Between Black and White: An Exploratory Investigation of Biracialism in the United States and South Africa

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Abstract

The United States and South Africa both endured periods of intense racism produced from rigid social hierarchies. While European populations controlled these institutions, black populations remained marginalized. Critical race theory proposes that race is socially constructed as opposed to inherently biological. Although social construction of the white and black ethnicities formed similarly, the development of the mixing of white and black into biracial peoples developed uniquely in each country. This study will apply concepts from critical race theory to analyze similarities and differences within the constructions, highlighting the elements of colonization, slavery, and de facto segregation and investigating the effects on the social identity.

Introduction

In recent years biracialism has received a significant increase in scholarly investigation. Mixed race people of black and white ancestry--people who constitute a biracial identity--currently account for 2.9% of the US population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000) and 8.9% of the South African population (Statistics South Africa 1996). Experts predict that these numbers will continue to rise. Unfortunately, many researchers do not understand the scope and significance these mixed-parentage people have in our societies. This research focuses on the social constructions in the United States and South Africa that lead to the social identity of biracial people today. These two countries make for a significant comparative case study because of their similarities, and as noted by anthropologist Ruth Landes, "the fundamental feature of American race relationships… [is] matched only in South Africa" (1955:1261).

Previous research has been limited in a number of ways. Because of the historical and present-day similarities that these countries share, there have been many scholars who have conducted comparative analyses between the United States and South Africa (Ansell 2006; Marx 1999; Frederickson 1997), but only a minority have dedicated their research specifically to the social construction of biracial people (Makalani 2003; Beckles 1994; Landes 1955). Race-relations in these countries have followed strong experiences of white supremacy and black oppression, but the status of the mixed-raced people remains undefined. Another area in which research lacks is the emphasis on social identity. The scholars and researchers who have done work comparing the political dynamics of the United States and South Africa have left out much discussion on the social psychological aspects such as identity formation, societal pressures and stereotypes.

This present research adds to the understanding of the societal effects of

history on the social identities of biracial people. In-depth accounts of historical events, political environments, and laws that have shaped racial labels to this day will be analyzed to highlight the differences between the two countries. Additionally, this study will summarize the social identity of biracial people in the United States and "Coloureds," the label of mixed-parentage people, in South Africa, from intimate interviews with subjects self-identified as being biracial. Similarly, this study will demonstrate the commonalities shared by American and South African societies as they pertain to race-relations and social identity.

The goal of the study is to broaden the research in the area on the construction of biracial people. The questions I intend to address begin with: What are the specific historical factors that influenced the social construction of race within the United States and South Africa? What are the explicit factors that influenced the unique construction of biracial people? Or more importantly, what impacted the dichotomous American racial system in comparison to the continuous South African system? And finally, what are the social identities of people categorized as biracial?

Social Construction of Race
In much of the literature (Newman 2007; Omi-Winant 1994; Rothenberg 2005), two main perspectives on identities emerge: essentialism and constructionism. An essentialist argues that identity is an inherent and universal fact, that the characteristics of a person are biologically determined at birth. An alternative theory to essentialism is constructionism, which argues that identity is the "product of a person's context, place, cultural influences, and time period" (Newman 2007:36). When applied to race, essentialism views race as biological and/or cultural, while constructionism shares ideas with Critical Race Theory, proposing that race is a social construct (Newman 2007; Doane 2003; Haney-Lopez 1996). Race is a constructed category influenced and accepted by society. The social construction of race refers to the "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi-Winant

2004:55). This theory holds that race and identity are the product of the socialization process. It is during the socialization process where members of society look at a person's physical attributes and "learn what attributes to value or to reject" (Rothenberg 2005:3). Ultimately, the constructionist view proposes that the meaning of one's race is created and learned by its perspective society.

Not only are racial categories created but, as the biracial person exemplifies, a category can also be transformed: "Racial agreements of a society undergo a constant process and restructuring as a result of political and social change" (Doane 1994:9). Critical Race Theory, in general, is extremely applicable when investigating biracialism because it contradicts and rejects the essentialist approach that a person's physical or biological characteristics determine their personal and social characteristics. The essentialist or biology approach leaves no room for ambiguity or areas in between because it generally looks for absolutes. Noel Ignatiev, editor of *Race Traitor*, proclaims that "biological race theories lead to absurdities… the well known (American) phenomenon of white women giving birth to black babies, but a black woman can never give birth to a white baby" (1995:1). With the creation of "new races," new social meanings formulated to attach to the race labels. Different societies have invented different labels and meanings for the biracial people, further evidencing how race is constructed by social context.

Racial Categories
The socialization process which all humans have all undergone to understand race is dependent upon racial categories. Johann Friedrich Blumenbachm (1752-1840) was a prominent German anatomist and early anthropologist who studied the science behind racial prejudice. Blumenbach is widely known for his study on the classifications of human races. Even to this day the Webster dictionary gives reference to the Blumenbach Study on race (Haney-Lopez 1996:6). The model divides the human race into five groups: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Grouping the entire human race into five

categories shows how limiting racial categorization is--not only are ethnicities grouped together to an absurd degree, there are many population groups that are left out.

Until recent years, the United States government had based its race categories off of this model, varying subgroups to fit the time period. Specific racial categories have changed with such frequency in the United States that it is nearly impossible to enumerate exact classification schemes. Looking at the categories in South Africa we are able to see how this model was adapted and evolved to fit their society. Reviewing race categories of South Africa thus suggests how race can be socially constructed, because South Africans created their own categories to fit their unique structure, with the official inclusion of mixed-raced people. These racial categories of South Africa have been well established and steady over the years than the United States. The categories in South Africa are White, Black/African, Coloured and Indian.

Social Identity
Identities are the definitional categories given by society to specify who we are. A person's social identity is determined by a variety of factors and they serve as the social location for a person's position in the world (Newman 1996:33). Social Identity Theory (Kaufman 2003; Eramsus 2002; Tajfel 1982) examines the effects of society on individual identity. The theory suggests that personal identity is largely based on membership in social categories. These categories express characteristics associated with the identity, define appropriate behavior, and access the social worth of that identity. Individuals have multiple social identities dependent on religious or sexual choices, physical appearance, nationalities, sex, etc. Identities are both subjective and objective categories that are formed during the socialization process.

Prominent scholar of social identities David Newman proposes that the formation of a person's "social racial identity is constructed through human identifiers" (1996:37). The identifiers are dependent on context, often think in terms of opposites, reflect social rankings and power relations, and have psychological and

structural meanings (p. 38). Although this formula seems basic, the formation of biracial people is complicated. The identity of a biracial person is not standard throughout varying contexts, and therefore social rankings and structural meanings also fluctuate significantly. Because being biracial means falling somewhere in between the established categories, it has no opposite to draw definite comparisons to. Identities are definitional categories, yet there is not a definite identity of mixed-race people, sustaining the lack of definite category for biracial people.

Identity evaluation is important because it shows the role of an individual or group within society. The lack of social recognition that biracial people face can lead to lack of a strong self and social identity and can result in social exclusion, confusion, and personal insecurities. Sociologist Mary Waters testified before Congress during the 2000 census trials regarding social identity and its meaning for biracial people. She highlighted the positive changes that could occur with the recognition of the biracial people in the U.S., stating "the fact that the group does not exist now does not mean the group cannot come into existence and begin to have social meaning for people" (as cited in Makalani 2003:90).

Historical Comparison

Forming a Nation: The United States of America

When the first slaves came to North America in 1619 they were traded by merchants of the Dutch West Indian Company for food. These slaves were initially considered indentured servants. The black slaves were considered strong workers but had come from dissimilar cultures that the whites dismissed as being ignorant and uncivilized. So, although the black servants were not initially labeled as slaves, the inhumane treatment they received and the fact that they had no control over their own lives led to the belief that they were slaves. Unlike their white indentured servant counterparts, no ethical contract was ever signed between the parties. Subsequently, though slaves did not blatantly consoli-

date ethnic identifications on the basis of color, it was widely understood that most blacks were slaves, and no slaves were white (Beckles 1994:37).

White slave masters used the scheme that black skin color equates slave status to their advantage, and often engaged in forced sex with their female slaves because "rape of a slave was not a crime" (Marx 1998:58). Soon laws were created to address these interracial sexual activities. The 1662 Naturity Conditions stated that in situations where there were doubts about the race of a slave child, they would be determined a slave or free according to the condition of their mother. Laws stating that the child's racial identification is dependent on the mothers' status therefore meant the illegitimate child of a white male and black female would be a slave, because interracial relations rarely occurred in other combination.

One-Drop Rule

Contradictory to the opinion of white slave owners, other white citizens did not like the thought of white impurity and laws soon appeared to prohibit interracial marriage, though the act of sex between different races was never banned. Soon, the multitude of biracial generations caused hysteria because it defied the need for clearly defined racial boundaries. Some biracial people with light enough skin tones began to pass for white, threatening to disrupt the white race's purity. The One-Drop Rule was constructed to fix to the biracial problem. By the mid-nineteenth century "the offspring of interracial unions were generally categorized as blacks even if they only had one drop of African blood" (Marx 1998:69).

The One-Drop Rule is one of the most prominent ideologies that affects the state of biracial people to this day. Haney-Lewis describes the rule as a basic metaphor of purity and contamination: "White is unblemished and pure, so one drop of ancestral Black blood renders one Black" (1996:27) and therefore impure. An impure person could not be white. Therefore biracial people were legally identified as black, and the explicit poles of white/good/superior and black/evil/subservient were once again defined. The One-Drop rule has been transferred from generation to generation, and

although the rule is no longer in effect through law, the idea lives on to this day. As a social response to the strictness of the rule, many biracial people tried to gain solidarity through their ties of blackness and soon began to accept and internalize their black identity.

Fall of Slavery

When the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, the words "all men are created equal" echoing throughout all Americans, many blacks felt emancipation would shortly occur. But less than twenty years later the line "Any alien, being a free white person, may be admitted to become a citizen of the United States" was written in the Naturalization Act of 1795 (Congress Naturalization Act). The Act states that only whites qualified as citizens of the U.S. and had a tremendous impact of the status of blacks.

Eventually by 1830, black freedom fighters and abolitionists really began to make waves toward better treatment of blacks. Throughout, however, interracial relations had still persisted and biracial children remained bound to the black slave status. Because of the large numbers of biracial children and their offspring, the 1850 Census finally divided the nonwhite population into black and mulatto. Mulatto was the first governmental term used to identify a biracial person. It derives from the Spanish and Portuguese word for "small mule." Mulatto was used inconsistently in the Census until 1930, but is generally considered offensive because it was once a generic designation term used for all hybrids. The enumerators declared one's racial category according to the person's physical appearance. Therefore, a person could be black in one census and mulatto in another. Overall, in 1850 the census recorded 11.2% of the black population as mulatto (Painter 2006:59). This figure is likely to be extremely low because many people at the time refused to acknowledge racial mixing.

Finally in 1865 with the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, blacks were granted citizenship and guaranteed equal rights with whites, and the Fifteenth Amendment gave suffrage to all men no matter what skin color.

Although it seemed like the end of racial domination and oppression of blacks, soon a new president came into office and progress soon regressed, as ingrained racial attitudes continued to permeate. In 1883 the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which declared equal treatment of everyone in public accommodations, was ruled unconstitutional. The Supreme Court declared that the Fourteenth Amendment forbids states, but not citizens, from discriminating. (Painter 2006:141).

Jim Crow Era
"One of the biggest fears in society was the mixing of the races; this was something the white people vowed to stop. The government succeeded by using the segregation laws" (Wagman 1993:197). In 1896 in the monumental Supreme Court case of *Plessy V. Ferguson*, the courts ruled for "separate but equal." The ruling was of monumental significance because it was stating that the government backed racial prejudice by ruling legal separation of the races. This is equally important to the history of biracial people because interracial communication was extremely difficult. The ruling is commonly noted as the start of what we now call the Jim Crow era, "a legal expression of racial domination" (Marx 1998:140).

Jim Crow laws ruled the South and spread into some areas of the North as well. Jim Crow was known first as a "stage Negro" and the name soon became known as a collective racial epithet. The popularity of the shows that portrayed blacks as coons spread Jim Crow as a racial slur. Jim Crow soon began to signify black disenfranchisement and brutal segregation, but by 1900 Jim Crow meant a system of laws to segregate all aspects of life and deemed blacks as inferior to whites (Davis n.d.). Miscegenation laws that criminalized marriage between whites and people of other races increased in degree and frequency during the early twentieth century, and American "mulattos" were treated the same as "negros." This strict segregation meant that the whites did not, by law or by choice, interact much with blacks or biracial people. All mixed-race people in this time who could not pass for white were stripped of a separate racial iden-

tity, label or culture, and lumped into one all-encompassing category.

The United States strived to define distinct races throughout the twentieth century, but, for the most part, a person was either white and received societal and legal privileges, or non-white and treated as inferior. Some tried to define their race through legal means in order to gain such rights and privileges. There are 52 documented cases that were brought before the courts to decide if a person was white or not (Haney-Lopez 1996:4). None of them had to do with a black American of mixed race wanting to be considered legally white because, although frequent, this claim would be ruled out immediately because of the underlying racial prejudice. The majority of the cases included people from Asia or the Middle East. Each case varied in certain ways, with the determining factors often being skin color or other subjective categories. This was controversial because the Supreme Court sometimes had to reject the same scientific explanations of race that were used to degrade blacks in favor of common knowledge beliefs, when the science failed to reinforce popular beliefs about race. For instance the court ruled that "skin color cannot serve as racial lines we are familiar with" (Haney-Lopez 1996:59) and went on to say a person's physical attributes had little to do with their racial identity.

Civil Rights and the Biracial Movement
Tired of being oppressed, many black Americans used their strengthening education and voice to stir up a significant civil rights movement. When the white primary was banned in 1944 blacks slowly regained the right to vote and power in the United States. During this period of the mid 1900s solidarity was key, and many black Americans unified, with the help and support of some whites. Day-to-day victories by individuals were backed by collective measures, like proactive equality groups such as the National Urban League and the National Association for Advancement of Colored People. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was very influential, along with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, in ending the disenfranchisement of blacks. The Civil Rights

Act of 1964 overall helped the social and economic status of blacks because it desegregated all public places, and increased job and educational positions.

Since the civil rights era, programs, marches, persuasive speeches, etc. have tried to improve the situation of black Americans, and thus biracial Americans too. Even with the continuing fight for greater acceptance of racial groups, it was not until the 1990s when acceptance and use of the term biracial gained popularity, and it is still on the rise. The U.S. Census 2000 was the first census in which respondents were allowed to indicate a multiracial identity, and can be viewed as "another step in racial formation" (Schaefer 2000:16). Some lobbied for listing the term "multiracial" on the census but a compromise on allowance of checking multiple identities was reached.

There are many new organizations, publications, and Web sites (see appendix) that provide valuable information and support for biracial people today in the United States. The significance of these programs and support groups are tremendous. Biracial people are now hearing their voice in U.S. society and have been able to encounter more personal positive gains. The creation of these programs and groups show the evolution of new racial categories, and how changing history creates new stories in these people's lives. Research supports that the biracial label will continue to transform from the "socially unstable" identity (Makalani 1994:91) to an accepted racial distinctiveness. It also shows that this newly accepted American racial category is a social construction, and not a biological distinction.

Forming a Nation: Republic of South Africa
About 30 years after the Dutch landed in the Americas they reached yet another "new world." In 1652 Dutch navigators in the Dutch East Indian Company landed on the western cape of what is now South Africa. From 1652 until the 1870s this land and its indigenous population would become familiar with encounters with white colonial settlers from Western Europe. The Dutch (initially referred to as Boers) planned to use the area as a

40

reenergizing stop for its vessels on the way to India. They appeared to keep to themselves and didn't expand their land holdings until about five years later when they began to view their coincidental landing at the southernmost tip of Africa as more than a pit stop to India. The Dutch began expropriating land and importing black slaves from the same northern areas where people were being captured and shipped to the Americas (Hopkinson 1964).

The black inhabitants did not understand nor welcome the Boers and many small wars occurred during this time. Although tension was high, the Africans were not unfamiliar with war and did not think of the white invaders as much of a threat. The two groups often seemed to be interdependent for shared lifestyles and mutual convenience (Chazan et al. 1999). The technology of the Boers gave them an unequal advantage when they did engaged in battle with other natives, and upon winning they began to take the conquered Africans as slaves for themselves. Colonization was in full effect during the late fifteenth century and soon the British set their eyes on the beauties and resources of southern Africa. Through an agreement made with the Dutch, the British claimed rights to most of the lands surrounding the southern cape of Africa.

For the next century a plethora of wars, battles, and squabbles were fought between the Boers and the Africans, the British and the Boers, the Africans and the British, and among African tribes. They fought to determine who owned what land and who created the laws of those lands. By the 1800s, the dominating British had a strong hold over laws and land in the region and their liberal ideology set the foundation for anti-slavery laws passed in the 1830s (Lewis 1987). The capturing of Africans for slaves and the egalitarian views of the British began the first generations of people from both European and southern African ancestry.

Most historians believe that by 1838 the population of the Cape colony was made up of white colonists, Khoi-San (African ethnic titles) and a group of heterogeneous people of mixed parentage. At this time, many of the mixed

heritage groups did not have a respected label, but rather they were known more by what they were not: neither white nor indigenous Africans (Martin 2002). For some time, Malay people (typically from Malaysia or Indonesia) were also lumped into this category. All of these people eventually became known as "people of colour," a term that evolved over time by social and lingual adaptation to "Coloured" people. The very creation and existence of the Coloured identity significantly distinguishes the historical contexts of the United States and South Africa. The mixed-race people in South Africa are given a social and political identity before, as opposed to after, major racial oppression and discrimination was written into their legal codes. Their accepted racial label allowed the Coloured people to create a meaning, although subjective and ambiguous, which gave them a group say in the history of South Africa.

Overall during the seventeenth century, life in most of South Africa was reasonably calm, although small territorial battles were being fought in the coastal areas. Governmental institutions were based on supposed nonracial franchising open to land-owning males, and the formation of representative government began in 1853 (Lewis 1987). The equipoise of people was disrupted when diamonds were found in 1867 and gold in 1886 by the eastern coast lines. This lure of instant wealth amplified the populations of Europeans in South Africa to 200,000 in 1865 and over one million by 1905 (Chazan et al. 1999). The mining industries soon completely transformed the country and its future. The demand for mineral wealth intensified altercations between all population groups. From 1899 to 1902 over 500,000 British troops were sent to squash African empires, such as the Zulu, and to suppress Boer power (Chazan et al. 1999). The dominating figure before the rush for precious material was the poor rural farmer, indifferent to color or race; after, it was the whites equipped with funding from their overseas ties that prospered from the booming economy.

Pre-Apartheid

With growing wealth and capital, class stratification became more and more prevalent. Some scholars (Chazan 1999; Marx 1998; Frederickson 1997) argue that studies about racial stratification are directly correlated to studies of power and struggles for material resources. With the discovery of diamonds and gold, race and class stratification soon became a permanent fixture of South African society. Whites rose steadily to the wealthy class as the non-whites scrambled for a place on the spectrum. Although blacks did hold some positions in the mines or as servants, the overwhelming majority of white South Africans still viewed them as a backward race. The black Africans, stemming from a legacy of oppression, remained uneducated and lived in destitution. Some chose to hold onto traditional values and lifestyles while they remained at the poor farming or subsistence level. The Coloured people once again fell in between the two poles.

Social identity was as unclear as the definition for the Coloured people. Both in 1937 and 1976 when the South African government tried to define the racial label no consensus could be reached (Lewis 1987). Racially mixed citizens were, at this time, simply the descendents of white and black ancestry and viewed by whites as an acceptable working class, if they remained at a distance. It was thought at this time that Coloured people were above the status of the black Africans, giving the Coloureds some political voice. Racial divisions continued to increase and although the principle of non-white franchise remained intact until 1910, when the Union of South Africa was established, voting qualifications seemed to rise whenever non-whites were close to meeting the standards (Lewis 1987). The South African Act of 1909 removed the right for Coloureds to stand and serve as elected or nominated representatives in the houses of Parliament. An even greater blow came with an all-white franchise (including women) with the Franchise Laws Amendment Act of 1931 (La Guma n.d.). This meant the numbers of the white population who were able to vote increased, decreasing

the power of Coloureds.

As an attempt to create a stronger voice for the non-whites, the African Political Organization (APO) became the first national political organization for Coloured people in 1902. Although this organization's membership was entirely Coloured, the consensus agreed upon early on was to have greater allegiances with other African-based organizations (La Guma n.d.). Even with said allegiance to blacks, the APO distinguished themselves specifically as Coloured. The APO's goal was to increase power of the non-white population. In the decades that followed the APO's creation, racial tension increased and whites gained more political power. Soon, a new generation of Coloured radicals formed and rejected the passive cooperation of the APO and formed the National Liberation League of South Africa in 1935.

Apartheid

Even with the Coloured and African political and social organizations, the National Party came to power in 1948. In this same year the National Party introduced the system of apartheid. Apartheid derives from the Dutch language and refers to "apart or separate." It was a political extension of the Dutch policy of *baasskap*, translated into "bosshood," meaning complete white domination of society (Hopkinson 1964). Apartheid left black Africans legally and economically powerless, and gave very few opportunities to the Coloureds and Asian populations. For instance the Electoral Law Amendment Act, which passed shortly after, gave Coloureds the opportunity to vote only in the presence of a white electoral officer. In effect the Coloured vote, and overall power, had little significance because of their low numbers.

New laws continued to emerge under the Apartheid system to decrease interracial mixing in both public and private sectors. The Mixed Marriage Act was passed in 1949 to "check blood mixture and promote racial purity" (Hopkinson 1964:90). This notion was further emphasized a year later with the passing of the Immorality Act that imposed severe penalties for sexual relations between whites and non-whites. In 1950 the Population Registration Act No. 30 sepa-rated the entire South African population into distinct racial groups. All of these legal regulations are important to note because they effect social interaction by limiting it to one's specific race. These racial groups were estranged to an extreme when the Group Areas Act of 1950 was implemented. The act became the heart of the apartheid system designed to geographically separate the racial groups. Population control was a central theme used by the Apartheid government for a successful platform during the election, urging the white South Africans to increase their power within the country by increasing group separation. Once in power, they implemented segregation and legally enforced Apartheid, "as race became the factor in the distribution rights" (McEachern 2002:219). District Six, a well-populated heterogeneous area transformed into an all-white area in weeks after the Group Areas Act was passed, is one of the most prominent examples of the effects of the Population Act. Every other race group was displaced and thousands became homeless overnight. Peaceful neighborhood ties were broken, and from this point on, housing arrangements were based solely on skin color, and the whites were always assigned to the well-maintained and environmentally sound areas.

One of the main goals of the apartheid regime was to place every person living in South Africa into a distinct racial category; however, defining the Coloured race proved to be difficult. An example is the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, which defined a Coloured person as a person who "is not a white person nor native" (Erasmus 2002:18). The Population Registration Act's main goal was to codify racial purity. By this time, the Coloured race was distinct, by definition that they were neither black nor white. New generations of racial mixing were prohibited by this time because "racial mixing was an evil thing, bringing biological, moral, and social pollution" (Posel 2001:100).

Throughout the Apartheid era, Coloureds were forced to consolidate a definite group but the exact definition of their identity was unclear. Marike de Klerk, wife of the last state president during the apartheid era was quoted for calling Coloured as leftovers or "people that were left after the nations were sorted out" (Erasmus 2002:18). The Coloured label was so indefinitive that in some documents "coloured" would be written or typed in undercase lettering, whereas the other racial labels all began with uppercase (Reddy 2002). During this time, the South African government went through a wide variety of illogical tests and categorization rules to determine race. For instance, when determining whether a person was Coloured or native (African), they would ask which sport they played. If they answered rugby they were Coloured, but if they answered soccer they were native (Posel 2001).

Similar to the cases in the United States, there were many cases in South Africa to determine one's race. Racial identity cases were heard by the Race Classification Appeal Board, and 17 made it to the South African Supreme Court. Physical anthropologists and geneticists were often called to stand as expert witnesses. By 1964, 3,940 appeals had been made; one-third of the appeals were by Coloureds who wanted to be considered white, and the rest from natives who wanted to claim the Coloured label (Posel 2001). These cases were actually insignificant in number or effect when compared to the numbers of millions of absurd categories given, and also because rulings of the cases differed and outcomes were often viewed as luck of the draw.

Post-Apartheid

Blurred and misguided views by the outside world made many other countries believe that Apartheid was a good system for South Africa. Between 1948 and 1970 South Africa was the second-fastest growing economy in the world (Chazan et al. 1999). The economic boom in some aspects backfired on the whites in power because it forced them to loosen some of the restrains set on the Africans to fulfill the greater need for manpower. Internally, most non-whites were tired of the harsh constraints of Apartheid, and with the slight decrease of rigidity, black and Coloured leaders arose. The Soweto School Uprising in 1976 resulted in hundreds of blacks killed or imprisoned and became a call to action. Sit-ins,

speeches, and rallies ignited across the nation, very similar to the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. Media coverage of the injustices of South Africa increased, and the protests also increased in power and effect, soon leading to the death of the Apartheid regimen (Chazan 1999).

Finally in 1983, Coloured people regained their ability to be represented in parliament. However they were secluded to separate exclusive chambers. The United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched in 1983 and membership soon expanded to about three million members. Anti-Apartheid organizations, international resource sanitations, and boycotts against parliament were frequent (Chazan 1999). Internal battles between citizen armies and police brigades in townships, and external financial pressures headed by human rights activists, finally led to the end of Apartheid. To head off a even more gruesome uprising, the Apartheid government eventually released the ban on the African National Congress, a strong black powered political party, and also released the national peace icon, Nelson Mandela. All of these events finally led to the one person-one vote election in 1994 where Mandela became the first truly democratic president.

The New South Africa
Even with the repeal of the Population Registration Act, the racial categories still remain in South Africa. They can be heard in casual conversation, can be seen in the work place, in housing or education applications, and are still used by the government. For example, the Employment Equity Act in 1998 reproduces the racial categories, but attempts to make amends to the Population Registration Act by opening more job opportunities to Coloureds, Indians and Blacks. The powerful legacy of Apartheid left the new South Africa with some hefty problems to work out. The structures that were built to support the institutionalized racism are still undergoing a revamping process, and racist attitudes are still deeply entrenched. One of the biggest contemporary issues is how to address the social equation: Coloured identity equating to the problem identity (Reddy 2002). Even so, Coloureds are engaging in steps similar to those of biracial

people in the United States.

> When one considers the question of a 'coloured identity' in today's South Africa, what emerges is a situation full of ambiguities and contradictions: people who were formerly oppressed to the very idea of a 'coloured culture' and are now rediscovering it and presenting it as a contribution to South African culture. (Martin 2002:222)

Coloureds are continuing efforts to embrace their identity and celebrate it.

The new collective and social identities of the Coloureds were made public during testimonies throughout the trials of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, a place where witnesses and offenders were subpoenaed to recollect the events during apartheid and to possibly gain amnesty. The transformation of the social identity of the Coloureds can be seen through Zahrah Narkadien's testimony as reported by Grunebaum and Robins: "We had a history that was forced on us by the South African government" (2002:160). She told the committee about the stereotypes of Coloureds being violent citizens and the subsequent unfair treatment. Telling the story of one situation, she was thrown into solitary confinement for seven months after a fight broke out and she heard the warden say, "Let's blame it on the Coloured!" She continued, "So I suffered just for being a Coloured woman. I thought I was just an African woman… because my parents had always taught me that my ancestors were African. But I despised it at first." She thought being either African or a white Afrikaan would be better, until she gained her freedom from jail and then her freedom to embrace and enjoy her Coloured identity (Grunebaum and Robins 2002: 160). Zahrah's journey to reach a positive biracial identity can be applied to the majority of mixed-raced people not only in South Africa, but also in the United States.

The Biracial Social Identity
Methodology
A study that attempted to understand racial awareness among college students

suggested that "race relations on campus is a particularly powerful part of the societal and university context in which racial identity is played out" (Chesler, Peet, and Sevig 2003:215). Because college life allows identity formations to take place, I chose to conduct interviews with college students in the United States and South Africa to better understand the current biracial state. The two universities I focused on were Grand Valley State University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) is a medium-sized liberal arts college, located on the west side of Michigan, a midwestern state in the U.S. Racial tension appears to run high in Michigan, which ranks second for race-related hate crimes in the 50 states (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2004), and GVSU has also encountered hate crimes targeting minority students. Grand Valley is showing efforts to make a tolerable environment for its students through student groups and diversity promotions by administration. GVSU has a total population of 22,000 students, with a high percentage of whites. However, with increasing overall enrollment, the proportion of minority students has risen.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) is located in the coastal city, Durban, in the largely populated province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Formally called Province of Natal during the apartheid era, the name change embraced the large black-Zulu culture of the area. Under the new government the school merged the once predominantly white University of Natal with highly Indian populated University of Durban-Westville to make UKZN in 2004. The enrollment is now quite high compared to other public schools, as it ranks 38,532 students. Since the merge, racial barriers have diminished at a welcoming rate; however, though achieving a multiracial enrollment status, racial groups are still solidified around the campus.

For the purpose of this study, subjects who had only black and white ancestry were chosen. Although including students who identify as white or black or other multiracial identities would likely provide further insight to the racial construction in these countries, for this

initial study I focused on the specific "in-betweeness" of the two: white and black. Selection for participants began with contact of people who have publicly made aware their identity. At GVSU initial contact was made with self-proclaimed bi- or multiracial participants of a preestablished group, the Multiracial Student Association. In South Africa, initial contacts with students came about in classroom dialogue, in which their identity was publicly announced within the discussions. I then used snowball sampling, asking them to nominate two to three other persons who are self-proclaimed biracial or considered by peers that could potentially respond to the survey, until I reached my targeted sample size of 11 subjects in each country.

The subjects received a survey questionnaire (see appendix) soliciting demographic information, while a tape recorder was used to capture open-ended dialogue about identity. The survey requested information on family life, school settings, preference in dating, choices in selective race labels, and intimate inquiries about their identity and shifts throughout their life. Due to the hesitancy of some people to talk about race, respondents were prompted to make sure all areas were fully addressed. The interviews were administered in empty classrooms in the universities in the company of the researcher only.

For the most part, participants were receptive and willing to share their biracial stories, perhaps because past opportunities to discuss their identity and related aspects have not been offered often, if at all. The only difficulties encountered with participants centered around time constraints. Prompting did occur, but for the most part the open-ended questions were in conversational form and participants had control of the direction of the conversation. In addition, this study was completely voluntary and all participants were free to end the discussion or leave the study at any time. No participants left prior to the completion of the study.

Findings/Results
The data were analyzed descriptively to establish trends. Although the sample size was small it allowed for full at-

tention of the subjects, and the data do reflect revealing patterns. An almost equal number of males and females were represented and a variety of age, educational levels, and majors were represented in the sample. The sample is a good representation of the total population of university students who are biracial, and data conclusions were generalized for fascinating conclusions.

In the United States more than half of the participants were raised by single white mothers. Thirty-six percent of participants grew up in black neighborhoods and 54% spent the majority of their childhood in a diverse environment. Although only one participant grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood, almost 50% attended a predominately white school system. When asked if they could choose a particular racial group to surround themselves, 27% said they would choose a predominantly black area where the rest choose a diverse multiracial area. About 73% of participants said that race was slightly important when choosing a significant other while one participant said they would never date a white person. When asked to choose the race label they would most identify with out of given choices, 100% of the subjects chose black over white, 90% chose mixed over white or black, and when given the choice of multiracial, again 90% chose that self-identifying label.

In South Africa 73% of participants were raised by two-parent households in which most of their parents were also identified as multiracial. Twenty-seven percent were raised in Coloured communities, another 27% were raised in predominantly white areas, and the remaining 46% reported being raised in diverse areas. Thirty-six percent went to schools that catered to the Coloured communities, 18% were enrolled in a diverse school system, and a little less than half attended predominantly white schools. Twenty-seven percent of the participants said that race was very important when choosing a significant other, another 27% said it was completely unimportant, and the remaining group felt it had some relevance. Twenty-seven percent said they would not date a black person and 9% would not date a white person. When asked to choose the race label they

would most identity with out of given choices, all but one subject chose black over white. One hundred percent chose Coloured, but it dropped to 63% when the label multiracial was available.

Qualitative Analysis
Racial Identification:

> One girl asked me, if I was mixed why wasn't I gray or half or my body black and half white.

A strong similarity between the two nations was seen right away. In reference to a question focused on the socialization process used to recognize and learn race categories, 81% of both American and South African subjects mentioned schools as the institution responsible for this learning process. Newman (2007:132) claims that one of the most powerful institutional agents of socialization is the educational system for children because they "subtly teach them who they are and what they can expect from themselves in the future." Almost all of the participants, indifferent of country, recalled their memories with feelings of confusion and frustration or with humorous retrospect of ignorant comments. Participants recounted stories when their peers or teachers labeled them in a racial category they did not consider themselves belonging to. One American who attended a primarily white school recounted:

> I was on the bus and the kids were saying that I was Mexican. And I didn't know better so I thought I was Mexican so I went home and I told my mom I was Mexican. And she laughed and was like "no no," so she got out a globe and showed me Mexico, and then Germany and she said that's were she was from, and then Africa and she said that's where my dad was from. Then she showed me the U.S. and said people came from all over. And I'm a mixture… I think this all went over my head at this time. And I still thought I was Mexican.

Other subjects both in the U.S. and S.A. mentioned standardized tests, adminis-

tered through the educational system. Filling out the questionnaire of government-issued tests that do not acknowledge mixed-race people can deny one's racial identity and force biracial people to choose a race that is not their own. In this way, schools play a role in the production of race as a social category both "through implicit and explicit lessons in the schools practice" (Lewis 2004:188). One South African participant recounted a survey she was asked to fill out and said "it was only white or black. I felt like I had no say. They didn't recognize us. I left it blank because I didn't want to choose."

All of these recollections show the confusion created through arbitrary race labels that are produced in society and reproduced through everyday language. At young ages when children are trying to figure out their own identities and place in the world, being multiracial can add to the confusion and prolong the identity shaping process. According to Lewis, the schools that most of the participants attended chose to reproduce (probably subconsciously) "rather than challenge the contemporary racial formations of society" (2004:190).

In-betweeness:

I'm not quite over there and then they're like you can't come over here.

The second question of the open-ended section of the survey, which asked whether the subject's race ever made him/her feel ostracized, illustrated more similarities between the countries. The same number (90%) of participants said that their biracial status has indeed made them feel ostracized at some point in their lives. Differences did surface when analyzed further; the majority of American students recounted more stories of being in the out-group from the black American standpoint, whereas the South African participants told of harsh stereotypes they battle primarily from whites.

When asked if they ever felt forced to "choose a side" by downplaying either their "whiteness" or "blackness," American subjects said they often felt the pressure to "be more black." This is best summarized through one respondent's recount: "Yeah. All the time. I feel like I had to choose. In high school I felt like I had to act more black to be accepted. I always knew I was both but it was just easier that way." The majority of the same American subjects also felt as though their skin tone automatically made them an outcast amongst their white peers, perhaps resulting from the legacy of the One-Drop Rule, causing the internalized belief that their brown skin color means they are not white. In attempting to find a social group to belong to, they often had to try to adopt black cultural values and reject white ones. This is highlighted in a subject's comments: "I don't even like rap but I made myself listen to it so I could fit in with the hip black crowd."

American subjects also encountered racial slurs such as "house nigga," "whitewashed" or "oreo" by some members of the black community. They noted that, because of the way they dressed, spoke, or even the neighborhood they lived in, they could never be fully accepted by blacks because they were not "fully black." Subjects also recounted stories of where they felt alone or confused within social or racial groups and how they tried to transform themselves to fit into the certain group by listening to certain music or only attending certain functions. Almost all of these stories were relayed in past tense and subjects felt that with personal growth, race seems to matter less to their personal esteem.

The stereotypes Coloureds encountered seemed to be embedded in the historical racism of South African culture and institutional structures. Deemed by many white South Africans as "leftovers" and "trash," many subjects said they feel ostracized because of the harsh stereotypes they battle on a daily basis that are attached to everyone in their racial group. Sixty-three percent mentioned stereotypes in answering the question about their race making them feel ostracized, and gave examples, such as, "We [are] viewed as the violent, drug-abusing, alcoholic, take-no-shit kind of people." Subjects recounted stories of times where whites ran away from them if they were in large groups, or how in discussions in classes or around campus students would remark about their small representation in the school.

The apparent difference in these stereotypes is that American subjects encounter them primarily when trying to gain acceptance into a preestablished racial group, whereas the stereotypes of the South Africans subjects are applied independent of context and to their own preestablished racial group. In effect, South African participants have a greater social support network when facing feeling of alienation, because they do have their Coloured group identity and an existing network to turn to. On the other hand, many American subjects encountered stereotypic issues when trying to gain acceptance and comfort of group solidarity and, therefore, had difficulties in finding social support due to hostility, rejection, or barriers of distinct white or black identity.

Adaptability:

'Cause when you're in Rome do as the Romans does [sic].

Another prevailing difference between the groups arose from the question about having to be or feeling forced to choose between black and white racial groups. One of the strongest and persistent themes appeared in the analysis of this question, that of adaptability. Coloureds took this opportunity to say that they are proud of their Coloured heritage and they would not want to be anything but what they are. For instance, participants proudly proclaimed, "No, I like being coloured. I don't want to be anything else….The best of both worlds," and, "No, I don't choose. Like I can change who I might be in different situations."

One hundred percent of the American subjects responded that they are forced by societal pressures to choose a distinct race of either black or white, and 72% of subjects said that at one point in their life, they did wish to solely constitute either the white or black racial group. Even so, the theme of adaptability reoccurred at the same time. This means that subjects felt that they were able to easily adapt to different social and racial settings. Through personal growth many

concluded that the "forcing to fit" into different race groups positively affected their ability to adapt to the groups when needed: "I wanted to at least be accepted by people who looked like me and when they didn't it was like, 'what do I gotta do,' ya know? But now I'm cool with it, like I said; I'm in the middle, I can move around!" In total 77.2% of all of the participants mentioned the word "adapt" and many said it multiple times throughout the conversation.

Participants said they used their ability to adapt, a positive and unique characteristic that other racial groups are robbed of. According to most subjects, distinct race groups do not have the same ability or opportunity to adapt; for instance, as this South African student proclaimed, "I have had the ability to be, well, experience, things that others can't." When encountering situations where they could be in a minority position, many subjects felt as though their mixed race allowed them to accept the racial or cultural differences, and adapt to them. Although they admit that it can be a difficult balancing act, "Being coloured it's … it's like walking the fence. Bordering two worlds and hard to balance. Hard to stay on top but we don't want to fall." Falling off of the fence that borders the two races means the biracial people could not enjoy the "the best of both worlds," the clichéd but real phrase that the overwhelming majority of participants mentioned.

American subjects shared very similar feelings. As mentioned, they appeared to undergo a more intense identity process but concluded with a contented outlook. One participant said with a smile, "I realized I do have the ability to adapt." Many subjects found that this ability was a great use in combating feelings where they felt they had to conform or transform to fit in. Peter Kaufman profoundly states, "to create new identity one must not only change roles but also must transform the subjective reality in which he or she exists" (2003:484). With maturity it seemed they used their adaptability in place of the failed complete transformation process. In general, adaptation seemed to be a great source of personal and group pride. I am left with the profound words that, "I can adapt. I am both equally. I get the best of both worlds."

Conclusion

Despite the limitations (time constraints of the research and the somewhat narrow sample size for the subject interview), the information gathered through investigation of the historical environments and the significance of the surfacing themes produced in the surveys can not be downplayed. Through literary and subject-interview analysis, evidence supports that history, in both the United States and South Africa, does have a strong effect on one's personal identity.

As noted through the historical background, these two countries, located in completely opposite hemispheres, underwent notably similar patterns throughout their nation formation. Black populations remained marginalized through colonization, slavery, and segregation to varying degrees in both countries. Prevailing through racial prejudice, discrimination and separation, miscegenation was frequent, resulting in generations of people with racially mixed parentage, biracial people.

Although the United States and South Africa shared similarities of foundational structures, the social construction of the biracial people differed. South Africa accepted the mixed-race label of Coloured during its formation process, allowing the South African biracial people to constitute their own unique racial group. Contrary to the more continuous racial categories of South Africa, the dichotomist nature of the United States forced racial polarization. The separate and distinct race groups were validated by the One-Drop Rule, which deprived the American biracial people of much of their own history and social identity. This resulted in greater feelings of group exclusion of the biracial people in the United States, in contrast to the group identity of the Coloureds.

However, it is vital to note that although Coloureds have had, for some time, their own racial group, they still encounter feelings of ambiguity. This further suggests that black and white mixed-raced people, independent to particular social contexts, do encounter similar cognitive processes. Most importantly biracial people in South Africa and the Unites States have the ability to adapt because of their mixed ancestry from the two most prevalent and opposing distinct race groups of white and black. Their unique in-between role gives them the opportunity to socially adapt to other race groups, and to experience the best of both worlds.

As research and literature in the United States on multiracial identities continue to grow into the academic sphere, it will be important to reference the gains of the Coloureds in South Africa and continue cross-country and cross-cultural analysis. Historical analysis and contemporary research on trends in identity and race will expand our understanding of biracial identity and the social need for group identity. Further research can enrich some preliminary assumptions this research produces. For instance, why were the mothers of the majority of American subjects white, and how does this contribute to their child's multiracial awareness and social identity? As this work suggests, if we are able to explore history we may be better able to critique the construction of these people to enhance a great social cohesiveness and positive social meaning for all people. ■

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Appendix: A

A Place For Us National, The Amegroid Society of America, Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans (AMEA), Center for the Study of Biracial Children, Happa Issues Forum, My Shoes, and Project RACE. All found on the multiracial.com Web site.