



The Effectiveness of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Perceptions of Xhosa, Afrikaner, and English South Africans

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION Perceptions of Xhosa, Afrikaner, and English South Africans

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This article empirically assesses the effectiveness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa as perceived by three ethnic groups in South Africa, namely, Xhosa, Afrikaners, and English. It examines whether the participants of each ethnic group viewed the TRC to be effective in bringing out the truth and bringing about reconciliation. The article also examines whether the TRC was viewed as having had a positive effect on South Africa's society, economy, politics, and image in the world. In addition, the perceived overall success of the TRC is assessed. The Afrikaner participants perceived the TRC to be less effective than the English participants and much less effective than the Xhosa participants. Finally, the article discusses potential future benefits that may be gained from the experiences of South Africa's TRC to manage ethnic and racial conflicts in other parts of the world.

Keywords: *South Africa; Truth and Reconciliation Commission; apartheid; nonviolence*

Although South Africa has a history of racial injustice and vast human rights violations, it also has a legacy of finding revolutionary ways of addressing interethnic and interracial conflicts. In

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1906, Mahatma Gandhi started his experiment of Satyagraha in South Africa to nonviolently protest against ethnic and racial discrimination. Satyagraha is the force that is born of truth and love (Gandhi, 1997). After apartheid ended, Archbishop Desmond Tutu led an experiment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) from 1996 to 1998 to nonviolently address the atrocities of apartheid in South Africa. It is one of the most remarkable efforts of peace making in recent human history.

In 1990, after the African National Congress was no longer banned, Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years of prison, and exiled African National Congress members were granted indemnity. The White South African perpetrators and Black South African victims faced one another to negotiate an Interim Constitution and a common future for their country to transition from apartheid to democracy. Scared of revenge, the White apartheid leaders made the first democratic elections only possible if amnesty was granted. Thus, the final clause of the Constitution reads as follows:

The Adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions of strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu (the African philosophy of humanism) but not for victimization. In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past. (Krog, 1998, p. vi)

It was this final clause of the Constitution that made the elections possible and laid the groundwork for the TRC. Thus, the TRC was born of political compromise, like most truth commissions.

The TRC of South Africa is not an entirely new concept facing up to historical truth. It learned a lot from prior truth commissions in many countries that were forced to examine their traumatic past while striving for transition to democracy. Between 1974 and 1994,

for instance, at least 15 truth commissions were established in various countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, El Salvador, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Chad, Zimbabwe, Germany, the Philippines, and others (Haynor, 1994, 1996). In addition to facing the immense task of replacing a dictatorship or an authoritarian rule with a democratic government, these nations were extremely vulnerable, and many of them were just coming to grips with the practice of governance (Kritz, 1995). Between 1979 and 1993, 11 Latin American countries faced a transition from authoritarian to democratic forms of government. In all of these countries, the former regimes performed gross, systematic human rights violations, which resulted in the deaths, torture, and disappearance of hundreds of thousands of their country's citizens. These countries were also attempting to undergo immense economic and social transformations. In many cases of transitional government, various elements of the old regime have remained in power during and after the process of political change (Christie, 2000, p. 41).

It is difficult to synthesize the truth commissions of these countries. Too many different and complex factors and circumstances are involved and are beyond the scope of this article. However, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is one that will likely have more far-reaching implications than most of the others" (Christie, 2000, p. 185). South Africa's situation is unique. South Africa is perhaps one of the most multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic countries in the world. The majority of the population is Black and is composed of several ethnic groups, namely, Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi, Tswana, Sotho, and others. The White minority is primarily composed of two distinct groups: the Afrikaners who speak Afrikaans and are descended from the original Dutch settlers who first came in 1652 to South Africa and the English who came originally from Great Britain and whose main settlements were from 1820 on. There are also Colored (mixed race) people and Asians with primarily East Indian heritage. Historically, there has been rivalry between the Xhosa and the Zulu, encouraged by the White regime to show the world that Blacks were not ready to rule South Africa. The White Afrikaners and English fought each other

to gain control of the nation. Even though there was a war and deep-seated historical bitterness between the Afrikaners and the English, both are White, and the White minority shared a colonial and apartheid domination and super-exploitation of non-Whites in a predominantly Black South Africa.

It was the Afrikaners who engineered and legally instituted apartheid (racial separation) when the Afrikaner Nationalist party came into power in 1948. Black South Africans were prevented from living in the cities. They were not allowed to vote. Various jobs were reserved for Whites only, and a form of education designated as *Bantu education* was implemented to produce a subservient and obedient Black labor force. The TRC Report stated,

Apartheid was a grim daily reality for every black South African. For at least 3.5 million black South Africans it meant collective expulsion, forced migration, bulldozing, gutting or seizure of homes, the mandatory carrying of passes, forced removals into rural ghettos and increased poverty and desperation. (TRC, 1998, Vol. 1, pp. 45-46; Vol. 2, pp. 34-35)

Hundreds of apartheid laws were put on the statute books to control and disadvantage Black South Africans from the cradle to the grave. "Every structure of South Africa, the army, police services and the whole of the civil service were committed to the maintenance and defense of an evil system by abhorrent means" (Boraine, Levy, & Scheffer, 1994, p. vii).

All truth commissions might be considered compromises and deals worked out within the framework of political negotiations surrounding the transitions. South Africa was faced not only with a transition but also with an immense transformation from an oppressive minority-ruled racist regime to a democratic government. What were the options to carve a new and free postapartheid South Africa? Should it conduct war trials treating the defeated like criminals, as in the case of Germany's Nuremberg Trials? Should it do nothing, like Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe? Should it, like Chile, provide blanket amnesty?

THE TRC OF SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's TRC was the first independent body established in South Africa's postapartheid era (Asmal, 1997) and is, indeed, one of the most remarkable efforts of peace making in our time. With the relatively new, democratically elected Black majority government in 1994, South Africa moved toward alleviating racial injustices and coming to terms with its recent tragic racist history of the apartheid era. Besides establishing a constitution that incorporated affirmative action, the new government passed an act that created the TRC to deal with racial injustice and gross human rights violations of the past. The Commission ran parallel to the justice system and made recommendations to the courts toward reconciliation. The Commission tried painstakingly to chisel a way, beyond the disturbingly deep wounds and almost unbearable pain, for all ethnic voices in South Africa to be heard with dignity (TRC, 1998). Thus, the TRC was controversial and met with resentment. It was established as an independent body that would operate free from political interference. However, born in political compromise, it remained, by the very nature of its mandate, a political body like many other truth commissions (Shea, 2000, p. 7).

In 1996, Archbishop Tutu accepted the challenge of leading the TRC to nonviolently address racial injustice in South Africa. The TRC went through immense efforts in trying to bring about nation building and healing of the South African society through reconciliation. Unlike the argument that nation building demands that history be forgotten for the past to be remade in the image of the present (Renan, 1990), the TRC firmly believed that the brutal truth of South Africa's traumatic past had to be revealed and acknowledged, no matter how immensely painful the process, before not only a transition but a whole-scale transformation to democracy could be made (Tutu, 1999).

The TRC recounted the violations of human rights in South Africa between 1960 and 1994 through the testimony of victims and perpetrators alike. The hearings were held in town halls, civic centers, and churches across the country. "Opened with prayers and

accompanied by hymn singing, the human rights violations hearings represented the commission's and the country's attempt to restore honor and dignity to victims and survivors, by giving them a platform from which to tell their highly emotive stories" (Shea, 2000, p. 4).

To forge a future, perpetrators and victims had to honestly and squarely confront their past (TRC, 1998). Thus, the TRC was established to provide rehabilitation, reparation, and amnesty to perpetrators of politically motivated crimes during the former atmosphere of political upheaval and apartheid. The TRC encouraged victims, offenders, and the community to be directly involved in resolving conflict. In its quest to make peace with the past, the TRC looked at the restorative dimension of both traditions in South Africa: the Judeo-Christian tradition and African traditional values of *ubuntu* (the African concept of humanism), which is rich in consideration for compassion and community (Mangaliso, 2001). Neither concept is monolithic in its approach; both contain strong sources of communal healing and restoration. It is in this spirit that the TRC asked perpetrators and victims to face one another and their painful past.

A five-volume *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* was handed over to President Mandela at a nationally televised ceremony on October 29, 1998:

While seeking to establish responsibility for many of the devastating wrongs suffered, the TRC sought the whole truth and, in so doing, to reconcile victims and perpetrators, and to help establish a just society. It was the firm belief of the TRC that unless a society exposed itself to the truth, it could harbor no possibility of reconciliation, reunification, and trust. (TRC, 1998, p. 2)

The TRC "had helped to create the space for words and not weapons. The space for the tender roots of a new democracy to take hold" (Hunter-Gault, 2000, p. x).

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The authors of this article were fortunate to observe the TRC hearings from August to October 1998 and to witness the process. Through headphones, simultaneous multilingual translations were made available to the audience. The hearing room was indeed pregnant with deep emotion, bitter tears, and the sound of crying. The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the TRC in South Africa as perceived by three South African ethnic groups, namely, the Xhosa, Afrikaners, and English. In this research, the TRC's perceived effectiveness was empirically assessed in a multi-dimensional way. The first area of assessment was whether South Africans perceived the TRC to be effective in terms of its stated purposes of bringing out the truth and bringing about reconciliation. The second area of assessment was at a macro level in terms of whether South Africans perceived the TRC to have had a positive effect on their country's society, economy, politics, and image in the world. Finally, it assessed how the perceived overall success of the TRC was related to its various effects on South Africa. To the extent that the TRC was perceived to be effective, it behooves us to learn from its successes and to incorporate them into developing a new framework for managing interracial and interethnic conflicts.

METHOD

A questionnaire was developed to learn about the perceptions of South Africans in relation to the effectiveness of the TRC (see the appendix). Three faculty members at a university in South Africa reviewed the questionnaire for face validity. This study was limited to three South African ethnic groups, namely, Xhosa, Afrikaner, and English. The Afrikaner and the English groups were not merely put together as White South Africans versus Black South Africans (Xhosa), because the Afrikaners and the English do have deep-rooted historical rivalry and strife, and because it was the Afrikaners who were the architects of the apartheid regime. Because all the participants in this study knew English, the questionnaire was

in English. It was tested for its understandability, involving six students at the university, to improve the validity of our questions.

The data were collected from 158 participants at a major South African university. Forty-two participants self-identified as Afrikaners (White South Africans of Dutch ethnic heritage). Seventy identified themselves as English South Africans (White South Africans of British ethnic heritage). Forty-six participants identified themselves as Xhosa (Black South Africans of Xhosa ethnic heritage). Males and females in the sample consisted of 48% and 52%, respectively. The data were analyzed for patterns of perceptions using descriptive statistics. Regression analysis was used to explain the participants' perceptions of the overall success of the TRC.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in two parts. The first part presents comparative patterns of the three South African ethnic groups' perceptions of the effects of the TRC. The second part presents the findings on the overall perceived success of the TRC in relation to those effects.

COMPARATIVE PATTERNS OF PERCEPTIONS

Descriptive analyses of the data revealed that the perceptions of the three ethnic groups varied greatly in relation to how each viewed the effectiveness of the TRC (see Table 1). Any additional qualitative comments made by the participants to explain their views were codified and categorized as they related to various questions under study. The subsections below present the findings based on quantitative as well as qualitative analyses.

a. Is the TRC Effective in Bringing Out the Truth?

All participants perceived the TRC to be effective in bringing out the truth, however, in varying degrees. The Afrikaners perceived the TRC to be less effective in bringing out the truth than the

TABLE 1
Comparative Statistics of Perceptions Regarding
the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

	<i>Afrikaners</i> (n = 42)		<i>English</i> (n = 70)		<i>Xhosa</i> (n = 46)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Bringing out the truth	3.95*	1.67	3.23	1.42	2.63**	2.02
Bringing about reconciliation	4.52	1.60	4.40**	1.55	3.41**	1.80
Legitimate to conduct hearings	3.86*	1.70	3.19*	1.44	2.53**	1.56
Effect on South Africa's society	4.40	1.82	4.37**	1.59	3.22**	1.75
Effect on South Africa's economy	4.59	1.70	4.69**	1.49	3.89	1.71
Effect on South Africa's politics	4.63	1.80	4.11*	1.62	3.28**	1.80
Effect on South Africa's image	4.17	1.79	3.64	1.53	3.04**	1.74
Should continue beyond deadline	4.73	2.04	4.24*	2.05	3.26**	1.97
Successful	4.54	1.55	4.16*	1.51	3.50**	1.72

NOTE: The mean difference comparison test shown under the Afrikaans column is between Afrikaans and English, under the English column it is between English and Xhosa, and under the Xhosa column it is between Xhosa and Afrikaans.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

English participants ($p < .05$) and much less effective than did the Xhosa ($p < .01$) as shown in Table 1. The quantitative data revealed no significant difference between the perceptions of the English and the Xhosa on the TRC's effectiveness in bringing out the truth.

Thirty-seven participants made qualitative comments explaining their views about the effectiveness of the TRC in terms of bringing out the truth. A content analysis of those comments revealed that all three ethnic groups perceived the TRC to be relatively effective in bringing out the truth, albeit in varying degrees. Five out of 6 English (86%) commented that the TRC was effective in bringing out the truth; so did 9 out of 15 (60%) Afrikaner and 13 out of 16 (81%) Xhosa. Thus, a large majority of the participants in each group who commented on this subject supported the findings of the quantitative data analysis that the TRC was indeed perceived to be effective in bringing out the truth. However, 10 participants felt that half-truths and lies were used by the accused to stay out of jail. Their views are reflected in the following quotes:

I would also tell any version of the truth to get out of jail. (Afrikaner)

The TRC accepts what people say, no matter what. The truth is often hidden and never comes out. (English)

Not all the people are honest, they just want to be forgiven. (Xhosa)

b. *Is the TRC Effective in Bringing About Reconciliation?*

The TRC was not perceived by each of the three groups to be as effective in bringing about reconciliation in contrast to how it was perceived in bringing about the truth. However, the quantitative analysis indicated that, compared to the Xhosa, the Afrikaner and the English participants perceived the TRC to be significantly ($p < .01$) less effective in bringing about reconciliation (Table 1). There were no significant differences between the Afrikaner and the English groups' perceptions in this regard.

Twenty-seven participants made qualitative comments explaining their perceptions of the TRC in bringing about reconciliation. All 7 Afrikaners who offered comments (100%) indicated that the TRC was not effective in bringing about reconciliation. However, 9 out of 12 English (75%) and only 3 out of 8 Xhosa (37%) indicated that the TRC was not effective in bringing about reconciliation. These percentages supported our findings in the quantitative data analysis that the Afrikaners and the English perceived the TRC to be significantly less effective in bringing about reconciliation than did the Xhosa.

Most of the 27 qualitative comments on reconciliation were just statements by the participants that the TRC was or was not effective in bringing about reconciliation. They did not explain their perceptions. However, the following explanatory comments represent the contrasting views:

There have been some remarkable acts of forgiveness by relatives and families of victims. (English)

Entire reconciliation is not possible due to the atrocities committed. (English)

Not everyone should be reconciled. (Xhosa)

[The TRC] seems to be prolonging the reconciliation process rather than actually contributing to it. (Afrikaner)

It [reconciliation] is not possible. There is too much violence. (Afrikaner)

c. *Is the TRC a Legitimate Body to Conduct the Hearings?*

The analysis of the quantitative data indicated that the Xhosa participants perceived the TRC to be the legitimate body to conduct hearings at a significantly higher level than the Afrikaners ($p < .01$) and the English ($p < .05$). The English group perceived the TRC to have significantly more legitimacy than did the Afrikaner group ($p < .05$). Only 2 participants offered qualitative explanatory comments on the legitimacy of the TRC, and both of them were negative. One Xhosa participant indicated that the TRC was “not representative of all,” and an English participant commented that he “would like to have seen some representation of more conservative persons.”

d. *Does the TRC Have a Positive Effect on South Africa's Society?*

Compared to the Afrikaner and the English, the Xhosa participants perceived the TRC to have significantly more of a positive effect on South Africa's society ($p < .01$). There was no significant difference between the Afrikaner and the English groups in their perceptions of the TRC's limited effect on South Africa's society. There were very few explanatory, qualitative comments except that a Xhosa participant stated that “the TRC helps the society to heal their agony, pain, and the feeling of loneliness,” whereas an English participant commented, “If we are to create a stable society, how can we sanction violence for whatever reason violence is perpetrated?”

e. *Does the TRC Have a Positive Effect on South Africa's Economy?*

Relatively low mean scores on the positive effect of the TRC on South Africa's economy (Table 1) indicated that the participants from all three ethnic groups perceived the TRC to have little posi-

tive effect on this area. However, both White groups, the Afrikaner and the English, perceived the TRC to have had significantly less ($p < .01$) of a positive effect on South Africa's economy than did the Xhosa. The participants made virtually no qualitative comments on the TRC's effect on the economy. However, further analysis of the qualitative data revealed that many participants expressed concerns about the "waste of money" in holding the TRC hearings. In fact, 17 participants (6 Afrikaners, 9 English, and 2 Xhosa) viewed the TRC to be "a waste of money" thereby supporting the findings of the quantitative data. Specific representative qualitative comments were as follows:

It has economic implications in the sense that it costs a lot to keep it going. (Afrikaner)

Money could be better invested in educating people. (an Afrikaner and an English participant)

It's a waste of money and resources. (Afrikaner)

Money could be used for compensating victims. (an English and a Xhosa participant)

f. *Does the TRC Have a Positive Effect on South Africa's Politics?*

Compared to the Xhosa, the English participants rated the TRC low ($p < .05$) in terms of its positive effect on South Africa's politics. The Afrikaner participants also perceived the positive effects of the TRC to be much lower than the Xhosa group ($p < .01$). There were no qualitative comments on this topic by any of the groups.

g. *Does the TRC Give South Africa a Positive Image in the World?*

An analysis of the quantitative data indicated that the Xhosa perceived the TRC to contribute to a positive image of South Africa in the world as compared to the Afrikaner group's perception ($p < .01$). The perceptions of the English group did not significantly differ from either of these groups in this regard. The English views of the TRC's positive effect on South Africa's image in the world were slightly higher than the views of the Afrikaners and slightly lower than those of the Xhosa.

Sixteen participants made qualitative, explanatory comments. All 5 Afrikaners who made any comments in this regard (100%) perceived the TRC to have negative effects on South Africa's image in the world. However, 2 out of 6 (75%) of the English and the 5 Xhosa participants who made comments (100%) viewed the TRC to have given a positive image of South Africa to the world. Some representative comments were as follows:

The TRC is a form of silent war which helps South African democracy to get recognition in the world. (Xhosa)

It [the TRC] is an example the world. (Xhosa)

The TRC is used as a smoke screen to mislead the outside world about what is really going on in South Africa. (Afrikaner)

The TRC paints a picture of South Africa in the worst way possible, and the world believes it. (Afrikaner)

The TRC gives a fundamental image to the rest of the world, but it is a distorted image. (English)

The TRC is seen favorably in other countries. (English)

These views supported the findings of the quantitative data analysis that the Xhosa group perceived the TRC to have had a much more positive effect on South Africa's society than the Afrikaners and a slightly more positive effect than the English.

h. *Should the TRC Continue Hearings Beyond the Deadline (of October 1998)?*

In the Xhosa group's perception, the hearings should be continued beyond the then-present deadline. This perception was significantly different from the Afrikaner group ($p < .01$) and the English group ($p < .05$). There were no significant differences between the Afrikaner and the English groups in relation to this question. Although there were no qualitative comments made directly on this topic, concerns over the waste of money, discussed in the above section on the TRC's effects on the economy, may be reflected in the quantitative findings here. In other words, the concerns of the Afrikaner and the English groups about "wasting money on the

TRC” would explain their opinions that the TRC should not continue beyond the deadline.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA

A content analysis of the qualitative data revealed that several participants voiced concern that the TRC opened up old wounds and that it brought out anger. Three Afrikaner, 9 English, and 5 Xhosa participants expressed this concern. Those concerns are reflected in the following quotes:

The TRC tries to correct the wrongs, but they are only opening wounds and letting people get hurt all over again. (Afrikaner)

The TRC hearings and news reports bring out a lot of anger. (Afrikaner)

It brings out a lot of needless pain and only generates anger. (Afrikaner)

Things that have happened in the past cannot be changed, so instead of opening old wounds, why don't they heal them without opening them? (English)

The [TRC] hearings also cause the victims' families to relive their losses over and over again. (English)

To me, the TRC only brings the hurt and anger back. (English)

We all know that terrible things happened in the past, but why should we reopen old wounds and bring out anger? (English)

The TRC has opened up many old wounds that have been left untreated after apartheid. These wounds need to be healed so that anger over the past can be worked through. (English)

The TRC is not effective at all because, as far as I see, it brings back the wounds of the victims and makes them angry. (English)

The TRC did bring out the truth about all the killings which happened during the era of apartheid. But socially and psychologically, the families of the victims were traumatized and the pain comes again when the truth comes out. (Xhosa)

The TRC brings heartaches to people, and it is useless because bad people apply for amnesty. (Xhosa)

It only opens the scars that took years to heal, and in most cases, more undesired information is given that makes it more difficult for the victim's family to grasp/forgive for that matter. (Xhosa)

Makes people angry, old sores are revived, most perpetrators make it a joke, when to others [victim's family,] their hearts break. (Xhosa)

These findings provide additional explanation for the perceptions of the Xhosa, Afrikaner, and English participants that the TRC was perceived to be relatively ineffective in bringing about reconciliation.

Another finding from the qualitative data analysis was that there were frequent comments, mostly from the Afrikaner and the English participants, stating, "Let us forget the past and focus on the future." Eleven Afrikaners mentioned that the past should be forgotten so that South Africa could focus on its present and future. Nine English participants also expressed this opinion. However, only 1 Xhosa participant shared that view. Here are some of the comments:

We should now forget about the past and all work together on our future. (Afrikaner)

We should build on the future, not the past. (Afrikaner)

What's done is done and cannot be brought back. (Afrikaner)

Sometimes it is best just to let go, to leave the past and concentrate on the future. (Afrikaner)

It is time to bury the past and get on with developing our nation. (Afrikaner)

Specific happenings belong to the past. (Afrikaner)

South Africa's government is living in the past—far too many things are blamed on the past. (English)

People shouldn't dwell on the past for so long. (English)

I think we should forget the past and start anew. (English)

We must continue with the future and not so much the past. (Xhosa)

These comments may further explain why both the Afrikaners and the English perceived the TRC not to have had a positive effect on South Africa's society or economy. The Xhosa group's perception did not match that view.

THE PERCEIVED SUCCESS OF THE TRC

Overall, none of the three ethnic groups perceived the TRC to be highly successful as indicated by relatively low mean scores on this question (Table 1). However, the Xhosa participants perceived the TRC's success to be significantly higher than the perceptions of the Afrikaners ($p < .01$) and the English ($p < .05$). There was no significant difference between the perceptions of the Afrikaner and the English groups in this regard. To assess what contributed to the perceived success level of the TRC, regression analysis was conducted for each ethnic group.

For the Afrikaners, variations in their perceptions of the TRC's success were explained by three independent variables: their perceptions of the TRC's positive effect on South Africa's society, the continuation of the TRC hearings, and the legitimacy of the TRC. The findings that the Afrikaner participants expressed negative views of the TRC in terms of its effect on South Africa's society, its legitimacy, and its continuation of hearings explain why they perceived the TRC's overall effectiveness to be low.

The perceptions of the English and the Xhosa participants, in relation to the success of the TRC's overall success, were explained by two independent variables. These were their perceptions of the TRC's positive effect on South Africa's society and the TRC's effectiveness in bringing about reconciliation. The finding that the English viewed the TRC to be relatively unsuccessful is supported by their negative perception of both of these independent variables. On the other hand, the Xhosa participants' relatively positive perception of the TRC's overall success is explained by their perception that the TRC is relatively effective in terms of its positive effect on South Africa's society and in bringing about reconciliation.

DISCUSSION

Was the TRC effective in bringing out the truth? Despite concerns expressed that perpetrators would tell half truths and lies to avoid punishment, the participants of all three ethnic groups perceived that the TRC was, in fact, effective in bringing out the truth, albeit in varying degrees. This is congruent with observations by other authors.

Shea (2000) stated that the TRC needs to be credited with bringing out in the open the brutalities of the apartheid era:

It is no longer possible for the average South African to suffer from selective amnesia or to deny the nature and extent of the gross human rights violations that took place under the old regime and during the country's transition to democracy. (Shea, 2000, p. 6)

The truth came out that apartheid was an appalling human tragedy. Boshoff (1988/1989), an Afrikaner who admitted voting for apartheid, stated that the truth came out that apartheid was an appalling human tragedy. He called apartheid "the Afrikaners' Frankenstein: their own creation has degenerated into a monster" (Boshoff, 1988/1989, p. 13).

In relation to reconciliation, our findings indicate that the TRC was perceived to have been much less successful in bringing about reconciliation than in bringing out the truth. Reconciliation is much more difficult to accomplish when the wounds are immensely deep. It may be too much to ask. One can never forget how difficult it must be to reconcile! Reconciliation has to happen on the individual level. It is with each individual "where the seeds for societal transformation are planted" (Shea, 2000, p. 7). In the words of Hugo van der Merwe (1998), "It would be a great mistake to equate political stability with genuine reconciliation" (p. 2). The TRC required the victim's relatives to be fully satisfied that the full truth was told and the confession was genuine. The regrets of the accused needed to be sincere and the evidence needed to be convincing that the accused acted only because of orders from political leadership. In addition, the TRC was developed and designed to conduct hear-

ings with social and judicial focus. It did not have psychological and personal focus, which might have facilitated reconciliation.

The designers of the TRC believed that bringing out the truth would provide healing medicine for sore wounds of past atrocities in South Africa's apartheid era. At the least, those wounds would not get infected, and infections would not spread throughout the society. The tide of conflict would be abated before it overflowed and turned into a monstrously unpredictable and uncontrollable plague that might destroy or permanently scar South Africa's society for future generations. However, the qualitative comments from all ethnic groups in this study indicated that the TRC was perceived to have opened old wounds without proper support for healing and with a high potential for generating anger and revenge, because people had to relive those terrible events all over again.

Although there were significant differences among the three ethnic groups, each of them had the lowest mean score on the legitimacy of the TRC component. This is a significant finding, because without that perceived legitimacy, the effectiveness of the TRC had to be hampered.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was that only the Xhosa participants strongly agreed that the TRC had a positive effect on South Africa's society and that South Africa's society is better off because of the TRC. The TRC's openness to the public and its work of operating in the interest of society as a whole might have contributed to this positive perception. Though the wounds are deep and very difficult to heal, South Africa might be able to put behind a significant amount of interracial animosity of the apartheid era. The TRC might contribute to releasing interracial tensions in fair, open, and nonviolent ways. However, because the Afrikaner and the English groups did not perceive the TRC to have had as positive an effect on society as the Xhosa group perceived, the former (White groups) might be expecting trouble ahead in terms of social strife. In their view, the TRC opened old wounds that might trigger social unrest.

All three groups of participants felt that the TRC did not have a positive effect on South Africa's economy. However, the Afrikaner

and the English expressed strong concerns about the wasteful and misdirected use of money. They would rather see the money used on education and job creation. These concerns were also reflected in their views that the TRC hearings should not be extended beyond its deadline.

Although the Xhosa and English groups perceived the TRC to have a relatively positive effect on South Africa's politics, the Afrikaners did not support that perception as strongly. This may be explained by the fact that many Afrikaners had opposed the TRC. The ex-prime minister and ex-president of South Africa, P. W. Bhuto, had snubbed the TRC by refusing to appear at the hearings. The former Afrikaner apartheid regime's belief in White superiority and its right to commit political atrocities against non-Whites might help explain the Afrikaner participants' view that the TRC did not have a positive effect on South Africa's politics. Having lost rule of the country, they might have feared political instability and felt disenfranchised.

The Xhosa participants believed that the TRC had given South Africa a positive image in the world. However, no Afrikaner participant shared this view at all, although some English participants did. This may be expected, because the admissions of atrocities during the apartheid regime were officially admitted and recorded in the public hearings for the whole world to know. This must have been extremely uncomfortable for the perpetrators, to say the least.

All three ethnic groups perceived the overall success of TRC to be related to its effect on South Africa's society. However, the two White groups perceived the TRC to have little positive effect on the country's society and, hence, rated its overall success to be relatively low. These two groups did not consider the short-term effects of the TRC in terms of bringing out the truth and bringing about reconciliation to be important for its overall success. They considered the long-term effect on society to be a major expectation and criterion for its overall success. These participants' perceptions that the TRC opened up old wounds of the past and that the TRC hearings were a waste of money were of great concern to the long-term stability of South Africa.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research cannot be extended to all ethnic groups in South Africa, because the study includes only three ethnic groups of South Africa, its sample size is small, and the sampling is convenience based.

The transferability of the concept of South Africa's TRC to manage racial conflicts in other parts of the world is limited by the uniqueness of South Africa's experience. Apartheid was unique in that a small minority population committed state-sponsored and state-supported crimes against the large majority population over a relatively long period of time. Political power was transferred from the White minority to the Black majority in a remarkably peaceful way.

There are many characteristics of South Africa that are similar to many other parts of the world. For example, in South Africa, the atrocities had been committed over generations, but there was political will and social support toward resolving interethnic conflicts. Some of these conditions may exist in other nations. For example, the United States encompasses a vast cultural diversity and has, from its inception, a long history of interracial and interethnic tension. South Africa's TRC may provide an excellent framework for managing these long-time conflicts in a relatively peaceful and equitable way.

Many atrocities have been committed around the world by human beings against human beings. These atrocities are often the result of economic, political, and/or social inequities over a long period of time. Greed, racism, and prejudice have led to human genocide, ethnic cleansing, deportations, terrorism, and confiscation of personal property. No matter who might gain in the short term, violence of human beings against human beings seems to have continued over many generations. Various political systems and schemes in many parts of the world have attempted in vain to overcome that human history. South Africa's TRC offered a nonviolent approach to break the cycle of violence, racism, and atrocities. The jury is still out regarding the long-term success of the TRC. However, there are indications of future positive effects of the TRC toward breaking the horrific cycle of racial violence.

Although there may be many lessons to be learned from South Africa's TRC, further research needs to be conducted on this experiment of human potential. One of the most important lessons we can learn from South Africa's TRC is that there is a need for ubuntu (the African philosophy of humanism), but not for victimization, and a need for understanding, but not for vengeance, in managing interracial and interethnic conflicts.

APPENDIX
Your Perception of the
Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

<i>In your view, (please circle one)</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>							<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
a. The TRC is effective in bringing out the truth.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
b. The TRC is effective in bringing about reconciliation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
c. The TRC is the legitimate body to conduct the hearings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
d. The TRC has a positive effect on South Africa's society.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
e. The TRC has a positive effect on South Africa's economy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
f. The TRC has a positive effect on South Africa's politics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
g. The TRC gives South Africa a positive image in the world.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
h. The TRC should continue hearings beyond the present deadline.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
i. Overall, the TRC is successful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Comments to support your responses:

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