makes Ruth feel like she's a part of the community. In this way, Ruth can affirm her white subjectivity while avoiding a conscious analysis of power.

In some instances of feeling excluded or like an outsider as a result of their privilege, the participants perceive the scenario to be unmistakably about their white racial identity, and there appears to be a tone of resentment at being so categorically identified. Participants expressed a sense of frustration or offense at what can be read as a transgression to the narrative of self as an independent individual. For example, when Alice explains that, "if you're white there's an automatic assumption that you'll give them money" she seems to struggle with the direct correlation in the minds of local people between white people and money. She also seemed to feel a certain discomfort at the directness of the requests for financial support by stating that

local people would ask her to, for example, pay their tuition when Alice did not even know their names. Mary also explains that she experiences, “unwanted attention . . . of people wanting to talk to you because you’re a novelty. Umm, unwanted attention in terms of something like asking for money, umm, because they assume you have a lot.” And Mary offers a similar sentiment of feeling like she is often being asked for things and that this elevates her status as someone who has a lot of resources to dispense. These encounters render the individual down to ‘just a white person,’ and deny the participant their narrative of self as an individual who is singularly leading social change.

The sense that the treatment, often privileged treatment, which they experience, may be linked to white racial dominance brings on a feeling of dis-trust among some participants when it comes to interactions with local people. For example, Ana explains that when foreigners arrive, the local people express happiness and gratitude that they are here yet her feelings are mixed:

I don’t know, like it’s hard to know what they think exactly and what, and if that’s the feeling that is shared by all people. . . . It’s hard to know if this is the true answer that people are giving me or if it’s just like the polite thing to say.

And Eva gives a similar account when, as cited above, she explains how it is hard to decipher if people, “genuinely” wanted to get to know her or if they are more interested in knowing a “white person.” These narratives suggest that participants are concerned that their privilege will in effect contaminate their relationships with local people. That a white woman’s position of privilege can potentially be exploited by local people at the expense of white women development workers is a powerful reminder of their position of dominance. Furthermore, this

potential for exploitation forces the female subject to be aware of their white identity, from which they are invested in trying to distance themselves. They are reminded of their white privilege that they are simultaneously in the process of denying. Part of this denial, or mystifying of the history of racial and colonial dominance, is to protect the development workers' desire to be known as an individual and not be relegated to being just another one of the many white people present in the development arena.

Alice accounts of her experience of being confronted with her white identity and how she understood her experience of being treated as a "white woman":

I know when I was there, I thought, yeah, I wanna go down to the river and wash my clothes like the rest of the ladies, like I don't want to make one of them feel like they want to wash my clothes for me but they would never hear of bringing me down to the river because that's not a white woman's job, you know? And to them, in a very practical way, you can understand why they'd rather I pay them to wash my laundry cause at least they get a bit of an income, you know, like, it's not seen as a demeaning thing for them, but it would definitely be seen as a demeaning for me to be along with them and they wouldn't, umm, they barely speak to me actually, like it's hard to get a [local] woman to speak with me even if I initiate conversation because there is almost like a reverse racism there. So that's, that's pretty tricky.

In this account it is evident that initially Alice thought that her shared female identity would allow her to bond with the local women by participating in 'women's work'; however upon arrival she learns that her white identity makes her an outsider despite her shared gender. Alice

interprets her exclusionary treatment as indication of “reverse racism.” She does not consider that perhaps the local women are invested in protecting their space from the dominant presence of a white woman and that this may be an appropriate response from the local women. Rather than respect their authority to claim their own space, Alice interprets this as an act of racism against her. Again this suggests that Alice is being made aware of her racial dominance at the same time that she is attempting to deny it. In addition, Alice understands her unwelcomed status washing clothes by the river as a form of “reverse racism,” yet a critical race analysis suggests that this may be an example of how local people perform their learned lower racial status in relationship to development workers. The forthrightness of local behaviour assaults the sensibilities of the white worker for whom discreteness is more acceptable. In other words, the way in which racial power inequities are pointed out in such a common sense and everyday way is surprising to the development worker and does not fit her paradigm, therefore she is required to deny the experience of racial privilege to protect her status at the same time that her assumption that she is to be welcomed anywhere, should have access to any place she wishes to go is being denied.

What these complex and contradictory accounts of experiencing privilege reveal is that although the development arena is constitutive of the moral self in the context of Northern discourse, the development worker is at times confronted with images of themselves that present them as less moral narratives of self; a self that is participating in dominance and oppression. Rather than internalizing these experiences to form a new narrative of self, they are converted into experiences that serve to affirm the normative white subject position.

### **Performing whiteness in the development arena**

Acknowledgment of historical events is part of a process that nurtures a re-articulation of whiteness. As stated earlier, it is this re-articulation of whiteness that holds the potential for establishing more equitable racial relations. Therefore, when the narratives demonstrate the denial of historical events, or “protection of innocent knowledge”(Heron, 2007), it is evident that the performance of whiteness continues to mark the engagement of white middle class female subjects in the development arena. Most pronounced is the denial of historical events that link the individuals’ experience of privilege to the broader historical context of global exploitation and conquest. This would require the acknowledgment that one’s privilege reaches far beyond the development arena; it exists even in the North and also in the company of only other white people. As Heron (2007) explains, to acknowledge that, “some of us are better off *because* others are and historically have been poor, and that this is structured by the intersections of race, class and gender, is almost unrecognized” (p. 41). The resistance to acknowledge the making of our privilege is a form of protecting the constitutive effect of the development arena. We resist because we are invested in protecting the moral status of development work in order to preserve the arena of our own production. As noted by Heron (2007) when historical analysis of colonization is omitted we compromise the practice of international work.

The narratives indicate, to varying degrees, an inclusion of historical events in how the participants understand the apparent inequality in distribution of global goods. The most persuasive example of protection of innocent knowledge is found in Eva’s narrative. She frames her understanding of inequality as a condition of overpopulation and unemployment in the local country:

Eva: I mean some of them I think it's just that's how it's always been for them. Like I think it's very hard for families if they've never come from any kind of money or had anyone who's been able to kind of get a higher paying job. It's hard for them to get out of that. Jobs are hard enough to come by here because there just aren't enough jobs for the amount of people that are here....it's very very difficult to get any kind of job and to get out of the routine, or not routine, but that pattern that their family has been living in.

Interviewer: How do you think that pattern even started?

Eva: I don't know, overpopulation I guess....they're stuck where they always were. Just getting by and supporting their family.

By this account, it appears that Eva understands the challenges facing the local population to be more or less of their own doing, basically 'blaming the victim'. The danger here is a mind-set of essentialism, which serves to further entrench dominant discourse of the "helpless Other."

Furthermore, the flip side would suggest that Eva's position of dominance is earned, which gives her the authority she needs to affirm her helping imperative. Yet this response is consistent with her overall framework for understanding power relations since in another part of Eva's narrative she explains how she does not feel that she experiences a power imbalance in her work.

Therefore it is unreasonable to expect that she would provide an analysis of inequality that would encompass her personal experience of power, since she does not acknowledge experiencing a power imbalance in the first place.

Although Eva's narrative is the only one to entirely dismiss historical factors, other participants nevertheless avoid making linkages between the historical factors that they identify

and their own position of privilege. For example, Kelly explains the global inequality as the result of

Developed or first world, or whatever term you want to use, countries exploiting these countries. A lot of resource stealing....the system is created in such a way that you have to have some people who are suffering and other people who are just consuming....I see it as capitalism as the big problem and that's what's causing the big difference in the way that we live.

Similarly, Mary explains that the, "opportunity wasn't there and was actively sort of squashed or prevented from being there for a long time in that other people were taking advantage of the resources here, including people, and sort of stunting the economic system so that it wasn't developing and at the same time using those resources for sort of extra gain themselves."

Although both these statements provide a broader historical analysis for understanding global inequality, Kelly and Mary nevertheless are careful to frame their account in terms that do not call into question their personal position of privilege as it relates to the historical analysis of inequality. The use of the terms *other people* and *developed or first world countries* distances their own privileged status from the events and processes they describe. It is as if to say that these economic systems and historical factors account for the economic scarcity or deficiency among others but not the privilege and affluence of themselves. Although Kelly and Mary go the farthest in terms of offering a historical analysis for global inequality, yet how they personally have benefited from these hierarchical systems is conspicuously omitted.

The omission of historical analysis among all the participants is significant. It serves to protect an undercurrent in their self-narrative that affirms a status of earned privilege as it relates to their participation in development work, as if to say in subtle terms that their position of privilege in the global economic system is isolated from hundreds of years of exploitation and conquest, yet the position of subordination of Others is not. The danger here is multi-fold. The notion that white people are exempt from being produced by historical power relations sustains the perception that our white racial lens is neutral. That we are the “unmarked norm” (Heron, 2007) to which all Others are on the periphery. This notion exempts white people from analyzing their position of privilege as it relates to patterns of global exploitation and conquest, since we can claim that we are not affected by these conditions. This allows us to deeply internalize our claim to individuality and meritocracy since we chose to see only how historical events have resulted in relative poverty there (in the South) but not how they have resulted in relative wealth here (in the North). Therefore, understanding the historical factors that have shaped global inequality must be applied to everyone, not just to the situation of non-white people in the development context, but also to the lives of the development worker. Otherwise, there is potential that we will exempt ourselves from understanding how we in the North are being produced by and immersed in history in the same capacity as non-whites. The difference being that we benefit from these events rather than suffer the consequences. It also serves to perpetuate a perception of the Other who are, by our “neutral white” lens, all marked by the same historical events by which we claim to be unaffected. As if to say that we are so exceptionally individual and superior that we are immune to the global happenings that have constructed the context and identity of all those we intend to help. Furthermore, the distancing of one’s position

of privilege from the political, economic and social systems of exploitation, “obscures any suggestion that the white person is an oppressor” (Heron, 2007, p. 70). De-historicizing oneself from the broader hierarchical systems is a move to deny that as a white person your racial identity is intimately linked with a system of oppression. The critical question raised here is how development workers might be better prepared in critical race analysis prior to departure. Since understanding how we are implicated in the perpetuation of racial dominance is a first step towards dismantling these processes, it is imperative that development workers be not only cognizant of their participation in dominance, but also prepared to actively work towards disrupting this pattern in development work itself.

### **Evidence of resistance**

It is a challenge to decipher the narratives in a way that suggests authentic resistance and it is here that I am most acutely aware of my subject position and how it may obscure my capacity for clear analysis. With this in mind, I move forward with presenting the topic of resistance both by its presence and absence from the narratives.

Resistance is not a clear process and neither does it provide a clearly marked destination. Awareness of and acts of resistance resemble something more like a spectrum and even still the ends of the spectrum and the points in between are not easily discernible. However, for the purpose of this research, ‘resistance’ refers to those narratives that reflect a willingness to compromise the moral self since it is in our willingness to forfeit the protection of innocent knowledge that pathways for equitable relations will emerge. I explore the narratives for evidence of a willingness by the women development workers to compromise their moral

narrative of self by acknowledging how they may be complicit with enacting dominance. Within the six narratives, there are two narratives that are on either side of the spectrum and four narratives that fall more ambiguously in between. For the purpose of this analysis, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at the two outer most narratives to better understand the contrast.

On one end of the spectrum, Kelly's narrative reads as most suggestive of resistance. She is willing, to a degree, to compromise her moral self in her acknowledgement and distress with the enactment of racial dominance that is present in development work.. Some of her narrative reads as follows: "I'm a little bit more unsure....about these things;" "I could hear my own experience overseas of going to "help" people and the negative tone that ;" "[it] makes me more and more uncomfortable all the time;" and "sometimes I actually wonder if I am doing more harm than good." In her state of distress she goes to greater lengths than any other participant to justify her participation in development in light of this compromised narrative of self:

I don't know if there's a way to deal with this....it's a constant challenge. Sometimes I feel like it's best to talk about the power imbalance outright with them. They, you know, "this is wrong, I'm giving and you're receiving," so trying to talk about that power imbalance and not pretend it doesn't exist. That's one of the strategies that, I mean, it might just be something that makes me feel better. I don't know if it's umm, bringing down the power imbalance but at least bringing it out and putting that power imbalance on the table makes me feel a little bit better (laughs). I don't know if it makes real change. Umm, another thing is just to, for example with the projects, like they get to choose their project, whatever project they want to do, whatever their community needs and they do still have to jump through the donors hoops, but at least they're, it's not us

telling them what to do. So, often times when I'm thinking about how I try to decrease the power imbalance I hear myself saying the words 'at least, at least' and that's not really good. But, better than nothing is I think sort of how I justify it in my head and wake up and go on every day...there are things that I see I that I can do differently or in a more innovative way but I definitely, I mean, year it's, it definitely creates a bigger power imbalance to have foreign people coming to "help."

Her justification can be read as making strong claims to exceptionality, but it can also be read as Kelly as a courageous and candid reflection of her participation in dominance. Her narrative is the most compelling justification for participation in development and I sensed that it is a symbol of her struggle with her participation in development work.

On the other end of the spectrum, Eva's narrative expresses no doubt or questioning whether she is doing "more harm than good." According to Eva, "the only thing that we can do is try and help that I guess, I mean, I don't know;" and "[local country] is going through some rough stuff but I just think that us being aware of it and trying to help out wherever we can is, umm, like great and I just think we need to not be very selfish." Although her intention is honourable, her narrative suggests a position of clinging to innocent knowledge and the affirmation of her moral self. She offers no justification for her presence in the development arena, since her narrative suggests there is nothing that needs justification. For example, in response to a question about her having experienced any power imbalance in the context of her work, where she works with both nationals and foreigners, she explains that she feels like, "we're all on the same level." Eva's response indicates that she feels there is no need to justify

her presence or make an attempt at resistance of dominance since she does not experience a power imbalance in the first place.

What can account for the contrasting narratives between Eva and Kelly and for the other four narratives that fall more ambiguously somewhere in between? What experiences may have shifted their thinking or not to a point of critical reflection? These are the significant questions that make for the starting place for more research and data collection. Perhaps the most relevant outcome of this research is the arrival at this question: what are the factors that are responsible for the shift or change in how an individual understands their white identity and how this translates into equitable practices in the development arena? According to Heron (2007), “the most helpful approach is the re-articulation of whiteness by means of individual transformation” (p. 10). Therefore understanding what, for example, accounts for Kelly’s relative resistance in contrast with Eva, would be one approach for understanding how the “re-articulation of whiteness” may be repeated among individual development workers prior to participation in the development arena. Although Kelly’s narrative represents the most articulated discomfort with dominance and privilege, she too engages in power-evading tactics and protection of innocent knowledge. However her feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt are positive signs that the white subjectivity is being challenged. Is this the result of her formal and informal education? Or are there other factors that arouse the self-doubt that is necessary in a move towards power subversion?

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This research has demonstrated that the development arena offers an occasion to affirm the white middle class female subject and the position of racial superiority which marks this subjectivity. The development arena offers an occasion for white middle class female subjects to construct an identity that both diverges and converges from the traditional ideals of what it is to be a woman; an identity that is congruent with one who is free, brave, independent, and a change agent while being a “good woman.” In order to produce herself in these terms, the development arena is protected as site of “helpless Others” who are awaiting her intervention. The position of racial dominance, whether acknowledged or not, that is experienced by the white middle class female development workers enables the production of selves as independent and self-reliant. Authorized by the denial of her racial privilege, the white female development workers in this study recognize the development arena as a “particularly expressive” site from which to produce themselves as trail blazers in social justice. The analysis suggests that racial privilege affords the white subject the occasion to “get away with it” (Mary); “to be more innovative” (Kelly); “to push the thinking” (Ana); or be “contributing a unique perspective on things” (Ruth). Racial privilege and dominance put the development worker in a position of authority which serves to affirm their subjectivity. Their perceived position of authority is further supported by the notion that she is immune from being constructed by the global forces that have shaped the context and identity of the ‘helpless’ Other and that have brought her abroad to help. Although the development workers at times acknowledge a link between the ‘deprived state’ of the Other and a history of global exploitation and conquest, she consistently denies that these same factors have produced her privilege. In addition, in her realization of her position of authority, she is able to

maintain her traditionally feminine identity through the constructed charitable nature of the development arena.

As development workers prepare themselves for working overseas, it is evident that critical race analysis must be a significant part of the training. Given that everyone learns some form of racial classification, often without any conscious thought (Omi and Winant, 1998), and that this classification system “regulates interpretations of who we trust, who we identify with and who we intrinsically see as intelligent, athletic, weak, lazy, etc.” (Dei, Karumanchery, Karumanchery-Luik, 2004) it is essential that white development workers invest in a process of critical race analysis as it relates to their own privilege. It is this process, rather than good intentions, that will qualify development workers to work towards a more meaningful reflection of justice and equality. Despite the prevalence, de-historicising racial privilege is not now, nor historically ever has been, an acceptable approach to managing white racial dominance. This strategy only serves to perpetuate white dominance and therefore injustice and subordination of non-whites.

It is imperative that the safeguarding of the moral self be compromised in order to move forward in establishing more equitable relations across race in the development arena since the danger in development work resides in the conviction that the development worker can do no harm; her only desire is to help and learn from Others. These seemingly benign desires are steeped in the history of her subject formation and as such, her comfort in dominance. The comfort with dominance resides so naturally in her subject position that it is often undetected. In this state of willed innocence, the development worker carries out her desires to intervene in the lives of Others, with her moral status uncompromised and unchallenged.

Although the narratives at times suggest a mild state of compromised self, it is accompanied by justification and “claims of exceptionality” (Heron, 2007). These narratives of exceptionality are a source for concern since, “if we do not understand how we are implicated in the perpetuation of global domination, we are bound to help reproduce it” (Heron, 2007, p. 22). An outcome from the conclusion of this research therefore is another question. Aimed at an effort to end the repetition of dominance, the next step to this line of research is to seek answers as to what factors and/or experiences produce an understanding of how we are “implicated in the perpetuation of global domination”? Further research is recommended in order to develop an understanding of the factors that dismantle the comfortable repetition of enacting whiteness, since it is through this understanding that one may begin to engage in the more important process of transforming these constitutive systems in order to avail space in our contemporary discourse for more equitable relations of power.

Finally, it is important to recognize and honor the engagement of the participants in this research. It takes courage to present ones thoughts and ideas on a rather taboo subject for the purpose of furthering our understanding how white female subjectivity is performed in the international development arena. The six women who participated in this study come from a place of sincerely wanting to make a meaningful contribution to bettering the lives of people in the world. In the words of Heron (2007):

In very important ways these are noble aspirations shaped by our effort to live moral lives. Here are white bourgeois subjects seeking to situate themselves in the global context by claiming a common humanity, and wanting to redress injustice on a global

scale. In this respect participants' decision to become development workers can and should be read as conscious resistance to social injustice. (p. 41)

Where these "noble aspirations" breakdown is when we engage in the arena of development work equipped with an abundance of good intentions and a scarcity of critical racial analysis concerning our position of unearned privilege. Optimism resides in the genuine desire of the development workers to make a positive difference in the world, and the potential to re-articulate what that engagement looks like so that it authentically promotes equality and justice.

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## **APPENDIX A: Recruitment Materials**

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Sarah Loewen and I am a master's candidate at the University of Saskatchewan in the Educational Foundations department. I am currently seeking participants for my research study and I hope that you will be able to assist me.

I am seeking female participants who are currently working or volunteering in international development and who have been there for at least six months and not more than two consecutive years and who are between the ages of twenty to fifty years old. They must also be Canadian citizens. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview for the duration of approximately one hour. There is no financial compensation available for their participation.

If you know of any candidates who may be interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at (306) 683-9847 or at [sarahloewen@hotmail.com](mailto:sarahloewen@hotmail.com) and more details will be provided.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sarah Loewen

*The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has approved this research study on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. They can be contacted through the Ethics Office at (306) 966-2084.*

### **APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled **White Identity and the Education of Development Workers**. Please read the following information carefully and ask any questions you might have.

**Researcher:** Verna St. Denis, Professor in Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0X1 Ph: (306) 966-2734.

**Student Researcher:** Sarah Loewen, Master's candidate, Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. Ph: (306) 683-9847

**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of this study is to gain deeper understanding of how white female international development workers conceptualize their racial identity and the inherent power imbalance among racial groups in the context of working in foreign countries. Participants in this study will be asked to participate in an interview (over the phone or in person if available) for the duration of approximately one hour on the topic of their experience as a white western woman in the context of working in international development. The interview will follow a semi-structured format and will be guided by the natural flow of conversation and towards topics of relevance within the context of each interview. Participants will also be given a copy of the final report and the student researcher will be available for debriefing the results as participants feel it is necessary. It must be noted that all participation in this study is voluntary.

Data collected will be reported by using summaries and direct quotes. The identity of participants will be protected when direct quotes are used.

**Potential Benefits:** Potential benefits in participation in this study include a contribution to the growing body of knowledge on the subject of power, race and white identity. Individual participants may also experience benefits of personal reflection and reaching new insights as a result of taking time to reflect on their personal experiences.

**Potential Risks:** Participants may find some questions to be of a sensitive nature and may feel uncomfortable answering these questions. Participants have the right to refuse to answer any questions they feel they do not want to answer for any reason. A further potential risk for participants is that they may experience emotional distress as a result of their participation in this study, such as guilt or shame. Participants wishing to debrief and discuss these emotions with the researcher in order to process their feelings are encouraged to do so. In the event that participants wish to seek professional counselling services, the researcher will seek to find an appropriate professional in the participants home community for referral.

**Storage of Data:** Data will be stored in a locked and secure location for the duration of the study. Following the study, the data will be stored at the University of Saskatchewan for five years after which time it will be destroyed. A coded sheet that indicates the identity of participants will be locked and stored in a separate location from the rest of the data and will be destroyed immediately following the conclusion of the research.

**Confidentiality:** All names and reference to specific locations will be removed or changed in the report in order to preserve anonymity. If the data is used in presentations or journal articles, names will be changed or removed. Participant responses may be quoted directly in the research thesis and therefore participants may be identifiable based on these quotes.

**Right to Withdraw:** Participants will be given the opportunity during and after the interview to withdraw their participation and all data collected from their interview will be destroyed. If a participant should choose to withdraw they have total freedom to do so and it will not upset the researcher. Participants will also be informed of any new developments in the research that may affect their willingness to participate. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until data has been pooled. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Use of Data:** The data collected as a result of the interviews will be used as a basis for Sarah Loewen's master's thesis. This information may also be used in presentations or publications if such opportunities should arise.

**Transcript Release Protocol:** Prior to using any verbatim quotes from participants, you will be given the opportunity to read and either give or deny your consent to their use. If you do not provide consent to the use of the selected quotes then they will be deleted from the thesis and all

future presentations and publications. All names and references to specific locations will be changed or deleted from selected quotes.

**Questions:** If I have any questions concerning this study, I understand that I am free to ask them at any point. I am free to contact the researcher at the number provided above.

**Ethics Approval:** This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. Any questions regarding my rights as a participant may be directed to that committee by contact the Ethics Office at (306) 966-2084. Collect calls are accepted.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above and I have been provided with the opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered satisfactorily. By signing below, I consent to participate in this study and I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time prior to when the data is pooled. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

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Name of Participant

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Date

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Signature of Participant

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Signature of Researcher

### APPENDIX C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell me about when you first realized you wanted to work overseas and what motivated you in this direction?
2. Describe how you prepared for your first experience going overseas. Did the organization you work with provide an orientation and/or preparation materials?
3. In what ways did you find these preparations to be useful (trainings, readings, courses, etc.)
4. What did you expect your surroundings to be like there before you left? Did you have any expectations? If so, what were they?
5. How did you feel about your surroundings when you first arrived there?

## WHITE IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT WORKERS

6. Describe some of the conditions that the people you worked with/recipients of the projects experience.
7. How do you understand these conditions to have come to be this way? What are the factors that created the apparent situation of global inequality?
8. In what ways do you feel like a part of the community in which you are working?
9. In what ways did you remain an outsider?
10. Tell me about the experience of being a woman in the context of your life and work abroad?
11. Was there ever a power imbalance in the context of your work and life abroad? If so,
  - a. Describe this imbalance.
  - b. How do you reconcile this imbalance?
12. What do you feel was the most important contributions you made to the recipients of the work you do?
13. Do you have any regrets about your time working overseas? If so, what might those be?
14. What is the best part of the experience of working overseas?
15. Will you seek further opportunities to work in international development, explain.

**APPENDIX D: Transcript Release Form**

**Title of Study: White Identity and the Education of Development Workers**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Sarah Loewen. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Sarah Loewen to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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Signature of Participant

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Signature of researcher