

BETWEEN RACE; BEYOND RACE: THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF INDIAN-WHITE BIRACIAL YOUNG ADULTS AND THE FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR CHOICES OF IDENTITY

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Abstract.

This study, based on my doctoral research, is an exploration of how nine Indian-White biracial young adults interpret their social reality, especially with regard to their understanding and experience of racial identity. I chose life histories as a method in line with my view of social identity as a resource that people draw on in constructing personal narratives, which provide meaning and a sense of continuity to their lives. As a life history researcher I started with the assumption that by asking the participants to tell me stories of their lives I would gain access to how biracial young adults interpret their social world and what they believe about themselves. All of the primary research took place within the Durban area. In giving an account of their identities, the nine biracial young adults in my study described their life worlds as the sum of many parts, which included but was not limited to their racial identity. With regards to racial identity, the participants chose a variety of ways to name themselves. Four self-identified as Indian, one chose not to place himself into a racial category, and four named themselves as Indian and White or mixed race. None of the nine Indian-White biracial young adults in my study named themselves as White, and none identified themselves as Coloured. The participants named a combination of factors as influencing how they identified – at times these were not without inconsistencies and contradictions. While some factors were more salient than others, I argue that no single factor that influences identity can be looked at in isolation or as assumed to be more important from any other. In their account of the various factors that contributed to their understanding of racial identity, none of the participants identified their assigned racial classification as having a direct influence on their choice of racial identity.

INTRODUCTION.

This study, based on my doctoral research, is an exploration of how nine Indian-White biracial young adults interpret their social reality, especially with regard to their understanding and experience of racial identity. More specifically, I examine three research objectives. These are: (1) what racial identities Indian-White biracial young adults chose to identify with; (2) how their racial identities were constructed and

experienced; and (3) what the factors were that influenced their *choice* of racial identities.

The term “biracial” is used in the US to refer to people who have parents from two socially defined races. Within a South African context Morral (1994), Ledderboge (1996), Blankenberg (2000) and Maré (2005) have used the term biracial to refer to children of interracial unions. Maré (2005) in his article “Mixing Blood: What does ‘biracialism’ do to the notion of ‘race’?” argues that the term biracial ambivalently both confirms and undermines the notion of race. I agree with Maré’s (2005:99) argument when he writes that the notion of biracial “... confirms a perception of races, resting as it does on the existence, in some form, of two distinct ‘somethings’ (races) that gives rise to a combination. At the same time, paradoxically, it also adds confusion to the apparent certainty of race existence – what meaning can ‘race’ have if it is so easily undermined through the creation of a totally new racial group or of a person who straddles ‘races’?” In focusing on Indian-White biracial young adults, I am not proposing that an individual can be divided into halves, one Indian and the other White. Nor am I suggesting that there are Black and White races and that there is a space between these called biracial. Biracial is a constructed category; similar to the way Coloured, African and Indian have been constructed.

A question that arises is: What is the social imperative for studying biracial adults in South Africa at present? There are still deeply held assumptions about race, which, whilst rejected by most contemporary scientists, still maintain their hold on the general society. Posel (2001:51) explains that after “decades of racial reasoning, the idea that South African society comprises four distinct races – Whites, Coloureds, Indian and Africans – has become a habit of thought and experience, a facet of popular common sense still widely in evidence.” As a result of this, Posel argues that it remains the norm to designate social actors in terms of their race in public media and in conversation. According to this way of thinking, there is a tendency to think of race as an essence, as something fixed, concrete and objective. It is this tendency that has placed the biracial person in a “betwixt and between” position (Root, 1992:4). A study that focuses on the phenomenon of biraciality usefully brings this common sense norm into question.

Because bi-race challenges deeply held notions about the biological and social meaning of race, various assumptions have been made of biracial people. Kahn and Denmon (1996:122), for example, in an examination of social science literature pertaining to mixed race identity in America, have drawn attention to some of the research, from 1967 to 1995, aimed at providing evidence that mixed race individuals were of lesser physical quality than their parents. “Lungs, muscular strength, and resistance to disease were believed to be negatively affected by ‘race crossing’ (...). Individuals mixed with European and African ancestries, in particular, were believed to have shorter life spans (...) and to be less fertile (...)”. This kind of evidence supported the idea that race is something that is fixed and clearly defined. Prah (2002:12) points out that the morphological features of race, such as hair and skin, form less than one percent of our genetic make-up. Therefore, the significance that is attached to race by society is the result not of fundamental biological differences but, rather, of ones which have been socially constructed. As Omi and Winant (1986) argue, racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the social relations and historical contexts in which they are embedded.

The topic of bi-race has also received prominence on two South African television chat shows: **Felicia** (e-TV, March 2003) and **The Big Question** (SABC 2, 29 May 2003). Both shows attempted to interrogate whether interracial relationships work and invited panellists who argued its limitations and successes. One of the shows, **The Big Question**, included a telephone poll to establish whether viewers believed that “interracial relationships were for the better or for the worse.” Fifty two percent of the poll voted “that interracial relationships were for the worse.” Those who argued against interracial relationships cited their concern for the children and the identity confusion the children will experience. As one of the panellists went on to say, “I guess you could marry but you should not have children. It’s the children who suffer.” This response reiterates my earlier comment of how the biracial person has been constructed as “betwixt and between”.

I understand that to talk about race, racial categories, race mixture, inter-racial, biracial and mixed descent is to use terms and habits of thought inherited from the very race science that was used to justify oppression and marginalisation (Erasmus, 2001). I respect that some may argue that to continue to use these categories and terms is to continue that oppression. Yet it is difficult to talk about what is essentially a flawed and problematic social construct without using language that is itself problematic (Tatum 1997). In this article, I view and use race as a social construct and not as indicator of absolute, pure strains of genetic material or physical characteristics. Also, while I will make reference to racial categories such as Indian and White, this should not lend legitimacy or credibility to the many popular cultural stereotypes and caricatures that accompany these descriptors. By using the categories, it allows me an opportunity to engage a select group of young adults to establish how they make sense and communicate about the existence of the idea of race and racial identity, noting and reflecting on the possibility that my use of the terms, and the ways of thinking that accompany them, may influence my research methodology and analysis.

Given all of the possible combinations of different racial groups, there are several groups of people who could be considered biracial for example, Indian-African, White-African, Chinese-Indian, etc. While people of mixed race descent may all be considered “biracial”, they may differ significantly from each other in terms of appearance, cultural practices, and experiences (Wijeyesinghe, 1992). My choice was to focus on only one such group, Indian-White biracial young adults, to understand in greater depth how they interpret their social reality, especially with regard to their understanding and experience of identity.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY.

A full understanding of identity requires distinguishing the *categorical* aspects of identity from the *personal*. I have drawn on Social Identity Theory, as outlined by Tajfel (1978; 1981; 1982), and Tajfel and Turner (1979), as a means of providing an entry point for understanding how individuals categorise, identify and compare themselves in relation to other groups and categories. Social Identity Theory (SIT) is about the social categorisations of self and others, self-categories that define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories, the self as “we” and “us”.

A significant recent development in SIT is Catherine Campbell's unpublished doctoral thesis, "Identity and gender in a changing society". I make reference to Campbell's work because she evaluates and extends SIT's approaches in the interests of understanding the social identity of working class South African township youth in a real-life social and historical context. In doing this, she (cf 1992:31-48) identifies four obstacles that limit SIT. These include: (1) a methodological over-reliance on artificially constituted groups and laboratory traditions; (2) the reduction of society to the group, and a failure to locate group membership against the background of social power relations; (3) the failure to take account of the interaction between individual and society; and (4) the failure to develop a dynamic account of identity formation and transformation with changing social conditions. Campbell compensates for what she sees as SIT's shortcomings by extending it to include both Bhaskar's (1979) model of the society-person connection and Leonard's (1984) materialist framework for understanding human consciousness. Bhaskar suggests an active concept of the subject, actively participating in shaping the course of his or her life in the process of his or her ongoing choice of behavioural options in the face of social demands. Leonard (1984:11) adds that society is patterned around a hierarchy of unequal social relationships based on social divisions of race, gender and class. Campbell's (1992:350) use of Bhaskar's and Leonard's theories to extend SIT is useful in that it "develops a more active notion of the individual, and theorises the social context as an integral, dynamic and irreducible aspect of identity." In doing this, she emphasises the relationship between the individual and society as crucial to understanding how identity is constructed and experienced.

In exploring the usefulness of SIT for understanding how biracial young adults experience identity, I name a further obstacle. SIT fails to recognize individuals who view themselves, or reject the view of themselves, concurrently as members of two social groups. This means that an individual cannot see herself as heterosexual and homosexual, or as Hindu and Jewish, male and female or Indian and White. This is a significant issue for this study as it raises a number of questions as to how biracial individuals experience and negotiate their social identities, including that of race. Do biracial individuals choose between two "mutually exclusive categories" or do they establish a synthesis of the two identities? And if individuals experience conflicting social identities, such as between racialised identities, how do they negotiate which identity to enact?

As categorisation, identification and social comparison are key concepts in my study, I have drawn on Social Identity Theory and Campbell's extension thereof as a means of providing an entry point for understanding how individuals self-define or self-identify themselves with regard to racial identity.

THE LITERATURE.

Morrall (1994:67), in her study, "Interracial families in South Africa: An exploratory study", mentions that "not a single reference to studies on biracial children could be found in the context of South Africa." She outlines two reasons for this lack of reference. Firstly, it is only recently that interracial marriages have been legalised, thus families are likely to consist of couples with young children. Secondly, before the scrapping of legislation, interracial unions did exist but couples "would have been unwilling to openly discuss their relationship and the experiences of their children". Morrall's reasoning seems convincing. It is indeed likely that there have been more interracial marriages

since the scrapping of the Mixed Marriages Act in 1985. However, to quantify this is difficult. In addition, people involved in interracial unions would not have been likely to draw attention to their families under apartheid and this would have been an obvious obstacle to research. The main body of literature relating to biracial identity has come from the US and to a lesser extent from the UK. While all the studies cited are located in these contexts, they have proved useful by articulating how biracial individuals perceive themselves within their respective environments.

Gibbs and Hines (1992:227) conducted a two-year study of 12 African American-White biracial adolescents and their families in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. The purpose of the study was to investigate the psychosocial adjustment of the adolescents, the process by which they negotiated racial and personal identities, and parents' perception of their adjustment to being reared in an interracial family. Six adolescents identified themselves as mixed race, three as Black and two were unsure how to respond. Gibbs and Hines did not account for how the twelfth person in their study responded. The participants, when asked what they liked about their racial identity, reported that they like their "appearance, being different and unique and the ability to fit in with all groups". They reported having difficulty with being "targets of racial slurs, being questioned about their appearance, their parents, and whether they were Black or White" (Gibbs and Hines, 1992:231).

In a British study, Tizard and Phoenix (1993) explored the racial identities of young people of mixed parentage living with their parents. The sample consisted of 60 mixed race young people from middle class and working class families, aged 15-16. Tizard and Phoenix (1993:159) found that less than half of the mixed parentage sample thought of people of mixed parentage, including themselves, as Black. The rest of the young people of mixed parentage thought of themselves as "brown", "mixed" or "Coloured" and none of them said or thought of themselves as White. Similarly, in a study conducted by Fatimilehin (1999) of 23 biracial adolescents studied, 43 percent named themselves as "mixed race" and 52 percent self-identified as Black.

Brunsma and Rockquemore's study (2001) focused on Black and White biracial individuals living in the US and the choices they made about their racial identity. The authors introduced their study by presenting Rockquemore's (1999, in Brunsma and Rockquemore 2001) taxonomy of the racial self-understandings of biracial individuals in which four types of racial identity options for biracial people are identified: (1) singular identity (singular Black or White); (2) border identity (exclusively biracial); (3) protean identity (sometimes Black, sometimes White) and (4) transcendent identity (no racial identity). Using Rockquemore's (1999) typology of racial identifications, Brunsma and Rockquemore (2001) test how physical appearance and social context affect the racial identities of Black White biracials. They make use of a survey to collect data from 177 respondents, who ranged in age and socioeconomic status, at two tertiary educational institutions in Michigan. Criterion for inclusion in the sample was that individuals "had one White and one Black identifying parent" (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 2001:232).

Brunsma and Rockquemore (2001:235) found that 64 percent of the respondents considered themselves to have border identities, in other words, understanding themselves as biracial, 13.7 percent understood themselves as "singularly Black" and the same percentage (13.7) understood "themselves without a racial label", or with a

transcendent identity. Five percent saw themselves as “shifting between Black, White and biracial depending on the circumstances” or having a protean identity and 3.7 percent understood themselves as “singularly White”. Brunnsma and Rockquemore findings demonstrated significant variation with regards to racial identity among their sample of biracials.

In exploring the relationship between phenotype, appearance, and racial identity among biracials, Brunnsma and Rockquemore reported that there was no association between skin colour and the way biracials understood themselves. However, there was a strong association between socially mediated appearance and identity in the sample. They argue that respondents who adopt singular, protean and border racial identities do so because of the “assumption” and “review” of others. An individual’s social context seems to be crucial in the relationship between phenotype and socially perceived appearance as well as in how these two factors influence identity (Brunnsma and Rockquemore, 2001:239).

Charmaine Wijeyesinghe (1992) examined how a select group of African-American / Euro-American heritage living in the US, came to choose or develop a sense of racial identity. The participants varied in age, gender and economic class. Of the seven Black-White biracial adults studied by Wijeyesinghe (1992), four self-identified as mixed race, three as Black and one as White.

The participants in Wijeyesinghe’s (1992:8) study provided detailed descriptions of the factors that influenced how “each of them came to choose a particular racial identity”. The factors that were seen as having the most influence on choice of racial identity were “past and current cultural affiliations, early experiences and socialisation, and physical appearance. Additional factors that played a lesser role in racial identity development included the nature of social values within a given historical period, biological racial heritage of the individual, and a participant’s sense of spirituality and connection to other social identities such as gender, religion, age, and ethnic identity” (Wijeyesinghe, 1992:8).

The literature essentially highlights two main aspects. Firstly, the biracial respondents did make choices with regards to race and secondly, there is a range of identity positions that could be occupied illustrating that “sections of social reality are potentially there” (Maré, 2005:103). In many ways, the literature also reinforces my theoretical discussion on identity in which I argue for a more active notion of the individual, and theorise the social context as an integral, dynamic and irreducible aspect of identity construction.

RESEARCH STRATEGY.

I chose life histories as a method in line with my view of social identity as a resource that people draw on in constructing personal narratives, which provide meaning and a sense of continuity to their lives. I assumed that by asking the participants to tell me stories of their lives I would gain access to how biracial young adults interpret their social world and what they believe about themselves. I chose to adopt the short life story approach (Plummer, 2001) as it requires less time than long life stories, tends to be more focused and allows for a series of autobiographical presentations.

In the selection of participants, I used the following criteria (see Table 1 - Appendix). Firstly, participants had to have biological membership in a family where one parent was identified as Indian and the other parent was identified as White. The Population Registration Act, Act 30 of 1950 formed the basis of the National Party's policy of "separate development". It imposed a specific racial grouping and therefore a formal identity on an individual, effectively shaping their life-story through this classification (cf Reddy, 2001:74). As the Population Registration Act was only repealed in 1991, parents of the 18–21 year old biracial participants would have been racially classified in terms of this Act. Secondly, participants were young adults. I specifically chose participants who were between 18 and 21 years of age because, as a researcher, I assumed that I would be able to gather sufficient life experience from this age group as compared to using a younger adolescent sample. This is also a critical period for the selected participants, as they would have just emerged from the norms of the school system and would now have plans and choices for mapping out their futures. They would perceive themselves as agents in the social world.

In gaining access to the defined sample, a non-probability sampling technique, snowball sampling, was utilised. Interracial families and biracial young adults were identified through schools, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and religious and social service organisations in the Durban area. Once participants were established they were asked to identify other such families or children within the Durban area. Consequently my intended sample snowballed, as each participant suggested others.

My study did not include a large sample (See Table 1 - Appendix). I preferred to encourage intensive interviews where the participants were able to "dig deep" and communicate their life stories about how they self define, or self identify themselves with regard to racial identity. The life story method favours conducting open and in-depth interviews in an interactive fashion, using only the most general of guides in order to help the participants construct a sense of their cultural world. The purpose of in-depth life story interviewing is not to get answers to questions, not to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate, as the term is normally used (cf Plummer, 2001:140). At the root of in-depth life story interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of people and the meaning they make of that experience (cf Seidman, 1991:3). I used three in-depth interviews of 90 minutes each as suggested by Seidman (cf 1991:11). All the interviews were audio-taped, and written transcripts were prepared from the audiotapes of each interview.

In analysing the life histories, the purpose was to expand, refine, develop and illuminate a theoretical understanding of how nine Indian-White biracial young adults interpret their social reality, especially with regard to their experience of racial identity. The analysis involved a cross-case analysis for the purpose of theorising from experiences drawn from the in-depth interviews, theoretical framework, and literature.

DISCUSSION.

Before I proceed, I would like to mention, albeit briefly, how the participants made meaning of the idea of race and how it informs identity. The notion of race "shares processes of identity formation with all social identities. Race thinking refers not only to the manner in which we make sense of social relations, actions and events, but also to the way in which we perceive our own group membership and those of others, the way

in which we share identities with some and are distinguished from others – the making of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Maré, 2001:77). Maré’s trope is similar to Social Identity Theory, which I have described earlier in this article. To recall, social identity refers to the individual’s knowledge of belonging to a certain social group and to the emotional and evaluative signification that results from that group membership (Tajfel, 1981).

When the participants use the term “Indian” or “White” they do so in ways that echo some but not all aspects of Tajfel’s definition of social identity in the context of race. This definition holds in the sense that their use of race carries certain emotional connotations as Prashantha, one of the respondents, recounts:

I was always very - I wouldn’t say, embarrassed, but it did feel strange having two parents that weren’t like the same race. I must add that I do not think my embarrassment was something I felt personally. The children [would] always point it out to you or ask you questions like, “Is that your mum?”

It also carries political and legal meaning. For example, two other respondents, Nicole and Kerry, indicated that they were reclassified so that could benefit by attending a school for Whites. Kerry explains:

Otherwise, we would have not been accepted if we had Indian on our birth certificates we had to go to one of those Chatsworth schools or those other township schools.

However, the definition does not apply completely, because there are also many other elements that are clearly not racialised. Their life stories do not read as demonstrating an acceptance of an essentialist notion of race as the key organising principle of identity. The nine biracial young adults in this study described their life worlds as the “sum of many parts”, which included but was not limited to their racial identity as Daniel explains:

I mean I’ve been studying with these guys in Law School for like five years now and you know, like, they told me, this year, that for four years they’ve been wondering what the hell am I? You know, “Who am I?” “Am I like White, am I Indian, am I Coloured?” Like, “Why do I speak like this?” “Where’s the influence coming in?” and I said “Well, you know, like, I’m an individual and I want you to get to know me as an individual, and my background is not necessarily a determinant of who I am.” I’m more than the sum of my parts – that’s what people have to understand. I don’t define myself as a “racial identity”, but I named race because other people have tried to define me in terms of my race, and that’s the way people understand each other, and that’s why those students were asking me, “So what are you?”

Race was simply an aspect of a much more complex and multidimensional whole that was made up of gender, class, religious, age, and sexual orientation identities. So how do the participants make meaning of race? When the participants use gender, there is clear definition. In contrast, race may have force but lacks definition in their accounts. The respondents’ racial identity is sometimes counter-posed to ethnic identity or to culture instead of to other racial identities. For example, when they talk about White they also talk about being “Italian” or “Scottish” or even describe themselves as “Indian

and Scottish". So, in acknowledging and confronting what the participants have said race seems to be an elusive concept in the way in which it comes across in the interviews. One moment it is simply a description in terms of apartheid. In another instance it is simply a description in terms of appearance. Another moment it carries elements of culture. But it is not clear whether culture is essentialised in relation to being Indian – food, dress, religion etc. Race is an elusive term, in other words, their self-description of themselves independently of whatever else they might be.

Racial self-identification.

The Indian-White biracial young adults in this study chose a variety of ways to name themselves. Ishmael, Natalie, Dayallan and Marlon self-identified as Indian (singular identity). One participant, Daniel, chose not to place himself into a racial category (transcendent identity). He explained that he would not tell people that he was biracial but would prefer to let people view him as an individual rather than in terms of one race or the other. Four of the participants, Kerry, Mayuri, Prashantha and Nicole named themselves as mixed race or Indian and White (border identity). Earlier in this paper, I noted how participants in the various studies identified racially. Tizard and Phoenix (1993:159) reported that less than half of their 58 mixed parentage sample self-identified as black, the rest thought of themselves as "half and half", "brown" or "mixed race" and none of them named themselves as White. Similarly, in a study conducted by Fatimilehin (1999) of 23 biracial adolescents studied, 43 percent named themselves as "mixed race" and 52 percent self-identified as Black. Of the seven Black-White biracial adults studied by Wijeyesinghe (1992), four self-identified a mixed race, three as Black and one as White.

None of the nine Indian-White biracial young adults in my study named themselves as White. Four possible interpretations drawn from the participants' life histories can be offered as to why this is so. Firstly, all the participants shared a number of stories where they felt that they were not accepted as part of a "White community". For example, even though Ishmael, Kerry, Nicole, Daniel, Prashantha and Mayuri lived in White residential areas and attended predominantly White schools they recounted stories of always being seen as "not White".

Ishmael: Once when I was about nine my sister and I went to this shop, which was about 100 metres away from our house [and] there was this White woman who started asking us a whole lot of questions, "Are you white? What are you? Why are you wearing that hat? Where are you living?" Then a whole group of White people gathered [and were] asking us all these questions.

Kerry: When we were in class one, there was this one other Chinese boy in our class. For some odd reason, because we were like a similar colour the White kids would say that he and I were girlfriend and boyfriend because we were the same colour. I said, "No. He's Chinese and I'm White - there's a difference." [laugh]

Nicole: I remember in my first week at the new school there was this girl who was always asking me what I was. Because I am classified as White I said, "I'm White." She decided to start this stupid argument of, "You not White." I said, "I am White and I can prove it." She then said, "No, you can't be White because your mother is Indian." And I remember I screamed, "I'm White".

Natalie: *I remember when I started at the school I was referred to as a “non-white”. There were very few non- whites (and I hated to be called “non-white”) in the whole school.*

The above supports Hall’s (1996:4) view that “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference.” Hall argues that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its “constitutive outside”, that the meaning of any term – and thus its “identity” – can be constructed. A second possible reason is the participants’ experiences of White racism – arising out of the Apartheid policies that rested on a clear notion of exclusive Whiteness. All the participants shared stories of their experiences of racism from White grandparents, friends, fellow students, teachers and partners. Dayallan’s comment sums this allusion perfectly:

I think when I meet racist Whites such as that guy, I just do not acknowledge that part of me is White.

A third possible answer is that to identify as White in contemporary South Africa is interpreted “to be at the bottom [sic] of the food chain”, as Nicole stated. She argued that because she is classified as White many people assume that she “lived her life as a privileged White girl ... during apartheid.” She believes that is an incorrect assumption as she “struggled throughout her life” and “now because of affirmative action ... she is still at the bottom of the food chain”.

At this point, it is necessary to relate the above interpretation – as to why the participants did not identify as White – to a point made by Tajfel and Turner (1979) in which they state that an individual will remain a member of a group as long as it contributes positively to the individual’s social identity. If the outcome of social comparison results in a negative identity for in-group members, these individuals will engage in strategies to achieve a positive social identity, but what is not available, in most cases, is to “choose” a “racial” identity.

Finally, the socio-political context during apartheid, with its rigid categories and race classification, simply did not make certain “choices”, such as being legally White, available except under extreme possibilities, e.g. through making a formal appeal to be able to get a second birth certificate, which process some of the interviewees did go through.

In the same way none of the nine participants identified as Coloured. In fact, some of the participants reacted strongly to being named as Coloured and related how they differed with those who labelled them as such. Examples of such experiences can be drawn from Dayallan Natalie, Prashantha, Nicole and Kerry’s vignettes. Perhaps this can be attributed to participants’ parents telling them that they were not Coloured. Prashantha, for example, recalls her mother citing all the stereotypes associated with Coloured people and telling her that she “shouldn’t see [herself] as Coloured.” Here we gain a sense of the participant’s own socialisation into racial prejudice and discrimination.

Prashantha: ... *I think it's because of my mother, because she's always had a strong like belief that we're not Coloured and she's never liked us to like think of ourselves as Coloured. ... She has not given us any explanation [pause]. But she always says, you know, like, "Coloureds are always drunk or they always like this and that" You know like stereotypes. So, like, my whole life, like I'd never be allowed to like think of myself as being Coloured.*

Natalie: *I don't know. I don't know why I didn't want to be a Coloured. But I just did not want to be Coloured.*

Reference was made above to Tajfel and Turner (1979) in which they state that an individual will remain a member of a group as long as it contributes positively to the individual's social identity. Another way of explaining the participants' views on not self-identifying as coloured or white is to take into account an affective theorization of identity – racial identification more as a matter of powerful affective ties, less than rational commitments and investments. In other words, an understanding of racial identity not as driven by “rational” choices as to interest, but rather as driven by processes that impact affectively on the individual, and that deliver a sense of commitment to an identity, whether wanted or not. This is something that seems largely under-emphasized in SIT. Such processes would involve developing a complex of responses that determine who is racially “other” and who is racially “us”, a choice that in time may come to seem final, unquestioned, and even “natural”. As Gilroy expresses it “Our relation to our racial selves is an evasive thing, often easier to feel than to express” (2004:241).

Factors influencing racial identity.

It is evident that the participants in this study experienced the construction of their racial identities as a dialectical process between how they saw themselves and how those in their immediate social environment perceived them. All the participants shared different stories about the messages they received about race and racial identity and seemed to have reconciled the messages they received with their own understanding thereof. All nine indicated that the messages were gathered from various sources that included family members, teachers, friends, classmates, people in the community and strangers. Television programmes and classroom charts were also named as facilitating their understanding and awareness of racial difference. This is in line with Campbell's (1992) view of social identity construction, where society presents the individual with a range of socially structured categorisations and where the individual in return conducts his or her life in varying degrees of submission or resistance to the possibilities offered by the socially structured categorisations.

The nine participants in this study also made constant reference to the social milieu in which they lived. They named location, relationship with extended family, the interconnection with other social identities, appearance, dates, friends and marriage partners as contributing factors to their understanding of race and racial identity. Here reference can be made to earlier theoretical discussion, recalling Campbell's view that it is the social context that will inform whether an individual will be marginalised, unaffiliated, included, or have a unique role in several social groups.

In Wijeyesinghe's (1992) study of seven biracial adults, she named appearance, socialisation and cultural experiences as prominent factors in shaping racial identity. In my study, while some factors were more salient than others, I have come to recognize that no single factor that influences identity can be looked at in isolation or as more important than any other. The nine participants named a combination of factors as influencing how they identified racially and at times these were not without inconsistencies and contradictions. Even when participants self-identified in similar ways they cited different factors and experiences as influencing their choice of identity. For example, each of the four participants who identified as Indian cited different factors as influencing their choice of racial identity. Ishmael and Natalie self-identified as Indian but both named very different factors. The participants' experiences in this study were different and varied and no set permutation or combination of factors could be identified as influencing how they racially self-identified.

Furthermore, Brunnsma and Rockquemore (2001) in their study exploring the influence of appearances on identity of 177 Black White biracial young individuals reported there is no association between skin colour and the ways biracial individuals racially understand themselves but there is, in fact, a strong association between appearance and identity in their sample. Based on the finding of their research, the authors argue that "it is socially-mediated appearance, or the way you believe others perceive yourself" influences racial identity among biracials. In my study there was no consistent pattern of racial identification amongst the participants in terms of appearance. For example, both Marlon and Dayallan, although described by others and themselves as "looking White", self-identified with a singular Indian identity. This contradicts Brunnsma and Rockquemore's (2001:241) argument that respondents who adopt singular, protean and border racial identities do so because of the "assumption" and "review" of others. The explanation might be that despite "being White in appearance" Marlon and Dayallan have lived in an Indian township, attended schools for mainly Indians learners, had Indian friends and limited access to White people other than their parents and this may have contributed to their identification as Indian. In these cases, self-identification seems not to have been driven by appearance to others.

Questioning assignment.

In naming the various factors that contributed to their understanding of racial identity, none of the participants named their assigned racial classification as influencing their choice of racial identity. For example, Natalie, Dayallan and Marlon were classified at birth as Indian and all three currently self-identified as Indian, but none of them cited prior assignment as a reason for how they understood themselves racially. In the same way, Nicole, Kerry and Mayuri noted their experiences of "reclassification" but did not speak of their reclassification as influencing how they currently identified. Several possible reasons can account for this. Firstly, the assigned racial category is seen as useless and insubstantial. Nicole, Kerry, and Mayuri would have witnessed the meaninglessness of such classification when they had to be reclassified to enable them to attend White schools.

Nicole: My father and mother had to fill in all these forms and the people were very unfriendly. When all of this was finished we were classified as White, we got a White birth certificate and we could then go to Addington Primary. I remember thinking if all

White people had to go through the same classification process and if it was really worth it.

In this case, the classification itself was meaningless in terms of how they identified. However, it did hold meaning in terms of privileges one could or could not access.

Secondly the racial categories are seen as archaic and unsuitable in describing how the participants identified racially. For example Mayuri refused to fill in forms that requested her race as she felt that she was not represented in any of the categories.

So I was like, "Well, I don't know: I'm a mix." [laugh] Even now "what race am I?" those boxes, I never fill them in, so I just don't tick. Even if it says "compulsory" to fill in, I never fill it in. I get completely upset with that. It's none of their business and screw the statistics and [the] census. Who gives a damn? I never fill those in, but that's just - if they had a box for me, then I'd tick it. But they don't.

Daniel's refusal to use any of the racial categories to describe himself can also be seen as a rejection of assignment. Perhaps each of these examples illustrates the participant's refusal to draw on apartheid's catalogue of race to construct their social realities in racial terms.

Thirdly, the circumstances in South Africa have changed with regards to race, which has brought a level of uncertainty in how people identify racially. Here is a possible tension, because while Daniel and Mayuri ask for freedom (for those for whom it is an issue), for participants such as Marlon who live within a context where race is found as valid, and where the categories of apartheid – and history – are accepted as common sense, it is a different story. Apartheid was a powerful allocator of identity as it assigned identity by emphasising race and ethnicity, at the expense of other markers of identity, through legislation and other sanctions (Singh, 1997). In various ways, race common sense continues to permeate our society, in blatant and banal forms (Mare, 2001).

CONCLUSION.

Let me, in conclusion, pull the findings of this study together. In giving an account of their identities, the nine biracial young adults in my study described their life worlds as the sum of many parts, which included but was not limited to their racial identity. With regards to racial identity, the participants chose a variety of ways to name themselves. Four self-identified as Indian, one chose not to place himself into a racial category, and four named themselves as Indian and White or mixed race. None of the nine Indian White biracial young adults in my study named themselves as White. In the same way none of the nine participants identified as Coloured. The nine participants named a combination of factors as influencing how they identified and at times these were not without inconsistencies and contradictions. While some factors were more salient than others, I have argued that no single factor that influences identity can be looked at in isolation or assumed to be more important than any other. In naming the various factors that contributed to their understanding of racial identity, none of the participants named their assigned racial classification as directly influencing their choice of racial identity.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS

NAME ¹	GENDER	AGE	*CLASS	#RACE OF MOTHER	#RACE OF FATHER	PLACE OF RESIDENCE
1. Kerry Guy	Female	18	Working	Indian	White	Albert Park/ Bluff
2. Ishmael Vally	Male	21	Upper middle	White	Indian	Clairwood/ Glenwood
3. Natalie Kumar	Female	21	Upper middle	White	Indian	Glenwood
4. Dayallan Naicker	Male	21	Working	White	Indian	Clairwood/ Phoenix
5. Mayuri Breschi	Female	19	Upper middle	Indian	White	Durban North
6. Daniel Kearney	Male	21	Upper middle	Indian	White	Sarnia/ Westville
7. Prashantha Burn	Female	20	Middle	Indian	White	Reservoir Hills/ Redhill
8. Marlon Govender	Male	20	Working	Indian	White	Phoenix
9. Nicole Lyons	Female	20	Working	Indian	White	Albert Park/ Rossburgh

*Named by participant

#Named by Population Registration Act

¹All names of the participants, references to places and people have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality.